

Brighton & Hove City Council

Cabinet

Agenda Item 58

Subject: Black Rock Future Vision and Meanwhile Use

Date of meeting: Thursday, 15 October 2026

Report of: Cabinet Member for Finance and City Regeneration

Lead Officer: Corporate Director, City Operations

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Ward(s) affected: Kemptown;

Key Decision: Yes

Reason(s) Key: Expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the expenditure of the City Council's budget, namely above £1,000,000.

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 Black Rock is one of the city's most strategically important regeneration opportunities, offering significant potential to drive economic growth, improve health and wellbeing, enhance community facilities and support the long-term renewal of the eastern seafront. The Council's vision is to transform the site over time into a landmark coastal destination centered on culture, leisure and recreation, supported by complementary commercial, environmental and community uses. This ambition supports the priorities of the Council Plan and the wider objectives set out within the Brighton & Hove Seafront Prospectus.
- 1.2 Central to that vision is an ambition to create a nationally and internationally recognised cultural destination, including a major visual arts offer, with work already underway to explore potential gallery partnerships, investment opportunities and future funding streams. Any meanwhile use must therefore remain flexible and capable of adapting to, and supporting, this longer-term transformation of the site.
- 1.3 The Council is pursuing a phased approach to Black Rock. The first phase is the delivery of a meanwhile use capable of activating the site, generating income and creating community benefit whilst maintaining flexibility for future redevelopment. The second phase is the long-term redevelopment and

transformation of the site through future investment and regeneration opportunities.

- 1.4 To support delivery of the first phase, the Council undertook an Expressions of Interest process to identify proposals capable of delivering a meanwhile use for the site. This report sets out the outcome of that process and seeks approval to progress negotiations with a preferred bidder whilst retaining a reserve bidder should satisfactory terms not be capable of being concluded.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet notes and endorses the Black Rock Future Vision and approves the Council's phased approach to site activation and long-term regeneration.
- 2.2 Cabinet approves Bidder 1 identified in the part 2 report as the Council's preferred bidder for the Black Rock meanwhile-use opportunity, subject to satisfactory completion of due diligence and the negotiation of acceptable commercial, legal and operational terms.
- 2.3 Cabinet approves Bidder 2 identified in the Part 2 report as reserve bidder should satisfactory terms not be capable of being concluded with Bidder 1.
- 2.4 Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director City Operations to, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member, to:
 - a) undertake all necessary due diligence;
 - b) negotiate and finalise Heads of Terms;
 - c) enter into all lease agreements and ancillary legal documentation necessary to implement the recommendations contained within this report.
- 2.5 Cabinet agrees that any lease agreement should:
 - be limited to a maximum five-year term;
 - contain appropriate break and termination provisions;
 - require removal of tenant infrastructure at lease expiry;
 - require the site to be returned in a condition substantially equivalent to that existing immediately prior to occupation, at the operator's expense, unless otherwise agreed by the Council;
 - include agreed social value commitments and monitoring arrangements.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 Black Rock occupies a prominent position on the eastern seafront between Brighton Marina, Madeira Drive and neighbouring communities including Whitehawk and Kemptown. The site is recognised as one of the city's most significant strategic assets and has long been identified as having the potential to contribute towards regeneration, economic growth, leisure, community wellbeing and visitor economy objectives.

- 3.2 Whilst consideration of the long-term future of the site continues, the Council identified an opportunity to bring Black Rock into productive interim use through a meanwhile-use programme. The Council's objectives were to support activation of the site, create community benefit, attract visitors, generate income and improve perceptions of place whilst preserving future development options.
- 3.3 The Council's long-term position is set out most recently in the Brighton & Hove Seafront Prospectus, published in June 2026. The Prospectus identifies Black Rock as a key seafront investment opportunity and describes a two-stage approach: first, meanwhile activation through temporary venues, outdoor spaces and community events; and second, longer-term transformation as a landmark destination making full use of the site's coastal location and improved connectivity.
- 3.4 The Prospectus does not prescribe a fixed scheme. It envisages that the permanent development could accommodate major cultural or commercial uses, potentially including a gallery, within a wider leisure and recreation-led destination. This sits within the City Plan strategic allocation for leisure and recreation-led development, supported by uses which strengthen cultural, environmental and community value.
- 3.5 The Council has invested approximately £18m in enabling works to prepare the site for future development and improve the wider eastern seafront. These works include land remediation and levelling, utility diversions, a realigned and extended sea wall and improved coastal defences, the 800m seafront boardwalk, improved pedestrian and cycle connections to Brighton Marina, and refurbishment of the Volk's Electric Railway station and public toilets. Together, these interventions have reduced constraints, improved access and established a more robust platform for permanent redevelopment.
- 3.6 The long-term approach to Black Rock forms part of the Council's wider, place-led vision for the full 13km seafront. That vision seeks high-quality placemaking, stronger access and active travel, investment in maintenance, environmental resilience and heritage, and sustainable commercial activation aligned with public benefit. Black Rock is also expected to complement the restoration of Madeira Terrace, the eastern seafront public realm and connections with Brighton Marina and neighbouring communities.
- 3.7 As part of this wider vision, the Council is exploring the potential for Black Rock to accommodate a cultural destination of national and international significance, potentially including a major visual arts gallery capable of attracting significant exhibitions, partnerships and audiences. Such an offer could build on Brighton & Hove's established creative identity, strengthen the city's cultural infrastructure and act as a catalyst for regeneration, learning, skills and economic activity. The form, scale, deliverability and funding of any permanent cultural offer remain subject to further feasibility work, partnership development, business case preparation and future decision-making

- 3.8 While this remains the long-term aspiration, significant preparatory work is already underway. The Council and its partners have begun exploring opportunities with nationally and internationally recognised gallery operators and cultural organisations, alongside engagement with higher education institutions, museums, creative industry partners and potential investors. This work is helping to test the concept, understand delivery models and identify the partnerships required to develop a financially sustainable and culturally ambitious proposition.
- 3.9 In parallel, officers are actively exploring potential funding routes and investment opportunities. Early discussions have included consideration of Arts Council England programmes, National Lottery funding, philanthropic giving, sponsorship, commercial investment and central government support. The intention is to develop a robust business case and investment proposition that can attract a blend of public and private funding, ensuring that any future gallery is delivered on a sustainable basis and maximises benefits for residents, visitors and the wider creative economy.
- 3.10 The Council also recognises the importance of maintaining momentum while the long-term vision is developed. Opportunities are therefore being explored to bring nationally significant gallery programming and exhibitions to the city in advance of any permanent facility, helping to build audiences, strengthen partnerships, raise the city's profile and demonstrate the demand for a major visual arts destination. This phased approach will help position Brighton & Hove as a leading centre for visual arts whilst laying the foundations for a future cultural institution of national and international standing.
- 3.11 Accordingly, the recommended meanwhile use should be treated as an interim stage in delivering the Council's established strategic direction. It should animate the site, generate income, build audiences and test demand and accessibility, but must not create an expectation of permanent occupation or fetter future decisions on the form, procurement, planning or delivery of the long-term development.
- 3.12 An Expressions of Interest process was therefore undertaken. Four submissions were received. To protect the Council's commercial position during negotiations, the submissions are referred to in this public report as Bidder 1, Bidder 2, Bidder 3 and Bidder 4. The bidder identities are set out in the exempt Part Two report.
- 3.13 Submissions were evaluated against the published criteria and weightings:

Evaluation criterion	Weighting
Operational Plan & Provider History	40%
Local Economic Impact	20%
Rent Offer	40%

4. Assessment outcomes

- 4.1 Four submissions were received and assessed against the published evaluation criteria. Officers undertook a comparative assessment of each submission against the published criteria.
- 4.2 The assessment identified Bidder 1 as the highest scoring proposal and Bidder 2 as the second highest scoring proposal. Officers concluded that these submissions most closely aligned with the objectives of the meanwhile-use opportunity.
- 4.3 Bidder 1 proposes a temporary active leisure, sport and wellbeing destination incorporating padel, fitness, food and beverage facilities and mental health programming. The proposal includes a fixed annual rent and does not require a Council capital contribution.
- 4.4 The social value proposition is an important component of the recommended bid. By combining accessible opportunities for physical activity with dedicated mental health programming, the proposal has the potential to support prevention and early intervention, reduce barriers to participation and create regular opportunities for social connection. The visible seafront location also provides an opportunity to normalise conversations about mental health and connect participants with appropriate community and wellbeing support.
- 4.5 Bidder 1's proposal also has the potential to generate wider community and economic value through local employment, volunteering, coaching, training and work-experience opportunities; partnerships with schools, colleges, community groups and health and wellbeing organisations; and activity targeted at residents who experience financial, social or health-related barriers to participation. These potential benefits will need to be translated into specific, costed and deliverable commitments through the due diligence and Heads of Terms process.
- 4.6 Bidder 2 proposes a cultural, leisure and placemaking destination incorporating a public beach hub, community facilities, food and beverage uses and event space. The proposal demonstrated significant operator experience and a substantial level of proposed private investment. Bidder 3 and Bidder 4 presented alternative proposals which were considered as part of the assessment process. Whilst both demonstrated positive attributes, officers concluded that they did not represent the strongest overall options when assessed against the published meanwhile-use criteria.
- 4.7 Detailed bidder identities, commercial terms, financial offers, proposed lease structures and evaluation information are contained within the exempt Part Two report where disclosure could prejudice ongoing negotiations and the Council's commercial position.

5. Analysis and consideration of options

- 5.1 Four Expressions of Interest were assessed against the published evaluation criteria of Operational Plan and Provider History (40%), Local Economic Impact (20%) and Rent Offer (40%). Detailed scoring and comparative commercial analysis are set out in the exempt Part Two report.
- 5.2 Preferred Option:
The recommended option is to appoint Bidder 1 as preferred bidder. Officers concluded that the proposal offered the strongest overall combination of deliverability, financial return and community benefit whilst meeting the objectives established for the meanwhile-use opportunity. The proposal achieved the highest overall assessment outcome and is supported by an experienced delivery partner. In social value terms, it offers an opportunity to use sport as a route into improved physical and mental wellbeing, stronger social connections and wider participation. It also provides a platform for partnership working with local communities and services, and for creating employment, skills and volunteering pathways linked to the operation of the site.
- 5.3 To ensure that these benefits are realised and can be evidenced, officers will seek an agreed social value framework before completion of the lease agreement. This should establish baseline information, target groups, measurable outputs and outcomes, delivery partners, reporting frequency and appropriate review arrangements. Measures should include, where achievable, affordable or free access, participation by under-represented groups, delivery of mental health and wellbeing activity, local employment and training outcomes, community partnerships and participant feedback.
- 5.4 Reserve Option:
Bidder 2 is recommended as reserve bidder. Officers recognised significant strengths in the proposal's cultural offer, placemaking ambitions, investment proposition and operator experience. However, the proposal generated a lower and less certain financial return than the preferred bidder and therefore did not achieve the highest overall assessment outcome.
- 5.5 Alternative Proposals Considered:
Bidder 3 presented a credible and deliverable active leisure offer and demonstrated positive community benefits. However, officers concluded that the proposal offered a narrower range of economic and community impacts and a lower financial return than the preferred and reserve proposals.
- 5.6 Bidder 4 proposed a broader regeneration vision centred upon a long-term occupation model rather than a temporary meanwhile use. Officers recognised the potential merits of that approach. However, it was not directly comparable with the objectives of the current Expressions of Interest process and would require separate strategic, legal, property, procurement and financial consideration should the Council wish to explore longer-term redevelopment opportunities for Black Rock in the future. Progressing the recommendations contained within this report does not

prevent the Council from considering such opportunities through separate governance arrangements at a later date.

- 5.7 Having considered all submissions against the published criteria, officers concluded that Bidder 1 represents the most advantageous proposal for the purposes of the meanwhile-use opportunity. It achieves the strongest overall balance of financial return, deliverability and public benefit whilst supporting activation of the site and maintaining flexibility over the long-term future of Black Rock. Officers therefore recommend its appointment as preferred bidder, with Bidder 2 retained as reserve bidder should satisfactory terms not be concluded. The temporary and relocatable nature of the proposal, together with suitable termination, reinstatement and handback provisions, is important to ensuring compatibility with the Council's two-stage approach for Black Rock.

6. Community Engagement and Consultation

- 6.1 The Council undertook an Expressions of Interest process to test market interest in delivering a meanwhile use at Black Rock. The process attracted four submissions from organisations operating across the leisure, cultural, community and regeneration sectors. Officers assessed submissions against the published evaluation criteria.
- 6.2 As proposals progress, further engagement will take place with ward councillors, local stakeholders, statutory consultees and relevant Council services through planning, licensing and operational approval processes as required. Engagement will include early discussion with neighbouring communities, including Whitehawk and East Brighton, and with organisations working in physical activity, mental health, youth provision, disability and inclusion. This will help shape an offer that responds to local need and identifies credible referral and delivery partnerships.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The recommended proposal is expected to generate a fixed annual rental income for the Council over a 5 year period and does not require a Council capital investment.
- 7.2 Final financial implications will depend on the outcome of due diligence and negotiation of Heads of Terms, including the agreed rent, payment profile, responsibilities for site preparation, utilities, maintenance, insurance, business rates, reinstatement and handback.
- 7.3 The Council will need to ensure that the agreement protects it from avoidable costs, liabilities or compensation exposure and does not prejudice the future redevelopment of Black Rock.
- 7.4 Financial due diligence will be undertaken before completion of any legal agreement, including assessment of the operator's financial standing,

deliverability of the proposed investment and any security, guarantee or rent deposit requirements.

- 7.5 Any agreed income will be reflected against the Income & Commercialisation transformation programme included within the councils MTFS. Due to the timing of the agreement being signed it is unlikely that this income will be received in 2026/27, should it be then it will contribute towards the councils in year financial position.

Name of finance officer consulted: Craig Garoghan Date consulted:11/09/2026

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 The Council has the power to enter into the arrangements proposed by this report pursuant to section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 which permits the Council to dispose of land for the term as set out in the report via way of a lease. The Council may also rely on section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 which allows the Council to do anything that an individual may do subject to any statutory constraints on the Council's powers.

Name of lawyer consulted:Siobhan Fry Date consulted:25/09/2026

9. Risk implications

- 9.1 The principal risks associated with the proposal are:
- Delivery risk
 - Commercial and financial risk
 - Planning and statutory approvals risk
 - Reinstatement and end-of-term obligations
 - Operational management risk
 - Reputational risk
 - Strategic opportunity risk
- 9.2 These risks will be managed through due diligence, contractual protections, financial assessment and appropriate governance arrangements before any agreement is completed. In particular, the legal agreement will need to protect the Council's ability to obtain vacant possession and progress long-term redevelopment without avoidable delay, compensation exposure or constraints arising from the meanwhile operator's occupation or investment.

10. Equalities implications

- 10.1 In reaching any final agreement, the Council will have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. Officers will seek to secure appropriate accessibility, inclusion and community benefit commitments through the Heads of Terms and subsequent lease agreements. Particular consideration will be given to accessibility of the site, activities and facilities for disabled residents and visitors. The social value plan should also identify practical steps to widen participation among groups

who are less likely to access organised sport or who face cost, confidence, cultural, physical or other barriers. This should include consideration of accessible facilities and equipment, inclusive programming, affordable access, targeted outreach and appropriate safeguarding arrangements.

11. Sustainability implications

- 11.1 The proposals include varying levels of temporary, modular and relocatable infrastructure. Sustainability considerations will be reviewed through detailed design, planning and due diligence processes. Opportunities to reduce carbon impacts and promote sustainable travel will be explored through the detailed design and planning stages.

12. Health and Wellbeing Implications:

- 12.1 The recommended proposal places health, wellbeing, participation and mental health outcomes at the centre of its operating model and has the potential to contribute positively to the Council's wider health and wellbeing objectives. The combination of regular physical activity, structured mental health programming and opportunities for social interaction could contribute to improved wellbeing, reduced isolation and earlier engagement with support. These benefits will depend on the quality, accessibility and reach of the programme. Officers will therefore seek clear delivery arrangements, appropriate partnerships and proportionate outcome monitoring as part of the final agreement.

Other Implications

13. Procurement implications

- 13.1 The proposed arrangement relates to the grant of a lease of Council-owned land and is not a public contract for goods, works or services. Accordingly, the decision does not constitute a contract award and a contract award notice is not required. Procurement and legal advice has been sought regarding the appropriate governance route for the transaction.

14. Property Implications

- 14.1 The proposal involves the temporary use of a strategic Council asset ahead of its permanent redevelopment. Any lease agreement should be limited to a maximum of five years and contain suitable break, termination, reinstatement and handback provisions, controls over permanent works and change of use, and protections against security of tenure where legally appropriate. Any lease agreement will require the operator to remove infrastructure and return the site in a condition substantially equivalent to that existing immediately prior to occupation, at the operator's expense, unless otherwise agreed by the Council. The agreement must preserve vacant possession and avoid prejudice, delay or additional cost to the future development and regeneration of Black Rock.

15. Corporate and Council Plan Implications

- 15.1 The recommendations support the Council Plan priorities relating to inclusive economic growth, health and wellbeing, culture, sustainability, community participation and responsible stewardship of Council assets. The proposals support productive use of a significant strategic site whilst maintaining flexibility for future regeneration, cultural development and long-term placemaking aspirations at Black Rock.

16. Conclusion

- 16.1 The Expressions of Interest process has demonstrated strong market interest in Black Rock and has provided the Council with a range of credible options for bringing the site into productive use.
- 16.2 Officers have undertaken a detailed assessment of all submissions against the published evaluation criteria and have considered the relative merits, opportunities and risks associated with each proposal. Whilst all bids demonstrated positive features, the assessment concluded that Bidder 1 offered the strongest overall combination of deliverability, community benefit and financial return within the scope of the meanwhile-use opportunity.
- 16.3 The proposal delivers the highest guaranteed rental income to the Council, provides a clear and deliverable activation strategy for the site and supports health, wellbeing and participation objectives whilst preserving flexibility over the future strategic direction of Black Rock. Its social value contribution has the potential to extend beyond participation in sport, supporting confidence, social connection, mental wellbeing, skills development and routes into employment or volunteering. Securing measurable commitments through the Heads of Terms will enable the Council to assess delivery over the five-year term and ensure that community benefit remains integral to the operation rather than an ancillary element.
- 16.4 Officers therefore recommend that Cabinet approves Bidder 1 as the preferred bidder, subject to satisfactory due diligence and completion of the lease agreement, and that Bidder 2 be retained as reserve bidder should terms not be capable of being concluded with the preferred bidder.
- 16.5 This recommendation will enable the Council to secure activity, investment and income from the site in the short to medium term while progressing its established two-stage strategy for Black Rock. The first stage is meanwhile activation; the second is permanent transformation as a landmark, leisure and recreation-led destination with potential cultural, commercial, environmental and community uses. The recommendation does not predetermine the form of the permanent scheme or any future decision on planning, procurement, development, disposal or investment.

Supporting Documentation

1. Appendices

1. Black Rock Site Plan

2. Background documents

1. Brighton & Hove Seafront Prospectus: A Seafront Fit for the Future, published 5 June 2026
2. Policy & Resources Committee, Development Brief for Black Rock, 1 December 2022 (Agenda Item 82)
3. Brighton & Hove City Plan Part One, Policy DA2: Brighton Marina, Gas Works and Black Rock Area
4. Black Rock Site Enabling and Public Realm Works project information

