

Huntingdon Town Hall

A Long Term Sustainable Future and Project Management Arrangements

Report by EW Consultancy Ltd

1. Introduction

- 1.1 EW Consultancy Ltd has been retained to establish a project management approach to the long term use of the Huntingdon Town Hall. The tasks required to be completed are set out in the brief agreed with the District Council.
- 1.2 This report presents the work completed and information collated under each of the main steps of the brief (phase 1 and 2) and then sets out the project management arrangements including an action plan for the longer term sustainable use of Huntingdon Town Hall.
- 1.3 The report is in 7 main sections dealing with:
- The background and current position;
 - Consultations carried out as part of the study and the position of the consultees on the property;
 - Potential for future users;
 - Governance and ownership arrangements;
 - Financial issues and possible arrangements;
 - The project management plan for taking the project forward;
 - Decisions to be made by the District Council.

2. Background and current position

- 2.1 The Town Hall is a Grade 2* listed building which is held in Trust for the "public good" by Huntingdonshire District Council (the freeholder). The Council has no liability for maintenance, repair or making good works.
- 2.2 There are three leases which were originally held by County Council (when the Court Service was in their governance), and is now held by the Dept. of Constitutional Affairs (DCA). These leases require the DCA to do all repairs, maintenance and making good. At the current time the negotiation with the Her Majesty's Court Service (HMCS - the agency for the DCA) to hand back the leases are progressing slowly due to the limited nature of the proposal by the HMCS.
- 2.3 Huntingdon Town Council has the use of the 2nd floor for Council functions. They have no formal lease, pay no rent, but are responsible for the payment of utility bills (electricity) and the repair and maintenance of the 2nd floor interior and windows. They also currently occupy other offices in Huntingdon, where the day to day Town Council business is conducted.
- 2.4 The Court Service vacated the building when courts were provided elsewhere in Huntingdon. The current usage of the building is therefore very sporadic or indeed non-existent.
- 2.5 The District Council has had a survey undertaken (2007) for the purpose of an estimate for repair and maintenance which is costed at a minimum of £800k over 4 years. This does not include any particular costs that may be necessary for the re-use of the building (depending on what those uses are) and associated costs.

3. Consultations with Groups and Organisations

3.1 EW Consultancy Ltd has had an initial informal meeting with each of the following groups and organisations to discuss their views on the possible long term uses for the buildings, the type of governance arrangements that they would support and their possible involvement in the project:

- Huntingdon Town Council;
- Huntingdon Town Partnership;
- Huntingdon and Godmanchester Civic Society;
- Huntingdonshire History Society;
- Huntingdon Freeman's Charity;
- Cromwell Museum Curator.

Notes of the discussions are available from EW Consultancy Ltd if required.

3.2 The general outcome of the consultations is that there is some degree of agreement about the possible future uses and governance arrangements. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

3.3 One of the most important aspects of this project is that the Town Hall is seen as a key local community building and there is much interest in its long term use. If there are to be successful bids for funding to help with a range of works (including the capital works) then there must be wide ranging community support for the project and its outcomes. It is therefore suggested that as part of the initial phase of the work a community consultation programme is established including open days to the building to enable local people to look through the building and to add their voice to the choices to be made.

4. Future Uses-Options Appraisal

4.1 The key criteria for considering the longer term sustainable uses for the building are:

- Compatibility with the scale and historical context of the building;
- The building being held in trust for the public good which means that the amount of commercial uses would be limited;
- Importance in relation to the heritage aspects;
- Public benefits and accessibility to the community;
- The ability to physically accommodate the uses within the building and the works necessary being acceptable to English Heritage;
- There being no specific car parking associated with the building;
- The need for a lift to be installed if there is to be public access /usage in accordance with the DDA;
- Compatibility with other uses within the building;
- Long term funding availability for the uses or generation of revenue funding.

4.2 The first step in the project management arrangements would be to produce an "options appraisal," a formal process which is a necessary step in identifying the best long term uses. It would look at the range of possible uses in varying combinations and identify the most likely successful long term solution. The importance of the option appraisal is to:

- test the range of possible uses;
- ensure the long term financial viability;
- ensure all possible uses have been considered;

- enable the long term ownership of the building to be determined;
- provide reassurance for funding bodies – funding is often conditional on an options appraisal being completed.

4.3 In order for the Option Appraisal to be grant funded, it would have to be undertaken by an organisation such as a Building Preservation Trust (BPT). This would enable it to be funded through the Architectural Heritage Fund grant system. The AHF will provide a grant of up to £12K for such an appraisal but will only provide 75% of the money necessary. If the Option Appraisal is undertaken by the District Council such funding is not available. The work on preparing the bid for funding for the option appraisal can begin before the establishment of the BPT or the conclusion of the discussions regarding the lease with the DCA. However, the option appraisal must be done by the BPT.

4.4 From the discussions with the range of organisations listed in paragraph 3.1 there is a general local consensus that the building should be used for a range of “public access” activities with some public sector/commercial office accommodation and some “quasi” commercial retail to support the building.

4.5 In general terms it is therefore suggested that the option appraisal has at its core the following possible uses:

Ground floor : living learning centre, justice or town museum, café and shop

First floor : Town Council offices and other “partner” organisations’ offices

Second floor : public usage of the assembly room

Whilst these uses will form a major part of the options appraisal, the appraisal will need to look at all other opportunities including residential, retail and commercial in order for the successful outcome to be evidenced.

4.6 The main issues that arise from such uses are:

- compliance with DDA and the need for a lift to the 1st and 2nd floor;
- the ability of the building to include catering facilities;
- the ability of a modern extension to be built on the east side in terms of listed building status, and land ownership and servicing;
- ability of the ground floor to provide sufficient space for the proposed uses.

4.7 Whilst all of these are major obstacles, they must be explored as part of the options appraisal. This will enable any funding organisation to be satisfied that the proposed uses are the best option available.

5 Governance and Ownership

5.1 The freehold of the building is currently held in trust for the public good by the District Council. The Council could continue to hold the freehold in the long term but this would effectively preclude it from seeking financial assistance from various grant bodies, thus meaning that the Council would have to fund restoration and future costs if the leases were surrendered.

5.2 An alternative is for the District Council to pass the freehold to another public sector body such as the Town Council but that organisation could have much the same funding issues. If there was another public sector

organisation willing to take on the ownership, even with this proviso, then the Council could consider this option.

- 5.3 A third option is to transfer the freehold to a private sector commercial organisation, but due to the fact that the building is held in trust for the public good it is considered unlikely that this would be acceptable to the local community.
- 5.4 There is some consensus that the building should become owned by a Building Preservation Trust. This approach is a well established one throughout the country and there are many examples of where this has been a very successful outcome for buildings to be restored and used enabling public access to be maintained through a variety of uses. It also enables funding to be accessed from various sources. However, if this approach is taken then there needs to be a phased approach to the transfer of ownership to enable the project to be successfully accomplished.
- 5.5 It needs to be very clear that if this route is followed that the Trust is established with a range of Trustees and that no public body would be able to have "control" of the BPT. Public body representation would be very limited
- 5.6 As there is no "ready made" BPT in the area, if this approach is to be taken, work should start straight away to establish a Trust as soon as possible, seeking Trustees from the local community who have both the time and expertise to help the project. The Architectural Heritage Fund does provide support in establishing a Trust and early contact through EW Consultancy has shown that they would be interested in helping.
- 5.7 The BPT will therefore need to be established as a Charity through the Charity Commission and would probably be a "not for profit" company limited by guarantee. Trustees should be local people with both time and expertise in the fields of finance, property, conservation, community work and education, with a limited number of representatives from the public sector.
- 5.8 However, at the inception/option appraisal stage of the project the ownership of the building could remain with the District Council. This will enable the BPT to undertake the option appraisal work without having made the legal commitment to take ownership of the building. Once the Option Appraisal shows whether there is a viable long term use then the BPT would make the commitment to take on the ownership of the building It will also allow the BPT to build its "track record" of handling the project before seeking the larger scale funding for the actual restoration works from the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- 5.9 It is also suggested that until such time as the BPT is established a Steering Group should be created. This will enable community involvement to be established and also shows that there is the intention to progress to a BPT. This Steering Group would oversee the project until the BPT is established but have no decision making powers. The Steering Group should comprise, at the least, a representative from:
- District Council;
 - Town Council;
 - County Council;
 - Town Centre Partnership;

- Huntingdonshire History Society;
- Huntingdon & Godmanchester Civic Society;
- Cromwell Museum.

All these groups currently have their own governance arrangements which would allow the project to be supported by them with feedback on the progress being taken back by each member of the Steering Group to their own organisation. It may also be useful to encourage a small number of other community groups and representatives to be on the Steering Group.

5.10 If the proposal for a Steering Group is agreed then there will need to be terms of reference agreed and formal arrangements made for meetings, agendas and minutes.

5.11 Once the option appraisal work has been completed and there is a long term viable option identified then the ownership of the building can be transferred to the BPT who will then seek the funding for the restoration works.

6. Financial Issues-Costs and Funding

6.1 Capital Works

6.1.1 The initial options appraisal needs to be undertaken. This could cost up to £20K, part of which could be funded through the AHF. It would be for the BPT to fund the other 25% of the cost of the appraisal. The BPT would initially need to look to other organisations to help it with start up costs including this 25%. It is therefore probably necessary for some public/community/voluntary funding to provide the BPT with some start up fund.

6.1.2 Other capital finance required will include monies for the works required to bring the building back to a state of reasonable repair and maintenance as well as any works necessary to enable new users to use the building (from the option appraisal). There is no definitive costs yet related to with this work but would include:

- a DDA compliant lift;
- kitchen and food preparation facilities;
- public toilets and cloakrooms;
- fitting out of offices and shops area;

6.1.3 The structural survey undertaken in 2007 showed that there was about £800,000 worth of works required but that these ranged from essential to desirable, over a four year period. It is not unreasonable to expect all costs to come to a total of about £2million.

6.2 Funding for Capital Works

6.2.1 The funding sources for the capital works include:

- AHF monies for the Option Appraisal;
- Heritage Lottery Funding for the major capital works;
- other funding sources for community based involvement;
- DCA lease hand back;
- smaller grants from local bodies;
- public sector local authority monies (District and Town Council)

It is probable that all these sources will be needed to complete this project.

6.2.2 Initial contact with the AHF has shown that they have an interest in supporting this project, but much more work would be needed to gain their financial support. The AHF will only fund developmental costs such as the Option Appraisal - it will not fund repair, maintenance and improvement works.

6.2.3 Grant funding sought from either the AHF or the HLF would require at least 25% matched funding with 5% being from the organisation making the bid.

6.2.4 The Heritage Lottery has three main aims:

- Learning;
- Conservation of the heritage;
- Participation.

The HLF can give grants over £1 million for the restoration and long term sustainable uses of listed buildings. In order to qualify the bid must meet certain criteria (bidding criteria is set out in paragraph 6.2.5). The HLF also give grants for the development of a Conservation Management Plan. This plan is required by the HLF as part of the bid for major funding.

6.2.5 To be successful a bid to the HLF would need to be assessed against the following criteria:

- Importance of the project to the heritage of the area;
- Conservation benefits;
- Accessibility to the public;
- Any additional public benefits;
- Business plan;
- Quality of design solutions and materials;
- Financial viability and cost management;
- Strength of governance arrangements;
- Ability to manage the project;
- Professional expertise being used;
- Development of a project strategy;
- Use of a conservation management plan;
- Maintenance and sustainability in the longer term.

It should be noted that this is where the formal options appraisal becomes essential.

6.3 Revenue Costs

6.3.1 The current leaseholders (HMCS) have a revenue budget of about £30K for upkeep of the building. In addition the Town Council provide some revenue support for part of the maintenance of the building. Until the business case has been prepared for the new uses the costs will not be known but these would have to be established as part of the bid to the heritage lottery fund.

6.4 Revenue Funding

6.4.1 Reuse of the building as proposed would require sufficient revenue funds to provide for the maintenance of the building and the support of the uses in the building.

6.4.2 One of the key elements of possible future uses of the building is to seek uses which are both in the "public good" and also help to generate revenue to fund the ongoing maintenance and running of the building. It

is considered that the best that can be achieved is for the costs to be at a "neutral" position to allow the BPT to take ownership. The option appraisal will enable this decision to be made.

- 6.4.3 In balancing the public use of the building with office and quasi commercial uses there needs to be recognition that the greater the public activity and usage (with the less commercial use) then the greater the possibility of the need for subsidy from public bodies.

7. Project Management Arrangements

- 7.1 To take the project forward the District Council must recognise that this is not a simple project, but requires considerable effort both from a technical and governance perspective.

- 7.2 There are several phase to the work:

1. **Conception phase-** to get formal agreement to the project from all parties including participation in the project and the way the project should be managed, including any willingness to assist in funding and the development of the initial bids to be made for funding
2. **Option appraisal stage-** with oversight by BPT producing a project strategy, sketch drawings of possible usages, initial QS costing of proposals. This would also include the start of work on development of a conservation plan and business plan. It would also be necessary to re-open discussion with DCS on the leases;
3. **Consultation on option appraisal outcomes-** including discussions with English Heritage, community consultation and development of detailed bids for funding;
4. **Detailed design phase-** including detailed drawings and costing for submission for planning, listed building approval and building regulations;
5. **Tendering and Implementation**

- 7.3 The project team would (at different points in the process) need people with the following skills:

- Project management;
- Structural, electrical and mechanical engineering;
- Architectural conservation and listed building;
- Quantity surveying;
- Surveying valuation and /or estates management;
- Planning /conservation;
- Finance and grant funding.

- 7.4 If the building is to be successfully used in the long term, a project management plan needs to be agreed and to progress the work. A draft plan is attached.

- 7.5 For the project to be successful, if the Council decides to establish a BPT it will need to provide support to the BPT until it is well established. This would include providing the BPT with a project manager (this is not necessarily a full time post). There are two choices for the Council in terms of accomplishing this:

- Appoint an external project manager;
- Second a member of staff from within the organisation (or another organisations) and then "backfill" the post for a period of time.

8 The Project Plan

8.1 The Project plan is set out in Annex 1 and shows potential timescales involved. The project plan is set out by **Phase** but each phase covers the main areas discussed in this report in terms of:

8.2 **-Governance and project management arrangements:**

- oversight/governance arrangements which include a wide range of stakeholders;
- identifying a project manager to help develop the BPT and then advise that organisation on the development of a bid for the option appraisal.

-Legal/ownership arrangements including:

- negotiation on current leases;
- agreement on charitable trust (BPT);
- establishing the trust and timelines for ownership transfer;
- legal advice on any issues associated with transfer;
- type of trust to be established.

-Agreement in principle to long term uses:

- developing the option appraisal including:
 - assessment of capacity for “living learning” or citizenship/interpretive centre on ground floor;
 - Town Council office usage;
 - community uses in the assembly rooms;
 - catering requirement;
 - any other possible uses such as residential, office or retail uses.

-Listed Building Requirements:

- ability to install lift for access to 1st and 2nd floors;
- parameters of works that should/could be undertaken;
- possible extension for café purposes.

-Financial Issues:

- lease hand back by DCA;
- funding possibilities for establishing the BPT and option appraisal;
- capital works for the building and costs of repair and maintenance;
- costs of long term usages;
- revenue implications and possible revenue streams;
- commitments from public organisations;
- fundraising and membership subscriptions to BPT.

-Documentation:

- project strategy
- conservation management plan
- access plan
- risk assessment

9. Recommendations


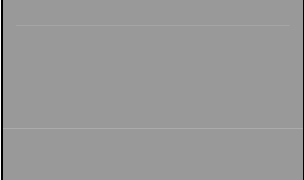
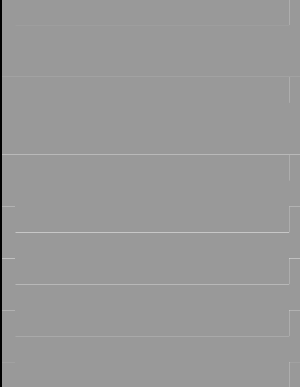
- 9.1 As the first stage in this work the District Council needs to give consideration to this report and in particular to decide on:
- Its approach to the project in terms of its long terms involvement;
 - Project management arrangements;
 - Involvement by other organisations;
 - Immediate Governance arrangements;
 - Support for the project sustainable long term uses;
 - Any financial support in the short and medium term - capital and revenue.
- 9.2 This report recommends that the District Council:
- Agrees to establishing a Building Preservation trust;
 - Agrees to the transfer of ownership of the building to the BPT when a viable long term solution has been identified through the options appraisal;
 - Provides project management support to the BPT until it is established and can provide its own project management arrangements;
 - Considers possible BPT trustees;
 - Agrees to the Steering Group arrangements in the short term;
 - Develops the terms of reference for the Steering Group and agrees the organisations to be invited;
 - Provides some initial start up funding needed for the matched funds for the option appraisal;
 - Considers whether it will assist with the long term revenue funding for the building;
 - Continue discussions with the DCA on lease surrender.

Annex 1: Project Plan

Activity	Sept-December 2009	Jan – March 2010	April – June 2010	July-September 2010	October 2010 onwards
<p>1. Concept Phase:</p> <p>Council agrees the approach to the future of the building as set out in EW Consultancy Ltd report</p> <p>Council to decide on project management arrangements</p> <p>Project strategy plan prepared and agreed by the Council</p> <p>Organise the establishing of a project manager</p> <p>Search for BPT Trustees</p> <p>Establish BPT through Charity Commissioners</p> <p>Establish Terms of Reference and invite organisations to be on the Steering group.</p> <p>Initial bid to AHF for options appraisal</p> <p>Prepare pre application bid to heritage lottery to cover project management costs- meeting with HLF</p>	<p>Shaded area covering the first five activities: Council agrees the approach to the future of the building as set out in EW Consultancy Ltd report, Council to decide on project management arrangements, Project strategy plan prepared and agreed by the Council, Organise the establishing of a project manager, and Search for BPT Trustees.</p>	<p>Shaded area covering the activities: Search for BPT Trustees, Establish BPT through Charity Commissioners, and Initial bid to AHF for options appraisal.</p>	<p>Shaded area covering the activities: Establish BPT through Charity Commissioners and Prepare pre application bid to heritage lottery to cover project management costs- meeting with HLF.</p>	<p>Shaded area covering the activity: Prepare pre application bid to heritage lottery to cover project management costs- meeting with HLF.</p>	

Activity	Sept-December 2009	Jan – March 2010	April – June 2010	July-September 2010	October 2010 onwards
2. Options Appraisal stage					
Hold Steering Group meetings to provide community input for project					
Hold initial community consultation events					
Finalise BPT Trustees and establish Trust as a Charity					
Options appraisal undertaken with initial sketch drawings for uses to be prepared					
Initial work on business plan developed for the uses to show revenue costs and funding to be self sustaining					
Prepare stage 1 bid for detailed capital works to submit to funding bodies-discuss with HLF					
Negotiate with HMCS for lease hand back					
Discussions with English Heritage on possible alterations/options					
DC agree to transfer freehold to BPT if appropriate uses found through option appraisal					

Activity	Sept-December 2009	Jan – March 2010	April – June 2010	July-September 2010	October 2010 onwards
Options Appraisal stage (cont'd) Seek HLF funding for a Project Planning Grant to develop the Conservation Management Plan Develop a draft conservation management plan for the building Develop an accessibility plan for the building Risk management plan prepared	 [Shaded] 	 [Shaded] 	 [Shaded] [Shaded] [Shaded] 	 [Shaded] [Shaded] [Shaded] 	

Activity	Sept-December 2009	Jan – March 2010	April – June 2010	July-September 2010	October 2010 onwards
<p>3. Consultation on Options Appraisal Stage</p> <p>Community consultation on the future of the building at the beginning of the Project</p> <p>Consultation event with steering group parties on the proposed uses and drawings for the building from options appraisal</p> <p>Community consultation events on option appraisal outcomes</p>					
<p>4. Detailed design phase</p> <p>BPT to develop bid for HLF and other funding organisations for capital works</p> <p>Detailed drawings for long term uses and installation of lift</p> <p>Schedule of works required to be prepared</p> <p>Risk management plan updated</p> <p>Business plan refreshed</p> <p>Stage 2 bid to the HLF</p> <p>Detailed costing prepared</p>					
<p>5. Tendering and Implementation</p>	<p>Project Plan to be developed for this Phase at a later date</p>				