

CABINET

**MEETING HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, BOOTLE
ON THURSDAY, 29 JUNE 2023**

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Maher (in the Chair)
Councillors Atkinson, Doyle, Fairclough, Hardy,
Lappin, Moncur and Roscoe

ALSO PRESENT: 3 members of the press/public

31. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cummins and Veidman.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of any disclosable pecuniary interests or personal interests were received.

33. SOUTHPORT PIER

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director – Place that provided an interim update on the condition of Southport Pier, in advance of receiving the final structural survey reports. The report presented options on the future of the Pier, but recommended pursuit of the significant additional funding required to enable the full refurbishment of the Pier that was required, to enable its safe reopening.

In respect of Decisions 5 and 6 (below), it was noted that Southport Pier had been closed since December 2022 for Health and Safety reasons, and a full structural survey had been undertaken to evaluate the condition of, and required repairs to, this important heritage asset. This detailed process had taken considerable time, and at the time of writing the final survey reports are still awaited, but sufficient feedback had now been received to enable progression of the Cabinet report at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Pier remained closed as Health and Safety remained the top priority for the Council, but its closure was having a significant effect on local businesses and stakeholders. The report was therefore urgent to enable, subject to Cabinet approval, the progression of discussions with key stakeholders and potential funders regarding the potentially significant funding gap to be addressed to enable the required full refurbishment, and subsequent safe reopening, of Southport Pier. It was also urgent that, again subject to Cabinet approval, pre-development works were progressed for the whole refurbishment project, again at the earliest possible opportunity, to enable rapid progression of the project itself once

the funding gap was addressed. The Pier was a hugely time sensitive matter in every respect, for all affected, hence the urgency of the report and meeting.

The Cabinet Member – Regeneration and Skills outlined the background to the matter; issues with pier decking; health and safety concerns; and reaffirmed the Cabinet's commitment to the future of Southport Pier.

Decision(s) Made: That

- (1) the Cabinet reaffirms its commitment to the future of Southport Pier, and its support for the full refurbishment project required to enable safe reopening;
- (2) the Cabinet agrees to progress and fund the pre-development process for the full refurbishment project while funding sources for the whole refurbishment are pursued, reflecting the Council's aim to commence, and therefore complete, the project as soon as practicable, to enable safe reopening as soon as possible;
- (3) engagement is progressed urgently with external partners and central government departments including Historic England, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, National Piers Society, the Southport Pier Trust, and other agencies, regarding not only the capital funding gap, but the requirement for ongoing maintenance funding to sustain the future of the newly refurbished asset once completed;
- (4) any further and future funding approvals relating to the full refurbishment project, and procurement processes associated with the full project, will be presented to the Cabinet and Council at the earliest opportunity, and in accordance with the Council's financial procedure rules;

Rule 29

- (5) it be noted that the proposal was a Key Decision but it had not been included in the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions. Consequently, the Leader of the Council and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) had given their consent under Rule 29 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules of the Constitution for these decisions to be treated as urgent on the basis that they cannot be reasonable deferred because of the urgency and time sensitivity of this important project and the impact of sustained closure on the local economy and local businesses; and

Rule 46

- (6) it be noted that the Leader of the Council and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) had given their consent under Rule 46 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules for these decisions to be treated as urgent and not subject to "call in" on the basis that they cannot be reasonably deferred because of the urgency and time sensitivity of this important project and the impact of sustained closure on the local economy and local businesses.

Reasons for the Decision(s):

Southport Pier is a critical visitor attraction that holds significant importance to Sefton's economy and brand. It is also a Grade-II listed structure. As part of the routine maintenance, it became apparent the pier decking was starting to fail in isolated areas, and therefore several detailed inspections from timber experts have taken place. In September 2022 Council approval was granted to replace the entire decking after the 2022 summer season for a sum of £3m, to ensure the Pier is fit for purpose and remains safe. Due to the accelerated deterioration of the decking a visual inspection (by structural engineers) was carried out in December 2022, after which the Council were then recommended to close the Pier with immediate effect due to health and safety concerns. Shortly after a full structural survey was commissioned.

The final survey report is awaited at the time of writing, but interim verbal feedback has been received and is clear on the scale and urgency of repair work required to timber joists and decking (including strengthening to enable the return of the train to the Pier), and to elements of the steel structure. While repairs to the decking and many of the timber joists are required immediately, it is recommended that a significant amount of further work will be required within 3 to 5 years, including replacement of all timber joists and repair to some elements of the steelwork. Given the impact of the Pier's closure on local businesses and stakeholders, and the urgency of progression towards a funded solution, these recommendations are offered in advance of receipt of the final survey.

The feedback reaffirms that the regrettable decision to close the Pier for Health and Safety reasons was correct, but also that the Pier cannot safely reopen until most of these significant works have been completed.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

The other options have been considered and rejected:

1. Full replacement over several years – This would result in the pier decking being replaced in phases over 10 to 15 years. This has been rejected particularly due to Health and Safety reasons, but also due to the costs, the impact on the pier concession and wider economy of continued closure.

2. Do nothing – This has been rejected on Health and Safety grounds. “Do nothing” would therefore mean the continued and indefinite closure of Southport Pier. Notwithstanding the funding pressures articulated within the report and its recommendations, this option is not supported given the importance of this heritage asset to the town, and the impact closure would have on local businesses and stakeholders.