

Minutes of the Meeting of the Thameside Complex Review Panel held on 3 March 2015 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Charles Curtis (Chair), John Purkiss and Graham Snell

Apologies: Councillors Robert Gledhill

In attendance: Matthew Essex, Head of Regeneration
Stephen Taylor, Programmes and Projects Manager
Matthew Boulter, Principal Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Election of Chair

Councillor Purkiss nominated Councillor Curtis as chair. This was seconded by Councillor Snell.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Curtis be elected chair.

2. Declaration of interests

None.

3. Terms of Reference

The panel was informed about the origins of the review from the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and that the Council needed to make a conscious decision about the future of the services in the Thameside complex and that the review panel were being placed at the heart of this decision making.

RESOLVED: That the terms of reference are agreed.

4. Options Appraisal

The panel broadly discussed the issues surrounding the options report and felt that the community's opinion on the value of the Thameside as a landmark building in Grays needed to be assessed through the panel's work.

Thameside Theatre

The panel recognised the theatre was too small and could only be enlarged to around 400 seats in its current location. A theatre consultation company, who were currently running Basildon Theatres and had advised on the High House Production Park Backstage Academy, had advised that a Theatre in Thurrock needed to be at least 700 seats to become a viable regional theatre that attracted a certain level of artist or theatre production. Some Members thought the theatre could be better placed at Lakeside and the Panel discussed where a theatre should best exist in Thurrock. Other Members thought that Grays was well placed due to the community based within walking distance. The panel agreed that the consideration of venue sites would be included in their review.

The panel noted that there were four options for the theatre:

- Keep it in the Thameside Complex
- Move it to a new building somewhere in the borough
- Re-build the theatre in the place where the Thameside complex currently was
- Offer a multi-venue service whereby there was no fixed theatre space and other venues were used across Thurrock.

The Panel discussed possible transition arrangements and it had been recommended by experts that the current theatre option needed to be invested in and developed so that any new enlarged offer attracted a core audience. There was a danger that should the theatre be closed for a period while new buildings were being erected or new services were designed, there was a potential to lose audiences rather than enhance or increase them. Officers stated they would need to look in detail about how, if it was agreed, the Thameside Theatre could continue on the current site if a new site was being developed.

There was a brief discussion on the development of Grays town centre and how enhancing the high street and surrounding area attracted other businesses, like restaurants, that would be conducive to a theatre.

Members noted that the capacity of surrounding theatres was larger than Thurrock and felt that the Council needed to be sure to have the right number of seats to encourage good quality acts. Officers highlighted that they would like the theatre consultants to come before the panel for a witness session.

Registry Office and Museum

The Panel agreed that certain services in the registry office could be provided from the civic offices and there were many venues in Thurrock that would prove popular for wedding ceremonies, including venues such as Coalhouse Fort, which were not currently licensed.

Members thought the idea of expanding the museum offer across the riverfront was valuable and allowed the archives to be used. The Panel recognised the museum itself was outdated. Members felt the local history should belong to the areas within Thurrock and therefore specific objects or books related to those areas should be housed or displayed in those localities and not centrally somewhere.

5. Work Programme

RESOLVED: That the proposed work programme for the project is agreed.

6. Consultation

The committee agreed with the consultation structure. For the general public consultation the following areas of questioning were agreed to be added:

- Whether the Thameside Complex building was valued within the community.
- Whether the Theatre should stay in Grays and if not where would it go.
- Where do residents visit for theatre productions other than the Thameside.

7. Thameside Complex visit

The Panel agreed it was important to visit the complex and officers stated that to see all the issues raised within the report they would need around ninety minutes for their visit. The Panel agreed to fix a date outside the meeting.

8. Witness Day

RESOLVED: That the witness day plan be agreed and it be scheduled outside the meeting.

The meeting finished at 8.03 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**