

Lowestoft Town Hall Project

Progress Report for Full Council up to 21 July 2023

This report covers the period from mid-April 2023 to current.

Funding Applications

- The full funding application to National Lottery Heritage Fund was submitted on time on 25 May. The application will be decided at the Heritage Fund regional committee in late September. Meanwhile, a site visit by their senior grants officer and two committee members is scheduled for 31 July.
- As agreed by Full Council, I submitted (3 July) an Expression of Interest to the Arts Council England for £230,561 (ie 50% of the costs of gallery and messy space, 2.25% of overall project costs). If successful, we will be invited to submit a full funding application by 3 October this year, with a decision in April 2024.
- The final report to the Architectural Heritage Fund was submitted in June, with a repayment request for the full £65k of grant funding; the funds have been received.
- A short capital funding request, for a 9.7% contribution, has been prepared to go to ESC, and once this is signed off by the Clerk it will be submitted to their CEO.

Planning & LB Consent

- The planning and listed building consent applications were submitted on 19 May, along with a transport statement as requested by Suffolk County Council. The transport statement by KMC Consulting has concluded that there is adequate parking in the vicinity of the Town Hall, to cope with the predicted levels of activity.
- Ecologists were procured to undertake three bat roost surveys over the summer. The resultant report will be provided to ESC planning to inform the planning and listed building applications.

Business Planning and Legal Issues

- The final business plan for submission to NLHF was completed in late May. Radical changes were made to the operational financials, in particular to reflect the higher income and expenditure (including staff costs) arising from the decision to take the café 'in house'.
- I have established that there is no need for any transfer of land or changes to the existing boundary between the Town Hall site and ESC's adjacent land. Noting that the alignment of the westernmost boundaries of the various deeds for the Town Hall appeared to go beyond our planned development boundary, I asked our design team to superimpose the deeds over the development boundary and confirmed this.
- The only action now is for LTC to confirm this with ESC and create a boundary agreement that is lodged at the Land Registry (even this isn't essential, but for comfort of mind, and to ensure NLHF are satisfied there is zero future risk of disputes, it would seem prudent).

Design Stream

- The cost for a new UKPN substation (potentially on adjacent land) comes to c. £165k, compared to £154k+ for linkage to the distant substation on the other side of Jubilee Way (this

figure will go up if any difficulties are encountered, eg with road closures or below-ground issues). Although a new substation is more expensive, on the recommendation of the design team, QS and project manager, the Project Board approved this option, because there is cost certainty. Discussions re land access will now need to be held with ESC.

- Specialist investigators (including a 'RotHound' sniffer dog!) were brought in to identify the presence of dry rot in the building. Four areas were found, and a report regarding the extent and recommended remediation is due at the end of the month.

Financials

- The final capital costs calculations, submitted to NLHF, showed a budget for the next stage of £9,290,089, including contingency, inflation and volunteer time. We are currently 65% funded (Towns Fund and LTC PWLB loan). However, the Board agreed further funding beyond the NLHF should be sought, so that we reduce the committed use of the PWLB loan, and therefore have further financial contingency should it be required. This is key – the volatility in the construction market continues, and we are dealing with an old building, which will have hidden issues.
- The development (current) stage is on budget and should show a small underspend (amount to be determined depending on the Board's view re project management fees, heritage PM fees, and whether to use any balance to support dry rot assessment work).
- Expenditure to date is:

Budget this stage:	£490,798
Spend to date (net of VAT):	£447,341
Balance remaining:	£47,657
- The remaining balance covers an allocation for PM and HPM fees, volunteer time, archaeology and ecology work, leaving a surplus of c. £4k to contribute to the dry rot investigation work.

In the period to September NLHF decision:

- I will submit the final request for funding drawdown to NLHF.
- Jess Johnston, Heritage Project Manager, will meet with conservation specialists to review the Town Collection and advise on conservation required.
- We will meet with NLHF for a site visit on 31 July.
- LTC staff will determine their AV and IT requirements, including for the Council Chamber, as input to the next stage of design work.
- The majority of the professional consultants who are engaged to resume work, should we secure NLHF funding, will stand down until end September. All have confirmed they are happy to continue at that point.

Sheila Moss King
Project Manager