

Brighton & Hove City Council

Cabinet

Agenda Item 56

Subject: Seafront Lease: Brighton Wheel Proposal

Date of meeting: 17th September 2026

Report of: Corporate Director City Operations

Contact Officer: Toni Manuel
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Ward(s) affected: Kemptown

Key Decision: Yes

Reason(s): Over £1m

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval to award a new 25-year lease, subject to Planning consent, to the current tenant for the reinstatement of the Brighton Wheel on its former site at Madeira Drive – see site plan Appendix 1 at the end of this report. The proposal would secure a significant increase in rental income for the council, support delivery of the Seafront Prospectus and wider regeneration ambitions for the Eastern Seafront and provide a major visitor attraction at no capital cost or operational risk to the council.
- 1.2 The proposal aligns with the council's objectives to support economic growth, increase commercial property income, enhance the visitor economy and deliver visible improvements along the seafront. The return of the Brighton Wheel would complement existing attractions, increase footfall to the eastern seafront and contribute to the long-term vitality and attractiveness of the area.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet agrees to grant a new 25-year lease to the existing tenant for the reinstatement and operation of the Brighton Wheel on its former site at Madeira Drive, subject to planning permissions, statutory consents, matters referred to in this Part 1 report and the lease terms and matters set out in the Part 2 report.
- 2.2 That Cabinet delegates authority to the Director City Operations in consultation with the Director Property & Finance and Cabinet Member for Economy, Culture, Heritage and Tourism to finalise and enter into all necessary legal agreements and associated lease documentation required to implement the proposal.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 The Brighton Wheel operated successfully on Madeira Drive between 2011 and 2016, becoming a recognised seafront landmark and popular visitor attraction. The wheel was always intended as a temporary meanwhile use and, following the expiry of its lease, was removed to facilitate the development of the i360.
- 3.2 At the time, the council took the view that supporting the launch of the new multi-million-pound i360 attraction was important to help it establish itself as a flagship visitor destination for Brighton & Hove. The wheel's removal, around 10 years ago, reflected the council's commitment to enabling the i360 to develop and strengthen the city's tourism offer.
- 3.3 Since then, the i360 has become an established part of Brighton's visitor economy and demand for elevated seafront experiences has remained strong. The council's view is that the return of an observation wheel would complement existing attractions by providing a different visitor experience, appealing to different markets and further enhancing the seafront's appeal as a destination for residents and visitors alike.
- 3.4 The proposal supports the objectives of the Seafront Development Board and the Seafront Prospectus, both of which seek to encourage investment, improve the visitor experience and enhance the economic performance of the seafront. The return of a highly visible attraction would provide an early and tangible demonstration of progress within the wider regeneration programme for the Eastern Seafront.
- 3.5 The proposed operator is a local family-run business with more than 15 years' trading experience at the site and has invested in excess of £1.33 million in infrastructure and attractions along Madeira Drive, including the Zip Wire and structural works associated with the previous Wheel installation.
- 3.6 Under the proposed arrangement, all operational, maintenance, staffing and commercial responsibilities would remain with the tenant. The council's role would be limited to that of landlord and would not be dependent upon visitor numbers, turnover or business performance. This arrangement provides a guaranteed rental income while transferring all commercial risk to the operator.
- 3.7 The Wheel is expected to increase visitor footfall and encourage movement towards the eastern section of the seafront, supporting nearby businesses and complementing existing attractions including the Sea Life Centre, Volk's Railway, adventure golf, the Zip Wire and Brighton Palace Pier.
- 3.8 The Brighton Wheel proposal supports the Council Plan priorities by strengthening the visitor economy, creating jobs, increasing footfall for local businesses and attracting investment to the seafront. As a distinctive attraction, it would help grow a diverse and sustainable local economy while enhancing the city's unique identity. The proposal also aligns with the city's Economic Plan by supporting sustainable economic growth, extending the

tourism season and reinforcing Brighton & Hove's position as a leading visitor destination.

- 3.9 As the land proposed for the Brighton Wheel is designated as public open space and the proposed lease term exceeds seven years, the council will be required to undertake the statutory public open space consultation process before any final decision is made. The consultation will provide an opportunity for interested parties, including residents, stakeholders and other users of the space, to comment on the proposal. All representations received during the consultation period will be carefully considered and taken into account as part of the decision-making process. Following completion of the consultation and consideration of any responses, the final decision on whether to proceed with the lease will be made by the Director under delegated authority, having regard to the consultation outcomes and all other relevant Planning and legal considerations.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 The proposed return of the Brighton Wheel must be considered within the context of a number of significant site-specific constraints that limit the range of realistic alternatives. A comprehensive review of the seafront has confirmed that this is the most suitable location for accommodating a wheel of this scale.
- 4.2 A key consideration is that the building beneath the site was specifically strengthened in 2011 to accommodate the original Brighton Wheel. These structural works were undertaken at significant expense by the current tenant and the support infrastructure required for the Wheel now forms an integral part of the building. The building itself is subject to a secure tenancy, meaning that the council is unable to separate the site from the underlying asset for the purposes of marketing it independently. As a result, an open market exercise seeking alternative operators is not considered a viable option, as any prospective operator would remain dependent on infrastructure embedded within a privately occupied premises.
- 4.3 The potential impact of the Wheel on the city's wider visitor economy has been carefully considered. The introduction of a major new seafront attraction is expected to strengthen Brighton & Hove's tourism offer by increasing the city's appeal as a visitor destination, attracting additional visitors and encouraging longer stays. The council considers that the Wheel would complement the existing range of tourism and leisure attractions by providing a distinct visitor experience and broadening the overall offer available to residents and visitors. Experience from other established seaside destinations demonstrates that a diverse mix of attractions can operate successfully alongside one another and collectively enhance the visitor economy. The proposal is therefore expected to increase overall footfall and deliver wider benefits for attractions, businesses and the local economy across the city.
- 4.4 Another alternative would be not to proceed with the proposal and leave the site vacant. While this would avoid potential Planning objections and

stakeholder concerns, it would also result in the loss of a significant opportunity to enhance the city's visitor offer and generate income from an otherwise constrained site. As with many seafront developments, some objections are anticipated, particularly from a small number of nearby residents. However, experience suggests that such representations typically come from a limited but vocal minority and do not necessarily reflect wider public opinion.

- 4.5 The return of the Brighton Wheel would create a highly visible landmark attraction, increase footfall and help draw visitors eastwards towards quieter parts of the seafront. This, in turn, would support surrounding hospitality and leisure businesses and complement existing attractions including the Sea Life Centre, Volk's Electric Railway, the Zip Wire, adventure golf and Brighton Palace Pier. As a family friendly, year-round attraction with a proven track record, the Wheel would strengthen the overall visitor experience, contribute to a more balanced distribution of activity along the seafront and support the council's wider objectives for a vibrant and economically successful seafront destination.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 This is a commercial arrangement and lead Councillors have been briefed on the terms of this lease.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 As part of the 2026/27 budget setting process and agreed at Budget Council, the MTFS contains income targets for commercialisation of existing council assets. Agreement of this 25 year lease will contribute towards these income targets. Should a lease not be agreed, then these income targets may not be fully achieved adding further pressure to the councils financial position Under the proposal all operational associated costs would be the responsibility of the tenant with the councils role limited to landlord which would provide a guaranteed rental income while transferring all commercial risk to the operator.

Name of finance officer consulted: John Lack Date consulted: 18/08/2026

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The Council has the power to dispose of the land by way of a 25 year long lease under section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 ("LGA 72") subject to obtaining the best consideration reasonably obtainable. Where a site is open space, under section 122 (2A) of the LGA 1972, this power is also subject to a requirement to advertise the proposed disposal in a local paper for two consecutive weeks and to consider any objections raised before taking a decision on whether to dispose of the land. In exercising the delegations set out in this report, the Director City Operations in consultation with the Director Property & Finance and Cabinet Member for Economy, Culture, Heritage and Tourism. will need to be satisfied that these requirements are met.

- 7.2 Prior to grant of the lease of the land it will also be necessary for Legal Services to review the titles to the properties to confirm that no interests exist that may prevent a transfer. If any restrictions or covenants exist, the reviews will ascertain whether or not they are still capable of being enforced.

Name of lawyer consulted: Hannah Bassett Date consulted:(03/09/2026)

8. Risk implications

- 8.1 Under the proposed arrangement all financial and commercial risk is passed to the tenant. The council's role would be limited to that of landlord and rental income would not be dependent upon visitor numbers, turnover or business performance.

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 The Brighton Wheel proposal has been considered with regard to its equality and inclusion implications and is expected to provide a positive and accessible visitor attraction for a wide range of users. The Wheel will be fully wheelchair accessible, enabling people with mobility impairments to access and enjoy the attraction alongside other visitors. The operator will be required to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and all other relevant legislation, regulations and industry standards relating to accessibility, health and safety, and customer service. The design and operation of the attraction will seek to minimise barriers to participation, with accessible boarding arrangements, clear signage, staff training and reasonable adjustments provided where required. The area immediately in front of the site will remain clear and unobstructed to maintain safe and convenient pedestrian movement for all users, including wheelchair users, people with pushchairs and those with visual or mobility impairments. An inclusive pricing structure will be expected, with consideration given to concessions and companion or carer arrangements where appropriate, helping to ensure that the attraction is accessible to people from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Overall, the proposal is intended to support equal access and enjoyment for residents and visitors regardless of age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity status, or other protected characteristics.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 Sustainability will be addressed through the Planning process.

11. Social Value and procurement implications

- 11.1 This is a lease arrangement and there are no direct procurement implications.

12. Crime & disorder implications

- 12.1 The observation wheel will generate increased activity and footfall throughout the year, extending into the evening period. The attraction will be

illuminated and will provide a prominent, well-used focal point within the area, increasing natural surveillance and contributing to a safer environment for visitors and residents during hours of darkness.

13. Public health implications

- 13.1 A vibrant and active seafront supports health and wellbeing by encouraging people to spend time outdoors, engage in walking and recreation and enjoy opportunities for social interaction in an attractive coastal environment.

14. Conclusion

- 14.1 The proposed reinstatement of the Brighton Wheel represents a significant opportunity to secure a major investment in the city's seafront at no capital cost and with no operational or commercial risk to the Council. The proposal would deliver a substantial increase in rental income, support the Council's commercial objectives and contribute positively to the Medium Term Financial Plan through a guaranteed rental stream.
- 14.2 The Wheel has a proven track record as a popular visitor attraction and would strengthen Brighton & Hove's tourism offer by complementing existing attractions and encouraging increased footfall, particularly towards the eastern seafront. Its return would support local businesses, enhance the visitor experience and provide a visible demonstration of progress in delivering the ambitions set out within the Seafront Prospectus and wider regeneration programme.
- 14.3 Cabinet is therefore recommended to approve the grant of a 25-year lease and delegate authority to the Corporate Director Property & Finance to conclude the necessary legal agreements to enable the project to proceed.

Supporting Documentation

1. Appendices

1. Site Plan