

## **St Georges Guildhall Complex – Consultation Background**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 In November 2015, the Council's Regeneration, Environment & Community Panel visited the Arts Centre complex and received a report on opportunities for the site. In general, the panel supported outline proposals for improving use of the site provided this was done in an affordable and sustainable way. At its meeting in November the Panel was clear that Arts activity on the site should be financially sustainable. At this point the proposal was to develop a scheme for HLF funding with the Arts Centre Trust as a key partner. The trust had developed a master plan for the site as this was to be used to develop a scheme
- 1.2 In December 2015 the Arts Centre Trust wrote to the Council to confirm that it was no longer financially viable and would be closing its doors at the end of December. The Trust was initially established in 2012 when the Council had determined to close the Arts Centre and transfer part of the operation to other venues. The Arts Trust had taken a lease on the Fermoy Gallery, Shakespeare Barn, Red Barn and offices at a peppercorn rent, this was handed back to the Council on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016.
- 1.3 Following the demise of the Arts Centre, further consideration has been given to options for use of the site and other potential partners.

### **2 . Future of the Complex**

- 2.1 In discussion with Portfolio Holders and Members of the Regeneration and Development Panel (from May 2016) two options have been identified for the complex.
- 2.1.1 Option 1  
Minimum intervention and investment retaining the existing layout of the buildings. Facilities would essentially be available for hire or potentially leased to other operators (subject to National Trust approval). Potentially a small programme of exhibitions during the year but essentially use and footfall of the site would be minimum.
- 2.1.2 Option 2  
Develop a scheme for the site to increase use and footfall to make the site financially sustainable on a long-term basis in the context of reductions in revenue available to the Borough Council. Essentially, this would require the development of a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant for the complex. The Council has had significant success with HLF

grants, indeed, the King's Lynn Corn Exchange transformation in the mid 90's was one of the first projects, the most recent completed project being the King's Lynn Town Hall.

- 2.2 Officers have been able to work up a proposal based on option 2.
3. Proposals St George's Guildhall
  - 3.1 The St George's Guildhall operates as a hall for hire following a service review of Arts and Entertainment in 2009/10. The Hall is hired out by a multitude of organisations but is not programmed for performances by the Council. The number of bookings are circa 50-70 evenings per year.
  - 3.2 The Council has a lease from the National Trust for the buildings until 2050. During the service review, discussions were held with the National Trust concerning the termination of the lease but this was not viable.
  - 3.3 As previously discussed the intention is to return all or part of the space to flat floor by removing the existing fixed seating and sloping floor. The space will still be primarily used as an auditorium for performances but with flexible seating arrangements, complementing the other established theatre offer in the town. The flat floor will allow multi-use of the space for a range of hiring's and events to maximise use
  - 3.4 A lift would be installed to enable an improved access for people with mobility problems/issues to the auditorium and multi-use space, coupled with improvements to the other historic buildings in terms of both access and circulation. This would also provide an internal link between the main spaces.
  - 3.5 Draft plans have been completed for consideration.
4. Shakespeare Barn
  - 4.1 Discussions have taken place with the Building Crafts and Conservation Foundation (BCCF) who are working with Anglia Ruskin University and the College of West Anglia to establish a degree course in Heritage Construction Skills. The course would have a large practical element which would use the Shakespeare Barn as a workshop area together with adjacent office space. Separate access from King Street would be available for the BCCF use. A public viewing area would be provided to encourage the public to see work in progress. The intention is to start with an 'A' level based course before moving forward with a degree level qualification.
5. Fermoy Gallery

- 5.1 The Fermoy Gallery to be retained as a Gallery/Exhibition space with options to be considered for use/programming of the space.
6. Glass Link
  - 6.1 To link the spaces together a glass structure is proposed to create a covered link between the Fermoy Gallery, Shakespeare Barn, Red Barn, St George's Guildhall and other parts of the complex.
7. Building Frontage
  - 7.1 The front of the complex requires improvement to enhance the setting of these buildings. Alterations to the highway and footpath will increase the presence and identity of the complex, initial discussions have been held with the Highways Authority regarding these. These improvements will include the enhancement of the courtyards within the complex.
8. Old Warehouse
  - 8.1 Discussions have taken place with Historic England on the viability of raising the floor height and the beams within the building to make it a usable space. This is not acceptable and as a result there are no proposals for the existing building at this stage.
9. White Barn
  - 9.1 There are no plans to change the use of the White Barn as part of the HLF project but consideration is being given to conversion of the existing building to residential use.
10. Miscellaneous
  - 10.1 There are miscellaneous spaces on the site currently used by amateur groups for scenery, props and workshop space for shows. There are no proposals to change this use in the HLF proposal.
11. Heritage Lottery Fund
  - 11.1 As previously mentioned, the Council has extensive experience of HLF projects including Corn Exchange, Greyfriars Tower, Walks, King's Lynn Town Hall and most recently approved Heritage Gardens scheme in Hunstanton. HLF funding to the Borough is circa £10million.

11.2 The HLF have a detailed website at [www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk) covering their grant programmes, the process and how they determine if a scheme should receive grant aid.

11.3 The Council aim to submit a Stage I application to the HLF at the end of November 2016. If successful, an HLF development grant would be provided to work the proposals up to a full application, probably in Autumn 2017. Again, if this was successful the project would aim to start on site Spring/Summer 2018.

## 12. Consultation

12.1 As part of the HLF process the Stage I application will need to include evidence of consultation and how that has influenced or shaped the proposals. If successful at Stage I then part of the development funding provided by the HLF will be for a much more rigorous and detailed consultation process.

## 13. Finance

13.1 The final design agreed for the complex following consultation will determine the capital cost of the project. However, as a starting point the maximum grant from the HLF at regional board level is £2million with a contribution from the Council of circa £500,000, this would put a scheme at a maximum level of circa £2.5million but probably around £2.3million. The cost would cover building works and an activity plan for 3-5 years to help inform the community and visitors about the heritage of the site.

13.2 The annual revenue cost of the site is £116,000, the aim of the development is to bring this close to breakeven.

## 14. Summary

In summary, the proposals are intended to create a sustainable use for the complex on a long-term basis. This is particularly important in the current scenario of ongoing reductions in Local Authority funding. Investment in the site should enable the Guildhall and the gallery space to continue to contribute to the artistic life of King's Lynn with increased use and footfall into the complex.