

## CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF THE SECOND EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

held on 22 March 2022 at 7.45pm

#### PRESENT:

The Deputy Mayor (Councillor L Mascot), who chaired the meeting in the absence of the Mayor

Councillors R H Ambor, L Ashley, H Ayres, K Bentley, M W Bracken, D J R Clark, P H Clark, W A Daden, A E Davidson, C K Davidson, S M Dobson, N A Dudley, J A Frasca, I D Fuller, J Galley, M C Goldman, S M Goldman, I S Grundy, P V Hughes, R J Hyland, G B R Knight, J C S Lager, J S Lardge, R J Lee, M J Mackrory, R Massey, R J Moore, G H J Pooley, S Rajesh, I C Roberts, S J Robinson, T E Roper, E J Sampson, C M Shaw, C R Tron, N M Walsh, T N Willis and S Young

#### 1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors N Chambers, J A Deakin (Mayor), N Gulliver, D G Jones, J A Potter, R J Poulter, M Sismey, A B Sosin, J E Sosin, M S Steel, A Thorpe-Apps, R T Whitehead and I Wright.

#### 2. Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded to declare at the appropriate time any personal and prejudicial interests in the business on the meeting's agenda.

#### Exclusion of the Public

RESOLVED that the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of Item 3 on the agenda as it contains exempt information within Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972. The public interest in not disclosing the content or the report outweighed the public interest in disclosing it on the grounds that making public the terms for the contract could jeopardise the Council's ability to obtain the best value possible.

### 3. Theatres Capital Project

The Council considered a report which gave an update on the Theatres Capital Project and to sought approval for an increase in the budget for the scheme.

It was explained that since the original budget for the scheme had been approved additional costs had been identified in the form of inflationary pressures, extending the scope of the project, additional enabling works, bringing forward the repair and replacement programme for the Theatres, and increasing the provision for contingency costs.

During the discussion of the report, several members expressed support for the improvement of the theatre but questioned the extent of the scheme now proposed. The budget for the scheme had been increased twice since originally being reported to the Council and was now 175% higher than approximately 12 months earlier. No detailed reasons for that increase or the breakdown of the costs had been given and there was concern that the Council would be incurring more debt at a time of financial challenges. It was argued that the scheme should be limited at this stage to making those improvements originally identified and deferring the additional improvements now proposed until they were affordable. Questions were also asked about the location of the Changing Places facilities; whether the £382,000 brought forward for anticipated capital repairs was already budgeted for; whether there had been neighbour consultation on the holding of outdoor events in Fairfield Road and Marconi Plaza; whether the project would increase the theatre's capacity, possibly by combining the Civic and Cramphorn Theatres; and whether providing a café area would add to the congestion in foyer areas.

In response to those points and questions, the Council was told that:

- The cost of the project previously reported to members had been estimates and it had been made clear that they were expected to increase. Now that tenders had been received accurate capital costs could be reported and as this was a fixed price contract they were not expected to increase.
- The £382,000 was part of the £2.746 million budget for the scheme.
- There would be no external borrowing to fund the project. A Minimum Revenue Provision needed to be allocated for any project funded by internal borrowing but the increased revenue from the improved and refurbished theatre was expected to more than offset that. In essence, this was an invest to save project which was not only affordable but would be a welcome addition to the cultural offer in Chelmsford and increase accessibility to the arts.
- It would not make good financial sense to spread the works over a period of time as this would lead to higher costs and greater disruption to users of the theatre.
- Owing to constraints on space, it was not possible to include a fixed Changing Places facility on site but the possibility of providing a mobile facility was being looked at.
- The configuration of the building also ruled out combining the two theatres. Whilst the scheme would not increase capacity, this was only running at 50-55% at present. Improving the theatre's facilities and appearance, and users' experience, would increase that figure and result in higher revenue from the theatre.

- Part of the purpose of the improvements was to improve the flow of people around the theatre and the presence of the café would not increase overcrowding. It would provide another revenue source, especially at times when performances were not taking place.
- Any outdoor events that might take place in future would be in the daytime and would not disturb residents living nearby.

On being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED that the Council approves a budget increase from £1.5m to £2.746m for the Theatres Capital Project, as detailed Appendix 2 to the report to the meeting (Breakdown of Costs), and that the Director of Connected Chelmsford be authorised to award the contract for the scheme.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm

Mayor