

CITY CENTRE REGENERATION BOARD

ABERDEEN, 2 December 2013 - Minute of meeting of the CITY CENTRE REGENERATION BOARD. Present: Councillor Boulton, Deputy Leader, Convener; Councillor Crockett, Council Leader; and Councillors Forsyth, McCaig, Young and Yuill; and Derek McCrindle (Scottish Enterprise), Bob Collier (Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce), Steve Harris (Visit Aberdeen), Richard Noble (Aberdeen Inspired) and Tom Smith (ACSEF). Officers in attendance:- Valerie Watts, Angela Scott, Gordon McIntosh, Rita Stephen, Sandy Beattie, David Leslie, Angela Taylor and Vikki Cuthbert. Also in attendance for item 3:- Jennifer Craw (Wood Family Trust).

APOLOGIES

1. Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Sir Ian Diamond and Professor Ferdinand Von Prondzynski.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITY CENTRE REGENERATION BOARD

2. The Board had before it a report prepared by Rita Stephen outlining the roles and responsibilities of the Board as agreed by Aberdeen City Council.

The report explained that the Board had been set up by Council on 31 October 2013, whilst also approving the establishment of a £20m City Centre Infrastructure Fund. The remit of the Board had been agreed by Council to be:-

- To oversee the regeneration of the City Centre as part of the "A better image of Aberdeen" priority of the Strategic Infrastructure Plan (SIP).
- To identify additional projects for the city centre which meet the aims and objectives of the Strategic Infrastructure Plan and related strategic documents.
- To oversee the submission of a report for each cycle of the meeting of full Council to recommend project (s) to regenerate the city centre and to provide updates on progress. The first report is scheduled to be presented to Council at its meeting on 25 June 2014.
- The Board will meet every 8 weeks, no substitutes are allowed but as projects are developed, experts will be co-opted on to the Board as required.

The Board heard from Gordon McIntosh who explained that this was in pursuit of one of the five priorities of the Strategic Infrastructure Plan, and that the Board would submit a report to the Council on 25 June, 2014 with recommended project(s) to regenerate the city centre. The Board should also provide updates to Council at every meeting, and its future meetings would therefore be scheduled to take place before each Council meeting.

The Board was also advised that as a working group of the Council, it was acting without any powers, unless these were specifically delegated to it.

The report recommended:-

that the Board agree the roles and responsibilities set out in the report.

The Board resolved:-

to approve the recommendation.

LETTER TO ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL FROM WOOD FAMILY TRUST

3. The Board heard from Jennifer Crow on behalf of the Wood Family Trust, on a letter which had been sent to the Chief Executive on 15th October, 2013 by the Trust. The letter was circulated to the Board.

The letter had reiterated the offer from the Trust of £50m towards city centre regeneration, to fund a transformational project which would inject a new heart into the city centre. Mrs Crow explained the Trust's vision for such a project and what would be required from a design perspective to secure this funding. As a minimum, it would involve covering of the road and rail network around the Denburn valley, raising of the gardens, in essence covering the area from Union Terrace to Belmont Street and connecting the area north, south, east and west and creating a walk-on space which was accessible from all sides, with topography. The ability, or opportunity, to create an all-weather space was important. The Council was asked to make a decision on this by the end of the calendar year.

Other contributors noted that, if the criteria were met and the £50m funding allocated to Aberdeen City Council, additional funding, including TIF (Tax Incremental Financing) monies, would be added to the overall total to regenerate the city centre, creating a budget significantly larger than £50m. Mrs Crow confirmed that the intention would be to maximise usable space and accessibility with sloping/gentle terracing.

The Board discussed the extent to which the views of its members could be taken into account, and the Convener explained that the Council would welcome the views of Board members before a final decision was taken on 18 December, reinforcing that the Board had many other projects to consider over and above the development of Union Terrace Gardens.

The Board resolved:-

- (i) to note the verbal update and that Board members could submit their views to the Council before 18th December, at which time a decision would be taken in response to the letter from the Wood Family Trust; and
- (ii) to receive an update at the next meeting on the decision taken by the Council.

SMARTER CITIES MASTERPLAN

4. The Board had before it a report prepared by Sandy Beattie presenting for comments a draft procurement brief for a masterplan for the city centre and summarising the conclusions of workshops held at RGU in June, August and November, 2013 (City Centre Vision and Masterplan Brief).

The draft procurement brief had been prepared following the workshops, and aimed to set out a clear strategy for vision and action in the city centre. The brief sought to address the ten action points in the RGU paper "Regenerating Aberdeen: A Vision for a Thriving and Vibrant City Centre" in the context of the Local Development Plan

and the Aberdeen City Centre Development Framework. These ten action points were set against current actions and strategies, and it was intended to further develop the key themes common to both RGU and the Council's approved documents and to then express these as a revised city centre vision leading to a deliverable masterplan to guide future development and investment. The report explained that any masterplan would take account of the Council's Strategic Infrastructure Plan.

The report recommended:-

that the Board –

- (a) give consideration to the draft procurement brief; and
- (b) note the conclusions of the workshops held at RGU.

Sandy Beattie addressed the Board and further explained that this was not a masterplan, but a brief for one. The City Centre Development Framework had been approved by the Council in 2010 as a supplement to the Local Development Plan. The paper by RGU had challenged these plans and helped to outline a vision for moving forward. A future procurement process would be subject to legal and financial advice and the necessary approvals being in place. Mr Beattie explained that the purpose of a masterplan was to set a long-term vision for an area, and enable its delivery, incorporating roads, streets, buildings, and more. The procurement process for the masterplan was estimated to cost around £750,000, a proportion of which would be from the Council. Legal risks would need to be accounted for and mitigated, although further advice on this was needed. It was expected that the procurement process would take around six months.

Gordon McIntosh explained that the next step would be to discuss potential contributions to this overall sum with partners.

Mr Beattie further explained in response to questions from Board members that the procurement process should not be viewed as an architectural competition, and the result would be the establishment of a team to develop a masterplan and engage with all partners in doing so. Contributions from other partners focused on timescales, funding and the demand feeding the vision. Bob Collier indicated that he would submit his own comments directly to Mr Beattie and copy Board members into that correspondence, however, that the brief should in his view be amended to include –

- challenging assumptions to date and barriers to progress and delivery;
- reference to the need for consensus from citizens, not just the Board; and
- benchmarking against other cities.

The Board resolved:-

- (i) to approve the recommendations;
- (ii) to request officers to approach partners before the Council meeting on 18 December, 2013 at which time a decision would be sought on funding for the masterplanning procurement brief; and
- (iii) to request that officers also approach Network Rail to discuss options for development of the Denburn valley within a masterplan for the city centre.

STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN – UPDATE

5. The Board received a verbal update from Gordon McIntosh on the Strategic Infrastructure Plan (SIP), namely (a) that the Structure Plan and the Local Development Plan set out a clear and ambitious way forward to develop Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire; (b) that the services of Price Waterhouse Cooper had been procured to examine the projects falling within the plans, and to prioritise these; (c) that a visualisation day had been held, resulting in the identification of five key priority areas, now contained within the SIP; (d) that the Scottish Cities Alliance had followed suit, with all local authorities (except Glasgow, for reasons explained) now developing a SIP of their own; (e) that there would be a joint approach across the SIP and “City Deals”; and (f) that the SIP was not a one-off, and would be reviewed as part of every budget setting process.

The Board resolved:-

to note the verbal update.

ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

6. The Convener invited any other competent business, at which stage (a) Rita Stephen advised that Board members had been invited to a presentation on city centre retail, to be held on 15 January 2014 at 1.30pm in Marischal College; (b) the Council Leader highlighted Aberdeen’s favourable position in the recently published Good Growth Index 2103 and the UK Competitiveness Index 2013, coming 2nd in both studies, after Reading and Cambridge respectively; and (c) Bob Collier enquired as to whether guidance was available on how members should respond to press queries arising out of the business of the Board. Angela Taylor, Communications Officer, advised Board members to refer all queries to the Council’s press team, and advised that she would prepare and circulate a protocol for Board members to refer to. The Board was also advised that, as a working group of the Council, meetings were private, unless agreed otherwise.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

7. The Board was advised that meetings in 2014 would be scheduled to fall around two weeks prior to Council meetings to allow recommendations to be made timeously. Appointments would be issued in due course.

- **COUNCILLOR BOULTON, Convener.**