



## CABINET – 15TH SEPTEMBER 2021

**SUBJECT: REGENERATION BOARD – PROJECT PROPOSALS**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT**

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To recommend the allocation of up to £130,000 from the Regeneration Project Board Development Fund towards two recently endorsed and evaluated project proposals; (i) Risca – Redevelopment of Strategic Town Centre site (Feasibility & Master-planning); (ii) Bargued Empty Property Enforcement Action Plan.
- 1.2 To note that a further £1.0M of development funding has been allocated to the Regeneration Project Board.

### 2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 At the meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2018, Cabinet agreed that a Regeneration Project Board would be set up with a cross-party political representation of Councillors plus key officers. This group is supported by a Regeneration Assessment Panel consisting of officers from a range of service areas. An initial sum of £300,000 was allocated to the Project Board.
- 2.2 The Regeneration Assessment Panel have met on numerous occasions to consider the prioritised list of capital projects, which have been identified by the Board to move to the Assessment Stage. Following subsequent Cabinet Approvals, since February 2019 numerous projects have been endorsed with financial assistance provided (where necessary) from the Regeneration Project Board Development Funds.
- 2.3 During January 2019 Cabinet resolved to release £1.2m of reserves for the Regeneration Board prioritised projects. This was supplemented in April 2021 when the Cabinet resolved to allocate an additional £1m to the Development Fund budget. Cabinet on 7 July 2021 resolved that a further £1.0m should be allocated to the Board for prioritised capital regeneration projects. This decision was approved by Full Council on 13 July 2021. This brings the total allocated **Development Fund budget to £3.5M.**

- 2.4 In December 2020 Cabinet resolved to allocate £50,000 seed money to the Regeneration Board for 2020/21 to progress concepts and ideas under the 'Licence to Innovate' Scheme. Due to the success of the initiative, Cabinet on 7 July approved a proposal for a further £200k to be set aside for the scheme. **The total funding allocated to the Regeneration Project Board, including 'Licence to Innovate', is therefore £3.75M.**
- 2.5 This report seeks Cabinet approval for the allocation of £130,000 Regeneration Development Funds towards two project proposals (i) Risca – Redevelopment of Strategic Town Centre site (Feasibility & Master-planning); (ii) Bargoed Empty Property Enforcement Action Plan.
- 2.6 The above request would leave an active overall Regeneration Development Fund of circa £1.436M and a balance of £0.209M in the 'Licence to Innovate' Fund.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 That Cabinet:
- i) Agree that £130,000 of the Regeneration Project Board Development Fund be allocated to progress two project proposals (i) Risca – Redevelopment of Strategic Town Centre site (ii) Bargoed Empty Property Enforcement Action Plan
  - ii) Note that a further £1.0M funding has been allocated to the Regeneration Project Board to bring forward strategic project development activities.

### **4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 To progress feasibility and master-planning activities for an identified strategic development site in Risca Town Centre, to facilitate future detailed design and funding proposals.
- 4.2 To establish a budget to implement an empty property enforcement action plan in respect of targeted premises requiring urgent remediation works, within Bargoed Town Centre.

### **5. THE REPORT**

- 5.1 On the 30<sup>th</sup> May 2018, Cabinet agreed that Council Officers convene a Regeneration Project Board. The Terms of Reference of the Board were approved by Cabinet at the same meeting.
- 5.2 At the subsequent June 2018 Board meeting a Project Prioritisation Toolkit was approved for the Board to prioritise projects and this was subsequently agreed by Council on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2018. A Regeneration Assessment Panel has been set up to assess each of the projects using this toolkit. The Assessment Panel is an internal Officer panel from a wide range of Service Areas set up specifically to assess prioritised strategic physical regeneration schemes.
- 5.3 The Regeneration Assessment Panel has met several times to consider a list of previously prioritised capital projects. These, for the most part, have been evaluated and considered by the Regeneration Project Board before being presented to Cabinet for endorsement and funding (where required) from the available

## Development Funds.

- 5.4 Initial funding of £300k was allocated to the Regeneration Board Development Fund in 2018. In January 2019 Cabinet resolved to release £1.2m of reserves for Regeneration Board Projects and then in April 2021 the cabinet resolved to allocate a further £1.0M. This has been recently supplemented by an additional £1.0M in July 2021, bringing the **Total Development Fund budget to £3.5M**. This has allowed additional projects to be considered for development support, prioritisation and funding [**Please refer to Appendix 1**]
- 5.5 In December 2020 Cabinet approved the Council's Commercial and Investment Strategy and resolved that a further £50,000 from the Education and Corporate Services reserves be approved to progress 'Licence to Innovate' ideas via the Regeneration Project Board. In July 2021 Cabinet approved proposals to set aside a further £200,000 to the 'Licence to Innovate' scheme. All 'Licence to Innovate' project ideas are subject to a Panel Assessment to determine their eligibility prior to their presentation to the Regeneration Board.
- 5.6 At the Regeneration Board Meeting held on 27 July 2021 a further tranche of schemes was considered by the Board. A summary of each project and the Regeneration Project Board's recommendations are set out below.

### **(A): RISCA – “THE BIRDS SITE” – RE-DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC TOWN CENTRE – FEASIBILITY AND MASTERPLANNING**

- **Total Project Cost Estimate (£): £30,000**
  - *Funding Secured* £0
  - **Request for funding from Regeneration Project Board: £30,000**
- 5.7 Risca is a Principal Town within the Council's Adopted Local Development Plan and plays an important sub-regional role in relation to shopping, employment, leisure and tourism.
- 5.8 Risca is ideally located to benefit from its strategic and geographical prominence within the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal and its principal economic driver, the Valleys Metro. Risca Town Centre is also a short distance from the Crumlin Arm of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal and Cwmcarn Forest attractions. Both the Canal and Cwmcarn Forest are recognised as key strategic economic and tourism drivers within the South East region.
- 5.9 The Council's Regeneration and Planning Service recognise the significant potential for Risca to benefit from these emerging regional economic and investment priorities through the creation of a sustainable "investment corridor" linking Risca, Cwmcarn and their adjacent communities.
- 5.10 The proposed project is located at land at the rear of 139-153 Commercial Street, Risca. The development is directly at the southern gateway of the Town Centre and within the main commercial core of the Town. It is a visually prominent brownfield site in joint ownership between the Council and the Birds Group of Companies.
- 5.11 Cabinet of 19<sup>th</sup> May 2021 considered project proposals for the new UK Government Funding Programmes, including the **Levelling Up Fund**. The endorsed project pipeline list included a suite of three interlinked projects for the Islwyn Constituency,

comprising Cwmcarn Visitor Attractions, Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal Enhancements and the Redevelopment of Risca as a Strategic Town Centre. An ambitious mixed-use development, comprising commercial, retail and leisure use is proposed for the site.

- 5.12 Funding from the Regeneration Board has been requested to commission a comprehensive feasibility study for the development area. The funding will support the Council's long-term Place Making plans for Risca as a Strategic Town Centre and its goal to consolidate the area as a regionally important visitor destination. The study will specifically focus on the re-development of the land at the rear of Commercial Street, Risca and help inform the Council's proposed bid to the Levelling Up Fund in 2022.
- 5.13 The contribution from the Regeneration Board will match a complementary bid to Welsh Government's Transforming Towns programme for £45,000 revenue funding towards the development of a wider Place-Making Plan for Risca town as an integral part of the development of the Newbridge to Risca Corridor Masterplan.

**RPB Decision: Project Approved. It was agreed that £30,000 be allocated towards the project.**

#### **(B): BARGOED TOWN CENTRE – EMPTY PROPERTY ENFORCEMENT ACTION PLAN**

- Total Project Cost Estimate (£): £100,000
  - *External Funding Secured* £0
  - **Current Request for funding: £100,000**
- 5.14 Funding is requested to enable Officers to establish an enforcement budget to undertake urgent remedial works on dilapidated, empty and underutilised properties within Bargoed Town Centre.
- 5.15 The town centre is currently experiencing high vacancy rates on several prominent retail/commercial properties. Officers from Regeneration and Planning are developing an Enforcement Action Plan to address the issues relating to the empty properties, including proactive engagement with property owners/landlords to ensure the necessary improvement works are undertaken in a timely manner. The Council will seek to use its authorised powers to serve notice on property owners to undertake the works.
- 5.16 It is hoped that most of the issues will be addressed by the individual property owners/landlords at the request of the Council. However, in the event of landlords failing to act or non-compliance, the Council will use its powers to undertake the improvement works in default. The Council will register a legal charge and restriction on these properties.
- 5.17 The improvement works undertaken as part of the Enforcement Action Plan will deliver a series of economic benefits, including (i) bringing the empty properties up to the necessary standard to attract potential tenants; (ii) contribute to a thriving and visually attractive town centre environment that is well placed to attract future jobs and investment.

- 5.18 The funding will allow a rolling programme of action to be undertaken on property owners in the event of non-compliance with Enforcement Notices. The average default works cost has been estimated at £10,000 per property. Funding support will enable remedial works to be undertaken on approximately 10 properties.
- 5.19 Funding from the Regeneration Project Board will complement additional in-principle financial support of £250,000 received from Welsh Government towards a series of wider town centre interventions for Bargoed, including a third party property grant improvement scheme for local businesses and property acquisition.

**RPB Decision: Project Approved. It was agreed that £100,000 be allocated towards the Empty Property Enforcement Action Plan**

- 5.20 If Cabinet are minded to approve the recommendations contained in the Report the residual funding available to the Regeneration Project Board is:

- Regeneration Development Fund £1,436,800.00
- License to Innovate Fund £209,311.00

## **6. ASSUMPTIONS**

- 6.1 This report assumes that the identified projects, once supported by Cabinet, will be developed further and where applicable implemented, with assistance from appropriate sourced and secured external funding.

## **7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 The recommendations contained in the report have a neutral overall impact, however schemes supported through the board will all have varying impacts and will all be subject of full IIA.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 An overall project Development Fund of £3.5m has been previously approved to allow a project team of officers to develop projects ready for implementation when funding becomes available.
- 8.2 Development Funds of £1,933,200 have previously been approved and allocated to projects. If the current requests of £130,000 contained in this Report are approved, then £1,436,800 remains from the total budget allocation for funding future projects.
- 8.3 A Licence to Innovate budget of £250,000 has previously been approved, of which £40,689 has now been allocated by the Regeneration Board. This leaves a residual balance of £209,311.

## **9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There will be a requirement for Officers from Regeneration & Planning, Transportation & Infrastructure, Corporate Policy, Housing and Corporate Services Divisions within the Authority to dedicate human resources to the project activities outlined in order to progress them, the level of which depends on the status of each project. Otherwise, there are no personnel implications arising from this report.

## **10. CONSULTATIONS**

10.1 Consultees comments have been incorporated into the Report.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

11.1 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

11.2 The Local Government Acts 1998 and 2003.

11.3 Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Author: Glenn Cooper, Principal Regeneration Project Officer

Consultees:

Cllr Eluned Stenner, Cabinet Member for Performance, Economy & Enterprise  
(and Chair of the Regeneration Project Board)  
Mark S. Williams, Corporate Director for Economy & Environment  
Stephen Harris, Head of Financial Services & Section 151 Officer.  
Marcus Lloyd, Head of Infrastructure  
Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services/Monitoring Officer  
Sue Richards, Head of Education Strategy & Finance (Interim Head of  
Transformation)  
Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services  
Rhian Kyte, Head of Regeneration and Planning  
Allan Dallimore, Regeneration Services Manager  
Paul Hudson, Business, Enterprise & Renewal Team Manager  
Local Ward Members (Bargoed)  
Local Ward Members (Risca East & Risca West)

Appendices:

Appendix 1 List of Approved Projects and Funding Allocations