

Body: Cabinet

Date: 1st June 2015

Subject: Wish Tower Restaurant – Development and Marketing Programme

Report of: Senior Head of Regeneration, Planning and Assets

Ward(s) Meads

Purpose To consider and decide upon future options for the marketing and development of the site of the former Wish Tower restaurant

Decision type: Key Decision

Recommendation: Cabinet is recommended to:

- i. Agree to recommendations for the marketing and future development of the site
- ii. Agree to the appointment of the project manager to assemble the project team and prepare concept designs to support the marketing of the site
- iii. Delegate to the Senior Head of Regeneration, Planning and Assets in consultation with the Strategic Property Board the marketing of the site to secure a cafe/restaurant operator and agree the final design
- iv. Agree the £1.2m from the DLCG grant fund is allocated to the new Wish Tower development

Contact: Paul Friend, Corporate Property Manager, Telephone 01323 415261 or internally on extension 5261
Email:paul.friend@eastbourne.gov.uk

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Council opened the temporary catering facility in 2013. However, it has been a commitment of the Council to develop a destination café/restaurant on the Wish Tower site. Now, in accordance with agreed longer term objectives, the council will move forward with the development of a permanent top quality venue that offers an exceptional dining experience, boosted by high end interior and exterior design values.

1.2 The unique location of the site presents the Council with an unparalleled opportunity to secure an iconic development; the intention being that the new scheme will prove attractive to both visitors and residents. It is anticipated that there will be significant community interest and varying opinions on the scale, design and use of the new facility. A full consultation process will be undertaken and is referred to below. However, in accordance

with the Council's commitment to a sustainable asset base, it is imperative that the new development is financially viable providing an income to the Council.

1.3 Funding for the new development is provided by the successful award of capital from the DLCG grant fund of up to £1.2m. This projects represents the largest element of the total £2m fund granted by DCLG, which is providing support to a range of other economic development activities across the town.

1.4 Notwithstanding the above and befitting the generous donation made by the Foyle family in the 1950s, the permanent facility will retain its original standing as a memorial to the civilians of Eastbourne, killed in World War II. The Council has safeguarded the original commemorative plaque, previously displayed at the former café. It is the Council's firm intention that this fundamental feature be installed in the new landmark building and form part of the integrated design of the successful scheme.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Council previously marketed the site in 2009 with an accompanying planning brief. Unfortunately, no suitable schemes were forthcoming, largely influenced by the financial climate at the time and the inability to obtain vacant possession within a reasonable period.

2.2 The Council has updated the planning brief to support the new marketing exercise be launched from June 15. In addition, the Council has commissioned and received a 'soft market test', undertaken by an international leisure market and investment appraisal specialist. The results of this study and how this has informed the proposed marketing strategy are detailed below.

3.0 Leisure Market and Investment Appraisal

3.1 The soft market testing exercise has established the following :-

- The Wish Tower remains an attractive, visible seafront site at one of Britain's more famous and visited resorts. However, the existing market profile of the site is low and needs to be raised through a local, regional and national marketing campaign
- The unique location and its potential are likely to appeal to independent operators which may be less attractive to operators within the corporate sector as it is considered off pitch when compared to the town centre.
- A strong local marketing campaign should be carried out to identify any interest in the site from an operator and investment perspective
- The site has the potential to become a significant draw for visitors attracting footfall towards the Devonshire Park and cultural quarter of the town
- Rather than constraining the opportunity at this stage, the marketing campaign should be flexible with an open prospectus that offers both standard commercial and long lease options. It should be clear that the council is open to alternative options that will enhance the site as

- a key destination on the seafront
- Through the implementation of an effective marketing programme, the appropriate disposal/letting method can be adopted to secure the optimum development to meet the Council's financial, economic, social and environmental objectives

3.2 Whilst funding has been secured through the DLCG grant fund Grant Fund as referred to in 1.3 above, ultimately the level of investment by both the Council and the operator will be informed by the marketing campaign and subsequent negotiations in respect of tenure. At this stage, it is envisaged that construction will follow a 'traditional approach' as opposed to say 'design and build' with the Council responsible for the design of the facility and a contractor to be appointed to deliver the scheme. Internal fit out will be the responsibility of the tenant. As referred to above the existing temporary facility is meeting its invest to save target; the permanent facility will need to meet the target yield, consistent with the commitment to a sustainable asset base.

3.3 The appointment of a project manager is now appropriate to drive through progress on the new permanent facility. The role of the lead a project manager will include appointment of an architect to draw up concept plans to RIBA stage C of the potential scheme(s) within the parameters of the planning guidance note and reflecting the Council's aspiration for this iconic site. It is envisaged that these plans will assist potential operators visualise the scale and form of the new facility, in turn assisting them in submitting bids for the future operation of the new café/restaurant.

4.0 Consultations

4.1 As referred to previously, the Wish Tower location is a treasured part of the seafront. Within the context of sensitive and considered plans it has huge potential. The Council anticipates and welcomes significant interest from the public in respect of the future development of this important site.

4.2 Following the marketing campaign, it is proposed that shortlisted proposals be considered by the Strategic Property Board as a pre-requisite to a wider stakeholder consultation process on the preferred scheme. This consultation will include public, heritage, commerce and tourism stakeholders with a report on the outcome to a future Cabinet meeting.

5.0 Corporate plan and council policies

5.1 The proposal to provide a permanent facility at the Wish Tower site conforms to the Corporate Plan priorities to create a prosperous economy and quality environment. That the new development be financial viable aligns with the commitment to sustainable performance.

5.2 The proposal to provide a permanent facility is consistent with the Corporate Plan as working in partnership to redevelop the Devonshire Park complex and the Wish Tower Restaurant site on the seafront.

6.0 Equality analysis

6.1 Equality analysis will be undertaken as appropriate as the programme commences.

7.0 Performance and outcomes

7.1 The progress of the marketing campaign will be monitored by the Strategic Property Board in accordance with standing instructions.

8.0 Conclusion

8.1 The future development of the Wish Tower site is an integral part of the Council's seafront and tourism strategy. The appointment of the project manager and the associated marketing campaign represents the first steps towards securing an iconic development that reflects the unique location and historic appeal of this site.

8.2 Members are requested to approve the recommendations as outlined in the report.

Background papers

The Wish Tower, King Edwards Parade, Eastbourne - Leisure Market and Investment Appraisal - a report by GVA, a Bilfinger Real Estate Company, November 2014.
Wish Tower Site, King Edwards Parade – Planning Advice Note, May 2015