

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration held at
2.00 pm on Wednesday, 25 November 2020

Present: Councillor J O'Boyle (Cabinet Member)

Members: Councillor P Male (Shadow Cabinet Member)

Other Members: Councillor G Ridley, Woodlands Ward Councillor

Employees (by Directorate): S Bennett, Law and Governance
G Holmes, Law and Governance
A Hunt, Property
E Kirby, Law and Governance
J Mascarenhas, Property
R Moon, Director of Property Services and Development

Public Business

20. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

21. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October, 2020 were agreed and signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

22. Response to Petition Requesting "Save the Coventry Elephant"

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Property Services and Development which responded to a petition bearing 876 signatures requesting that the Council "Save the Coventry Elephant and keep it under public ownership". The Petition Spokesperson had been invited to attend the meeting but was unable to do so. A statement in support of the petition was read out on their behalf.

On the 12 February 2019, Cabinet approved the managed decommissioning and closure of Coventry Sports and Leisure Centre which includes the swimming baths and the Elephant, as well as its potential disposal as a surplus property. Following these Cabinet decisions, the Council ran an expression of interest process for interested parties to come forward with proposals for the site and buildings. This has resulted in an identified developer entering into an Exclusivity Agreement with the Council which requires them to come forward with proposals and a business case for the site and buildings by May 2021 which needs to meet certain prescribed criteria for the buildings.

Once these proposals and business case are received, the Council will consider and take forward any viable proposals for the site and buildings that meet the said criteria in line with its usual governance procedures and statutory responsibilities, including Cabinet and Full Council approvals where appropriate.

The Council and the proposed developer are working within the parameters of an Exclusivity Agreement agreed between the parties in relation to the Coventry Sports and Leisure Centre. The report recommended that the Cabinet Member notes that work streams are continuing under the terms of the Exclusivity Agreement and that proposals will be brought forward in due course to identify sustainable uses and options for the buildings and the wider site.

For the avoidance of doubt, the report also indicated that no decisions have yet been made on future uses and options for the Sports and Leisure Centre buildings and site. The alternative to the above course of action would be to seek to negotiate an end to the Exclusivity Agreement with the proposed developer. This is not considered an option due to the legal terms contained within the Exclusivity Agreement and would result in the Council potentially missing an opportunity to have proposals brought forward, for further consideration, in relation to a key area of the city centre.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration:-

- 1) Notes the issues raised in the petition**
- 2) Notes that officers will continue with existing work streams in relation to Coventry Sports Centre in order to establish options for its future use**
- 3) Requests that officers inform the petitioners of the situation**

23. Response to Petition Requesting the Adoption of a Phone Box in Sutherland Avenue to House a Defibrillator

The Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration considered a report of the Director of Property Services and Development responding to a petition bearing 203 signatures requesting that “the BT phone box near the shops at Sutherland Avenue to be repurposed to host a defibrillator and call on BT and the Council to work together to make this possible.” The petition was supported by Councillor G Ridley, a Woodlands Ward Councillor, who attended the meeting and spoke on behalf of the Petitioners.

The report indicated that the Council is supportive of the principle of adopting the telephone box on Sutherland Ave for use proposed by the petitioners. It is understood that there are other examples of how this has been done successfully in other areas of the country.

However, it is imperative that the Council does not take on the long-term liability for the repair, maintenance, insurance and electricity costs which are a condition of BT agreeing to transfer the phone box. This is because an increasing number of

BT phone boxes are becoming redundant and may be proposed for similar uses throughout the city potentially creating a long-term financial liability for the Council.

Accordingly, it was proposed that the Council will only be prepared to adopt the phone box once the petitioners form a properly constituted group to take on the above liabilities. The Council will be prepared to fund these costs for an initial 12 month period to allow the group to fund raise, but the Council will require the group to indemnify it against these costs by way of a legally binding agreement between the parties. In the event that the petitioners aren't able to form such a group the Council will not finalise the adoption of the phone box.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration agrees to approach BT to request taking ownership of the telephone box for a £1 (One Pound) which will then be used to house a defibrillator subject to the petitioners forming a properly constituted group, who shall be responsible for taking on the liability for the repair, maintenance, insurance and electricity costs incurred in relation to the telephone box after an initial 12 month period as well as indemnifying the Council against these costs by way of a legally binding agreement.

24. **Redevelopment of Siskin Drive Traveller Site**

The Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration considered a report of the Director of Property Services and Development which indicated that the Siskin Drive Traveller site was originally established by the Council in the 1970's. The Council now has vacant possession of the site following the departure of the last remaining Traveller family. The site was left in a very poor condition. Planning policy in Coventry's Local Plan identifies the site as an allocated permanent Traveller site. Policy H7 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation in the Coventry Plan identifies that 'provision will be made for at least 16 permanent pitches for Gypsies and Travellers through the re-modelling of the site at Siskin Drive'.

The identification of 16 pitches in the Local Plan was based upon the Travellers Need Assessment of 2014 which was predominantly informed by natural growth within the existing Traveller families at Siskin Drive & Burbages Lane (private site) at the time. Since the 'Traveller Need's Assessment' of 2014 there have been changes to the physical requirements of Travellers pitches and changes to Health and Safety standards, along with the view that less cramped sites provide better places to live and improve support for the families. This has meant that the number of pitches had to be reduced to comply with guidance. Travellers are now looking for sites that can accommodate larger Chalets with Utility and Kitchen / dinning accommodation blocks provided as well as parking for vehicles and a travelling caravan. To provide the new larger pitches and accommodation blocks and roadway through the site, as well as meeting the site separation fire safety regulations, requires the scheme to be reduced to 12 pitches. In the wider context of the 'Local Plan' the other 4 pitches identified could be delivered from private 'windfall sites' if there was further demand from the community.

Funding towards the costs of developing Traveller sites is available from Homes England. They have just announced their 2021 – 2025 programme of funding for

affordable housing and money has been specifically identified for permanent pitches on Traveller sites as part of this main funding programme. Historically Homes England have prepaid to fund around 60 - 65% of the costs of a Traveller site development. This excludes the value of the land included therefore 35 - 40% of the costs are required to be found elsewhere.

There is a policy in the Local Plan for the requirement for permanent Traveller pitches across the city. If Siskin Drive is not developed as a permanent Traveller site an alternative site where permanent pitches could be developed would be required unless the Council relied on the private sector to develop permanent Traveller sites in the city.

The report recommend that the Council enters into a long lease (99yrs) with Rooftop Housing Group and that they submit a bid direct to Homes England for grant funding and make the planning application for the redevelopment of the site for 12 permanent pitches in accordance with an agreed design criteria. Rooftop Housing Group have a successful track record in securing funding and developing Traveller sites having done so in Solihull in 2016 with Solihull Borough Council. They used a modular build for the utility blocks which could be replicated on the Siskin Drive site.

A number of meetings have been held with Rooftop Housing Group and they have submitted an initial financial appraisal based on estimated costs to the Council. They have confirmed that they have internal approval to now work up detailed costings based on a design scheme and to complete a full financial appraisal. This will be the basis upon which discussions with Homes England, with regard to grant funding, will also be concluded and their final submission to their Board for approval to complete the lease. They have indicated that final sign off to their Board will be in March 2021. During this time as well as securing funding Rooftop will commit to instructing their legal team to ensure the lease documents are agreed by March 2021.

Rooftop Housing Group have experience of developing and managing Traveller sites having a successful design for facilities along with an understanding of development costs and working with Homes England. The Council would remain involved as land owner only with the direct responsibility for redevelopment of the site along with the financial risk of funding the development, letting of the site, management & ongoing costs of maintenance and repair passing across to Rooftop Housing Group. The site would remain as a permanent Traveller site with the 12 permanent pitches substantially meeting the citywide requirements for permanent Traveller pitches in the city as set down in policy H7 of the Local Plan.

The Council would not be required to make a capital contribution and there would be ongoing revenue savings of £33,568 for the Council as all costs and risk are passed to Rooftop

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration:-

- 1. Approves the proposal for redevelopment of Siskin Drive Traveller site to provide 12 permanent pitches.**

2. **Delegates authority to the Director of Property Services and Development to conclude negotiations for the terms of the long lease to Rooftop Housing Group that will enable them to secure Board approval, funding and planning, facilitating the redevelopment and subsequent management of Siskin Drive Traveller Site.**

25. **Outstanding Issues**

There were no outstanding issues.

26. **Any Other Items of Urgent Public Business**

There were no items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 2.30 pm)