

Lowestoft Town Hall Project

Progress Report for Full Council, April 2024

This report covers the period from 24 March to 15 April 2024.

Heritage Fund PTS

- Permission to Start (PTS) from the Heritage Fund was granted on 9 April. This enables us to reclaim the Heritage Fund's share of the funds expended to date on the project (just over 35%) – I expect this to be about £185k, once I've collected in eligible invoices from LTC finance (eg for strip out works) in addition to those I have already authorised.

UKPN substation/ESC land transfer/use of land during construction

- As members are aware, Full Council approved the acceptance of the UKPN substation quotation, which will entail payment of £162k to UKPN. ESC was unable to provide details of their legal contact, so I have agreed with UKPN that they will accept the order without this detail, at the moment. This is important to ensure that the UKPN design team begin work and schedule it into their programme, hopefully for this year.
- ESC have decided they would prefer to lease the land to LTC for a period of 125 years, and therefore LTC can handle the legal work. I have asked UKPN if this length of lease (with permission to grant third party rights) is acceptable to their legal team, and once I have confirmation, ESC will put a paper to their Cabinet for agreement in June.
- I instructed our architects to liaise directly with the planners to agree the design for housing around the substation; this they have done. Planning have agreed that no application is necessary as the land is outside the conservation area, and substations are usually handled under permitted development. We have, however, agreed a brick compound with a slate roof, in keeping with the Town Hall itself.
- I had a constructive meeting with Tony Rudd, property manager from ESC. He confirmed that the two outstanding title deeds (ref PTS above) would be transferred to LTC, although it is likely that only the necessary land will be passed over, with ESC retaining the remainder. This is probably quite sensible, as otherwise there is the risk that we would have a 'no man's land' between the two sites. Retention of land not required by LTC is felt by ESC to maximise the development opportunities for the site (although the substation occupies part of one deed). Tony will undertake a valuation of the land as part of due process (there is no suggestion that ESC intend to charge).
- Tony also confirmed that ESC is willing to license LTC to occupy the adjacent land west of the Town Hall site during the construction stage, to be used as site accommodation/compound. This is helpful of ESC, as it will make the construction easier to plan and manage (without having site huts within the already-tight site). However, there may be a charge for the use of the land; ESC is considering licensing the whole area, since they could not partially develop the site with contractors in partial occupation.

Design/Construction-related work

- The design team continues to finalise RIBA4, which is being pulled together for input to the tender/Bill of Quantities process. Timing is very tight, and delays to finalising requirements have not helped. We are still aiming for mid May tender publication.
- I have reviewed the AV proposals with Michael Winter, with the aim of reducing the complexity of the design, which exceeded the requirements provided by LTC. I believe we now have a system that is flexible but less costly/complex.
- I have reviewed the fire, security and access designs with our consultants along with Michael and Paul from LTC Admin. I subsequently led a security and access control requirements meeting with the Registrars to ensure that the designs for their office suite met their needs.
- The order for street lighting has been placed; it has a 12-week lead time, so hopefully should be completed prior to the main contractor arriving onsite.

Procurement

- I met with the Council's appointed procurement consultant in early April and agreed dates/process etc for the main contract. The first step was to publish a PIN (Prior Information Notice) on the Government's Contract Finder. The PIN aims to help 'warm up' the market and notified all of an informal Town Hall open day on 15 April.
- The workshop was well attended by relevant contractors, some local, some more distant. A good number of them are likely to be eligible to bid for the work (turnover etc) and have relevant experience, so this was very encouraging. Our architect led contractors around the building, explaining the designs and the priorities for the project; all contractors were well-engaged and we are hopeful of getting good quality tenders.
- A workshop was held with steering committee members and our QS and architect to agree evaluation criteria and weightings for the tender. It was agreed that quality would largely be built into the specification and tender documentation, which means that tenderers will effectively pass/fail on quality questions (there will be some exceptions, such as information on their experience of projects of a similar nature). This approach allows us to increase the ratio of price:quality to 80:20.
- Some 'social value' elements will be included in the tender, such as the inclusion of apprentices, and providing opportunities for construction students to participate in 'master classes' on heritage conservation techniques, and for members of the public to join tours of the building as work progresses.
- We have appointed Daniel Connal Partnership to take on Client CDM for the project, as authorised at a Full Council meeting on 9 April. I will meet with the CDM this week to ensure they are fully updated on the tender priorities.

Activity Plan

- Interviewing for the staff position of Heritage Manager took place last week, and an offer to the preferred candidate was made and accepted. We hope that she will be able to start at the end of this month. She has a first-class CV, with lots of relevant experience and great ideas. This role is funded by the project until 2028.

- Jess Johnston and I joined members and East Suffolk Buildings Preservation Trust on a visit to a smokehouse on Raglan Street. There is the opportunity to acquire and restore the smokehouse to operate as a working business and museum site, with links to the Town Hall. However, a full proposal needs to be worked up by ESBPT, including how grant funding could be secured and how the works would be managed.
- Jess and I also attended a meeting with Joe Thompson to consider his approach to LTC to submit a bid to the National Archives for funding for up to five projects in Suffolk. Jess and I subsequently met with Joe to understand the proposal in more detail; I have sent a briefing note to the clerk.
- Jess and I had an initial planning session with evaluation consultants Harriet Foster and Llewela Selfridge, in which they covered their approach, which is highly interactive and interesting. We also discussed how to begin establishing baselines for some of the economic outcomes. Overall, it was a very productive and encouraging session.
- We are considering what activity could be undertaken in the summer near to the Town Hall to maintain public interest/involvement in the project. Originally, a community archaeology dig was planned, but the absence of any finds during the initial archaeological work, combined with the risk of UXOs, would suggest that an alternative would be prudent!

Interpretation

- PLB held a series of workshops with focus groups to establish how best to deliver interactive interpretation. The aim was to identify what types of interaction had most traction with different groups, and useful information came out of them, such as the need for screens to be interactive/touch activated, even for the youngest visitors.
- We have held update meetings with PLB to review the interpretation plans, and to ensure they are integrated with the detailed designs for the building (particularly for power and IT connectivity). The entire heritage gallery suite of interactive systems will be installed with a single power off switch – this means that there are no complex arrangements for restarting etc, in the event of fire alarms or power cuts.
- The designs will incorporate the bust of Sir Samuel Morton Peto. We have also been reminded that the stone lion from the Royal Hotel is still seeking a home and are considering whether it could be a garden feature.

Financials

Spend to date	TOTALS
Budget	£ 9,290,089.09
Actual spend to date	£ 455,694.04
Balance remaining	£ 8,834,395.05

Invoiced expenditure since the last Full Council meeting is as follows:

Lowestoft Town Hall Project (NL-21-00031)		Delivery Stage	Invoice control sheet			
Invoice Date	Inv Ref N	Supplier	Description	Amount	VAT	Total inc V
26/03/24	LTH149	UKPN	New substation	£ 162,690.89	£ 32,538.18	£ 195,229.07
08/03/24	LTH150	Andrew Morton Associates	Prof fees QS Feb 24	£ 966.00	£ 193.20	£ 1,159.20
12/03/24	LTH151	HAT Projects	Design team fees (RIBA4)	£ 42,240.66	£ 8,448.13	£ 50,688.79
31/03/24	LTH152	People Landscape Buildings	Interpretation design fees March	£ 1,860.00	£ 372.00	£ 2,232.00
04/04/24	LTH153	MossKing Associates Limited	Project management fees March	£ 7,035.00	£ -	£ 7,035.00
Total spend to date				£ 455,694.04	£ 84,364.49	£ 540,058.53

Next steps

- Now that PTS is secured, I will submit the first reclaim and progress report for the Heritage Fund. This is being prepared currently, ready to for the HF portal to be made available to us.
- During the remainder of this month and into May, I will be managing/undertaking the following:
 - Detailed RIBA4 building design including instructions; attending design team meetings as needed.
 - Supporting QS development of Cost Plans re the above.
 - Working with the procurement consultant on the tender planning and development and supporting the procurement process overall.
 - Developing a brief for the clock conservation so a nominated subcontractor can be included within the main contract.
 - Procuring any further surveys or specialist advice to support the design team and/or tender.
 - Identifying mechanisms to record baselines for economic outcomes, to support the evaluation consultants' work.
 - Development of content for interpretation and planning activity/engagement.
 - Financial control over expenditure to support the above (in line with approved budgets).
 - A review of the business plan and updating of operational financials; this will take a couple of months to complete and may not start until after the tender has been issued.

Sheila Moss King
Project Manager