

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate
Change held at 1.00 pm on Wednesday, 22 June 2022

Present:

Members: Councillor J O'Boyle (Cabinet Member)

Councillor R Simpson (Shadow Cabinet Member)

Employees (by Service Area):

Business, Investment and Culture S Weir

Law and Governance: S Bennett, J Sprayson

Property Services and Development R Moon (Director) P Beesley, A Walimia

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 January, 2022 were agreed and signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

3. West Midlands Gigafactory

The Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Changes considered a report of the Director of Property Services and Development and the Director of Business, Investment and Culture which indicated that the delivery of a Gigafactory, making batteries for electric cars on a mass scale, is a key national and regional priority and will be a key part of the UK's efforts to deliver the technology that can remove the UK's dependence on fossil fuels. The Council believes that Coventry and Warwickshire is well placed to be the location for a Gigafactory given its proximity to large scale automotive production throughout the West Midlands.

A Gigafactory could deliver up to 6,000 new jobs directly, as well as thousands more in the supply chain, and would lead to significant investment into the local economy. The West Midlands Mayor, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and the Leaders of all its constituent authorities have all agreed that Coventry Airport is the preferred regional site for a Gigafactory.

Following the creation of the joint venture with Coventry Airport Ltd (CAL) and the subsequent submission of a planning application, planning consent has now been achieved for a Gigafactory on the airport site at a cost of c£1.1m per partner. Now that planning permission has been secured it is necessary to market the site to the widest possible range of international battery manufacturers and investors in both the automotive and non-automotive sectors, and to make the site available for such an investor as quickly as possible.

This report sought approval for an additional budget of £500,000. The funding (which is a 50% share of costs) will be used to undertake detailed pre-development design work on highways infrastructure, undertake detailed ground investigation, ecological and archaeological work to make the site ready for development and thus minimise pre-construction delays once an occupier is contracted. It will also be used to market the site to battery manufacturers around the world. Making the site available for development quickly will be essential to attracting the right battery manufacturer; these investment decisions are being made in the industry now, and only sites which can allow development to begin almost immediately will be considered seriously.

Officers provided additional information at the meeting on a number of issues, including how Coventry measures favourably against other potential competitor sites for a Gigafactory and the potential future market demand for such sites in the country.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change approves expenditure of up to £0.5m (as a 50% share) to be funded from reserves (in advance of future capital receipts) to fund the work streams required to undertake the work project activities associated with a West Midlands Gigafactory as set out in the report.

4. Grant Aid Agreement for Whitefriars Gate/Former Toy Museum and Non-Conformist Chapel - External Refurbishment

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Property Services and Development which indicated that in March 2022, Historic Coventry Trust (HCT) sought the Council's assistance to secure time limited grant funding from Historic England (HE) before the financial year end March 2022.

The funding is to assist with the repair of the external fabric of Whitefriars Gate (the old Toy Museum) and the Non-Conformist Chapel (London Road Cemetery) both owned by the City Council and are two of the three remaining buildings under the Council's control that are likely to be transferred to HCT in due course (as per the Framework Agreement with HCT). Historic England were offered a £180,000 grant for each property (Whitefriars Gate and Non-Conformist Chapel) and the Architectural Heritage fund also confirmed an additional £100,000 for Whitefriars Gate (Total available grant of £460,000). HCT were required to find £36,000 match-funding for the Non-conformist Chapel. This will be made available from either the income received from other properties already transferred over to HCT (Hales Street/Burges) or other fund-raising donations to cover the matched requirement.

It is anticipated that these properties will ultimately be transferred to the Trust once viable business cases are received and approved, as per the requirement set out in Cabinet Report dated November 2017 – “Historic Framework Agreement.”

To secure the grant, a tri party grant agreement was required which meant the City Council also needed to also sign and be subject to the grant conditions. The two key conditions for the Council are a) The public must be able to view to the buildings for 10 years and b) If the Council didn't transfer the properties to HCT and wished to transfer to a third party, HE would need to be consulted and there is a risk of clawback if the buildings are sold for a profit within the 10 years post works.

50% of the grant was paid out HCT on the commencement of the project i.e., before the end of March 2022, with works needing to be completed by March 2023. HCT are in receipt of these funds with work programmed for late July 2022.

The report sought the Cabinet Member's retrospective approval to enter into grant aid agreements with relevant parties.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change approves retrospectively the Grant Aid Agreement between the Council, Historic Coventry Trust and Historic England to secure grant aid funding of £460,000 in March 2022.

5. Any Other Items of Urgent Public Business

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 1.45 pm)