

Minutes of: RADCLIFFE CABINET COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 11 July 2022

Present: Councillor E O'Brien (in the Chair)
Councillors C Birchmore, C Cummins, J Lancaster, G Marsden
and M Smith

Public Attendance: Two members of the public were present at the meeting.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor C Morris

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Charlotte Morris.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The following question was submitted in advance of the meeting by a member of the public, Alicia Carlin:

How much is it going cost to turn the basement in Radcliffe market into the new civic hall? Would it not be cheaper to put the civic hall in the Hub or refurbish the library? When it comes to tanking a basement in a house it is a very expensive job.

Responding, Councillor Eamonn O'Brien reported that the project does not include the construction of a new civic hall. He advised that if a large scale events space similar to that being created in the Market basement were included within the Hub building, we would either need to reduce the floor space allocated to the leisure and library services, or significantly increase the floor space by constructing an additional floor. We would need to introduce commercial serving space, and the capacity of such a space would demand that we increased the provision of WCs, passenger lifts, widen corridors and staircases, increase access/egress points into the building, and storage space for furniture and equipment. This would be prohibitively expensive and the height and massing of the building would be unlikely to secure planning consent.

With regards to the library, the existing library building was refurbished relatively recently and is in a good state of repair and as such the proposed use of this space as an enterprise centre will require very little reconfiguration/refurbishment work with minimal costs incurred. Irrespective of the plans to regenerate the town centre, remedial works to the Market building are required to ensure it remains safe and structurally sound. Repeated flooding over many years have undermined the structural integrity of the building and therefore these works are essential to safeguard the continued use of the Market. The cost of these maintenance works is being met by capital budgets earmarked to manage and maintain our estate.

The following question was submitted in advance of the meeting by a member of the public, Louise James:

What action is being taken to address the eyesores which are the long empty and dilapidated buildings in the town centre e.g. buildings at the corner of Stand Lane/Pilkington Way and the old Adamson's Solicitors office on Blackburn St? Even though they are not owned by the Council, there should be some mechanism to disincentivise landlords/owners from leaving properties empty long term. The regeneration is significantly undermined by such properties.

Responding, Councillor Eamonn O'Brien reported that he had sympathy for this issue, and the Council were continuing to make attempts to engage with the owners of those buildings and keep all options open and on the table, continuing the works and improvements set out in the Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF). This would build confidence in the Town Centre and encourage private sector investment, with these buildings changing ownership to new businesses who wanted to have a presence in the area.

The following question was submitted in advance of the meeting by a member of the public, Judith Sheppard:

What are the 'specific' plans for Radcliffe Market Basement?

This will be a major project with the basement being tanked and kept watertight. The council claim that by waterproofing the Market basement, will provide space that could be used for community and cultural events.

Whilst I agree that Radcliffe needs this type of space, it is certainly not needed in a dungeon. Do you not think that it would be more cost effective to use the upper floor of the library building retaining a public building for the benefit of the town and its heritage? Is this a realistic project seeing that there are still no costings for the work required in the market basement?

Responding, Councillor Eamonn O'Brien reported that our project work will firstly involve remedial works to the Radcliffe Market building, ensuring that it is structurally sound and water tight. Reconfiguration and refurbishment works will then be carried out to install a new passenger lift and stair cores, ensuring the basement level of the Market is fully accessible and compliant with fire safety regulations. An events space will be created, alongside supporting and ancillary spaces such as a bar/servery, storage areas and public toilets including a Changing Places toilet. Design work is on display in the Regen office on Dale Street, where the project team will be happy to discuss these proposals and answer any questions.

Alongside the physical regeneration project work, progress is also underway to shape a programme of cultural activity in the town centre. The Radcliffe Community Plan is the collaborative vehicle being utilised by the Council and other partner agencies, to engage with local community groups, schools, businesses and residents. The emerging programme will be designed with, and for local people, celebrating culture, place and heritage. The events space in the Market will form part of a campus of civic spaces, all of which will host this cultural offer.

The project will firstly safeguard the Market building from the threat of flooding and address the damage water ingress has caused over the years. Radcliffe Market is a prized asset, which not only provides local jobs and drives footfall into the town centre supporting the day and night time economy, but also supports a wide range of events which directly support and benefit the local community. It is essential therefore that it sits at the core of efforts to regenerate the town centre. Our work seeks to transform the Market Basement from its current uninhabitable state, into a commercially viable space that can host an even wider range of activities and build upon the existing success of Market based community events, creating space that allows increasing numbers of groups to use it.

Our focus is very much on a 'campus of spaces', which complement rather than compete with each other, and collectively create a diverse offer in the town centre. The Market basement is just one element of this. Further community space is also being created in the new Hub

building, and investment here is being strengthened by improving the surrounding public realm, as well as developing the Enterprise Centre in the existing library building, which will continue to be available for community use and remain as a much loved heritage asset.

Councillor O'Brien advised that yes, this is a realistic project. The proposals as outlined in the Levelling Up Fund bid have undergone rigorous appraisal and review internally within the Council and from assessors at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, to establish that the project is deliverable within budget and programme, and that the cost benefit ratio evidencing value for money is met. The Council do have a cost plan for this, and all other elements of the project. This is managed, monitored and reported on a monthly basis by a project team who have experience in delivering complex capital construction projects. Over the past 12 months a huge amount of progress has been made to ensure the successful delivery of the project – the acquisition of the development site, assembly of the professional project team, procurement of contractor and design team, commissioning of surveys and site investigations, development of the design and technical schematics and securing an unprecedented level of investment from the Levelling Up Fund (LUF). Despite the scale and complexity of the work, the project remains on programme and work will start on site at the end of 2022.

As with any major construction project, extensive survey works are required to inform the design, which in turn has to be developed from outline concepts to final proposals. At every stage, costs are reviewed. We are currently at RIBA Stage Three, where survey and design work remain ongoing. It is not until the end of RIBA Stage Four, that the contractor will take all packages out to the market and tender the works – thus informing the final costs. Up until this point, forecasts are based on cost pm² provisional sums and average market rates, with appropriate percentage allowances for risk and contingency.

A further supplementary question was submitted:

What is the Council's backlog maintenance fund as you refer to it within the report saying that additional funding from the 'Levelling up fund' could also be used to pay for the basement refurbishment?

Councillor O'Brien reported that the annual capital budget is partly used to maintain our assets (the Council owned estate and capital equipment) and therefore funds ongoing and backlog maintenance and remedial works. This ensures we can continue to safely operate and manage our buildings. Work to the Radcliffe Market Basement includes both remedial works funded by the capital maintenance budget, and refurbishment works funded by both the LUF and Council's regeneration investment fund.

The following question was submitted in advance of the meeting by a member of the public, Alan Sheppard:

There has been a lot of talk about the Radcliffe 'Hub', however regeneration is about much more. Radcliffe needs new shopping space, bars and eating places, an exciting day and evening economy. The town needs to be attractive to visitors, the walk to the town from the Metrolink is a disgrace, it can feel threatening to pedestrians, particularly in the darker hours. Specifically, I want to know what has been done to address those, not your thoughts and vague plans, but what contracts have been signed, tell us in detail what the progress is on things other than the 'Hub'.

Responding, Councillor Eamonn O'Brien reported that this was about more than the Hub, it was also the Market Chambers building, the basement space, the enterprise Centre at the library, and work at Green Street. He advised that the Market Chambers building is being fully refurbished as part of the Hub project, which includes four commercial units on ground floor

and a further three on the floors above. We are currently in discussion with four prospective tenants. We are not in a position to disclose the specific detail of contracts being negotiated at this time. The Hub building also includes a ground floor commercial unit, and the proposed investment case and details of the operator model are due to be reviewed by our Programme Board in July. Development of the North Block, which is intended to include a mixed use commercial offer, is progressing through procurement activity currently. Once a development partner is secured, plans will be developed which detail the scope and size of retail units. Proposals for a commercial offer on the Green Street site are currently being reviewed as part of a formal planning application process.

A further supplementary question was submitted:

What is the timeline for residents seeing evidence of new shops and bars etc? Do we have to wait until the 'Hub' is finished or will work on the retail establishments progress at the same time?

Councillor O'Brien reported that final design packages for commercial spaces in the Market Chambers and Hub will be available in the Autumn, ahead of works commencing on site before the end of the year. RIBA Stage Three proposals are currently on display in the Regen office and the Project Team are available to discuss these plans and answer any questions. He advised that everything was on schedule, and the timescale for the commercial offer for the North Block will depend upon the procurement route and agreement negotiated with a development partner.

The following question was submitted in advance of the meeting by a member of the public, Ian Hayes:

Against a backdrop of rising energy costs and national shortage of chlorine will the council review the financial viability of a swimming pool in the proposed Hub using an unconnected third party firm of accountants paying particular attention to the significant element of variable costs in its day to day operation and forecast footfall. Ideally a firm with analytical insolvency experience not merely a big four numbers cruncher.

Responding, Councillor Eamonn O'Brien reported that as part of our initial strategic business case for new leisure centre, we undertook a full business analysis with an external company. This has helped plan for the new civic Hub. There will be new commercial aspects available to us within the civic Hub which will enable us to deliver a more sustainable model.

The Hub and its facility are being designed and developed with a range of key partners ranging from local authority, health, and wider voluntary sector. The way we have designed the pool allows us to maximise income through a new separate teaching learner pool and six lane pool to ensure a long term financially viable facility, which is fit for the whole community. This facility will not only deliver on the corporate and financial aspect that have been set within the facility, but the Hub will also be a new way of engaging and improving the health and wellbeing of the community from education of young generation, to having an impact on the health and wellbeing and being of the population. The pool itself as a new build is being designed with long-term cost-effective solution that will aim to reduce our energy usage and costs alongside system that will reduce our chemical usage, aiming to make this site as sustainable and efficient to run as we can.

Part of the corporate planning and the setting of our financial goal will be done as part of a wider full strategic review for this facility. This will take in to account the operation and our associated cost of all amenities for the site and the footfall and engagement we need to achieve or supersede these aims.

We are aiming to be fully engage with the community and its resident to maximise the usage of the site and the pool areas to provide great benefit to all in the borough.

A further supplementary question was submitted:

Will the council consider land behind the former Town Hall for a new pool where one once existed (along the lines of the successful small scale "Waves" pool in Nelson (creating dual usage of the existing Whittaker St car park)?

Councillor O'Brien reported that the Hub is a community focused building housing a wider wellness offer, including wet and dry leisure, library and adult education, community space, commercial space, and an office accommodation for public facing services. This follows a well-established model in GM and reflects the 'Moment to Pivot' strategy as well as our own objectives outlined in Let's Do It.

As evidenced in our bid to the LUF, the Benefit-Cost Ratio of this proposed development not only met the required threshold but exceeded it – location was a key part of this. The town centre location is highly visible and easily accessible, with immediate adjacency to the bus station and easy access to the Metrolink line. The development will drive footfall into the town centre, which has been dwindling for many years due to changing retail habits; a situation exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. A traditional leisure centre development, as part of a fragmented estate approach is unlikely to be viable in the longer term. A location outside of the town centre would have limited benefit to the economic prosperity of the high street.

The following question was submitted in advance of the meeting by a member of the public, David Arnfield:

I would like to know how many active retail shops are in Radcliffe centre at this moment and how may will there be after the Hub is constructed?

I would like to add that I don't go to gyms or pubs but I do find shopping necessary.

Responding, Councillor Eamonn O'Brien reported that within the South Block, where the Hub will be located, there are currently two retail shops – Boots and Shades of Sentiment. The card shop will remain in the town centre, and negotiations are progressing well to retain the pharmacy. There are a further eight commercial units; five are moving to properties in the centre of Radcliffe and five have opted to accept compensation rather than be relocated. In addition, three new commercial tenants are currently in discussions with the Council regarding leases on retail units in the Market Chambers, which is being fully refurbished as part of the project.

The eight commercial units in the North Block remain occupied and active. Development of this site will include mixed use commercial space (including retail) and car parking. Once timescales are determined we will be working with these businesses to support relocation where possible.

4 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the inclusion of a request for a profit/loss business plan for the Market Chambers building.

With regards to matters arising, Jacqui Dennis, Director of Law and Democratic Services, advised that a note would be sent to Members within the next 7 days regarding the title

investigation on the library, Becca Lord, Major Project Manager - Radcliffe, advised that the cost plan dashboard documents would be shared, and that a profit/loss business plan for the Market Chambers building could be provided for the next meeting.

5 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee formally received and noted its terms of reference.

In response to a question about the Radcliffe Regeneration Advisory Group (RRAG), it was noted that the Group hadn't met since August but that the Radcliffe Community Hub manager was still meeting with local groups and continuing to build networks, while officers continued to link in with existing local forums in order to reach out to the community in the absence of RRAG meetings. It was agreed that an update on the status of the RRAG be brought to the next meeting of this Committee.

It was agreed:

That the terms of reference be noted, and that an update on the status of the RRAG be brought to the next meeting.

6 SECONDARY SCHOOL PROVISION IN RADCLIFFE - FINANCIAL APPROVAL TO COUNCIL'S FUNDING OBLIGATION - PART A

The Committee received a report of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People regarding the delivery of a new secondary school in Radcliffe. Ordinarily, the Department for Education (DfE) would primarily work with the sponsor, in this case Star Academy, to agree the design and delivery milestones for the new Free School but given the critical role that the Council has played in securing the approval for the new school and the important role the new school plays in the wider socio-economic regeneration of Radcliffe, the Council has continued to meet with DfE and Star Academy on a monthly basis to maintain progress. This report focused on the financial approvals needed from the Council, to be funded from Children's Services schools capital budget, and it was noted that a range of factors had been discussed regarding which organisation would be financially responsible for each to ensure a fair distribution of costs.

Members noted that work with local primary schools had begun with Star Academy regarding attendance and curriculums but that it was challenging to keep the DfE focussed on Radcliffe delivery in the context of its wider remit. In response to Members' questions, it was noted that a meeting had been scheduled in August with the Radcliffe Swimming & Waterpolo Club when the project would enter RIBA Stage 4 and more detailed information would be available. It was also noted that Sports England were currently reviewing the plans for the swimming pool, after which these could be shared more widely.

In response to further questions, it was noted that the North Block plans were at an early stage but was planned to be mixed use with a combination of parking and some retail. With regards to the feasibility study, it was noted that although this was overdue, it had been followed up and regular contact continued with Star Academy and the DfE.

It was agreed that:

The Radcliffe Cabinet Committee:

1. Note the indicative financial costs that will fall to the Council;
2. Note that the Cabinet will be asked to approve the funding of indicative costs as set out in Part B of this report, to meet the Council's financial obligations, to be met from the Children's Services schools capital programme; and

3. Note that the Cabinet will be asked to delegate approval of the final costs to the Executive Director of Finance.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that the Wellness team were looking at the decant and interim arrangements for the break between leisure offers, and it was agreed that an update be brought to the next meeting.

8 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Decision:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting under Section 100 (A)(4), Schedule 12(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, for the reason that the following business involves the disclosure of exempt information as detailed against the item.

9 SECONDARY SCHOOL PROVISION IN RADCLIFFE - FINANCIAL APPROVAL TO COUNCIL'S FUNDING OBLIGATION - PART B

The Committee received a Part B report of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People regarding the delivery of a new secondary school in Radcliffe. This report set out the indicative costs falling to the Council.

COUNCILLOR E O'BRIEN
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 5.30 pm and ended at 6.15 pm)