

EXTRAORDINARY ECONOMY COMMITTEE

19 June 2023 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Nash (Chair), Dr Walsh (Vice-Chair), Cooper, Greenway (Substitute for Edwards), Gunner, Lawrence, Lloyd, Needs, Northeast, Penycate and Stanley

Councillors Goodheart and Pendleton were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

99. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Councillor Edwards. It was also advised that Councillor Gunner was on his way but running late.

100. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Nash declared a personal interest in Item 4 [Consideration of Meanwhile Uses for Brewers Fayre Building, Bognor Regis] as he was a volunteer for Arun Arts.

101. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The Chair invite Councillor Stanley to add the following items to the Committees work programme, where he requested a review of Littlehampton Beach Huts Project and a review of the Air B&B proposal be added to the work programme, this was seconded by Councillor Northeast.

Dr Walsh was supportive of the proposal given the level of resident concern that had been raised for both these projects.

The Chair confirmed that these reviews would be brought to the October meeting of the committee.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That a review of the Littlehampton Beach Huts Project and the Air B&B Proposal in Arundel be added to the Committees Work Programme and be brought to its meeting in October 2023.

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102. CONSIDERATION OF MEANWHILE USES FOR BREWER'S FAYRE BUILDING, BOGNOR REGIS

(Councillor Gunner arrived at the meeting during this item at approximately 18:20pm)

The Chair invited the councils Regeneration Consultant to update members on the future uses of the former Brewers Fayre building. He explained that the purpose of the report before members was to stimulate debate, in order to assist members with their debate he explained that the Council acquired the leasehold as part of the development of the Alexandra Theatre. It was originally agreed that Whitbread would take a sub-lease back from the council and run the Brewers Fayre pub for two years until the new hotel and restaurant opened, however, almost at the last-minute Whitbread decided they no longer wanted to do that. He reminded members that in January 2023 there had been a briefing held where discussions were had regarding the future development opportunities on the Regis Car Park, where there was support for including the site that the Brewers Fayre building stands. He confirmed that the council had now commissioned the enterprise partnership for the developments for the car park including the Brewers Fayre site. It was believed that the work that would be completed, including design and planning application stages may take 5 years to complete, which brought members back to the report before them at the meeting, Officers required direction to be set, in terms of what the Council was to do with the building as a meanwhile use. A site visit was completed with members, where it was agreed at this visit that a meeting to discuss all options open to the Council was the right course of action. In summing up he confirmed that once direction had been given, a best value exercise would be undertaken and brought back to members for a decision to be made. He explained each option that was before them in the report along with some suggested uses, café and soft play, continue with restaurant uses, find a meanwhile use operator to take the headlease and split up the use of the building as they saw fit. He stated that as Officers, the only option detailed in the report they could recommend was Option 2, which sought best value for the Council.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his presentation of the report and his detailed explanation to the committee. He then stated that there was a clear short term and long-term issues. The short-term issue being that Arun Arts had been given the option to move into the building, with no rent but they would need to pay for any refurbishment costs incurred. The Chair confirmed that he felt that this option would be the best option and he hoped that from the debate it would allow for the Council and Arun Arts to have further discussions to work out an agreement for them to take on the building that would work for all. The long-term issue he explained that now the Council had the freehold of the whole building, there was the opportunity to revive the Royal Hall which would be a very positive outcome for the Council and Bognor Regis.

The Chair then opened debate, where initial comments were made that revival of the Royal Hall would ensure that there would be opportunities created by this option that would allow to Bognor Regis to put on events all year round. It was also commented that without up-to-date visuals of the space it was hard to visualise,

however from their memory when it was previously the Royal Hall it created a nice and adaptable space for the area.

Clarification was sought regarding the comments that were being made about turning the site back into a Royal Hall was a long-term decision which had not been detailed in the report before members. It was also asked of Officers to confirm what discussions had previously taken place with Arun Arts up to this point in time as well as confirmation on where the 5-year timeframe that had been mentioned had come from as this was not clear.

The Chair invited the Regeneration Consultant to provide answers to the questions put. He explained that the 5-year timeframe had come out of the discussions held at the member briefing held in January 2023, to redevelop the entire site including the Brewers Fayre building. It was estimated that construction would not be able to be started for approximately 5-years given the design and planning work that would need to take place prior to this. In terms of the Royal Hall option being discussed this would be Option 1 which was detailed within the report and in terms of the conversations that had taken place with Arun Arts about them moving into the space, however, unfortunately the council received a written response from them that stated for various reasons, one being detailed as refurbishment costs that they were not interested in the option of moving into the space. He then reconfirmed that the purpose of the report was not intended for members to resolve anything, in terms of a final decision today, its purpose was to allow for discussion to be had and a direction for Officers to then go away and investigate and then bring back a report that details, issues, costs and options relevant to that.

One member then asked if there were any designs that were available for members to view in terms of what may be on the table in 5-years' time. It was confirmed that as this work had only just been commissioned there were no designs available at this time, however it was expected that these would be available in about 3 months' time. The Vice-Chair then confirmed that he was in favour of investigation Option 1, stating that Bognor Regis lacked an exhibition hall, lacks conference facilities and a large space for community events and he believed that it would be good to ensure that these were given consideration when looking into Option 1. He then advised the Committee that in terms of the options for what may be happening to the site in 5-years' time, he stated that he had concerns about the comments made as members had not formally seen anything with regards to this and it felt very much like the cart before the horse scenario at this point in time.

As discussion continued, it was commented regarding Option 1 the first concern for one member was that there was a £1 Million cost attached to this. He also reminded members that Butlins in Bognor Regis had plenty of meeting space available for use. His second concern was that currently the options before members felt very 'piecemeal', the site location was a prime site on the seafront, and it would be sensible to take a more holistic approach towards the theatre and this site, as a whole. He urged members to view the site, it was currently an 'empty shell' and would take a lot of work and significant investment to get it up to a Royal Hall standard. He also stated it was disappointing that Arun Arts did not want to utilise the space, however it was understandable given the potential refurbishment costs. In terms of whoever took on the

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space it clearly needed to be someone who could rejuvenate the space and would then therefore add value to Bognor Regis. Finally, he asked for confirmation regarding the former Royal Hall site and the Brewers Fayre site being separate sites, it was confirmed that historically they were the same building, however, when Whitbread took over the contract in 1996, they were separated.

The Chair offered his help at this point where he confirmed that the former Royal Hall had been used for many events such as conventions, exhibitions, big receptions for the council. It also had a sprung floor for dancing, one of the finest on the South Coast. To reconfirm members have the opportunity to consider all these other options including Arun Arts, I believe that there is a deal to be done with Arun Arts, there would be financial cost implications with this option, however he believe that Arun Arts were the best people to take on the meanwhile use of the site for the next 2 – 2.5 years and alongside this a feasibility study be completed on redeveloping the Royal Hall. In summing up he stated that he believed this option would be good for Bognor Regis and would definitely add value as mentioned. Questions were then raised regarding the finances, specifically regarding consideration of Option 1, clarification on if the refurbishment took 2 years, would this be £1 Million over the 2 years or would it be £1 Million for each of those years. The Chair stated that these questions would be answered by the feasibility study. The Regeneration Consultant confirmed that in terms of the immediate refurbishment and the 2 year timescale for this, the building had, had a false ceiling put in and a bar, these would both be required to be removed, the work on the ceiling would also require all of the lighting and switching to be redone as well as the roof not being insulating currently which would need to be rectified. In terms of the income possibilities, these would need to be investigated fully.

One member stated that they felt a site visit was important for members of the committee to attend before any decision was made of which there was support from other committee members for this suggestion. A further question was asked about the £1 million cost that had been documented for Option 1 and how this had been arrived at. It was confirmed that this was an estimated cost that had been derived from the estimated costing of works that were known at this current time. A full a proper cost breakdown could be provided should that be agreed by members.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Stanley as invited to make comment, where he stated he agreed with the comments made by both Councillor Cooper and Lloyd. He said that the report fulfilled its purpose as a good discussion was taking place. There was a clear desire to explore the feasibility of a Royal Hall, Option one had been put forward on the basis of the building being knocked down in 5-years' time and this is not what was being discussed at this time. He proposed that he felt it might be best to defer a decision, so that investigative feasibility work surrounding the Royal Hall in the short and long-term as well as a site visit being arranged for committee members to attend. He also requested that Arun Arts be informed of the potential proposals discussed for redeveloping the Royal Hall to see if this made any change to their mindset on meanwhile use. This was seconded by Councillor Lawrence who reserved her right to speak. The Regeneration Consultant confirmed that the proposal of a deferral wasn't quite right as the purpose of the meeting was to provide a steer for Officers and within his proposal the steer was to investigate Option 1.

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Gunner was then invited to comment on the proposal, where he stated that he was in agreement with Councillor Stanley, he stated that he had visited the site and in its current state there was no Royal Hall, the current state of site had surprised him and given this he believed significant capital funds would be required as the current estimate of £1 million was a significant underestimate of the work required. He went on to say that he didn't believe that the committee had enough information to make any decision at this meeting and made reference to Worthing Council who provide over £1 million a year as subsidy for the Worthing Theatres. He wanted to know what the budget was to complete the work, a budget in terms of the rate costs and loss of revenue costs. In summing up he said he felt there was a strong desire to spend quite a lot of money without budgets, or more detailed information.

There was further concern raised regarding the other options detailed in the report and that the discussion seemed to be focused on Option 1 which was only a long-term option and what was the short-term option? The Chair confirmed that within the proposal put forward by Councillor Stanley the short-term option was to reignite conversations with Arun Arts, to retest their appetite to take over the meanwhile use. It was then asked was there not an option to consider the look of the site in its current state and encompass a tidier look to the area. It was confirmed by the Regeneration Consultant that external work was due to start next Monday, which would see external new planters, seating and graphics etc. In reference to councillor Gunners comments if members would like officers to investigate the options around reinstating the Royal Hall, he was correct there would be significant revenue costs and conversations would need to take place with the Section 151 Officer for this. If members want to pursue the Royal Hall option, it would not provide any form of 'payback' in the short term and these plans would need to be excluded from any other part of the other redevelopment designs.

The Leader of the Opposition, councillor Gunner then asked if there was already and allocated budget for this, where it was confirmed no, there was no current budget in place. He then asked did the Officer have any idea where the budget would come from, and his final comment stated that should the Royal Hall be reinstated it would be degeneration. The Officer reconfirmed that all revenue costs would require discussion with the Section 151 Officer.

It was also confirmed by the Officer that were pictures of the site as it currently is along with current footprint plans which he would share with members outside of the meeting.

Councillor Lawrence, seconder of the amendment was then invited to make her comments where she made reference to the work being agreed and undertaken for the Alexandra Theatre it would be a shame to leave the other side of the building in its current state. Councillor Stanley, proposer of the amendment stated that there was a clear public desire that wished to explore this option and it would be sensible for the council to understand if it was feasible to move forward with on that basis.

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The Chair then invited comments from non-members of the committee who were in attendance where further concern was raised about the funding and potential costs implications of the proposed option.

The director of Growth and Interim CEO was then invited to make any comments where he advised members that Officers will take the direction given by members, so if members were minded request investigatory work for option 1 be undertaken, then that is exactly what would be done. He also set expectations in terms of the timeframe for when a report would be brought back to committee after a decision was agreed. And finally, members should consider that the building would remain empty until such time as members make their decision.

A recorded vote was requested at the time the vote was taken and clarification was then sought on a reminder of the proposal before members. The Committee Manager then confirmed that the proposal was;

Proposer, Councillor Stanley and Seconder, Councillor Lawrence

defer any decision tonight prior to investigative work surrounding the Royal Hall for the short and long term and a site visit being booked for members to attend and review the state of the building. And if we could inform Arun arts on potential proposal for the royal hall to see if this makes any change to their mindset on use.

It was checked that the proposer and seconder were happy with the amendment as it stood, given the discussion that had taken place surrounding it not being a deferral. The proposer confirmed that the wording relating to deferral could be removed.

Further advice was provided by the Regeneration Consultant and the director of Growth and Interim CEO. The Vice-Chair stated that the discussion had been around Option 1 with no other options had been discussed which provided clarity that there was no interest in these. The Leader of the Opposition made comments raising concern that the remaining options had not been discussed as he believed that had not been the opportunity to do so and reiterated his concerns about the lack of information present to members of which they were about to make a decision on. He also stated that Option 1 in his opinion was not regeneration.

The Chair stated that he disagreed with Councillor Gunners comments that pursuing Option 1 was not regeneration. He then invited Councillor Stanley to speak as he wanted to speak to the wording of his proposed amendment. Councillor Stanley stated to simplify for members the wording of his amendment should now read.

That Officers investigate a feasibility study into option 1, to scope shorter term and longer-term options. As well as arranging a site visit for members.

He then asked for clarity that the amendment would not just be for a 3-year period. The Regeneration Consultant confirmed that absolutely, it wouldn't be for a 3-year period as currently mentioned in Option 1 in the report. The feasibility study would

be completed and brought back to members for review and decision. He also confirmed that by making this decision members were agreeing to the building remaining empty until this work had been completed.

The Chair then returned to the seconder, councillor Lawrence and asked her to confirm if she was happy with the change of wording put forward by Councillor Stanley. Councillor Lawrence confirmed that yes, she was happy with the change of wording, but also asked if the 'wider regeneration plans' that had been referred to could be explained to her as an aside.

Councillor Greenway sought clarity on the timeframe of 3 years being removed as this would suggest to him this was a long-term option that was being agreed.

The Chair then asked the Committee Manager to re-read the amended proposed amendment, so it was clear for all members what they were voting on. The Committee Manager read out the wording;

That Officers investigate a feasibility study into option 1, to scope shorter term and longer-term options. As well as arranging a site visit for members.

She then asked the Proposer and Secunder to confirm if they wanted the following wording added based on the debate as this was missing from the amended proposal;

That Officers investigate a feasibility study into option 1, to scope shorter term and longer-term options. As well as arranging a site visit for members. **Officers are also instructed to hold urgent discussions with Arun Arts.**

The Proposer and Secunder agreed the wording in bold be readed to the amendment. As a recorded vote had been requested the Chair instructed the Committee Manager to undertake this vote.

Those voting For were Councillors Lawrence, Nash (Chair), Needs, Northeast, Pencyate, Stanley and Walsh (Vice-Chair). Those voting Against were Cooper, Greenway, Gunner and Lloyd. There were no abstentions. The vote was then declared as CARRIED.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That officers investigate a feasibility study into Option 1, to include both the shorter term and the longer-term options discussed. As well as arranging a site visit for members. Officers are also instructed to hold urgent discussions with Arun Arts.

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The Chair then asked if the Regeneration Consultant if he had any further comments to make based on the result of the vote. He reconfirmed that the building would remain empty while the feasibility study is completed. He advised that Officers would also include a shorter, short term use for the building, potentially with Arun Arts operating it or incorporating it within the construction contract to keep the building alive. He confirmed that this would also provide officers time to obtain the feasibility study options for the wider Car Park to look at the wider regeneration scheme with and without the Brewers Fayres Site. That way members would be fully informed by the time their next decision was to be made.

The Chair then confirmed that all the business on the agenda had been completed and he was therefore closing the meeting.

(The meeting concluded at 7.10 pm)