

POLICY REVIEW & DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Type of Report: Open	Portfolio(s): Culture, Heritage and Health
Will be subject to a future Cabinet Report:	YES
Will be need to be recommended to Council:	YES
Author Name: Chris Bamfield	Consultations:
Tel: 01553 616648	Mark Fuller, Management Team, Pam Lynn,
Email: chris.bamfield@west-norfolk.gov.uk	Philip Bayfield, Alive Management / Leisure
OPEN	Staff

Regeneration and Development Panel

Date: 19th October 2016
Subject: St Georges Guildhall Complex

Summary:

The report details progress with proposals for the St George's Guildhall complex and the submission of a grant to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

- Guildhall to be converted to half flat floor with half retained as tiered seating with existing 1950's staircase.
- Seating capacity at or around 300 maximum capacity.
- New lift and stair access to Guildhall.
- New staging, lighting, sound system, seating etc.
- Glass structure to link spaces and provide a social/casual use space.
- Shakespeare Barn to be leased to Building Conservation Trust.
- Conversion of White Barn to residential.
- Fermoy Gallery retained.
- Improvements to street frontage.
- Stage I submission to be made based on the Council's current Capital provision of £230,000.
- Subject to a successful Stage I award, Stage 2 to be drafted further with users, Alive Management and Alive Leisure.

Recommendations:

The Panel are asked to comment on the proposals for the Guildhall Complex.

1. Background

1.1 The Panel received a report on the 1st June with regard to outline proposals for the development of the St George's Guildhall complex leading to the submission of a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

1.2 The outline proposals were:

- Return the Guildhall to flat floor multi use space with flexible seating

- Install lift and improve access
- Link the buildings with a new glass structure
- Utilise the White Barn or Shakespeare Barn for the Building Conservation Trust as a base for Heritage Construction Skills
- Consider multi use of other spaces
- Improve the frontage of the building on King's Street
- Improve site interpretation
- Develop an activities programme

1.3 Costs were estimated at circa £2.3million which would result in a regional HLF application (less than £2million), this has a higher chance of success than a National application (over £2million).

1.4 The Council had £230,000 in its Capital programme for work to the Guildhall; a further contribution of circa £200-300,000 could be required to draw down HLF funding.

1.5 As part of the Panel discussion it was noted that the annual revenue cost for the complex was £116,000. The scheme would aim to bring revenue costs close to break even.

1.6 From a commercial viewpoint any additional capital investment required for an HLF scheme would aim to have a revenue payback within 3 years. The investment would then ensure the financial viability of the complex for the foreseeable future.

2. Initial Feedback

2.1 Initial feedback from both HLF and Historic England was broad support for the outline proposals. In particular;

- Re-introducing a flat floor to the Guildhall
- Glass structure to link to complex
- Link with the Building Conservation Trust
- Improving the street presence
- Improving access with new lift

2.2 Following further discussions with the BCT the Shakespeare Barn was identified as best fit for their proposed use.

2.3 Consideration has been given to the conversion of the White Barn for residential use. A suitable residential conversion would reduce cost of the site and any future maintenance liability for the existing structure and generate a revenue/capital return.

3. Guildhall / Arts Complex Reviews

3.1 The Guildhall and Arts Centre complex has had a number of crisis points and internal/external revenue over the years.

3.2 In 1995 the Lottery award for the Corn Exchange had a significant negative effect on the use of the Guildhall theatre which at the time was run by an independent Trust. Due to financial difficulties the Trust folded in the late 90's. The Council at that time agreed to take over the operation.

3.3 In 1999 the Council carried out a review of the operation with external consultants "The Arts Business Ltd" including a market research analysis and the involvement of the different user groups.

The report considered four options 1) Do nothing, 2) Do a little (mainly repair works and internal refurbishment), 3) Create a cultural training and performance centre, 4) Create an arts and crafts centre with a studio extension of the Corn Exchange.

Option 3 was determined the best solution in artistic terms, this involved;

- Restore the Guildhall to flat floor
- Convert the White Barn to a small theatre for 150-200 seats
- Landscape the courtyard and remove parking

The review noted that Option 3 would require a revenue subsidy of £178,000 around £40,000 less than the budget at that time.

The total capital cost was estimated at £2.9million of which £750,000 was for the White Barn.

The proposals were not carried through.

3.4 In 2006 the Council commissioned Purcell architects to produce and cost proposals for a new lift and stair access for the Guildhall. The cost was estimated at £200,000 but proposals were not implemented.

3.5 In 2008 Costain Heritage consultants were engaged to carry out a review of the cultural assets of King's Lynn including the Arts Centre complex.

Their report identified 5 options for the Arts Complex;

Option 1 – As is but improved, refurbishment work to Guildhall and toilets, replacement roof and improvements to stage equipment, new lift and improved street frontage.

Capital cost was estimated at £420,000.

Option 2 – Development into a 'Covent Garden' environment with galleries, catering and theatre arranged around a central courtyard.

This included transformation of the Guildhall to flat floor, interpretation to tell the story of the Guildhall, White Barn developed as a small theatre, KLODS building converted to café and foyer (not in the Council's ownership), new DDA compliant lift and access, courtyard activities, transformation of Crofters to basement bar with jazz and stand-up comedy, continued use of galleries for visual art.

Capital costs estimated at £1.6 to £1.85million.

Option 3 – The Guildhall to become flat floor, White Barn converted to artist's workshops, other buildings converted for museum or meeting space.

Capital cost estimated at circa £700,000.

Option 4 – The Guildhall to become a museum.
Capital cost estimated at £1.7million.

Option 5 – Closure.

Option 2 was identified as the best option.

The report was used to further develop proposals and submit an HLF bid for the Town Hall but not for the Guildhall and Arts Centre.

3.6 In 2009 a Service Review on all Leisure, Arts and Entertainment services was carried out. This led to a decision to reduce programming of the Guildhall and make it a hall for hire.

This was identified as producing an annual saving of £50,000 based on continued use of 60 evening hire per year.

3.7 In 2010 the Council determined to close the visual elements of the Arts Centre complex and include visual art within the redevelopment proposals for the Town Hall. Following representation from Local Arts groups and individuals the Council agreed the lease the visual arts buildings to a new Arts Centre Trust and provide funding support of £82,310 in Year 1, falling to £61,520 in the 2014/15 financial year. The funding for 2015/16 was then maintained at £61,520.

3.8 In 2014 The Arts Trust obtained external grant funding to employ consultants to carry out a review of the complex and the production of a masterplan. The final document considers 9 options for the site including commercial and arts based approaches.

The favoured approach was for the Arts Trust to take over control and management for all buildings on the site including Crofters and Riverside, and buildings currently let to external arts organisations, some proposals followed previous consultant's report including improving access for people with disabilities and the street presence and making better use of courtyard space and considering creation of a small theatre in the White Barn and flat floor for the Guildhall but does not identify a preferred solution.

Capital costs of schemes vary from £2 to £4 million.

The Arts Trust passed this report to the Council when it closed.

3.9 In December 2015 the Arts Trust wrote to the Council to confirm it was no longer financially viable and would cease to operate in March 2016.

3.10 In summary,

- There have been 3 separate consultant's reports considering options for the Arts Centre and Guildhall, to date without any scheme progressing.
- All or parts of the complex have been run by 2 separate charitable Trusts both of which have folded.
- The Council has completed 2 service reviews which resulted in a reduced programme at the Guildhall and the proposed closure of the visual arts.

3.11 Given the timescale for HLF submissions the current proposals are not likely to be completed until early 2019 assuming the Council submits an HLF bid by the end of November.

4. Formal Consultation

4.1 Following on from the outline proposals the Council's architects have prepared 3 options for formal consultation. The consultation period commenced on the 11th of September and finished on the 30th September.

4.2 This initial consultation is to obtain feedback and views on the broad proposals to enable a Stage 1 HLF application to be made. More detailed consultation would take place if the project receives a Stage 2 award.

4.3 A total of 357 Consultation forms have been completed and a summary of the feedback is attached at Appendix 1.

4.4 The consultation also included an open meeting with existing users particularly of the Guildhall and it is fair to say that the proposals were subject to a generally negative response, particularly with regard to any reduction in seating numbers in the Guildhall. A more positive follow up meeting has been held with one representative from each group.

4.5 The Fermoy Gallery and Shakespeare Barn are currently available for hire but do not have programmed use. The only significant use in the last 6 months has been an exhibition hire by the King's Lynn Festival in partnership with the Sainsbury Centre.

4.6 The Guildhall continues to operate as a hall for hire. From July 2015 to July 2016 there were 46 bookings with a further 8 Festival Bookings. General occupancy levels are fairly low against the capacity of 345 seats. In the 12 month period there were 4 shows that sold more than 300 seats and a further 5 shows with over 250 seats.

4.7 Approximately 97% of the time until 6:00pm the Guildhall is empty.

4.8 Approximately 88% of the available evening use of the Guildhall the building is empty.

4.9 The total annual user numbers for the Guildhall in 2015/16 was 8961 on average 172 per week.

4.10 The White Barn is only used for storage.

4.11 The Old Warehouse has been used for occasional group use but is a poor quality space.

5. Developing Proposals

5.1 Consultation is continuing to take place to determine the best outline options for the site.

5.2 Guildhall

5.2.1 The draft proposals for the Guildhall outlined three options.

5.2.2 Retaining approximately half of the existing fixed tiered seating and converting the remaining area to flat floor. This gives a capacity of 157 tiered seats and suggests 20 bleachers and 70 flat floor. Total 247 seats.

5.2.3 A first floor interval bar / viewing gallery with circa 150 bleacher seats, two thirds of the Guildhall is flat floor.

5.2.4 Flat floor, all seating on flat floor for circa 200 seats.

5.2.5 A combination of flat floor and tiered seating is the favoured option. Following on from user feedback further investigation on seating numbers has taken place with the Council's Fire consultant and Purcell Architects. On this basis seating numbers at 5.2.2 can be increased to give a capacity of 300 for those shows/concerts that need these numbers. As with the current layout to obtain maximum numbers will need minimum space in between rows and seat width comparable to the existing seats at 50cm wide (Corn Exchange seats are 51cm wide). The booking system for shows is capable of offering different layouts for the flat floor area if, for example, as with the majority of shows 250 was chosen as the maximum capacity.

5.2.6 The maximum numbers would involve the Guildhall having half of its area with fixed tier seating comparable to its current layout but with new seating. The other half of the area would be flat floor for multi-use or different seating layouts. As a comparison, the flat floor area would be a comparable size to the Assembly Room in the Town Hall. The flat floor space could cater for exhibitions, corporate hires, conferences, wedding, exercise classes, etc. The combination of tiered and flat floor also offers flexibility for comedy, children's theatre, jazz or other music shows including a standing audience.

5.2.7 The existing stage area would be amended to include;

- Hydraulic stage with wings, proscenium, etc
- Improvements to orchestra facilities
- New LED lighting and rigs
- New sound desk and speakers

If successful at Stage I HLF then details proposals will be developed with user groups for a Stage II submission.

5.2.8 All parties are in agreement that improving access for people with disabilities in particular the provision of a lift is an essential part of the scheme. Access for equipment, props etc. is also an issue and should be included in the lift consideration.

5.2.9 At a follow up meeting with Guildhall users on the 6th October the proposals at 5.2.5 to 5.2.7 were broadly agreed as satisfying user needs. Detailed plans will be drafted with user involvement during Stage 2.

5.3 Building Conservation Trust

Two options were considered at the Panel meeting in May for the BCT (Building Conservation Trust), either the White Barn or Shakespeare Barn. The current proposals are that the Shakespeare Barn and the outdoor area leading to King Street are leased to the Building Conservation Trust. The Trust have considered the space and apart from changing the floor finishes and requiring some external storage feel the Shakespeare Barn could be adapted for their workshop use without major building works, and in principle, would like to continue on the basis of taking a lease for the Shakespeare Barn.

5.4 Red Barn / Link

Current thinking is that the Red Barn would be converted to a bar and together with a new glass link area could be used in connections with Guildhall events or visual arts activities.

5.5 Fermoy Gallery

Maintained as an exhibition space but examine opportunities for links with established organisations for exhibition programming.

5.6 External

Discussions are continuing with County Highways with regard to improving the street presence of the site.

6. **White Barn**

6.1 Consideration has been given to the conversion of the White Barn to residential accommodation. As such it would be outside of the proposals to be submitted to the HLF and subject to a future report.

7. **Capital Costs**

7.1 As previously reported the Council has £230,000 of Capital provision to allocate as match funding to an HLF bid.

7.2 It is not proposed to increase this figure for a Stage I application but to identify any funding gap between the amount requested from HLF and the Council's £230,000 against estimated total scheme cost. This will be a target to obtain other third party contributions.

7.3 As previously reported, Capital costs are estimated at circa £2.3million. As proposals for the site refined following consultation a more accurate figure can be established and will be included in the Stage I submission.

8. Revenue

8.1 The project aims to move close to breakeven on the annual revenue cost for the complex, currently £116,000 per annum. The current proposals to lease the Shakespeare Barn, link site management with Alive Leisure and Alive Management, increase flexibility and use of the Guildhall and rationalisation of the spaces on site will reduce costs and increase income. Developing a full business model for the site would be part of the Stage II process for an HLF grant.

9. HLF Submission

9.1 If sufficient progress can be made then it is proposed to submit a Stage I submission to the HLF by 28th November, the next submission deadline.

9.2 The submission will be within existing budget provision for the complex and if successful a development grant will be awarded by HLF to allow detailed proposals and costs to be established prior to a Stage 2 HLF application.

9.3 If a Stage I award is granted a further report will be made to the Panel as part of the process of obtaining Cabinet approval to proceed with a Stage 2 application. This is likely to be autumn 2017.