

FC35. ASSET RATIONALISATION: COUNCIL HEADQUARTERS PROJECT

Council considered a report by the Director of Development Services giving an update on progress with the proposal to construct a new council headquarters, including commentary on the outcome of the public consultation exercise. The report also summarised the outcome of an options appraisal exercise carried out in respect of a replacement town hall/arts centre.

Council agreed, on 24 June 2015 (ref FC20), to carry out no further contractual work in relation to the Council headquarters until the consultation exercise had been completed and members had been advised of the outcome. Council also agreed to participate in a business case and option appraisal exercise with Forth Valley College and Falkirk Community Trust in order to consider the optimum approach to the provision of a replacement Town Hall/ Arts facility.

The report summarised the background and context to the project, noting that the consultation exercise was undertaken between 11 May 2015 and 31 July 2015.

An outline option appraisal for a replacement Town/Hall Arts facility was provided. Eight sites were identified, of which 6 were Council owned:

- Municipal Buildings
- Meeks Road
- Melville Street
- Westfield/Gateway
- Kemper Avenue
- Callendar Park

Two further sites were included – at Middlefield, which was owned by Forth Valley College and a site at the east end of Falkirk in the Callander Square area which was part of a developer led proposal.

Each site had been assessed and scored with the Middlefield Campus site emerging as the preferred option. The report also outlined the policy, legal and financial implications of the project as a whole together with an assessment of the project risks and benefits.

Councillor C Martin, seconded by Baillie Paterson, moved that Council agrees:-

- (1) to proceed with the Council civic and office headquarters project and authorises the Director of Development Services to:
 - (a) commission Hubco to progress the Stage 2 designs for the new facility;
 - (b) request that Hubco submit the detailed planning application for the new Headquarters building on the Municipal Buildings site;
 - (c) seek to acquire the Westbank Clinic site from NHS Forth Valley on suitable terms and at a cost of £175,000; and
 - (d) seek an extension of the lease at Callendar Square for a period of one year and provision for three-monthly extensions; and

- (2) the principle of replacement of the Town Hall/Arts Centre on the Middlefield site to be pursued in partnership with Forth Valley College/Falkirk Community Trust and subject to a detailed business case for final approval being considered at October Council.

At this point Provost Reid; Baillie Buchanan and Councillors D Goldie, Gow and Spears each declared a non financial interest in this item, as Directors of the Falkirk Community Trust, but did not consider that this required them to recuse themselves from consideration of the item, having regard to the specific exclusion contained in the Code of Conduct.

As an amendment, Councillor Meiklejohn, seconded by Councillor Jackson, moved, in substitution, that:-

- (1) Council does not agree to proceed with the current proposal for the replacement of the Council civic and office accommodation as we believe:-
 - (a) it is the wrong time to bring forward such a major project with continuing austerity and cuts in services;
 - (b) all options have not been fully explored and presented to members or the general public; and
 - (c) the financial model has been inadequately developed to provide assurance of the project delivery; and
- (2) The proposal to incorporate the Town Hall within Forth Valley College new build campus is linked to the Council new build project, is also rejected on the grounds that the proposal is not fit for purpose; and
- (3) The inclusion of the Library facility is inappropriate at this stage as members have not been provided with enough information and context.

Council then adjourned at 2.55p.m to allow members of the Administration to consider the terms of the amendment, and reconvened at 3.15p.m with members present as per the sederunt.

Councillor Spears gave notice of a further amendment.

On a division, 15 members voted for the motion, 15 voted for the amendment and 1 member abstained, with voting as follows:-

For the motion (15) – Provost Reid; Baillies Buchanan and Paterson; Councillors Black, Blackwood, D Goldie, Gow, MacDonald, Mahoney, Martin, Dr C R Martin, McLuckie, Murray, Nicol and Nimmo.

For the amendment (15) – Councillors Alexander, Balfour, Bird, Carleschi, Chalmers, Coleman, Garner, Hughes, Jackson, McCabe, Meiklejohn, Oliver, Ritchie, Spears and Turner.

Abstained (1) – Depute Provost John Patrick

As there was an equality of votes, Provost Reid, in accordance with Standing Order 22.6, exercised his casting vote and did so in favour of the motion. The motion was carried.

Council then adjourned at 5.20 p.m and reconvened at 5.30 p.m with members present as per the sederunt.

As an amendment Councillor Spears, seconded by Councillor McCabe, moved in substitution for the motion, that Council, in order to maintain the status quo:-

- (1) puts on hold for the immediate future all works connected with the proposed new HQ build and Town Hall as all options have not been adequately explored. The illustration of the alleged repositioning of the building by 7m being the perfect example.
- (2) rejects the inclusion of the Falkirk library in these discussions. It has only appeared on the report as an afterthought.

There is a serious lack of transparency in most things this administration proposes. This is merely the latest example.

Following discussion, Councillor Gow, seconded by Councillor D Goldie, moved in accordance with Standing Order 26.2(ii) ‘that the question now be put’. Members then voted for or against the motion, with voting as follows:-

For (16) – Provost Reid; Depute Provost Patrick; Baillies Buchanan and Paterson; Councillors Black, Blackwood, D Goldie, Gow, MacDonald, Mahoney, Martin, Dr C R Martin, McLuckie, Murray, Nicol and Nimmo.

Against (15) – Councillors Alexander, Balfour, Bird, Carleschi, Chalmers, Coleman, Garner, Hughes, Jackson, McCabe, Meiklejohn, Oliver, Ritchie, Spears and Turner.

Councillor Martin then exercised his right to reply before the original motion was put to the meeting.

On a division, 15 members voted for the motion, 15 voted for the amendment and 1 member abstained, with voting as follows:-

For the motion (15) – Provost Reid; Baillies Buchanan and Paterson; Councillors Black, Blackwood, D Goldie, Gow, MacDonald, Mahoney, Martin, Dr C R Martin, McLuckie, Murray, Nicol and Nimmo.

For the amendment (15) – Councillors Alexander, Balfour, Bird, Carleschi, Chalmers, Coleman, Garner, Hughes, Jackson, McCabe, Meiklejohn, Oliver, Ritchie, Spears and Turner.

Abstained (1) – Depute Provost John Patrick

As there was an equality of votes, Provost Reid, in accordance with Standing Order 22.6, exercised his casting vote and did so in favour of the motion.

Decision

Council agreed:-

- (1) to proceed with the Council civic & office headquarters project;
- (2) to authorise the Director of Development Services to:-
 - (i) commission Hubco to progress the Stage 2 designs for the new facility;
 - (ii) request that Hubco submit the detailed planning application for the new Headquarters building on the Municipal Buildings site;
 - (iii) seek to acquire the Westbank Clinic site from NHS Forth Valley on suitable terms and at a cost of £175,000;
 - (iv) seek an extension of the lease at Callander Square for a period of one year and provision for three-monthly extensions; and
- (3) the principle of replacement of the Town Hall/Arts centre on the Middlefield site to be pursued in partnership with Forth Valley College/Falkirk Community Trust and subject to a detailed business case for final approval being considered at October Council.