
Executive

17 March 2009

Report of the Assistant Director of City Strategy

Urgent Business: Proposed Big Wheel in St George's Field Car Park

Summary

1. This report advises the Executive of the receipt of a proposal made by WTA Ltd to site a Yorkshire Wheel in the St George's Field car park for a temporary period of 3 months to assess its usage and impact. The report describes the proposal and makes officer comments on it.
2. The report recommends that subject to receiving planning permission and agreeing acceptable terms that the proposal is accepted for a temporary period of 3 months.

Background

3. On 20th January 2009 the Executive considered a proposal to site the Yorkshire Wheel in North Street Gardens. The Executive resolved not enter into an agreement with WTA Ltd to site the observation wheel in North Street Gardens.
4. Subsequent to this meeting WTA Ltd approached officers with a further proposal to site the wheel on St George's Field car park adjacent to the public toilets.
5. The key features of their proposal are:
 - To locate the wheel at the north east corner of St. George's Field Car Park, parallel to tree line with entrance facing towards the river. It is anticipated that the wheel footprint - maximum of 20 x 25m will take out 25 car park bays, no more than 27.
 - The size of the wheel is R40 - R60, (approx 40m or 60m) we have transportable R60 (ex Hyde Park, London and Royal Windsor) available for limited time.
 - The wheel would be temporary for 3 months to assess the usage and impact.
 - Target date for opening would be before Easter 2009.
 - The site already has a use precedence as a temporary fairground.

- There is however concern with flooding, as site is classified by EA as 'moderate' flood risk. Flood risk will be mitigated by temporary nature of the attraction. Also, we have a full flood management and evacuation procedure. Sign up to EA flood alert system to get advance warning of six hours before water reaches critical level. 20 minutes needed for full evacuation. We have mechanical provision to lift vulnerable electrics to above 100 year flood event level (2000) 10.40 AOD (scissor lift). Rest of wheel flood resilient and will displace little flood water. At our own cost, we will undertake clean-up wheel and immediate area in car park after flood water has receded.
- Once planning has been approved we will negotiate an appropriate commercial deal with York City Council.
- The York wheel will receive priority support from our formidable marketing team. We will offer a temporary attraction, which for a limited time, will allow tourists and residents to see the architectural and medieval treasures of York from closer than ever before. We will work closely with local businesses. We already have letter of support from Chamber of Commerce, Park Inn Hotel, other hotels in York have expressed their support. Many opportunities for cross promotions with local businesses - especially tourism and retail related. Work with other local attractions, e.g. Minster who have been supportive in past.

Consultation

6. Due to the very tight timescales it has only been possible to consult internal amongst officers at this stage. If the Executive supports the proposal then we would expect WTA Ltd to carry out extensive consultation in support of their planning application.

Options

7. There are three options for the Executive to consider.
 - A. Agree in principle to the proposal made by WTA Ltd subject to them achieving planning approval and agreeing acceptable terms with the Council.
 - B. Agree in principle to the proposal subject to agreeing modifications to the proposal, achieving planning approval and agreeing acceptable terms.
 - C. Reject the proposal.

Analysis

8. The fairground comes to St Georges Field annually for the week before and after Easter so this would present a problem if planning permission could be achieved within the timescale but this is highly unlikely.
9. There are likely to be major objections to the proposal from residents and businesses in the area.

10. St Georges Field car park is functional flood plain. There was an Environment Agency objection (and a proposed reason for refusal) to the 2004 Tower Gardens proposal. WTA Ltd would need to seek an early consultation with them prior to submitting an application.
11. Any terms agreed would need to absolve the Council from the clean up following a flood event and from any damage caused to the car park as a result of this proposal.
12. English Heritage did not raise objections to the temporary permission for a wheel on Tower Gardens however given the height of the wheel they may well take a different view this time around. They would also be a statutory consultee on the planning application.
13. Timescales are short for an application to be considered in April and WTA Ltd would need to progress their application as soon as possible.
14. Ownership of the site is with the City Council and as far as we are aware there are no covenants regarding usage.
15. Whilst WTA Ltd have suggested there will be 27 parking spaces lost our view is that this could be considerably higher as some bays would become unusable on safety grounds. We will make a charge for the lost revenue on the basis of the same time period last year.
16. There are already pedestrian concerns in this area with access to the car park and we would expect that the proposal would significantly increase pedestrian movements. This would need to be addressed by the planning application.
17. A wheel in this location would increase the visitor attractions for the city and could bring in additional visitors thereby boosting the local economy.
18. There is no doubt that the wheel would have an environmental impact in that part of the city next to the river and many residential properties and businesses.
19. However if the city is to continue to offer new opportunities to maintain market share of visitors it needs to provide new and interesting attractions for visitors. By considering a temporary 3 month arrangement then the city can assess the benefits that have arisen from the presence of the wheel and the impact that it has upon visitors and the environment and neighbourhood in which it is sited.
20. The specific location of the wheel in the car park, its access, hours of operation and maintenance need to be carefully assessed which would result in a modification of the proposals.

Corporate Priorities

21. This proposal has no direct connection with the Corporate Priorities. However it does support the economic vitality of the city centre as a visitor attraction thereby improving the economic prosperity of the city.

Implications

22. There are no financial or legal implications of this proposal.

Risk Management

23. There are a number of risks attached to this proposal. The Council could be criticised for agreeing to a proposal that is subject to river flooding, could have an affect upon local residences and properties and that there has been insufficient consultation before agreeing to the proposal.

Recommendations

24. Agree in principle to the proposal for a temporary period of 3 months, subject to agreeing modifications to the proposal, achieving planning approval and agreeing acceptable terms.

Reason: So that the wheel can increase the visitor offer in the city and allow the impact of the wheel can be assessed.

Contact Details

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Report Approved ☒

Date 08/03/09

Specialist Implications Officer(s) None

Wards Affected: Guildhall

All ☐

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers :

Executive Report – Proposed Big Wheel in North Street Gardens – 20 January 2008

Annexes :

Annex A – Company Profile

8 March 2009