



## Report of the Chief Planning Officer

### **PLANS PANEL CITY CENTRE**

**Date: 24<sup>th</sup> November 2011**

**Subject: First White Cloth Hall**

#### **Electoral Wards Affected:**

**City & Hunslet**

Ward Members consulted

No

#### **Specific Implications For:**

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

City Centre Plans Panel is asked to note the contents of this report, in particular that work is progressing towards repairing the First White Cloth Hall. A further report will be brought to Panel early in 2012 when a preferred option has been agreed.

#### **1. Purpose of this report**

- 1.1.1. To inform City Centre Plans Panel of progress in restoring the First White Cloth Hall (FWCH)

#### **2. Historical background**

- 2.1. The grade II\* listed FWCH is arguably Leeds' most important building because it is here that Leeds stole a march on the neighbouring towns in the district and established itself as a commercial capital. Built in 1711, it was as the name suggests the first cloth hall to be built in Leeds catering for producers of undyed cloth who had previously sold their cloth in Briggate and was directly spurred by the building of a hall in Wakefield in the same year.
- 2.2. It was quickly superseded by another hall and thereafter adapted for a variety of uses. By the 1970s, the west and south wings were derelict with the east wing, which was in separate ownership, operating as an amusement arcade until 2005. There has been a previous scheme to restore the FWCH in the 1980s by Speciality

Shops who carried out restoration of the Corn Exchange, but this foundered despite the offer of a large grant from the Development Corporation.

- 2.3. The FWCH is now in one ownership, namely City Fusion which is a sister company of EMCO. City Fusion also own the car park behind and the majority of the shops on the south side of Kirkgate between Call Lane and Wharfe Street.

### **3.0 Emergency demolition and repairs**

- 3.1 In August 2009, there was a dramatic and fast moving chain of events following the partial collapse of the building next door which could only be made safe by demolition. The wing of the FWCH was taking support from the adjacent building and also had to be dismantled. The demolition was agreed in advance of the works being carried out with the technical input of English Heritage's structural engineer. The walling materials and roof structure were salvaged and have been set aside for re-use.

- 3.2 Before the demolition of the west wing it was thought that the whole of the FWCH was incapable of repair and the best that could be achieved was reconstruction following demolition. It is now seem likely that the remaining structure, comprising two thirds of the FWCH, is capable of repair and consequently eligible for public funding.

- 3.3 Some propping has been put in place as well as weather protection and security measures at the cost of the owner. There is ongoing monitoring by the owner's structural engineer.

### **4.0 Lower Kirkgate Townscape Heritage Initiative (LKTHI) and development strategy**

- 4.1 In 2010 the City Council developed and submitted a Stage 1 bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to support the physical regeneration of Lower Kirkgate. A Stage 1 pass was granted by the HLF in May 2010. As a result the HLF awarded £1.005m to Leeds, a sum which has to be matched by £668k in LCC funding. In September 2011 a revised Stage 1 bid seeking an additional £500k to support the restoration of the First White Cloth Hall (FWCH) was submitted to the HLF who have now confirmed that they are minded to approve the additional funding subject to a successful Stage 2 bid.

- 4.2 Appraisals of different development options for the FWCH suggest that there is a £2m deficit – the cost of development minus the increase in asset value. The funding from the HLF funding combined with other possible grant sources will not be sufficient and the majority of the development costs will have to be met by borrowing by the developer against the net value of the FWCH and cross subsidy from development gain arising from the owner's adjoining landholdings.

### **5.0 Delivery options**

5.1 The owner of the FWCH is working in partnership with the Council and has expended a great deal in time and professional fees in contributing to the development of the bid to the HLF. There is a mutual recognition that the FWCH is both the most important and the most challenging aspect of the LKTHI scheme and that the current initiative may be the last realistic chance to save it from demolition.

5.2 However, in addition to providing the option of providing a grant to the current owner, a range of alternative development options are possible:

- Development Trust

With this option, the owner would lease or sell the freehold to a building preservation trust which would have access to loans and some grant aid unavailable to the private sector. However, the conservation gap (the difference between the costs and the end value) and the complexity of the site ownership would probably make this approach financially unattractive.

- Compulsory Purchase Order

The lack of tangible investment by a succession of owners has led to calls for CPO or a repairs notice to be served. Both the CPO and repairs notice routes would necessitate the Council having a viable development solution for the scheme and neither would be tenable until the opportunity provided by the LKTHI was extinguished. The conservation deficit has made the scheme financially unattractive as an isolated development and pressure on the capital programme makes an LCC funded or underwritten scheme unlikely.

There may be the possibility of other partnerships being developed to help finance the scheme and some of these leads are being explored by the FWCH owners. In the end, achieving the restoration of the FWCH is likely to be possible only with external public and private support, including the support of the owner, the flexible use of statutory powers and the ability to exploit the FWCH's links to the development site to the rear to cross subsidise the development.

## **6.0 Consultation**

6.1 Leeds Civic Trust are very concerned about the current state of the FWCH and have campaigned for a solution which will restore the building. The Leeds Civic Trust have been regularly briefed on the development of the LKTHI bid and have expressed a general satisfaction with its progress. English Heritage have been involved in the project from its beginning and this has been key to establishing credibility with funders.

6.2 A consultation exercise has also been carried out with shop keepers, workers and shoppers who use the Kirkgate area. There is dismay at the condition of Kirkgate but also a recognition of the potential of the area and the importance of restoring the FWCH.

## **7.0 Timescales**

7.1 The key stages in developing the options for delivery of the FWCH and the submission of the stage 2 Townscape Heritage Initiative are as follows:

Plans Panel / Ward Members	November 2011
Develop FWCH options paper and planning statement into a development masterplan	January 2012
Executive Board to consider the stage 2 (preceded by SIB)	March 2012
HLF decision on stage 2	June 2012
Scheme Delivery Starts	October 2012
Scheme Ends	October 2017

## 8.0 Conclusion

8.1 The Council is working with the owner and other funders and stakeholders, including the Heritage Lottery fund, to find a viable option for the restoration of the First White Cloth Hall. A detailed implementation plan is being developed for submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund early in March/April next year which will identify a preferred delivery option. A further progress report should be submitted to City Centre Plans Panel early in the New Year.

### Background Papers:

Lower Kirkgate Planning Statement August 2011

# APPENDIX 1

## LOWER KIRK\_GATE TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE INITIATIVE (REVISED STAGE I) PRIORITIES



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**The First White Cloth Hall today following demolition of the west wing. Temporary repairs have been carried out to ensure that the structure is watertight , secure and stable.**



**The First White Cloth as it could be following the repair and restoration of the remaining building and the reconstruction of the missing west wing. Image copyright of Ian Tod Studio.**