

**Report of:** Jane Lubbock, Facilities Management Business Manager

**Title:** Request for major project approval to re-furbish part of the Town Hall and update on longer-term project

**Ward:** Central

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**Key Decision:** Yes

**Lead Member:** Councillor Baker

**Scrutiny responsibility:** Finance

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Executive Board agrees to:

1. Grant Major Project approval to the scheme as outlined in this report subject to a project initiation request to the Capital Appraisal Panel.
2. Authorise Officers to progress the scheme, invite tenders and place the contract for the project within the available budget of £229,200.
3. To note that the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded the Council £44,600 to enable project planning to take place and test the Town Hall feasibility study longer-term proposals.

### **1. Summary**

- 1.1 This report explains the proposal for refurbishing the ground floor area at the back of the Town Hall to meet a range of demands for use and supports the longer term strategy for making the Town Hall more accessible and available for cultural, civic, council and commercial uses.
- 1.2 The refurbishment work can be scheduled to take place during 2005/6 enabling the area to be brought back into use by April 2006.

### **2. Vision**

- 2.1 The proposal fits into the Council's vision as follows;

a) Improving the environment where we live and work.

- This large area at the rear of the ground floor of approximately 350 sq.m. in the Town Hall is currently under used. Part of this area was previously occupied by the old print unit and the Crèche. The only occupants in this area currently are a team of officers from Neighbourhood Renewal and the switchboard staff. The switchboard team are in a self-contained area which will be unaffected by the proposals in this report. However, the Neighbourhood Renewal team are in an area that is unsuitable for their needs and the team are due to be relocated to another area this summer. This will result in three large rooms becoming available which could be utilised for a range of activities including meetings, small conferences, breakout space and a training room.
- The old print room is in a poor state of repair, and will require the removal of some industrial services, before it would be feasible to hire out to members of the public. This proposal would bring the area back into full use as exhibition/multi functional space.
- The old crèche is currently used as a furniture storeroom. This is about to be cleared and brought into use as a training room by Human Resources.
- Access for people with mobility problems to all of this area is limited because of the various floor levels encountered. The proposed scheme will provide full disabled access from the front of the building to the room at rear of the ground floor.

b) Providing more and improved affordable leisure facilities

- The proposed scheme will enable the Town Hall to meet the increased demands for use. The space(s) will be suitable for

Conferences  
Meetings  
Ceremonial events  
Break out space  
Exhibition space  
Light refreshment area  
Social events

2.2 The proposed scheme will not enable the space to be used for dancing, sporting events, or musical events such as discos. A scheme to include these types of events would require the floor to be strengthened to meet current standards and additional sound proofing

to be installed. As most musical events take place in the evenings it would not be possible to take bookings for these types of events at the same time without the additional sound proofing.

- 2.3 Musical events will therefore continue to be held in the existing 1<sup>st</sup> floor rooms.

### **3. Background and Context**

- 3.1 A Town Hall feasibility study was carried out in April 2004. The study proposed a major refurbishment scheme costing around 9 million pounds. To enable the Council to consider the possibility for taking such a large scheme forward an application was made to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The application has been successful and we have been awarded 81.57% towards the cost of the project planning to test the feasibility of the original report. The estimated cost of the project planning is £54,600. We have been awarded £44,600. The balance of the cost will be found from within existing budgets. The project planning stage will take between six and twelve months. The funding will enable the Council to appoint specialists to carry out the project planning work on our behalf.
- 3.2 The architects who carried out the original feasibility study recommended that the areas at the rear of the ground floor, that were under utilised should be put to some use while the longer term plans were being developed.
- 3.3 On 28<sup>th</sup> June 2004 the Executive Board agreed that a range of improvement be worked up into a scheme to improve access and open up additional parts of the building to increase its use but that any scheme should not conflict with the longer term proposals. A capital budget of £229,200 is available to do this.
- 3.4 Initially it was proposed that the scheme of smaller scale improvements should include the creation of a dance studio on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, and a link between the museum and the Town Hall. The cost of implementing these works within the small project of improvements would not be possible within the budget of £229,200. At the Finance and Scrutiny Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2004 it was recommended that the dance studio and link to the museum be omitted from this scheme.
- 3.5 The capital funding for the refurbishment is held within the Built Environment's capital programme for 2005/6.

### **Options**

- 4.1 There are three options to be considered: -
- Do nothing and leave the space empty. This will free up the 229K to support other capital improvements but will continue to leave a

large area of the Town Hall out of use.

- Put proposals forward for a larger and better quality interim scheme. However, this would require an additional capital expenditure of approximately £600,000 that would include the required floor strengthening works.
- Approve expenditure for the current smaller scale scheme to be implemented to enable the large space at the rear of the ground floor to be brought back into use for a range of functions benefiting the Council, community, cultural and commercial users.

This scheme will be integrated into any future larger and longer-term proposals.

- 4.2 There have been no comments received from the inclusion of the scheme in the Forward Plan.

## **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The proposed scheme would generate additional income for the Council from the range of hire opportunities created in this refurbished space, as well as increasing the opportunity for more visitors and users in the building.
- 5.2 It is proposed to charge a room hire cost of £50 an hour for each of the two large rooms. The rates will be negotiable for longer-term bookings such as exhibitions and our discount rate of 50% will continue to be offered to community and charitable organisations. This rate compares favourably with the hourly rate of £85 for the Old library and Assembly Room, similar sized rooms and is in line with other similar types of rooms that are hired in the city centre.
- 5.3 The Town Hall has a higher demand for bookings than it can currently accommodate, and is currently not able to offer exhibition space to display our own projects and schemes to the public in any large setting.
- 5.4 Based on the above hire rates and (including discounted bookings) the area is projected to achieve additional revenue of £30,000 a year. This is based on both rooms being used for 15 hours a week for 40 weeks of the year at discounted rates.
- 5.5 The old crèche will provide a good location for the Council to hold Human Resources training days on site, and could be used as a space for hire when not in use.

## **7. Legal and Planning Implications**

- 7.1 No legal implications have been identified as the additional space use still remains within our current entertainment license arrangements.

The proposed refurbishment scheme is also under the EU procurement threshold for tendering purposes.

- 7.2 There have been no suggestions through discussions with planning officers that a planning permission would be required for refurbishing the rooms for public usage.
- 7.3 The Assistant Conservation Officer has been consulted about the proposed scheme of refurbishment, and is of the opinion that Listed Building Consent would not be required so long as the character of the building is not affected in the areas concerned. The disabled access provision however, would need a consent.

## **8. Staffing Implications**

- 8.1 The staffing arrangements for this area can be covered within the existing Town Hall staffing budget for the hours that the Town hall is already open.
- 8.2 Built Environment will be using an external consultant to design, tender, and administer the contract works for the scheme of refurbishment.

## **9. Other means of achieving the objective**

- 9.1 There are no other options for achieving the refurbishment of this area in the short term.

## **10. Grounds for recommending the proposed option**

- 10.1 These are set out in Section 4 of this report.

## **11. Timetable for action following the decision**

- 11.1 If Executive Board approves the recommendations to this report, the following timetable is proposed: -

- Architects to finalise the scheme;      June/July 2005
- Neighbourhood Renewal move      July 2005
- Tender Period;      July/ August 2005
- Contract Award;      September 2005
- Construction Period;      October – March 2006

## **12 Longer term proposals for the refurbishment of the Town Hall**

- 12.1 The Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded a project-planning grant to enable us to test the original Town Hall feasibility study, and this will result in three major plans being produced.

These are –

- A Conservation plan
- An Access plan
- An Audience development plan

These important reports will take between 6 and 12 months to carry out. Specialists will be appointed to undertake this work in line with the Constitution contract rules. A brief for each of the above plans has already been written and agreed with the Heritage Lottery Fund so this process can start immediately.

A report will come back to the Executive Board once the plans have been produced to agree the next steps.

**THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY:**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Bill Baker, Councillor Mary Clarkson  
Strategic Director: Mark Luntley  
Legal and Democratic Services: Lindsay Cane  
Financial Management: Paul Sheppard/Anna Winship

Background papers: Town Hall Feasibility Study  
Heritage Lottery Fund application and award letter.  
Brief for the production of an Access plan  
Brief for the production of an Audience development plan  
Brief for the production of an Access plan