

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 27 NOVEMBER 2008

Present: Councillor Beard (Mayor);

Councillors Ayub, Ballsdon, Bayes, Benson, Byrne, Chowdhary, Cumpsty, Duveen, Edwards, Ennis, Gittings, Goodall, Hanley, T Harris, Hartley, Hoskin, Hussain, Janjua, P Jones, T Jones, Khan, Lovelock, Lockett, Maskell, Merriott, Orton, Page, Pugh, Ralph, Ruhemann, Rynn, Singleton-White, Skeats, Stainthorp, Stanway, Steele, Stevens, Swaine, Tickner, Townend, Warman, Watson and Willis.

Apologies: Councillors Epps and C Harris.

At the commencement of the meeting the Mayor referred to the recent terrorist attack in Mumbai and the terrorist attack in Islamabad in September 2008. The Council then stood in silence in memory of the victims of these acts of terrorism.

The Mayor also reported on the success of the Reading Credit Union in being awarded substantial lottery funding following a nationwide vote.

The Mayor also reported that some 70 replies had been received from local authorities in response to the Council's request for support for its campaign on Gurkham Right.

42. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:

That, pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of Item 43 below, as it was likely that there would be disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of that Act.

43. CIVIC OFFICES RELOCATION

The Council considered a report by the South-East Centre of Excellence entitled "Reading Borough Council Civic Offices Options Review Report - Part 2" and Councillors asked questions of officers in attendance. (See also Minute 47 below).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

44. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 14 October and 13 November 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

45. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER NO 9

Questions on the following matters were submitted:

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	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Answer</u>
1.	Colin Lee	Staff and Facilities in New Civic Offices	Cllr Lovelock
2.	Colin Lee	Comparison of Environmental Costs and Energy Efficiency Gains	Cllr Lovelock
3.	Colin Lee	Possible Changes to Local Government - Impact on Civic Offices Function	Cllr Lovelock
4.	Bob O'Neill	Civic Offices Project	Cllr Lovelock

(NB - The full text of all of the questions and replies was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

46. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER NO 10

A Question on the following matter was submitted:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Answer</u>
1.	Cllr Bayes (on behalf of Cllr Epps)	Corporate Manslaughter Responsibilities	Cllr Lovelock

(NB - The full text of all of the question and reply was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

47. CIVIC OFFICES RELOCATION

The Council considered a report by the South-East Centre of Excellence entitled "Reading Borough Council Civic Offices Options Review Report" on the options available for the re-provision of the Council's Civic headquarters building in the centre of Reading. The Director of Resources also submitted a report, supplementary to the Options Review Report.

The Options Review comprised a thorough 'due diligence' examination of the costs, programme and risks of the Hosier Street Scheme, which had been worked up to Planning approval status in accordance with recommendations made by the all-party Civic Board to Cabinet and unanimous decisions taken by full Council on 23 January and 16 October 2007 (Minutes 42 and 22 respectively refer). During this period a four-stage consultation process had been undertaken with public, staff and stakeholders as well as the statutory planning consultation. The report also set out two variation proposals on the Hosier Street scheme, both of which delivered the building specification at reduced cost. An updated assessment had also been carried out on the alternative options that had been previously considered, namely developer, market rental and use of existing Town Hall.

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The costs of refurbishing the existing building had also been updated to current 2008 prices as part of the review exercise. Cabinet at its meeting on 25 September 2006 (Minute 63 refers) had agreed that the refurbishment option should not be pursued on the basis that it was considered high risk and that, as the costs were not less than the cost of new build, it did not represent value for money. The Civic Board on 22 July 2008 had agreed that doing nothing and refurbishing the existing Civic Offices were not options for further consideration.

Part 2 of the Options Report (Minute 43 refers) principally included benchmarking information on developer options, a financial matrix and cost and risk summaries for each of the options. A full supporting matrix was included which tied all the key issues together to enable straightforward comparison of important matters for each option.

The report by the Director of Resources advised Councillors that, in considering the report, and the options before it, they must bear in mind at all times the fundamental reason why the Council was pursuing options for a new headquarters building. The present Civic Offices had been built in the early 1970s to a design involving extensive use of asbestos, and a water-cooled air conditioning system which carried with it the risk of Legionella. The building was over 30 years old and showed significant signs of wear and tear, structural deterioration, and of obsolescence. It was also very expensive to run in that it was extremely energy inefficient. It also had inherent accessibility problems.

As reported each year to the CCEA Scrutiny Panel, the ongoing maintenance of the Civic Offices building had been recorded as a red (high) risk on the corporate risk register. This risk increased should the Council continue to operate from the Civic Offices without undertaking a wholesale renovation of the building to remove asbestos and to invest in the building's future operation and safety. Cabinet had recognised in 2005 that doing nothing was not an option, and this view had been endorsed by the Civic Board on several occasions.

Following the Cabinet decision in September 2006 to develop a new headquarters and move out of the building, the Civic Offices maintenance regime had been scaled down to a basic level, to maintain day-to-day operation in a safe and secure environment. In considering the options set out in the report, all Councillors must be aware of the clear advice from the Council's Technical Officers and external consultants that doing nothing remained an unacceptable option. The responsibility for the future safety of the Civic headquarters building, the staff and Councillors working in it and public and other visitors to the Civic headquarters, was the Councillors' decision.

An appendix entitled "Inclusions and Exclusions of Hosier Street Scheme" was attached at Appendix A to the Director's report.

The following amendment was moved by Councillor Lovelock and seconded by Councillor Cumpsty and CARRIED:

"In Recommendation (1) delete all words after "That Council" and insert the following words:

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'agrees that the options of doing nothing, or of refurbishing the existing Civic Offices building, not be pursued for the following reasons:

- Doing nothing would expose the Council to untenable health and safety and service failure risks
- Refurbishment would not save money, nor would it deliver an asbestos free building, which has the exemplary standards of sustainability and accessibility that the Council aspires to.' "

The following motion was moved by Councillor Cumpsty and seconded by Councillor Lovelock and CARRIED:

- "1. That the Council agree to adopt the following twin-track approach to the re-provision of the Civic headquarters:
 - (a) continue to work up a new scheme on Council-owned land in Hosier Street, as a variation to the scheme as approved by Planning Committee on 16 July 2008 as set out in the Options Reports Part 1 and Part II.
 - (b) pursue a competitive process to invite bids from third parties for the re-provision of a new Civic Offices as part of a wider regeneration plan in the centre of Reading, and that the wider plan will take into consideration all feasible accommodation and commercial options for providing the Civic Office functions and will also include, but not be limited to, the provision of theatre and library facilities.
2. That the Civic Board be authorised to oversee both processes, including determining the specification and timescale for the competitive process; and to recommend a preferred scheme to Council following the completion of 1(a) and 1(b) as outlined above".

Resolved:

- (1) That Council agrees that the options of doing nothing, or of refurbishing the existing Civic Offices building, not be pursued for the following reasons:
 - i. Doing nothing would expose the Council to untenable health and safety and service failure risks
 - ii. Refurbishment would not save money, nor would it deliver an asbestos free building, which has the exemplary standards of sustainability and accessibility that the Council aspires to.
- (2) That Council agrees to adopt the following twin-track approach to the re-provision of the Civic headquarters:
 - i. Continue to work up a new scheme on Council-owned land in Hosier Street, as a variation to the scheme as approved by Planning Committee on 16 July 2008 as set out in the Options Reports Part 1 and Part 2I.

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- ii. Pursue a competitive process to invite bids from third parties for the re-provision of a new Civic Offices as part of a wider regeneration plan in the centre of Reading, and that the wider plan will take into consideration all feasible accommodation and commercial options for providing the Civic Office functions and will also include, but not be limited to, the provision of theatre and library facilities.
- (3) That the Civic Board be authorised to oversee both processes, including determining the specification and timescale for the competitive process; and to recommend a preferred scheme to Council following the completion of 2i and 2ii as outlined above.

NB: A Division having been demanded on the motion moved by Councillor Cumpsty and seconded by Councillor Lovelock above, the voting was as follows:

For the
Motion:

(38) Councillors Ayub, Ballsdon, Byrne, Chowdhary, Cumpsty, Edwards, Ennis, Gittings, Hanley, T Harris, Hartley, Hoskin, Hussain, Janjua, P Jones, T Jones, Khan, Lovelock, Lockett, Maskell, Merriott, Orton, Page, Pugh, Ralph, Ruhemann, Rynn, Singleton-White, Skeats, Stainthorp, Stanway, Steele, Stevens, Tickner, Townend, Warman, Watson and Willis.

Against the
Motion:

(0)

(The meeting closed at 8.21pm)