

Minutes



Cabinet

Date: 28 April 2022

Time: 12.00 pm

Present: Councillors Councillor J Mudd (Chair), J Hughes, Councillor R Jeavons, P Cockeram, D Harvey, D Mayer, Councillor R Truman and D Davies

1 Apologies for Absence

None received.

2 Declarations of Interest

None received.

3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Minutes from 6 April 2022 were agreed as a true record.

4 Transporter Bridge Funding Uplift

The Leader presented the report to colleagues, which had been previously discussed at Cabinet. The Transporter Bridge project was to protect and showcase the iconic structure and ensure the sustainability of its future so that it remained accessible for future generations.

After securing over £8.7m of funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Cabinet Members recalled the disappointment felt in July last year when the appointed contractors for both the bridge repairs and the new visitor centre had gone into administration and the proposed plans were on hold.

In the face of adversity, however, officers started the tendering exercise again and against a global backdrop of increasing costs and labour shortages, which were well documented and debated, unsurprisingly the tenders returned costs considerably higher than those originally agreed with the previous contractors.

The cost of the visitor centre saw a rise of 18% but the bridge repair package showed an increase of 100%. In real terms this meant that the project cost base had risen by £5million.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund was sympathetic to the plight of this project and also acknowledged that this situation was not confined to Newport; similar issues with significant cost rises were seen in other lottery grant funded projects. The Lottery Fund indicated that they would consider an application for a funding uplift provided the request could be kept below £2 million and they subsequently approved a request for an additional £1.95million.

A comprehensive value engineering review was also carried out and £680k in savings were identified. Nevertheless, as it stood, a gap of just over £2.9 million remained in the overall project.

If this project was to proceed, the Council needed to be prepared to underwrite this shortfall. This would require the re-allocation of the funding that was previously set aside in the capital headroom to cover match funding for the ultimately unsuccessful Levelling Up bid submitted last year for the Northern Gateway area of the City Centre.

This document is available in Welsh / Mae's ffurflen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg

This would increase the Council's capital headroom to £3.89 million, and therefore sufficient to support this project should additional funding not be secured from other sources.

The Council however did not intend to stop looking for sources of additional funding, and would continue to work with the Friends of Newport Transporter Bridge, who had been incredible and passionate supporters of this project, to identify fundraising opportunities. It was hoped that Welsh Government would also positively consider a request to increase their current £1.5 million contribution.

The tender period for both contract packages had expired and although both contractors remain engaged, there was a considerable risk of further cost increases if we do not formally agree these contracts without further delay, as there was no other option available.

The Transporter Bridge belonged to the City and continued repair and maintenance of the structure was required to ensure that it remained both operational and safe to use. Basic maintenance of the bridge structure alone, involved substantial costs because works were being carried out at height - these were fixed costs and must be paid no matter how much work was carried out.

This project would enable us to undertake comprehensive repairs to the bridge and provide visitor facilities which would ensure that it remained useable and accessible, now and in the future. There was an opportunity to accept over £12 million of external funding to make this iconic structure a focal point of the city and to maximise its impact as a heritage asset.

It was fully recognised that the increase in project costs puts added pressure on financial resources, however, given the amount of external funding secured and the benefits which flowed from this project for residents and visitors, the Leader invited Cabinet to consider the report.

Comments from Cabinet Members:

- Councillor Harvey was proud to be the Cabinet Member with the Transporter Bridge under her portfolio and agreed that the iconic structure must be kept and maintained and therefore supported the restoration of the Transporter Bridge.
- Councillor Roger Jeavons echoed the comments of the Cabinet Member and commended her on her hard work, along with the officers involved.
- Councillor Truman mentioned that the Transporter Bridge stood out as a Newport landmark and there were only six left in the world.
- Councillor Cockeram also endorsed the funding to preserve the Transporter Bridge, which was as famous as the Chartists in Newport.
- Councillor Mayer echoed comments of colleagues and supported the funding for the Transporter Bridge.
- Councillor Davies agreed with the Leader that this was a safety net, as capitol costs increased on major projects in Newport and material costs increased worldwide. The work had to be undertaken at a high standard to last for future generations.
- Councillor Hughes thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their hard work and support and also agreed that the Transporter Bridge was an iconic feather of the Newport Cityscape and was also part of Newport's maritime heritage.
- The Leader also mentioned that members of the public had written to her to light up the Transporter Bridge and it was important to consider that it had touched many people's lives in Newport, Gwent, UK and internationally.

The Leader met recently with Friends of Newport Transporter Bridge (FONTB) who agreed that these structures were iconic worldwide. The Leader also thanked Cabinet, Officers and FONTB for their support.

Decision:

That Cabinet accepted the additional funding award of £1.95million from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and for the Council to underwrite the remaining figure of £2.922 million, in line with the solution shown in the financial summary and the commentary provided by the Head of Finance.

This concluded the meeting.