

LEISURE COMPLEX AND BUS STATION PROGRAMME BOARD

Wednesday 4 September 2019

Present:-

Councillor Philip Bialyk (Chair)
Councillors Harvey, Mrs Henson, Pearson and Sutton

Also Present

Chief Executive & Growth Director, Director (JY) and Democratic Services Officer (SLS)
Justin Pickford, Programme Manager

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APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Foale and M Mitchell.

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2019 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made.

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LONG DISTANCE COACHES WAITING ROOM

The Programme Manager referred to the request by Members of the Programme Board to explore the options for a potential enclosed long distance coach waiting room facility. The findings of the exploration including a summary of the approach, the legal obligations and technical solutions were presented.

Following the closure of the Bus Station last June, an interim arrangement was put in place for passengers using long distance coaches, with a drop-off and collection point from on-street stands sited in Sidwell Street. Once the new Bus Station facility is completed, the long distance coaches will use dedicated bus bays in Bampfylde Street as their drop-off and collection point. A lease for a space within The Barn student accommodation, on the ground floor close to Bampfylde Street had been secured. An indicative layout of the accommodation was presented which was comprised of a single unit with glazing on both sides facing into the street. The fit out would have to have adequate space for luggage, the provision of some refreshments through a vending machine and be mindful of the security of the passengers.

Members were also reminded of the outline planning permission for the redevelopment of the Bus Station site, which included the demolition of the existing bus station and creation of new bus and coach arrangements in the city centre. Although the consent identified the long distance coaches would be able to stop 'on street' at dedicated stands in Bampfylde Street, no dedicated waiting room facilities were identified as being required in the Planning Permission or the Section 106 agreement. However, a planning condition attached to the consent for The Barn required a management plan, before any such facility was brought into use to cover maintenance, security, cleaning and provision of information to coach passengers.

The City Council undertook to consult with Devon & Cornwall Police in discharging the aforementioned planning condition. As a result, the exploration study included discussions with Devon and Cornwall Police who raised a number of concerns which related to the safety of passengers and public in an enclosed space, the potential for anti-social behaviour and the increased likelihood of such behaviour later in the evening and early hours of the morning encouraged by the attraction of a lit and warm area. A number of options had been explored to mitigate such behaviour and these included an access control for travelling passengers with tickets, tamper proof specification for fixtures and fittings and the inclusion of a panic alarm system and CCTV. Live monitoring would take place from the Council's Control Centre with the protocol for a first response from a private security firm. The Programme Manager responded to comments on access and he referred to the limitations of the access code and he set out a number of scenarios in respect of access control to the waiting room from discarded tickets and also both the security and life span of a single use code.

The operators of the long distance coaches (Megabus and National Express) had been contacted to discuss the technical viability of an access control system and operator funding for the waiting room facility. It was noted that there was no approved budget or allocation for the capital cost fit out works or for ongoing annual maintenance for the coach waiting room facility. National Express and Megabus had confirmed that whilst they were supportive of the facility, the provision of a waiting room was not part of their business model.

Indicative costs for the fit out work to the suggested specification of Devon and Cornwall Police would be in the region of £120,000. A detailed breakdown of the costs was provided. Ongoing annual and maintenance costs could not be entirely determined at this stage, but the full range of requirements which included cleaning general maintenance, electricity and wear & tear would range from £25,000 to £125,000 and was also dependent on the opening hours and level of security required.

The Programme Manager responded to Councillor Harvey's comment on the CCTV monitoring and confirmed that costs associated with the installation and annual cost, repairs and replacement also included allowance for staffing.

The Programme Manager also responded to Councillor Mrs Henson's enquiry about the duration of the lease and confirmed that he would check the duration with the City Surveyor.

The Programme Manager drew together the salient points around the exploration to establish an enclosed long distance coach waiting room facility:-

- The Council had secured a lease for a room in 'The Barn' which could be used as a waiting facility for long distance coaches.
- The waiting room facility (if secure, operationally sound and free from anti-social behaviour) would provide an enhanced waiting provision over and above any shelter(s) associated with the dedicated on-street stands.
- The requirements of Devon & Cornwall Police identified a need for access control to the facility. Both operators had confirmed that they can provide a ticket based access control system (QR Code), however significantly limited in its use and effectiveness.
- Should a waiting facility be provided, it is understood that under the 'Management Plan' Devon and Cornwall Police would have the ability to close the facility at any time should they consider such to be an appropriate course of action.

- There was no requirement for a long distance coach waiting room facility from a Planning or Section 106 perspective.
- There was no statutory duty to provide a coach waiting room facility.
- The initial costs for fit-out would be in the region of £120,000.
- The annual operational and maintenance costs could range from £25,000 to over circa £125,000 per annum.
- The operators had not confirmed that they would contribute to the costs of the facility or its ongoing maintenance/use.
- The current lease with the developer of the new building (The Barn) could be terminated, if required.

The Chair said that the team had spent a significant amount of time investigating the pros and cons of a coach waiting room. He was not aware of any complaints from coach passengers not currently having a facility, but he was aware that some complaints from tenants living near to the Sidwell Street coach pick up facility had been made over the summer. It had been considered that it was beneficial for waiting passengers to be close to the Bus Station, however given the success of the current arrangements in Sidwell Street, could the team 'sense check' if the permanent arrangements could remain in Sidwell Street. He confirmed that he had received an email from a member of the public on the proposed waiting room in The Barn accommodation block with a comment on viability and the current arrangement in Sidwell Street.

Members advised of the recommendation not to pursue the provision of a long distance facility as they were concerned for the potential to place waiting coach passengers at significant risk of anti-social behaviour. The Falcon coach service operated very successfully without any enclosed waiting room facility. It might be appropriate to have a discussion with Devon County Council's Exeter Highways and Traffic Committee to explore with National Express, the opportunity to consider a similar arrangement as the Falcon Service with pick up passengers on the outskirts of the city, thus avoiding unnecessary delays and also contribute towards reducing traffic congestion and carbon emissions in the city.

RESOLVED that following full consideration of the range of legal, financial and anti-social behaviour issues presented on this issue the Programme Board decided not to pursue the provision of a long distance coach waiting facility and to terminate the current lease on The Barn facility.

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DATE OF NEXT MEETING

A further meeting of the Leisure Complex and Bus Station Programme Board would occur as and when required to suit the needs and demands of the projects within the programme.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.30 pm)

Chair