

Newport Unlimited

Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 8 December 2005

Present: Grant Watson (Chairman)
David Bowler, Councillor Bob Bright, Nigel Campbell, Councillor Ken Critchley, Chris Freegard, Gerry Keighley, Nic Neal, Karen Thomas and Don Wilkes

Apologies: Professor James Lusty and Bob Macey

Also in attendance: Councillor Mrs E Heath (By invitation of the Board)

John Burrows, Philip Jardine, Richard Jefferies, Gareth Prosser, Steven Slocombe, Paul Tarling, David Ward.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2005 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman, subject to the addition of the name of Councillor Mrs Heath to those in attendance.

Board Agendas

Members noted the Board agendas had been slightly re-styled to help identify the new items for each Board meeting which will appear in the same place on each agenda under 'Reports and Issues for Discussion'.

University

Discussions were continuing with the University on a smaller first phase of the City Centre Campus. Funding was still the major issue.

Graham Moore

Karen Thomas asked that it be noted that she was not present at the beginning of the previous meeting when the item relating to the retention of Mr Graham Moore on a part-time consultancy basis for two days a month for Ryder Cup infrastructure work was discussed as she would have pointed out that it would not be possible for WDA to employ Graham in any capacity until at least 6 months had elapsed

since his departure. In view of this, Karen Thomas suggested that perhaps the City Council could look at facilitating the appointment.

Audit of the Company

Board members noted the report planned for the December meeting would now be presented in January.

Impact of the Merger of the WDA and the Assembly Government

John Burrows reported that the merger would be on the agenda for the next Board meeting in January 2006. Informal advice had been provided by Phil Jardine, the Company Secretary, which would be available then. It was likely the Articles of the Company would need revision and that other consequential changes may occur.

As to funding, no changes in arrangements were foreseen by any of the Founder Members. Board requested written assurance from the Welsh Assembly Government regarding the future position of the Company and its funding.

IT WAS AGREED that a full report on the implications of the merger would be presented to the Board and that the Welsh Assembly Government be asked for a 'letter of comfort' regarding the future of the Company and its funding.

Finally under the Minutes and Matters Arising, it was noted that this was Nic Neal's last meeting as a director of the Board and that he would be replaced by David Childs of the WDA for the time being.

The Chairman thanked Nic Neal for his services to the Board and in particular for his success in bringing forward the Rodney Parade development and in securing the possibility of an exciting development on the Whiteheads / Mon Bank sidings site in Newport which left open the possibility of the hospital relocation.

2. Project Team

The minutes of the most recent meeting of the Project Coordination Group were circulated to members and noted.

3. Chief Executive's Report

Chief Executive's Post

It was reported that Chris Freegard, and Karen Thomas, supported by Bob Macey were continuing to work on arrangements for filling the

Chief Executive post. The advertisement for the post has been circulated within the three Founder Member organisations with a closing date of 16 December 2005.

IT WAS AGREED the Board would receive a report on the details of the appointment process

Media and Promotion of Newport

Members were informed that a City of Newport Marketing Partnership had been established. The remit is to co-ordinate the marketing of the City of Newport.

Members recognised the key role of Newport Unlimited in marketing. The Company had led the successful inter-agency team promoting the City to potential inward investors and would have a key role in the general promotion of the City

At the last meeting members agreed the best time to start a more proactive promotion programme was considered to be after March 2005 when the frame of the footbridge will have been lifted into place and residents and visitors will start to see big changes.

The City – wide Marketing Partnership is looking at a city-wide branding of the changes in the City. It was recognised that a different strategy would be needed for different audiences. An event was planned in the New Year to promote progress on the master plan. A report on promoting Newport will be presented to a future meeting of the Board.

MAPIC – Retail Centres Exhibition

Members noted that Newport Unlimited had been represented at the European Retail Centres Exhibition. Modus had also been represented and it was considered Newport received a significant amount of positive exposure at the event.

Future Development Programme

The Future Development Programme for the next 7 years considered at the last Board meeting had been sent to the three Founder Members for their consideration. A meeting has been arranged with City Council officers for mid December.

Key Tasks and Targets

The Key Targets Schedule and progress on projects was noted. An explanation was provided where there had been any change in circumstances.

Arising from the report:

Rodney Parade Development

IT WAS AGREED that, in terms of the developments on the East Bank, Board members would wish to see the existing view of the whole of the West face of the Art College Building maintained by way of open space in front of the building. WDA said that this would be added to the information submitted to potential developers.

Ebbw Vale Rail Link

IT WAS AGREED a report on progress would be presented to the Board

4. Newport Virtual Animation / Fly-through presentation

Board received the visual presentation of future developments in the City prepared by Persona I D for the URC and requested that when the presentation is next amended that: the existing key buildings be given more prominence; a voice over should be considered; more information could be given on sites; and a stronger 'sell' on the environment.

5. Gateway Strategy

The Chairman of the Board, the Leader of the Council and Modus had all recently raised the need to enhance entrance points to the City which are important in forming a first impression of Newport. This included the need to provide updated signage, remove old signs, improving the environment and working with partners such as the railway station operators and private sector developers and retailers.

The Board was keen to make progress and recognised that finance sources would need to be identified. Gerry Keighley said that the railway station needed to be added to the list of key 'gateways' which needed improvement.

IT WAS AGREED a report would be presented to a future meeting of the Board setting out suggested areas for improvement and funding options.

6. **Housing Demand and Site Development**

The Board was concerned about potential emerging issues arising from residential demand. The Board was informed that consultants were currently preparing a 'residential demand and site development' strategy.

The Board considered that the strategy needed to take account of the growth strategy now included in the UDP but also issues such as the fact that the apartment strategy in Newport remains unproven at this stage. That said, whilst there is some uncertainty nationally in terms of residential markets, there appears to be considerable latent demand in Newport, mainly due to the drying up of supply particularly in the apartment market) in recent years.

It was important that the new strategy contributed to the growth strategy but did not lead to saturation of any particular market. It was important that the highest standards of accommodation were maintained and that contributions to wider objectives such as affordable housing, education objectives and open space are promoted.

Members considered it crucial to strike a balance between apartment and housing needs and that informed judgments are made at various stages on achieving the correct balance and mix to ensure the best possible occupation rates

IT WAS AGREED that the Board's comments would feed into the work being undertaken by the consultants and that a draft strategy be presented to the Board as early as possible

7. **Flood Defence**

Members were brought up to date on progress with the Environment Agency on the flood defence strategy for Newport and in particular, the East Bank.

The Agency had been informed of the key proposals within the proposed flood prevention strategy as part of the comprehensive development proposals for the City.

A letter had been written to the Environment Agency recently by Richard Owen of the City Council which raised the possibility of agreement in relation to the SPG on flood defence. The letter stated

that there was confidence in the completion of the flood defences on the east bank by way of developer commitments and availability of funding in the Newport Unlimited Business Plan to cover those areas left after the developers have completed their commitments.

There are still some issues to address but it was hoped that the first block of work was now moving forward.

The Board asked to be kept up to date on progress.

8. Board meeting

A schedule of dates for future meetings of the Board was agreed.