

Report of the Director of City Development

Report to Executive Board

Date: 16 July 2014

Subject: Leeds Town Hall – capital development

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): City and Hunslet		
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:		

Summary of main issues

1. The proposed improvement works to Leeds Town Hall are consistent with the Best Council Plan 2013 – 17 in terms of both promoting sustainable and economic growth by boosting the local economy and maximizing the impact of our cultural infrastructure and, by becoming a more efficient and enterprising Council by generating income for the Council.
2. This report considers the investment needs of Leeds Town Hall a Grade 1 Listed Building and the potential to enhance its uses through capital investment, incorporating a proposed bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund.
3. Completed in 1858, the Town Hall has accommodated a wide variety of uses during the past 156 years including rooms for the Lord Mayor, municipal offices, courts, cells, the city's police station, registrar services and as a venue for civic events and concerts. However, in recent years its use as Council offices has been reduced and, following the recent decision to consolidate the Council's office accommodation at Merrion House, it is unlikely to be needed for offices in the foreseeable future. In addition, the Electors and Registrars Service is no longer based in the Town Hall having moved to Great George Street in 2012.

4. As a consequence of these moves, the Town Hall now operates primarily as a concert, entertainment, events and conference venue, hosting over 200 events a year and, in the future it is this mix of uses that will, in the main, be its core use. Given the scale and profile of Leeds Town Hall to the City, it is clearly important that the building maintains a valuable role and function in the city and that it generates revenue to support its ongoing investment needs.
5. Against this background, it is proposed that the Council takes a civic enterprise approach and seeks to maximize external funding resources that can be leveraged into the Town Hall. Like any heritage building of such a scale and nature, Leeds Town Hall needs regular investment to ensure that its condition is maintained and it can continue to operate as a venue and provider of services that meets the needs and aspirations of its current and future users. Accordingly, the Council's Capital Programme incorporates £1.5m of funding for heritage assets, which is available to undertake essential repairs to the Town Hall including its roof. However, whilst undertaking core backlog maintenance on its own will be beneficial to the future use of the Town Hall, it is proposed that additional value would be secured by using the Council's allocated capital funds as match funding towards a proposed bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in their sub £5m category. By pursuing such an approach the Council will be able to address essential maintenance issues, whilst also improving the existing facilities at the Town Hall, with the aim of increasing public access to and appreciation of the building, whilst consolidating its use as a primary venue in the city for classical concerts, popular entertainment, events and conferences.
6. The proposed improvement of this Grade 1 Listed Building would make the most of its unique infrastructure and heritage, creating a visitor experience that will draw visitors to enjoy its offer and explore its long history. This will make a unique contribution to Leeds as Best City and could also contribute to any future bid to be European Capital of Culture.

Recommendations

Executive Board is recommended to:

- (i) Note the content of the report;
- (ii) Authorise the Director of City Development to undertake a feasibility study to address the key challenges and opportunities facing the Leeds Town Hall with a view to submitting an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund and other funding sources as appropriate to support the proposed improvement works;
- (iii) Note the actions required to implement the decision and that the Chief Officer Culture and Sport will be responsible for implementation of the decision.

1 Purpose of the report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek Executive Board's approval to undertake a feasibility study to address the key challenges and opportunities facing the Leeds Town Hall, with the intention that the feasibility study would help to inform a proposed application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for grant support to assist in the proposed improvement of the Grade 1 Listed Building.

2 Background information

2.1 History

- 2.1.1 The decision to build Leeds Town Hall was made in January 1851 at a meeting of the Leeds Borough Council (the motion being carried by 24 votes to 12). A subsequent competition led to the building being completed in 1858 to the design of Cuthbert Brodrick. For the next 108 years it stood as the tallest building in Leeds.
- 2.1.2 The Town Hall epitomises the rich industrial and architectural heritage of Leeds and tells a story which covers architecture, music, politics, civic history, industry, commerce, crime and criminal law, social history and civic pride. The building has had many roles over its lifetime including rooms for the Lord Mayor, municipal offices, a restaurant, courtrooms and cells, the city's police station, registrar services, and as a venue for civic events and notably concerts. Its musical heritage alone reflects its standing. In the Victoria Hall, the Leeds Triennial Music Festival began in 1858 and continued until the 1980s. The glories of the greatest classical composers have been celebrated too, including Vaughan Williams, Elgar and Delius. In more recent times Deep Purple in 1972, the Kaiser Chiefs in 2005 and Nigel Kennedy in 2013 have taken to the stage. In 2011 Leeds Town Hall was voted Leeds's Favourite Building by readers of the Yorkshire Evening Post at the prestigious Leeds Architecture Awards. The Town Hall deserves its reputation as the city's iconic landmark and, along with Millennium Square, the City Museum, the Carriageworks Theatre, the Central Library, the Art Gallery and the Henry Moore Institute helps define the Civic Quarter in the city.

2.2 Current use

- 2.2.1 In recent years the uses made of this very important building have changed significantly, with a move away from Council office accommodation, (currently only accommodating the Council's Arts and Venues and Electoral Services), to become an established and successful concert, conference and entertainment venue well regarded by both the public and commercial interests in the city. However, any significant, historic building of its age, nature and quality continues to need on-going and timely investment on its infrastructure, both to consolidate its position as a venue that hosts over 200 events a year, but also to optimise the future use of the building to ensure it has a sound, viable and sustainable future, building upon its location for:

- Major orchestral concerts, notably the Leeds International Concert Season. Since 1963 it has been the home of the Leeds International Piano Competition.
- Comedy shows with nationally renowned performers.
- Sporting events including boxing and wrestling.
- Conferences, exhibitions, meetings and events i.e. the Tour de France Grand Depart launch, events space for BBC Sports Personality of the Year, digital gaming festivals and, a recent addition, the Beer Festival.
- Venue for weddings and civic receptions.
- Arts and heritage activities. Tours are now a popular way for people to explore the building and celebrate its place at the heart of the city's history.

2.2.2 Members of Executive Board should note that recent efforts to drive up earned income from cultural assets have seen a growth in commercial activity which is driven through business partnerships that benefit the service with a proactive, flexible and innovative approach. As such, any proposed investment in the Town Hall's infrastructure needs to focus on enhancing such activities which have already been introduced within the building and are proving popular and commercially successful, the core elements of which can be defined across three key areas:

- Promote, sell and increase internal and external business hire of rooms and spaces in Leeds Town Hall, the Carriageworks Theatre and Pudsey Civic Hall
- Research, secure and sustain sponsor and partner associations that support the cultural offer across the service
- Develop and deliver new in-house commercial events/ventures that contribute and add value to existing activity.

2.2.3 This innovative approach has resulted in a diversification of the Town Hall's commercial activity. In the last year the Town Hall has hosted large national conferences, award ceremonies, business exhibitions, product launches, sporting events and food and drink festivals. It has also acted as a film location for TV and cinema production and, where appropriate the inclusion of heritage tours of the Town Hall as a means of increasing access to and appreciation of a significant heritage asset, which has proved popular for both residents of the city and is a unique selling point especially for national and international delegates to the venue.

2.2.4 The Victoria Hall remains a major asset, however, feedback from business users of the small rooms and other satellite breakout spaces in the venue advise that such spaces are outdated, frequently too small and are in need of modernisation. Investment is, therefore, needed if the venue is to remain competitive and commercially successful and, to this end the proposed feasibility study would endeavour to assess the ability of the building to provide a mix of spaces ranging from a new conference space capable of accommodating between 200/250 people, plus associated supporting infrastructure to improved public access and improved vertical transportation through the building.

3 Main Issues

3.1 Challenges

3.1.1 In order to optimise the future use of the building, to ensure it has a sound, sustainable future it is proposed that the City Council appoint NPS Leeds (the Council's strategic partner for the provision of design services) to undertake a feasibility study to address both the key challenges and opportunities facing the Town Hall as detailed below and, which will focus not only on the essential maintenance works required to maintain the fabric of the building but also the further development of activities that are popular and commercially successful. The proposed feasibility study would address;

- (i) The condition of the roof - The roof is in need of major repair and is at the end of its lifecycle. The roof is also not sufficiently sound-proofed which compromises particularly the simultaneous programming of the Town Hall and Millennium Square.
- (ii) The dormant space and commercial opportunity - Around 685 sqm (7,374 square feet) is currently void and unused space and Brodrick's original gallery is also hidden from view. Adaptions made to incorporate more office space mean a floor divides the full height of this space, and an inner wall isolates it from the remainder of the building. Opportunities to generate further income for the venue are being missed. There is a demand for conference venues with multiple breakout spaces which the Town Hall is currently unable to deliver and, therefore, business is lost to other venues in the city or to venues elsewhere in the country.
- (iii) Disability Access - The building has poor disabled access. The feasibility study would identify access improvements that will be required to enable everyone to enjoy and use the building at the quality customers would expect for an iconic space in a major European city.
- (iv) Inadequate facilities and commercial opportunities - The layout and standards of facilities of the venue do not accord with the demands made on them. Washroom facilities, food and beverage spaces and waiting facilities are not satisfactory for a venue that hosts over 200 events a year including many of international standing. The venue falls well short of customer expectations in this regard, and places an unnecessary limit on the Service's ability to offset cultural programming costs through earned income.
- (v) Learning opportunities - Educational tours and projects continue to attract strong levels of interest and would be a prerequisite for any HLF funding. The current oversubscription to Town Hall tours indicates the potential for using the heritage of the building to inform and engage both the people of Leeds and visitors to the city. However, the opportunities for learning and interpretation are currently not maximised due to the current condition of the facilities and, therefore, the feasibility

study would need to identify development options that would afford the opportunity to increase access to and understanding of the heritage environment i.e. the restoration of the architecturally significant Civil Courtroom on the north east side of the building to create a space that would restore the original Brodrick's design. The space would be used to complement the interpretation programme and be a key element in the heritage tour of the building. Talks, film screenings, exhibitions and performances could also take place here with the space at the heart of a revitalised commercial, entertainment and learning offer.

- (vi) The consolidation of the venue as a leading classical music venue, building upon work undertaken in 2006 to improve the acoustic performance of The Victoria Hall.

3.2 Funding

3.2.1 The Council has approved £1.5m capital funding for expenditure on heritage assets, which would enable works to progress to undertake the repair to the roof of the Town Hall. Officers will give consideration to the timing of such works having regard to the urgency of the work and the desire to maximize value for money by ensuring that such funding can be used to unlock additional public and private sector investment to realise the scheme.

3.2.2 The Heritage Lottery Fund has indicated that it would be willing to receive a bid in 2014 for the Town Hall project. The HLF guidelines indicate that any HLF major grant application would require to have matched funding of at least 10% of the grant provided. The capital funding that has been released for expenditure on heritage assets combined with prudential borrowing secured against future additional income from increased commercial activities would significantly exceed the 10% threshold required by the HLF.

3.2.3 Members of Executive Board should note that officers will continue to explore other possible sources of funding for the project i.e. capital projects in the cultural sector achieve sponsorship and support from individuals and companies through, for instance, naming rights for rooms or optional contributions on ticket sales.

3.2.4 Funding for the feasibility study is available from existing resources held within the City Development Directorate.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 The Executive Member for Digital & Creative Technologies, Culture & Skills; elected members; the Director of Leeds Civic Trust; stakeholders in Libraries, Arts and Heritage; and the Business Development Manager of the Chamber of Commerce have all been consulted as part of the exploratory works undertaken to date.

- 4.1.2 A workshop with Council and other city cultural partners has been carried out to explore the potential activity plan for the heritage and learning element of the bid.
- 4.1.3 A survey of people who use the Town Hall was carried out at the end of 2013 and an initial analysis is provided at appendix 1. Feedback from concert and events audiences would inform the proposals to refigure the public facilities and access arrangements.
- 4.1.4 The evaluations from the major HLF Crime and Punishment project in 2006 – 2008 will inform the work on the heritage programme.
- 4.1.5 As part of the development of the HLF bid, a programme of consultation will take place directly involving young people. Plans will be developed as part of any bidding process to consult, and involve a wide range of groups including young people and hard to reach groups.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 An ECDI Screening has been completed and is attached as an appendix. Improving access to the building and encouraging a wide range of visitors from all communities is at the heart of the programme.
- 4.2.2 A diverse audience is vital to the health of the cultural sector and consequently the viability and sustainability of the Town Hall programming. Town Hall officers constantly consult with and canvas opinion across the city to inform new and effective ways of developing and marketing the programme.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 Increasing participation in cultural activity is a core priority for the city.
- 4.3.2 The sustainable development of the Town Hall including both capital work and the visitor experience, will help to raise the profile of the city. It will support the Best City Priorities – helping to ensure that Leeds is recognised locally and internationally as the Best City in the UK, and support sustainable economic development.
- 4.3.3 The learning and interpretation programme, which will link to the national curriculum, will engage young people in and out of school, and the Town Hall will become Child Friendly and family friendly.
- 4.3.4 This project will meet the city's published cultural ambitions of breaking down the barriers to cultural engagement; telling the story of the city, inspiring communities, and nurturing our local talent.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 Resources and value for money are addressed in Section 3.3 of the report above.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 Any alteration to Leeds Town Hall would be subject to Listed Building Consent.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 The proposed feasibility study will consider the risks in relation to any proposed improvement works to Leeds Town Hall. A project risk register would be prepared as part of the feasibility study.

4.6.2 There is a risk that the project may not achieve funding targets but plans and financial controls will be in place to mitigate this risk.

5 Conclusion

5.1 The Town Hall is already an established and successful concert, conference and entertainment venue with a strong reputation. A significant, historic building of this nature requires on-going and timely investment to maintain and upgrade its infrastructure so as to sustain its national status and realise its full income generating potential, placing it at the heart of the cultural tourism offer for the city.

5.2 A wide range of performances, heritage tours, talks and exhibitions, with excellent visitor facilities would place the Town Hall firmly on the tourist map. It will engage all our communities with exciting and relevant culture and heritage experiences; supporting the sustainable growth of the local economy by attracting more visitors to the Town Hall and the Civic Quarter.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Executive Board is recommended to:

- i) Note the content of the report;
- ii) Authorise the Director of City Development to undertake a feasibility study to address the key challenges and opportunities facing the Leeds Town Hall with a view to submitting an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund and other funding sources as appropriate to support the proposed improvement works;
- iii) Note the actions required to implement the decision and that the Chief Officer Culture and Sport will be responsible for implementation of the decision.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 None.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.