

## **SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION FROM THE GUILDHALL TASK GROUP MEETING HELD ON 22 JUNE 2022**

### **KING'S LYNN TOWN DEAL GUILDHALL AND CREATIVE HUB BUSINESS CASE**

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The Task Group considered the Cabinet report and additional documents that had been circulated in relation to the Business Case for the St George's Guildhall and Creative Hub project and made the following comments.

Councillor Crofts broadly supported the project and felt that it was important that it was well marketed and needed to be cost effective. He made reference to commercial elements and that lessons should be learned from the previous failed HLF bid. King's Lynn as a Heritage Centre needed to be promoted as a whole. Councillor Crofts explained that he was keen on promoting coach trips into the town centre and this project could be a catalyst for this. Information was provided from officers on the CIO business plan and marketing support.

Councillor Morley commented that the Guildhall was a huge attraction and needed to be refurbished and operating as a performing arts complex based on Shakespeare's connections and its history. He stated that experts had judged that the figures presented were the best estimates and we had to support these. However, the benefits of a creative hub did not appear to be evidenced in the case and it was difficult to envisage what will be happening in the hub to add value to the whole complex and the symbiotic or holistic relationship is not clear or explained.

The Chair, Councillor Nockolds made reference to the rental opportunities and how they related to creativity and activities relating to the development of skills.

Officers provided information on the attendance estimates and explained that these included school visits and school performances. The Portfolio Holder reminded Members that this plan had been through the Town Board and a lot of work had been carried out to forecast attendances and income. An Independent Appraisal report had also been conducted and found the Business Case to be satisfactory.

The Task Group discussed the Creative Hub and it was acknowledged, that going forward, more promotion within the business case would be of benefit to highlight how the Hub would achieve the outputs required.

Councillor Hudson, who was attending the meeting remotely, under Standing Order 34 commented that the attraction should be based on William Shakespeare. It was explained that Shakespeare would be a feature, but the venue needed to be flexible so that a range of performances and activities could take place.

It was explained to the Task Group that co-ordination with the MUCH would take place.

In response to questions from Councillor de Whalley, it was explained that the Business Case and Business Plan were two separate documents and the Business Plan had already been approved. It was also noted that the HLF was a separate application process and was not related to the Business Case. With regard to the footfall estimates and information on

volunteers within the Business Case it was explained that these were modelled with information provided by relevant organisations such as NMS.

Councillor Ryves addressed the Task Group under Standing Order 34 and commented that the project was expensive, and he would like to see an alternative plan that had respect for the public purse. He felt that the project was a risk and had concerns about the underwriting, should the HLF bid be unsuccessful.

In response to a question from Councillor Ryves, it was explained that consultation with stakeholders had taken place and regular update meetings had occurred. Councillor Ryves commented that he felt the process had been rushed and that the alternative proposal put forward by the SGT should have been considered.

The Task Group discussed the proposals for catering and doing it in house verses a commercial provision.

Councillor Morley referred to the Economic Case and felt that the key benefits did not include outputs of the hub. He felt that the Creative Hub would result in only a small return and therefore not good value for money. Officers explained that the project needed to be looked at as a whole, but acknowledged that the benefits of the Hub were perhaps not promoted as much as they should be in the Business Case, and this was something that officers could look at including going forward.

Councillor de Whalley referred to the White Barn and the Task Group discussed the benefits of the use of this space over and above the financial benefits.

A representative from the Task Group would present a summary of the discussion to the Regeneration and Development Panel at their meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022.

The Task Group excluded the press and public from the meeting to discuss the Membership and formation of the CIO.

Councillor Morley has also submitted the following which he has asked to be brought to the attention of the Panel:

There is no point in going on about the revenue return, footfall, and value for money. All want the Guildhall to be refurbished and operating as a performing arts complex based on Shakespeare's connections and its history. Experts have judged that the figures presented are the best estimates and we had to support these. However, the benefits of a creative hub do not appear to be evidenced in the case and it is difficult to envisage what will be happening in the hub to add value to the whole complex.

The symbiotic or holistic relationship is not clear or explained.

1. Examine the Strategic Case, opening paragraph states that a fully equipped facility will enable the site to operate without subsidy, but the benefit returns of the hub are not explained.
2. Bullet points 3 & 4 on page 22, list items within the hub including T-Level training in 5 aspects. These courses take up to 2 years to complete at a fully functioning college. How is the Hub going to manage this and the offerings for rent, art and design studios plus the illuminations people who light up our town and can enhance the visitor experience before a performance? There is also a competitor in some areas - The Garage of Norwich and recently Kings Lynn. Will they be happy to conjoin?
3. The Economic Case. Page 29. The approach to the case for the project hinges on 4 key benefits, namely: arts audience, willing volunteers, cost and mitigating of the maintenance or dilapidation liability. No mention of any benefit from the Hub!
4. Page 30 state the Towns Fund Investment in the Guildhall will transform the site. No mention of the Hub.
5. Page 35. Non quantifiable benefits. All good but nothing specific about the Hub.
6. The Financial Case. Redacted Page 27 shows that expected revenues from the Hub represent only 10% of the total revenue but the capital cost to secure that is not itemised.

It appears that the Hub is going to be a drain on the people and financial resources of the project and which in my view should have been separated long ago. Guildhall and Hub, 2 cases. The whole project has a large element of risk but it will be worth taking for the Guildhall.

However, to avoid the Hub bringing down the whole project, the symbiotic benefits and the Hub as a catalyst for encouraging arts in the town must be reinforced with some redrafting of the paper.