

## National Lottery Heritage Fund grant to support the decorative restoration in Victoria Hall

Date: 1 October 2021

Report of: Commercial and Development Manager

Report to: Chief Officer Culture & Economy

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

### What is this report about?

#### Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- Leeds City Council have been awarded a grant of £249,810 by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) to support the restoration of the decorative scheme in Victoria Hall, the main performance space in Leeds Town Hall. The grant is a significant boost to the scheme and will enable extensive restoration work to be carried out. Without urgent intervention the decorative scheme, which includes wall panels, columns, panelling and the façade of the Leeds Town Hall Organ will fall into further disrepair and are at risk of permanent loss. Work will take place when the venue closes for wider refurbishment works.
- The restoration of the decorative scheme combined with wider refurbishment work and the renewal of the Leeds Town Hall organ will elevate the status of the venue as a premier destination. This investment will attract more visitors which in turn will aid the local economy and support growth.
- The restoration will show a commitment to preserving and protecting heritage within our buildings. Revealing this history and the artistic intention can help to promote and improve mental health of visitors to the building. The scheme will also help to attract wider artistic use which will contribute to the cultural fabric of the city.
- The grant will enable the council to contract a leading decorative restoration company to undertake extensive work that has not been attempted previously. The level of investment will also enable a restoration of the highest quality which, given the status of the venue, is warranted.
- The NLHF grant also includes a community engagement programme that will feature talks, presentations, practical workshops for young people and families and the commission of a new artwork by Leeds based Pyramid of Arts.

## Recommendations

- a) To approve the acceptance of a grant of £249,810 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to support the restoration of the decorative scheme in Victoria Hall.

## Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 1 The decorative scheme in Victoria Hall has fallen into significant disrepair with urban pollution, dust and dirt and insensitive redecoration projects over the intervening years taking their toll. Without urgent intervention the scheme will fall into further disrepair and is at risk of permanent loss. The NLHF grant is significant and in addition to ring-fenced finance from the Leeds Town Hall refurbishment project will enable extensive restoration. In addition, the closure of Leeds Town Hall, in November 2021, for wider refurbishment works will provide a once in a lifetime opportunity to carry out this much needed work.

## What impact will this proposal have?

### Wards Affected:

Have ward members been consulted?       Yes       No

- 2 N/A

## What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- 3 Guided tours of the scheme were conducted on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2021 with Cllr Jonathan Pryor, Executive Member for Economy, Education and Culture and on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019 with Cllr Elizabeth Nash. The tours and subsequent discussions included plans for the Town Hall refurbishment, organ renewal and decorative restoration in Victoria Hall.

Consultations have been carried out with decorative artists and conservationists to ascertain the right approach and best practice; Hirst Conservation have carried out extensive laboratory testing of paint samples taken from the hall and this has provided an insight into previous decorative works in the space. Consultations have also been carried out with leading, expert decorative artists who have advised on repair and restoration work needed along with costings. Their feedback highlighted the poor condition of the decorative scheme throughout the hall and drew attention to at-risk areas. This process supported project budgeting and the submission of our application to NLHF.

## What are the resource implications?

- 4 The total cost of the restoration project is £488,810 this includes a community engagement project, marketing and evaluation costs. The NLHF grant of £249,810 represents 51% of the total overall cost with the remaining 49% coming from existing and ringfenced funds within the Town Hall's refurbishment budget – which has been signed off and approved. Effectively, there will be no new financial pressure on the council to match fund the NLHF grant.
- 5 The cost to restore the decorative scheme is relatively low when we consider the benefits it will provide. Currently Victoria Hall is worn and tired, and this has been noted by both commercial and arts clients as well as audience members. If this deterioration continues it will deter people from using the building and this will impact on revenue in the future.

- 6 The delivery of the community engagement project, which is a condition of NLHF grant support, will be delivered by colleagues within the Arts, Events & Venues service. However, this element of the project has already been costed and planned with most of the activity being managed by partner organisations. Although AE&V staff will support delivery the impact will be low and given Leeds Town Hall be closed during the lifetime of the project there is capacity within the service.

### **What are the legal implications?**

- 7 The terms and conditions of the NLHF grant have been assessed by colleagues in Resources and their advice has been submitted to the Arts, Events and Venues service. Concerns were raised about NLHF being able to sell project material such as imagery or videos of the restoration process for commercial gain. This concern was raised with NLHF but given the very specialist nature of the project any commercial opportunities would be small and would not place the council in a negative light. Other concerns regarding the project timeline and reporting have been acknowledged and can be managed by the service.

### **What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

- 8 If the grant is not accepted, it will severely impact on the scope of the restoration project. Work that is urgently needed would need to be scaled back and the earliest decorative scheme will remain hidden and at risk. Refusal of the grant and any delay to the project would risk us missing the crucial window of opportunity to implement the work when the Town Hall closes from November 2021, and risk reputational damage to the council over the longer term. Given that the Town Hall is to undergo wider renovation work and the organ will be renewed it will appear completely remiss of the council if this crucial and externally part funded element is not carried forward.

### **Does this proposal support the council's 3 Key Pillars?**

Inclusive Growth

Health and Wellbeing

Climate Emergency

- 9 Restoring Victoria Hall to the earliest decorative scheme will provide a range of benefits that will actively support the council's 3 pillars. Extensive restoration of the decorative scheme will present a huge opportunity that will help to create a 1<sup>st</sup> class visitor venue especially when the project combines with the wider refurbishment works taking place in Leeds Town Hall and the renewal of the Town Hall organ. As a premier destination the venue will promote future growth by increasing client hire and audience reach. In turn this activity will boost the local economy. The council's investment in the heritage and historical value of the venue will also make a positive statement about the city's most iconic building.

A newly restored performance hall will actively promote the health and well-being of audiences and visitors. Rather than experiencing cultural and commercial activity in a worn and dirty environment audiences will be able to enjoy the space in the way it was originally intended. In addition, the NLHF grant will also support a far-reaching community engagement programme designed to engage with a wide range of people. Comprises of talks and lectures, practical workshops for families and young people and the commission of a new artwork by Leeds based Pyramid of Arts. This inclusive programme will further promote the well-being of the participants.

The restoration work will also reverse years of urban pollution and the effects of climate change. This once-in-a-lifetime project will protect the decorative scheme for the next 150

years and drastically reduce the need for regular short-sighted interventions that will consume more energy over the long term.

### **Options, timescales and measuring success**

#### **a) What other options were considered?**

10 Smaller scale options have been considered but it was felt these would further exasperate the uneven decorative scheme we currently have in Victoria Hall. The scale of wear and tear and the impact of urban pollution have had a far-reaching impact across all the decorative features and small-scale intervention would just be cosmetic and lack ambition and investment. This approach would also highlight the degradation of the scheme to audiences and visitors and place the council in a negative light. The timing of the wider refurbishment work and the renewal of the organ would also expose the poor condition of the scheme further. The only realistic option is to carry out extensive restoration work of the highest quality, which the NLHF grant will enable us to achieve.

#### **b) How will success be measured?**

11 Acceptance of the NLHF grant will enable the council to carry out extensive restoration work in Victoria Hall. This level of investment will also allow the project team to contract a leading decorative restoration company to undertake the work and ensure the restoration is of the highest quality. The project will aim to reveal the earliest artistic intention for Victoria Hall, which includes extensive hand painted stencil designs, hidden for many decades, these designs will be fully revealed. The main decorative features including the columns, wall panels and the façade of the organ will be repaired and restored to their former glory. The completed restoration will make a huge difference to the Town Hall, it will celebrate and protect a unique piece of the city's heritage and provide a 1<sup>st</sup> class visitor destination for people living in Leeds and visitors to the city.

#### **c) What is the timetable for implementation?**

12 Acceptance of the NLHF grant will enable restoration work to commence on schedule in March 2022 with a completion date in July/August 2023.

### **Appendices**

13 NLHF application - Restoration of the Decorative Scheme in Victoria Hall

### **Background papers**

None