

## Newport Unlimited

### Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 12 January 2005

**Present:** Grant Watson (Chairman)  
Councillors Bob Bright and Ken Critchley, Graham Moore, Professor James Lusty, Karen Thomas, Andrew Wilkinson, Nic Neal, Don Wilkes, David Bowler

**Apologies:** Chris Freegard, Bob Macey, Nigel Campbell and Gerry Keighley

**In Attendance:** Leigh Donovan, Steven Slocombe, Jenny Heal, John Burrows and Philip Jardine

#### 1. Minutes

##### Whiteheads and Monbank Sidings Site

It was noted that a decision from the Welsh Assembly Government whether the site would be required for NHS purposes was outstanding. A feasibility study would be completed by mid January and a decision anticipated by the January 31.

Timing of the decision was crucial to the Council's case in reinforcing or the withdrawal of objections in connection with the UDP Inquiry.

##### Transport Review / M4 Relief Road

Concern was expressed that the Ministerial announcement of the M4 Relief Road referred to the provision of a single junction on the East Side of Newport. It was considered that full consideration should be given to the most beneficial location for a single junction. The Board was advised that the team preparing the West Newport masterplan had been requested to undertake an additional piece of work to consider both the east and west options. A separate paper would be brought forward in conjunction with the masterplan proposals.

(David Bowler and Karen Thomas declared an interest in this matter.)

##### George Street

It was noted that the completion of the Development Agreement in relation to the speculative office scheme at George Street was still outstanding. The issues were being addressed with the developer.

### Footbridge

The Board was advised that the increase in steel prices since tenders were invited would impact on the total cost of the scheme. Subject to further examination it was anticipated that the provisional sum of £4.25m was now expected to rise to £5.0m. David Bowler advised the Board that if it would be helpful for the team he could assist in providing further advice on the cost escalation of steel over the period. It was agreed that the Chief Executive would pursue this further with David Bowler

## **2. Chief Executive's Report**

### **HMPS**

Together with Birmingham and Peterborough Newport had been short listed as possible locations to provide a centre for finance and human resources advice to the Prison Service. A delegation from HMPS were to visit Newport on the 20<sup>th</sup> January and together with the City Council, WDA and WAG presentations would be given together with a tour of the Newport area. It was hoped that the timescales for a decision on preferred location would be established at that meeting.

### **Old Town Dock**

The Economic and Transport Minister 'officially' commenced reclamation works on 11 January 2005. Two matters were outstanding from previous Board meetings related to the determination of the land to be contained in the first phase and the fee structure for the appointment of FPD Savills to act as property advisers and agents.

Following further examination it was recommended that the first phase be located to the south of Jacks Pill and that the area to the north being offered as a phase 2 option. The advantage of this approach would enable the first phase to proceed as quickly as possible as the land was in public sector ownership and create a development aimed at improving the viability of the greater mix of uses proposed for the second phase. The Board endorsed this approach.

The Board was advised that a developer had secured an option on the Salty Yachts property and had requested that they be permitted to enter into discreet negotiations for the development of the land to the north of Jack's Pill now proposed as the second phase of development. Following full consideration the Board reaffirmed its decision and recommended that the first phase be exposed to open competition.

It was reported that a fee structure had now been agreed with FPD Savills for the marketing as sale of the first phase site. A capped fee of [REDACTED] had been agreed which reflects the strict design requirements of the development brief that are likely to be reflected in a reduced sale value.

### **Agreed**

1. To promote the 4 acre area south of Jacks Pill as the phase 1 of the development site with the area to the north being offered as a phase 2 option.
2. To visit the area as part of the March Board meeting.

### **City Centre Retail Development Scheme**

Tenders for the City Centre Retail Development Scheme from the 5 interested parties were expected by 28 January 2005. Arrangements had been made for the Council and NU to evaluation the submissions. An meeting would be held, on 14 April 2005, between the Council's Cabinet and the Board to discuss the tenders, in advance of a meeting of the Council's Cabinet to determine the preferred developer. Cllr. Bright requested that Councillor Critchley be included in the evaluation process, as the Council's Cabinet Member for Development and Employment.

The prime guiding criterion in undertaking the tender evaluation was the ability of the contractors to deliver the best scheme within an acceptable timescale.

### **WDA**

The Board was advised that a consultation document was being issued by the Welsh Assembly Government at the end January regarding the merger of the WDA. The Chief Executive proposed to meet with Assembly Officials in early February, to open dialogue on the potential implications for Newport Unlimited, and report to the next meeting on the outcome.

### **Freedom of Information Act**

Reference was made to the implications of the Freedom of Information Act for Newport Unlimited. It was debatable whether URCs were bound by the provisions of the Act. In line with legal advice given to the English URCs advice had been received that the Company was not covered by the Act. It was however agreed that it would be appropriate that the Company complied with the spirit of the Act and prepared a course of action that reflected the obligations of the Founding Members. A report

on establishing an appropriate protocol would be prepared and brought back to the Board for approval. A key issue would be the publication of a discretionary scheme.

### **Agreed**

To consider a report at the next meeting on the legal issues and the nature of information in the ownership of Newport Unlimited, to enable classification of information which would be made publicly available.

### **Key Targets**

The Board considered the revised schedules that would form the basis for ongoing monitoring of progress. Each of the projects was discussed and it was agreed forecasts should vary to reflect changes in circumstances and but that the targets should remain unaltered and reviewed annually.

Further consideration was given to the appropriateness of individual Members 'shadowing' individual aspects. Particular regard was given to the nature and extent of such involvement and the implications relating to possible improvement in the quality of decision making

### **Agreed**

Where a Board Member has a specific interest in any project, he, or she, should approach the Chief Executive for relevant information. The level of involvement of the Member would be at his or her discretion, but should not impede the efficiency of the project.

## **3. Cambrian Centre**

The Board considered the current negotiating position regarding the development gap to support the scheme.

Further meetings had taken place with advisors acting for the developer aimed at reducing the size of any gap-funding by interrogating the 'value' side of the development appraisal which will enable the scheme to move forward in its currently designed format rather than looking for ways to compromise the design of the scheme at this stage.

A proposal had been received from Goldtique Investments Limited, to undertake the scheme for between [REDACTED], subject to undertakings by the URC and partners, involving the Council occupying office space within the development, agreeing financial terms for its interest in the car park, and the WDA agreeing arrangements regarding the offices that would

underpin its value on completion. Confirmation from the Council and the WDA of their agreement to this approach was awaited.

An early decision on the proposals made by the developer with a view to bringing back a firm recommendation for consideration by the Board at the February meeting.

### **Agreed**

To note the report and consider a further report when a full financial appraisal was available.

## **4. Expansion of the University of Wales, Newport and City Centre Campus**

The Board discussed the latest position regarding plans to expand the University of Wales, Newport and the consequential development of the City Centre Campus.

Because of the regeneration issues associated with the expansion of the University, Newport Unlimited had assisted the University with its plans to expand in Newport. Specifically assistance to identify the most cost effective strategy for expansion, and help make the case to Government for expanding the number of 'funded' student places at the University.

A 'campaign task force' was been set up to promote the expansion strategy and secure Welsh Assembly Government and Higher Education Funding Council Wales (HEFCW) approval by March 2005, for the expansion of numbers at the University and the development of the City Centre Campus. This would enable the University to commission design work and then construction work on the City Centre campus for an opening in Autumn 2008 in accordance with its stated programme.

A strong case had been established for regarding Newport and its surrounding areas, including the Eastern Valleys, as a separate region from Cardiff and the Central Valleys for higher education provision. The Welsh Assembly Government's had been keen to rationalise higher education institutions in Wales from the existing 13 establishments to a lower number. Financial assistance had been made available by the Assembly's for implementation of its 'reconfiguration and collaboration' strategy.

The case for expansion at Newport made a good argument for treating Newport separately from the requirement to collaborate and merge with another higher education institute by showing that UWN was the only provider of higher education in eastern South Wales and may need to be

emphasised more if dialogue with UWIC failed to produce an acceptable way forward for Newport.

It was stressed that the University would not embark on any venture that would jeopardise the inclusion of "Newport" within its title and that Newport Unlimited would be involved in discussions concerning this, in the light of the clear economic reasons for doing so.

Professor James Lusty and Andrew Wilkinson declared an interest in the discussion

**Agreed**

To note the report.

**5. Project Co-ordination Group 17 December 2004**

The minutes of the group were received.

**Agreed**

To receive the minutes.

**6. Next Meeting**

The next meeting is to be held on 10 February 2005.