

CITY COUNCIL MEETING

TUESDAY 5 MAY 2020 AT 6.45 PM

PRESENT: The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Bowman), Councillors Alcroft, Allison, Mrs Atkinson, Bainbridge, Betton, Birks, Bomford, Mrs Bradley, Brown, Christian, Collier, Dr Davison, Denholm, Ellis, Ms Ellis-Williams, Mrs Finlayson, Mrs Glendinning, Glover, Higgs, Mrs McKerrell, McNulty, Mrs Mallinson, Mallinson (J), Meller, Mitchelson, Morton, Nedved, Paton, Patrick, Robinson, Robson, Rodgerson, Shepherd, Miss Sherriff, Southward, Tarbitt, Dr Tickner and Tinnion

ALSO

PRESENT: Town Clerk and Chief Executive
Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services

C.58/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

C.59/20 PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED – That the Agenda be agreed as circulated.

C.60/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Allison declared an interest in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct in the business to be transacted this evening. The interest related to the fact that his son-in-law is a senior manager for a significant local contractor.

C.61/20 ANNOUNCEMENTS

(i) The Mayor

The Mayor wished to take this opportunity to thank the many key workers who were putting their lives at risk to deliver an excellent service, namely the NHS; carers, including those carers who were looking after loved ones at home; the Police; Fire Service; Army and our own Council staff and countless volunteers. One really could not thank them enough for what they were doing on behalf of the city. The Mayor thanked each and every one.

It was with great sadness that the Mayor announced that, as Reverend Teasdale had alluded to during prayers, Canon William Roan had sadly died the week before. Canon Roan was a Freeman of the City of Carlisle and a very well-respected gentleman in our City. The Mayor invited Reverend Teasdale to say a few words in tribute.

Reverend Teasdale considered it a privilege to speak in tribute, explaining that he had known Canon Roan for over ten years whilst serving in Carlisle.

Reverend Teasdale informed the meeting that Canon Roan had been born on 16 June 1921 at Belle Vue Farm, Carlisle to parents Lydia and Robert. He provided a detailed overview of Canon Roan's family background, together with his personal; academic; employment and professional accomplishments, including his ordination within Church. Mention was also made of the tremendous assistance and support provided by Mrs Roan towards her husband's work.

Upon their retirement twenty-eight years ago Canon and Mrs Roan decided to return to the City of their birth, Carlisle, and lived here ever since. In his retirement Canon Roan worshiped at St Cuthbert's Church and was backstop for four Vicars right until 2013. He provided assistance over the years, including cover during holiday periods, conducting regular services as well as weddings, baptisms and funerals.

Being a Carlisle lad Canon Roan was always proud of St Cuthbert's and the City Parish Church, and to be Vicar and Chaplain to The Mayor and the City Council. He always took a great interest in City affairs. During his retirement Bill was privileged to carry out frequent chaplaincy appointments with the Bishop of Europe, serving overseas on a number of occasions. In addition to his work as Priest for over seventy years, Bill has been deeply involved in the Masonic movement in Carlisle and Cumbria, nationally and internationally, and been awarded the Honoured Grand Chaplain for several years.

In 2016 Canon Roan was made an Honorary Freeman of the City of Carlisle and that was something of which he was very proud. He was a grandfather of seven and took an active interest in his family and was proud of their achievements. He died peacefully at home surrounded by his family on 30 April 2020. Due to current restrictions a private funeral service and interment will take place at Stanwix Cemetery; and a memorial service to be arranged later.

On a personal note, Reverend Teasdale indicated that he owed a huge debt of gratitude to Canon Roan for being such an immense support to him since he was appointed to Carlisle ten years ago. Bill had assisted him on many, many occasions at Church and up until he had to retire from active ministry, would cover on occasions for holidays and if he needed to be somewhere else would take a service. Many other local Vicars would say the same. He was always a great friend and just like in Parliament you have the father of the House, we certainly had the father of the House of Clergy in the form of the wonderful man, Canon Bill Roan, and may he rest in peace.

The Mayor expressed thanks to Reverend Teasdale for a very fitting tribute to a wonderful man, whom she was sure all would miss greatly.

(ii) The Leader of the Council

The Leader referenced the thanks expressed by The Mayor to those who had worked tirelessly during the terrible coronavirus pandemic, indicating that help emanated from a wide sector of society. He wished, however, to home in on the Council's own staff commenting that the services delivered were absolutely integral to the wellbeing of the people in the community of Carlisle; covering homelessness, refuse collection, grounds maintenance, street cleaning, bereavement services, and revenues and benefits. He considered that, since clearly all of those services are essential to the wellbeing of the public, members of staff of this Council had gone to extraordinary lengths to maintain those services and he was sure he spoke for all Members when he paid tribute to them and thanked them profusely for the efforts put in.

The Leader paid particular thanks to the IT Department and Committee Services who made the meeting tonight possible.

The Mayor thanked the Leader and requested that the Chief Executive convey thanks to members of staff who were doing a fantastic job for the City of Carlisle. The Mayor considered that the staff had done a wonderful job keeping the City going through what was a very difficult time.

(iii) Members of the Executive

The Deputy Leader announced the intention to establish a Covid-19 Hardship Fund. He informed Members that quite a substantial sum of money had been received from government in order to assist local residents. Carlisle City Council currently operated a Council Tax Reduction Scheme which gave reductions to those on Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance, PSA and Universal Credit. That meant that many people in Carlisle on low pay, self-employment or sickness benefit could get help towards their Council Tax.

The Government had awarded councils across the country a sum to enhance those schemes. Their recommendation was that the liability be reduced by a further £150 for working age claimants. In discussions with other Cumbrian authorities Carlisle had come to a decision that the Council Tax support should be increased further; and so he was happy to announce this evening that the City Council was topping up the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, not by £150 for every eligible household, but by £300 reduction in Council Tax for every eligible household.

The Deputy Leader added that many people may not be aware of the availability of the scheme or may have experienced recent changes in circumstances that made them eligible. Therefore the Council would, over the coming days and weeks, advertise the scheme and encourage people to apply.

(iv) Town Clerk and Chief Executive

There were no announcements from the Town Clerk and Chief Executive.

C.62/20 CIVIC CENTRE REINSTATEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Councillor Allison, having declared an interest, took part in discussion and voting on this item of business.

Pursuant to Minute EX.41/20 and EX.43/20, there was submitted report of the Deputy Chief Executive (CS.20/20) and accompanying report (CS.06/20), concerning the redevelopment of the Civic Centre, Carlisle.

The latter report covered the following elements of the reinstatement and development project and its development:

- Background to the project and the steps completed to reach this final stage of decision making.
- An update on the project development, the proposed facilities, timeline for delivery and project management arrangements.
- Other important considerations concerning the use of the Civic Centre and its current condition
- Project budget development and proposals for funding

- Proposals for a scheme of delegation that will support timely decision making on key contractual arrangements and funding.

Extracts from the Minutes of the Executive meetings held on 9 March and 30 April 2020 had also been circulated.

Speaking at the invitation of the Mayor, Councillor Ellis advised that the report constituted an update on the agreed plan from April 2018 when Council had approved the final proposals for redevelopment across the whole site; and that what was being done now related to putting the finance in place and moving to the next stage of project delivery.

In terms of background Councillor Ellis stated that, in December 2015, Carlisle had experienced devastating floods across city. The ground floor at the Civic Centre was extensively flooded and during that period the authority had opened up temporary facilities in the Civic Centre car park, which provision had continued ever since.

He summarised for Members the measured approach adopted in relation to providing support to businesses and local residents post floods and in terms of the ground floor redevelopment scheme which had suffered a series of delays; the proposed facilities, including additional car parking spaces and alternative means of transport and electric car charging points; and enhancements to the general aesthetics of the area; together with the difficulties associated with the current Council Chamber.

Councillor Ellis stated that four and a half years had passed since the floods and the work required to be done now. He emphasised that there was only one way forward – the Council was not in a position to relocate and the Environment Agency had supported the scheme which had been designed in such a way that it should enable the authority to get back onto its feet as quickly as possible should a future flooding event occur

Councillor Ellis therefore recommended the report and recommendations set out therein to the Council.

Councillor Mallinson (J) seconded the recommendations.

The City Council then debated the matter at length. A number of concerns / observations were raised by Members during the debate, including and in relation to:

- the costs associated with continued retention of the portacabin which was not 'fit for purpose' and its impact in terms of the ability to attract potential tenants to the Civic Centre;
- that if the full amount of the flood reserve was released for the reinstatement work there would be no funding available if the Council wished to progress the Bitts Park Lodge project; concern at the lack of toilet facilities in Bitts Park;
- what steps had been taken to market the new ground floor, and implications thereon given social distancing measures;
- concern that the total project sum (£3,601,998) may be viewed as indulgent during a time of great economic uncertainty/austerity and when there were people in need in this City, reliant upon emergency food parcels, business support and income support schemes; and front line staff who did not have appropriate PPE;
- dependence upon revenue from car parking when society should be discouraging car use in the city centre;

- the total project cost was now significantly greater than that agreed by Council in April 2018; and how any income shortfall could be met;
- that the new ground floor should not include a room numbered 13

Other Members recognised that, to do nothing was not an option - if a decision was taken not to proceed now, the costs associated with the redevelopment project would inevitably increase restricting the City Council in driving economic recovery, and adversely affecting business confidence in the area; that the project would provide enhanced facilities for customers (including those with disabilities, particularly in relation to dementia), improved accommodation, job opportunities for citizens of Carlisle and security for members of staff.

Certain Members questioned:

- the ability to offset costs from increased car parking; the actions required to mitigate risk; and the impact on the authority's ability to provide services to the City;
- whether there would be a review of other major capital projects and an indication of which projects were being considered to help fund the redevelopment scheme;
- whether further questions may have arisen in relation to the tendering process had the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel been able to scrutinise this report; and that if agreed the project be the subject of scrutiny moving forward
- whether the project could be deferred pending further clarity on the implications of the pandemic
- whether contingencies were in place to change the civic and conference facilities given that virtual meetings were now taking place

A number of assurances to be taken on board during the project were also sought, including that the project would not result in an increase in Council Tax; that construction staff would be protected from risks associated with Covid-19 and that ongoing risk assessments would be undertaken.

Councillor Mallinson (J) underlined that the Council had a duty of care to provide its staff with better accommodation than was currently the case; and that the authority would insist that contractors operated under safe conditions and would monitor that. The contract was ready to be signed and could not be deferred for a period of time. He believed that the Council must demonstrate that it had confidence in the City of Carlisle, that it was prepared to go ahead and take balanced risks, and that the redevelopment project must proceed.

Councillor Ellis then responded to the comments / questions raised. Being dementia friendly was a priority for both the previous and current administrations, therefore rooms would be named rather than numbered. The current customer contact facility was inaccessible for disabled people and should not remain in perpetuity. Consideration had been given to Covid-19 and its impact; it would be beaten and a new 'normal' would emerge at some point. The redevelopment project was a sixty-week project to be undertaken by a local contractor, therefore now was the time for public spending, for public infrastructure, to keep money coming into the local economy. It was considered that the redevelopment project could be financed without compromising other capital projects. He added that residents may well consider it an indulgence to spend resources on reinstatement of the ground floor but may well think it more indulgent to spend £100,000 to £120,000 a year on a temporary portacabin.

Councillor Ellis gave an assurance that financing of the project would not come from Council Tax and that it would not impact service delivery; and provided an explanation on the option to tax. He also summarised the background to the Bitts Park Lodge project which was deemed to

be financially unviable. That did not, however, mean that Bitts Park was forgotten – an excellent play area and adult gym equipment was in place, in addition to which the tennis courts had been refenced.

Reference had been made to reductions in car usage, however, the Civic Centre car park was the premium car park in the city and its occupation greater than other car parks. Although the report under consideration this evening had not been scrutinised due to the pandemic, that did not mean that the ongoing nature of the project could not be so scrutinised.

In terms of marketing of the ground floor, discussion had been undertaken and a number of organisations were keen to become involved.

Councillor Ellis considered that members of staff had done an incredible job working in temporary accommodation. He emphasised that there was no low-cost option and if not undertaken now some form of work would be required in the future which would result in less value for money and greater cost.

Following voting it was:

RESOLVED – That the City Council:

1. Approve the amendment to the Capital Programme in 2020/21 and 2021/22 for this project;
2. Approve the funding proposals as set out in the attached Executive report (CS.06/20), utilising the insurance settlement and proposed 'invest to save' scheme, noting the current shortfall position, and approving a supplementary estimate funded from capital resources, if savings cannot be identified through a value engineering process. This supplementary estimate to be funded from a fundamental review of the current capital programme or other revenue budgets as part of the 2019/20 outturn position.
3. Note the recommendation to opt to tax for VAT purposes the Civic Centre capital project.
4. Delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive to deliver the Civic Centre Reinstatement and Development Project ("Project") in accordance with the approved Project and within the approved budget. The Delegation is subject to the usual condition of taking advice from the Council's Statutory Officers when appropriate. For the avoidance of doubt, 'in accordance with the approved Project' includes the usual variations required for the proper delivery of the said Project. Any sub-delegation of this authority by the Deputy Chief Executive to be recorded in a Project specific scheme of sub-delegation

C.63/20 COMMUNICATIONS

There were no communications or items of business brought forward by the Mayor as a matter of urgency to be dealt with at the meeting.

[The meeting ended at 8.30 pm]