

Question: PS24.01

Cabinet – 9 March 2021

Re: Agenda item 24 – Bristol Beacon

Statement submitted by: James Durie, Bristol West Chamber of Commerce & Initiative

We write ahead of Bristol City Council's Cabinet meeting on 9th March at which the continuation of the major transformation of Bristol Beacon and the revised costs are due to be considered.

The business community recognise the major challenges and difficult decisions the council and city face as we continue to battle our way through COVID-19 but it is vital that the council and its partners across the area continue to move forward a strong vision and offer for the future of Bristol. We know how much the arts and cultural offering is critical to Bristol's identity, its economy and to its appeal as one of the country's best places to live, work and visit, and it has an important part to play in our city's recovery and future offering.

Bristol Beacon sits at the heart of this offering, which when the major works are complete, will provide a world-class concert venue run by Bristol Music Trust to attract the best performers from around the world and encourage greater and more diverse audiences. It will deliver over 800 events a year, generating at least £13m GVA in its first year of re-opening alone, and contribute to the creation of hundreds of jobs. It will be a symbol for Bristol touching all parts of the city and its residents – showcasing the city's vision, commitment and investment that make us a leading cultural city and a place that people want to be.

We recognise that this Grade 2 listed building as a Bristol City Council owned asset has for far too many years suffered from a lack of maintenance, modernisation and investment with no major refurbishment for 60 years. It has long been recognised that the building needs a complete refurbishment and this was further emphasised with the completion of the Entrance Foyer development in 2009.

Despite all the work undertaken to originally build a specification, programme and an estimated capital cost led by BCC project officers supported by an external team of professional advisors we note that the size of the revised cost of has increased to £106.9m, and this is being considered by the Cabinet on 9th March. This is a significant concern given the pressures on public finances. We recognise that there have been a number of factors including the condition of parts of the building has been discovered as the works have progressed together with the impact and delays as a consequence of the pandemic.

Having considered the options which include not completing the work and all the consequences that would stem from this we request the Cabinet proceed and get the job completed but ensure fully that all the further risks are properly understood and mitigated and lessons are learnt for the future of projects of this type.

As the city's business community we consider that the major work to the Bristol Beacon need to be completed as an important component in the long-term future and economic recovery of our city for all its businesses and residents and many others who visit.