



Newport Unlimited

Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on 22 May 2008

Present: Mr G Watson (in the Chair); Mr J Burrows, Mr C Freegard, Mr S Gibson, Ms E Marks, Mr J Norvill and Mr D Roberts

Apologies: Mr D Bowler, Mr P Bisson, Councillor R Bright, Mr G Jackson, Mr G. Keighley and Mr M Noor

Also in

Attendance: Mr A Dakin, Mr L Donovan, Ms K Evans, Mr P Tarling, Mr S Trythall, Mr P Jardine and Mr R Jefferies

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed Eleanor Marks, Regional Director for South East Wales, Welsh Assembly Government (Economy and Transport Department), to her first meeting of the Board, replacing Karen Thomas.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2008 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

Political Situation for Newport City Council

Chris Freegard updated the Board on the current political situation at the City Council following the local government elections on 1 May 2008. No party had overall control. There were to be two by-elections and appointments to the Cabinet were unlikely until 24 June 2008.

Visit by the Deputy First Minister

Eleanor Marks informed the Board that the visit by the Deputy First Minister would now take place after the summer recess, rather than in June.

Crindau

Chris Freegard informed the Board that the SPG for Crindau was likely to be signed off in June.

3. Chief Executive's Report

Update on events and meetings

The Chief Executive updated the Board on the issues that had arisen and the meetings or events held since the last Board meeting. Progress on key projects and target dates for the regeneration programme were reported.

The main issues raised were:

Chartist Tower

The Board asked for discussions to continue with the owners in an effort to achieve fuller occupancy and a more attractive look to the building. It was considered that this should be considered as a project on which the Board would wish to follow progress.

World Banking Situation

The current world banking situation was discussed and the impact on regeneration schemes nationally and locally. Much of the regeneration programme is based on a buoyant residential property market and it was likely that the current conditions may lead developers to be more cautious and less speedy in the initiation of new projects or completion of existing projects.

It was considered, however, that land values and rents are not particularly high in Newport and may well be more robust in difficult times than those of other cities. Newport still does have very good locational advantages and there still is demand.

Friars Walk

Although there was an impact on the Friar's Walk scheme, and there had been unhelpful coverage in the national press, it was still hoped that start on site would be achieved in the summer of this year.

Sub prime Market – FT Article

The Board was provided with details of an article which had appeared in the Financial Times. The article had identified Newport as the top of the 'sub prime league'. The Board was disappointed with the article which was misleading and unhelpful and referred to theoretic outcomes, rather than any actual position. The reference to 'Newport' was also misleading as the article referred to the whole of the NP postcode area

Medipark and Hospital

The Board continued to express concern about the potential significant impact on jobs and regeneration in Newport should the decision to locate the regional specialist and critical care centre away from Newport rather than on the site purchased for the specific purpose of hospital development in the city and the adjacent Network Rail site. There was potential to lose in the order of 4,500 jobs and the City's largest employer based on place of employment.

The outline business cases for the new hospitals showed little new information and continued to rely on an inaccurate travel time analysis and a misleading consultation process which had not included the Newport option.

The option of locating both hospitals on the Whiteheads / Monbank site was the option which best fits with the Assembly Governments own sustainability agenda.

Councillor Bright had received a response from the Health Minister saying that the Minister was still considering her options and that any decision she makes would be based on all available information.

The Board considered that it should continue to campaign based on factual information and to ensure local residents were aware of the potential impact on local jobs of the siting of the regional facility elsewhere.

Members considered that it was important that master planning for the area took account of the need for significant prestigious employment opportunities should the second hospital be not located in Newport.

Rodney Parade / City Vizion

The Board was informed of significant changes in the company developing the City Vizion project and the significant impact on the scheme. It was hoped that there would be progress on elements of Phase 1 but there was a need to discuss proposals with the company

4. Project Coordination Group

The minutes of the most recent meeting of the Project Coordination Group were circulated for the information of Board members.

5. Whiteheads/ Mon Bank Presentation By Welsh Assembly Government

The Board received a presentation by Welsh Assembly Government on proposals for the Whiteheads/ Mon Bank development.

The Board was informed about the opportunity offered by the site for a high quality mixed use development including one or two hospitals. The current process concentrated on developing the site including the local hospital but plans could be amended should the decision by the Health Minister be that the specialist and critical care facility be sited here.

Mr Tim Howard explained to the Board that the current CPO approval from the Assembly Government was on the basis of the receipts from the site providing a viable scheme. The decision on the hospital would inevitably impact on the proposals for the site. The site provided an opportunity to promote sustainable development.

The Board was updated on the current position and about the planning application from Network rail for 850 residential units, in line with the UDP. The master plan was being developed and a JV arrangement was planned. Land would be disposed of to the NHS Trust at market value and the remainder of the site would be for mixed use.

Ms Sarah Jane Davies provided details of current works at the site, current costs and likely future costs. Demolition was underway and it was hoped to be complete by August 2008. Tenders had been invited for remediation works. These were to be complete by August 2009. Possession of the site by the NHS Trust was planned for 2009 with the hospital facility to be available by 2013.

Board members were informed of the expensive constraints on the site, including infrastructure and access issues and the

The Board was shown the current proposals for the mixed use of the site. The proposals for a new primary school were supported but the Board was very disappointed to see only 50,000 sq ft of office space identified at the site. This was in conflict with the aspirations of the Board in relation to the original objectives of the Newport regeneration programme. The current proposals would do little to compensate for the loss of jobs in the city should the decision be that the regional hospital facility is not sited here. The current proposals were also in conflict with the requirements of the local planning authority.

Mr Howard explained that the site needed to be viable to ensure that there was no impact on the CPO. The master plan advisors had provided guidance on the current allocations.

The Board was concerned that the original master plan drawn up by ARUP had shown the two hospital sites with flexibility inbuilt to promote other uses as necessary. The current proposals appear to be based solely on a commercial basis. This was particularly disappointing as it resulted in a mix of provision out of alignment with the needs of the city.

The Board was also concerned that the working group examining the master plan was not working to fulfill the aspirations of the Urban Regeneration Company and the City Council.

It was crucial that enough land is secured for the Local General Hospital and the employment uses required to substitute for any health service jobs which might be lost through the Clinical Futures proposals.

It was agreed that efforts would be made to establish wider and stronger dialogue between the interested parties to allow the master Planning process to develop further in an informed manner.

6. Jack's Pill

The Board was informed that the delivery of the Riverside Park at Old Town Dock involves the raising of land adjacent to the south side of Jack's Pill. An investigation had identified that the structure is likely to become unstable under additional loading. As a consequence options to carry out engineering and landscape works to facilitate delivery of the Riverside Park in this area were considered.

Original concerns about the integrity of Jack's Pill had been endorsed. Therefore, the stabilisation of the southern wall has become a very important aspect to the delivery of the Riverside Park and the adjacent development by Westmark.

The Board was informed of the options considered to resolve the issues raised, they being a Sheet Piled Structure; a revetment Structure (rock armour) and infilling of the Pill.

The current position was that an anchored double sheet piled wall with backfilling behind is adopted as the preferred solution. However, it is also recommended that the revetment option should continue to be progressed until a review of the proposals has been completed with the Environment Agency.

7. Gateway Strategy

The Board received a presentation on the current position as to the proposed gateway strategy. The strategy was wide – ranging but discussions mainly focussed upon Junction 28, Junction 24, the SDR, the new junction on the A449 and Heidenheim Drive.

The Board was informed of proposed generic actions relating to all target areas and also presented with specific proposals for particular locations.

The Board was very impressed with the proposals and was keen to see early progress particularly in areas of high priority where the solution was relatively low in complexity.

There would need to be a phased approach to take account of available funds and the timing of events.

It was suggested that the project team should approach the local colleges for potential involvement in the schemes and there was also a suggestion that litter cameras may be a useful addition, particularly at Junction 24.

It was also considered that where works were being undertaken by contractors, such as the imminent work on the roundabout at the Coldra, contractors should be encouraged to incorporate the plans into those works

THE BOARD AGREED

To implement the proposed strategy as a basis for progress

To establish an implementation team to include representatives of all stakeholders and to co-opt others as required.

8. Business Plan

Board members had been circulated and comments received were reported. The Business Plan for 2008 recognised progress in the past year and expressed confidence that, despite the current economic downturn, Newport would continue to develop.

The plan sets out the objectives and vision of the URC and the specific targets for 2008 / 09. Development programmes are set out in the plan together explanations as to funding and use of receipts. The plan also provides an opportunity to discuss future proposed developments and future funding needs.

IT WAS AGREED

To submit the draft Business Plan to the founder members for consideration

9. Newport West Railway Station

Arising from the discussion on the draft business plan, and following the identification of a potential funding source, the Board considered proposals to acquire three specific areas of land to secure a site for the proposed Newport West railway station

It was agreed

To use funds identified in the Business plan to acquire land for the proposed Newport West railway Station.

10. Marketing Activity Review

The Marketing Executive reported on recent, current and planned short term marketing activity for Newport Unlimited. The Board noted the current and planned activities.

Next meeting 24 July 2008