

FORMER PACIFIC ROAD ARTS CENTRE, AND THE TAYLOR STREET TRANSPORT MUSEUM, BIRKENHEAD

RECENT EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Egerton House - conversion of Pacific Road

Interest has been expressed by Egerton House t/a Wirral Business Partnership (now the Wirral Chamber of Commerce) in the Pacific Road building. The company wished to undertake a project to bring Pacific Road back into use by reconfiguring the existing layout to provide managed workspace. The new centre would accommodate a range of business types: 'social enterprises, private organisations, incubator space for fledgling and innovative businesses and visitor and knowledge economy operations'. Particular emphasis would be on innovation, entrepreneurship and business growth. The building would also serve to benefit the community and an education business link function

It is expected that after development the building would provide some 16,000 sq ft of managed workspace plus a catering kitchen and bar area as well as retaining an historic tram on the internal tracks plus its live line in preparation for Wirral Waters and associated visitor economy activities. The substation and infrastructure which feeds the tramline would also remain in place.

ERDF grant has been secured together with a loan from the Growing Places Fund. These, together with a capital contribution from the Chamber, are sufficient to fund the conversion works.

Community Asset Transfer - Transport Museum & Tramway

Following discussions with the volunteer groups who are active in the running of the transport museum and tramway a draft business plan has been submitted. Under that plan the volunteer groups propose that the Council should retain ownership of the transport museum and tramway but the groups would operate and manage the assets on behalf of the Council under a long term lease.

Based on the initial work done by the volunteers they anticipate being able to deliver substantial annual savings in running costs whilst developing the assets into a popular visitor attraction. They do identify within the plan the need for some initial and continuing financial support from the Council.

Their preferred option contains the following main elements:

The Council retains the freehold interest in the assets.

The volunteers are granted a long term lease.

The Council retains responsibility for

- The building - external and structural elements
- The tramway
- The museum collection

The volunteers take on liability and costs for

- Refurbishment/decoration
- All staffing (on a voluntary basis)
- Day-to-day maintenance and operation of the collection service charges, insurance costs and running costs would be transferred to the volunteers on a proposed tapering basis over an agreed period of time.

Their proposal estimates that based on the most recently available figures this would provide an immediate saving on running costs of some 77% for the Council on transfer, proposing to rise to 100% over the period of the taper.

They are clear that a “full” asset transfer would be unviable.

Wirral Street Car Project

In October 2012 Council officers were invited to a presentation by Peel Holdings of ‘The Wirral Street Car Project’.

The proposal is to extend the existing historic street car infrastructure to connect early stages of development at Wirral Waters with existing rail, ferry and bus services. Peel state that the project offers the opportunity to

- Be an exemplar project in low cost speedy procurement
- Make best use of the available time and expertise that existing community groups and volunteers are already contributing
- Be delivered quickly as the land requirements are in the ownership of Peel, Wirral Council and the Homes & Communities Agency.

The proposal identifies support from Merseytravel, who as noted elsewhere in the report are no longer understood to wish to pursue their own acquisition of the assets.

Further details are given in the attached presentation document.

Pacific Road - private sector approach

An initial unsolicited approach has been received from a private sector developer who refurbished and the Shorelines Building in Shore Road, Birkenhead. The developer has suggested a scheme for the Pacific Road building which would include

- Preserving the external and internal tram facilities including the ancillary spaces accessed from the tramway.
- Part-glazing the Shore Road gable and illuminating the trams housed within the facility whilst using accent-lighting to the building’s exterior. This will create added interest in the development, and add drama to the Shore Road street scene.
- Converting the stage and auditorium area for use as ‘hot-desk’ office space for start-up entrepreneurs, with meeting rooms and a first floor break-out space in the area of the existing bar.
- Maintaining KGB Guitars, accessed from outside the tram operating area.

They are of the opinion that the critical mass of employment activity in the area could be enhanced, and mutually supported by, the adaptation and refurbishment of the Pacific Road complex, to meet local demand for entrepreneurial, managed workspace.

They say they have funds available to acquire the asset, but any bid would be dependent on European Funding, which will not now be available due to Wirral Business Partnership's successful bid.