

Simplification Pathfinder Pilot Board: Minutes

Tuesday 25th February 2025, 11.30am-1pm, Wallasey Town Hall, Committee Room 1

Members of the Board	Organisation
Cllr Tony Jones (Chair)	Wirral Borough Council (New Brighton ward)
Cllr Paul Stuart	Wirral Borough Council (Seacombe Ward)
Cllr Brian Kenny	Wirral Borough Council (Bidston and St James ward)
Cllr Jo Bird	Wirral Council Borough Council (Bromborough ward)
Cllr Pat Cleary	Wirral Council Borough Council (Birkenhead and Tranmere ward)
Cllr Graeme Cooper	Wirral Borough Council (Liscard ward)
Cllr Phil Gilchrist	Wirral Borough Council (non-voting Ex-officio Liberal Democrat Group)
Cllr Andrew Hodson	Wirral Borough Council (non-voting) Ex-officio Conservative Group
Liam Kelly	CEO, Make CIC
Ian Lewis	Investment Manager (Place), Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
Andy Grimshaw	CEO, Eureka! Science + Discovery
Gareth Prytherch	CEO, Wirral CVS
Andrew Ellams	Commercial Director, Wirral Metropolitan College

Officers in attendance	Role
Marcus Shaw	Director of Regeneration and Place, Wirral Borough Council
Rebecca Lowry	Assistant Director - Chief Regeneration Officer, Wirral Borough Council
Matthew Bennett	Director of Finance, Wirral Borough Council
Matthew Neal	Lead Principal Lawyer (Regeneration, Planning and Property), Wirral Borough Council

Charlotte Carroll	Grants Manager (Regeneration), Wirral Borough Council
Sinead Griffiths (minutes)	Grants Officer (Regeneration), Wirral Borough Council

	Item
1.	<p>Welcome, Introduction and apologies.</p> <p>The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. Apologies were received from Neil Coles of Wirral Chamber of Commerce, Cllr Kaitlin Stuart, Cllr Ruth Molyneux, and Nicki O'Connor of Department of Work and Pensions.</p> <p>Deputies were in attendance for Cllr Kaitlin Stuart (Cllr Paul Stuart) and Cllr Ruth Molyneux (Cllr Jo Bird).</p> <p>The Chair reminded members of their role and the role of the board in providing recommendations to Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee in alignment with the terms of reference. The confidentiality of the information presented to the board was emphasised and the strong presumption that recommendations should be reached by majority consensus was also highlighted to members.</p>
2.	<p>Declarations of interests</p> <p>Members were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests and any other relevant interest and to state the nature of the interest.</p> <p>Cllr Bird declared a personal but non prejudicial interest in respect of being a resident near the Woodside area.</p>
3.	<p>Review of previous actions</p> <p>Members were assured that progress was being made on previous outstanding actions and will be completed by the next board meeting on 28 April 2025.</p>
4.	<p>Review of the programme The Director of Regeneration and Place explained that a comprehensive review of projects within the Simplification Pathfinder Programme had been commissioned to develop a further understanding of the deliverability of schemes and to provide further assurance that the grant funding will be spent by the 31 March 2026.</p> <p>Members were reminded of a resolution of the Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee on 16 July 2024 that was to solely invest into a Transport Museum at the Taylor Street site, delivered by Big Heritage CIC. To date, a Grant Funding Agreement has not been entered into for this scheme. Members were</p>

informed that a proposed recommendation presented to the board was to rescind this resolution.

Pacific Road

It was reported that the Council was not aware of any documented right that Big Heritage CIC had to the Council's asset at Pacific Road that is currently on a lease to Wirral Chamber of Commerce with approximately 15 years remaining. The lessee has requested a reverse premium to surrender the lease. This would cause subsidy control issues and considering the financial position of the Council would not be a viable option at this time. Findings from the IMB report concluded that even with an extension of timescale, Big Heritage CIC's revised scheme would not be deliverable. Members were further reminded of their mandate to ensure that all grant money is spent by the deadline of the 31 March 2026

Members questioned the viability of a £1.5m investment to Big Heritage CIC for a revised scheme at Taylor Street. They were reminded of recommendation 5b which provided for the proposed scheme at Taylor Street to be subject to a revised business case being approved. The Director of Regeneration and Place agreed to circulate the IMB report after the meeting.

The Lead Principal Lawyer re-iterated the March 2026 deadline, the councils' financials' position when considering a reverse premium, the Council's duty to achieve market value for its commercial property deals and the risks associated with the delivery of Big Heritage CIC's revised project. The Director of Regeneration and Place further clarified that grant funding could not be used to pay for reverse premium costs. If submitted, Members would subsequently review a new business case up to the value of £1.5 from Big Heritage CIC, which could be phase one of a larger scheme with the viability of being supported via future rounds of funding. If recommendations were approved, this business case would be presented to the board.

Members suggested that delivery of Big Heritage's revised plan by March 2026 was unachievable. The Director of Regeneration and Place stated that many changes had been last minute, which created risks relating of clawback of grant money

Members sought clarity around recommendation 3, questioning how much the Price Street scheme would be allocated. Members were assured that £1,300,000 would be allocated to the Price Street scheme for design and development.

Members raised concerns relating to decreased footfall and that key stakeholders were interested in seeing projects being delivered that have the potential to bring more visitors/passengers.

Discussion relating to the Transport Museum continued. Members sought clarity on whether lease agreements were currently secured or being negotiated. The Lead Principal Lawyer clarified that there was no agreement in place providing any agreed heads of terms between the parties relating occupation of Pacific Road by Big Heritage and there was 15 years left on the lease. Any element of tweaking the deal would be a further a change to the business case. MN further stated that he had seen no evidence of a partnership agreement between Big Heritage CIC and Hornby Hobbies.

The Assistant Director - Chief Regeneration Officer presented an overview of the IMB report to members, concluding that project completion would be unlikely by March 2027 and that an investment of £1,500,000 would safeguard developments at Taylor Street. Big Heritage CIC would still had a legal rights to access tramway infrastructure at the Pacific Road site and could connect to Woodside.

Members questioned if there would be any implications for tenants at Pacific Road. The Director of Regeneration and Place stated that there were sub tenants of the Chamber of Commerce, and limited information had been shared with the Council.

MN reminded members that SPP was not a decision-making board, but advisory to ERH committee, who would not be bound by these recommendations but would be required to have regard to the recommendations made by the pathfinder board when taking the decision on the recommendations presented by officers.

A number of Members stated that recommendations were difficult to support as they had not heard directly from Big Heritage CIC or Wirral Chamber of Commerce during the meeting. Members further stated that they felt uncomfortable being lobbied.

On a motion proposed by Councillor Tony Jones, Seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart, it was:

Resolved (4:3) (4 Abstentions) – That

1. The Transport Museum/Ticket to Ride proposed revised business case submitted by Big Heritage is not approved.

	<p>2. The resolution of Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee of 16th July 2024 to allocate £4,500,000 to Big Heritage CIC is rescinded.</p> <p>3. £2,000,000 is withdrawn from the Price Street Car Park project.</p> <p>4. £750,000 of grant funding is awarded to the Charing Cross & Grange Road, Conway & Europa Boulevard project, £2,000,000 of grant funding is awarded to the Birkenhead Market project and £3,447,288 of grant funding is awarded to the New Ferry Public Realm project.</p> <p>5. The Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. submit to MHCLG an application for timescale extensions for the Waterfront Infrastructure and New Ferry projects; and; b. Allocate by way of grant funding of up to £1,500,000 and consider an extension to Big Heritage CIC for the delivery of the renovation of Wirral Transport Museum upon the submission of a revised business case. <p>6. The Director of Regeneration and Place in agreement with the Director of Finance is provided with delegation to allocate any funding that becomes available up to £500,000 to ensure projects in delivery are provided with timely funding as appropriate.</p> <p>The Chair provided assurance to members that the untimely distribution of papers would not happen again. The Director of Regeneration and Place assured members that he was available to discuss issues on a one-to-one basis and is open to feedback on how the support for the board could improve.</p> <p>Members suggested a workshop or strategy session to be undertaken by members in the future, this was a suggestion and not noted as an action.</p>
7.	<p>AOB</p> <p>Meeting concluded 13:14.</p>
8.	<p>Summary of actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IMB reporting to be shared with members
9.	<p>Date and time of next meeting: Thursday 12th June 2025.</p>

