

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET – 6th SEPTEMBER 2011

FROM THE CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 23rd AUGUST 2011

CSC27: KING'S LYNN TOWN HALL

The Chairman stated that the Town Hall was an important asset to the Borough and that he had requested the report to be considered by the Committee because he had concerns that the consultation exercise that had been conducted had not been extensive enough and he also had concerns in relation to the shortfall in funding for the proposals.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Shared Services and External Relations also stated that the Town Hall was an important building in the Town and therefore it was important to open up access to the public to allow visitors and residents to gain a better understanding of the history of the building, associated archives, regalia and fine art. By attracting more visitors to the town, this in turn, would benefit the retail outlets. A consultation exercise had been carried out and if the Stage 1 application was successful, a full consultation exercise would be carried out on the proposals with consideration being given to funding requirements. The Executive Director, Leisure and Public Space explained that Cabinet had recognised the shortfall in funding for the proposals but the initial application for Stage 1 was to gain funding to work up the proposals in full. The Council were also working closely with the Museums Service and Norfolk Record Office. It was also explained that in the event of Stage 1 funding being granted, there was no guarantee that Stage 2 would also be granted.

Under Standing Order 34, Councillor A Tyler addressed the Committee and referred to the report carried out by Costain Heritage in July 2008. He highlighted that the report had recommended that the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) would be best retained in the Custom House and questioned whether Cabinet had given consideration to this when coming to their decision and if so, why had they rejected it? The Executive Director, Leisure and Public Space referred to the Cabinet report section 5.4 and explained that although the proposals to move the TIC were not likely to generate a substantial surplus in income they would improve utilisation of staff resources from the TIC and Gaol House/Town Hall combined with an increased income from the Town Hall. The proposals would have a positive revenue benefit compared to the current operation.

Alison Gifford, representing the Civic Society, stressed that the Society supported the proposals but had concerns that the consultation exercise that had been carried out had not been

sufficient. Concern was also expressed about relocating the TIC from the Custom House to the Town Hall and that the proposals would make the Town Hall the focal attraction of the town and detract from other attractions in the town.

Councillor J Collop referred to the Cabinet report under Section 8.1 in relation to raising expectations in the local community with regard to the proposals. Councillor M Tilbury also questioned what reassurance could be given in relation to securing the additional funding which would be required to complete the work required. The Portfolio Holder for Shared Services and External Relations explained that in 2008, there had been extensive consultation with the public on the proposals, at that time, for the Town Hall, and further consultation sessions on the proposal had taken place with the general public during July 2011. A specific consultation exercise had been held for 5 representatives of the civic society on the 11th of April. A stakeholder consultation meeting had also been held on 5 July 2011 involving the Civic Society and other agencies. The Community and Culture Panel had extended an invite to all Councillors to attend their meeting on 27 June 2011, when the Panel considered the proposals which was preceded by a tour of the Town Hall. Consultation had been carried out with the Museums Youth Forum who had made and shown a DVD at the Arts Centre. Prior to a Stage 2 award development funding from the HLF would enable a full and extensive consultation exercise to be carried out.

The Executive Director, Leisure and Public Space stated that a balance was required between the expectations of a range of people from young to old and also to address the expectations of the Civic Society. He explained that the proposals included the recruitment of an Archives Development Officer to facilitate access to the Borough Archives for formal and informal learners and new audiences.

Councillor A Tyler raised concerns about the knock-on effect the proposals would have on other cultural and tourist attractions in the town and whether Cabinet had considered the overall strategy for tourism for the Town. He also raised the issue on whether a Task Group should have been established to consider the proposals prior to submitting the application for funding.

The Chairman questioned whether it was financially viable to have a coffee shop at the Town Hall. In response, the Portfolio Holder, Shared Services and External Relations reiterated that an extensive consultation exercise had been carried out prior to the report being prepared in 2008 and several surveys had also been conducted. The proposals would enable the town to become more connected and would promote the overall heritage offering in King's Lynn not just the Town hall. With regard to catering in addition to the visitors

to the Town hall members of the public attending the registrars including weddings would be able to sit and have a coffee while they waited.

Councillor Howman suggested that it was premature for the Committee to debate the proposals at this stage.

Councillor Collop raised concerns at the cost of the scheme in light of the current financial constraints of the Council.

The Executive Director, Leisure and Public Space, explained that the revenue impact would be positive and that the proposals did not require any additional resources. He also stated that currently King's Lynn was under selling itself as a heritage centre. The application included proposals for funding for improved signage in the town.

The Chief Executive explained that Stage 1 was the initial step and that a full consultation exercise would be carried out prior to Stage 2. He also welcomed the debate about the proposals and stated that with the change in the way people shopped, i.e. over the internet, it was important to ensure that the town adapted to these changes and provided a mixed retail and leisure offering. Discussions were currently being undertaken to improve the overall heritage package in the town.

Councillor J Collop stated that firm numbers of visitors and financial predications were required and that all Councillors should have an opportunity to debate the proposals. The Portfolio Holder, for Shared Services and External Relations explained that the proposals had been considered by the Community and Culture Panel and all Members had the opportunity to attend and also attend the Cabinet meetings. All reports were also published and available to Members on the website and intranet.

Alison Gifford stated that the Civic Society supported some elements of the scheme and that they were committed to the town offering an improved tourism offer and keen to work together with the Council.

Robin Hanley (Western Area – Museums Service) stated that he had considerable experience in submitting applications for funding from the Heritage Lottery and that at Stage 1, the detail required was fairly minimal, whilst the consultation proposals for Stage 2 would be more robust. A forum would also be established involving key stakeholders. A group of young people who were not in education, employment, or training (NEET) had been involved in the consultation exercise and had made a film and had conflicting aspirations to those of the Civic Society.

Councillor M Tilbury stated that is was less assured about the proposals following the debate at the meeting and questioned the legality of them. He stated that the proposals could not be fully debated at what was such a short Cabinet meeting.

RECOMMENDATION: 1) That subject to the Stage 1 application to Heritage Lottery Fund being approved, a full and extensive consultation should be carried out with key stakeholders.

2) That the Policy and Review Panels be fully involved in the consultation on the proposals.

3) That subject to the Stage 1 application being approved, a special Council meeting be held to allow all Members to debate the proposals for Stage II.