



COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 26 March 2009

Title: LONSDALE FEASIBILITY STUDY

Report of: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

Report reference: CS 19/09

Summary:

To provide details on the study carried out by consultants into the viability of the Lonsdale as a theatre/arts centre, fulfilling the request from Council to support the Save Our Lonsdale Group in their aspirations for the building.

Questions for / input required from Scrutiny:

1. How does the Committee think the Council should provide support in the future to the SOL Group?
2. What level of support do Members wish to see given?
3. How does the Committee wish to be involved in any future work concerning the Lonsdale?

Recommendations:

Members consider the report and provide their comments to the Executive.

Contact Officer: Mark Beveridge

Ext: 7350

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: CS 17/09

Introduction

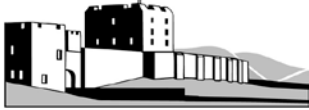
The appended Council Executive report was considered on 16 March 2009. That report provided the Executive with the draft conclusions of the study carried out by Roger Lancaster Associates, which was financed by the Council on behalf of the Save Our Lonsdale Group.

The study shows that the Lonsdale could be converted to a theatre/arts centre, given the availability of the required capital and revenue sums. It is important to note that both figures in the report are a guide at this stage and indicate the sums involved. A detailed building study was not possible as part of the work RLA carried out.

The outcome of the listing is key to the potential future use, if it were rescinded the owner could seek to pursue whatever outcome they seek within the planning guidelines that exist. If it were partially lifted, that would help to protect the building depending upon the details of the listing. No change to the listing prevents implementation of any viable change in so far as the attached study is concerned. That is because a requirement of the current listing is for the main balcony to be maintained in addition to the art-deco features.

Nonetheless, the RLA report is a positive outcome in that it shows the potential for the building. The future progress will depend in part upon how the SOL group wish to use this information. Discussions with representatives have indicated they wish to look at trust status because of the advantages that provides in being a constituted body, e.g. access to grant funding.

The work which has been undertaken in partnership with the Friends of Chances Park and Morton Community Association for example shows how success can be achieved. That approach is an appropriate model to follow if the SOL Group wish to do so.



REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

PORTFOLIO AREA: LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Date of Meeting: 16th March 2009

Public

Key Decision: Yes

Recorded in Forward Plan: Yes

Inside Policy Framework

Title: LONSDALE FEASIBILITY STUDY
Report of: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
Report reference: CS 17/09

Summary:

To present the results of the consultants appointed to assist the SOL group develop their ideas for the Lonsdale building.

Recommendations:

The Executive is recommended to:-

1. Forward the consultants report to Community O&S at its meeting on 26 March for comments.
2. Members consider the information contained within the report.

Contact Officer: Mark Beveridge

Ext: 7350

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: CLS 003/06, CS 56/06, CS 30/07, CS 88/07, CS 09/08

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Members will recall that following a Council resolution, a budget was provided to help the Save Our Lonsdale Group (SOL). To develop their ideas for the Lonsdale building, test their viability within the building fabric and provide outline capital costs combined with likely revenue implications.
- 1.2 Subsequently Council Officers and representatives from SOL established a small project team to undertake the work. Roger Lancaster Associates (RLA) were successful in receiving the commission. Coincidentally, RLA were the consultancy who carried out the study on behalf of the Council and Arts Council which established the market size for a theatre, as well as the type of facilities required to fulfil demand in the area. That work included consultation with a number of groups and organisations. A public survey was completed with members of the citizens panel, 1500 questionnaires were sent out and 608 were returned, of which 69% said they would like to see a theatre in Carlisle.
- 1.3 There have been a number of reports in the past 15 years on the subject of a theatre for Carlisle:
- the 1994 report on the Stanwix Theatre
 - the 1999 options appraisal on potential new theatre sites
 - the 2003 feasibility study into development of the Lonsdale Cinema
 - the 2004 options appraisal report for Tullie House Museum & Arts Service (which included a theatre option)
 - the 2006 report Creative Space, a new theatre/arts centre for Carlisle Roger Lancaster Associates
 - the 2007 (April) report by DCA, Carlisle Theatre Arts Centre 2nd Stage Feasibility Study, Business Plan and Specifications
 - the 2007 (September) report by DCA, Carlisle Theatre Arts Centre (appraisal of the Lonsdale)

The cost of the last three reports plus the one appended has been around £85,000, part of which was funded by the Arts Council, as they helped to fund the first RLA and DCA reports.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Lonsdale building is still owned by Empera Estates and the DCMS listing which applies has been challenged by the owners. To-date no outcome has been determined as to the future of the listing.
- 2.2 Access to the building was gained via the owner for the consultants to assess potential design options, although no electricity supply is currently available and the inspection was undertaken by torchlight.
- 2.3 It was agreed early in this latest study by RLA, in conjunction with the SOL group that the most effective route forward was to set aside the presentation they had produced for the briefing to Councillors. Instead they agreed to work with RLA designers so that SOL could input directly into the design work and influence the sort of provision that was finally arrived at in the report attached. This approach enabled SOL to use the work they had done to help shape the design work and ultimately the feasibility of what the RLA report outlines.
- 2.4 In addition and complimentary to the design work, an outline business plan was produced seeking to maximise the income and minimise the expenditure for the facilities the building could contain. (The RLA report is appended)
- 2.5 The outline capital cost excluding VAT for transforming the existing building to achieve the aspirations of the SOL group is £11.67million (current prices, without allowing for inflation), plus acquisition cost. However, as a full survey has not been undertaken that figure should be seen as a guide and could be higher once the condition and structural integrity have been fully assessed. In addition the revenue subsidy for the building are estimated at £500,000 per year, i.e. the figure required over and above the likely income thought by the consultants as achievable.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The report by RLA shows how the Lonsdale could be used to accommodate a theatre and arts centre. The designs reflect those elements that SOL were seeking to include and could if implemented secure the future of the building, as well as helping to re-generate that part of Warwick Road.
- 3.2 At the outset of this study, Council agreed a budget for the SOL group to secure the professional assistance needed to determine whether the Lonsdale building could be redesigned to achieve the aspirations of saving it whilst providing a cultural legacy. The RLA report has shown it is possible, albeit with a substantial capital and revenue funding being required.

- 3.3 The issues of the listing challenge and the owners intentions are still unknown.
- 3.4 If the report is to be turned into reality, a process which would take time, as other similar projects have elsewhere in the U.K., the SOL group may need assistance to establish their structure and commence the next stage of their journey to turn around the fortunes of the Lonsdale. A similar approach was adopted with the renovation of Chances Park which recently saw it receive £870,000 of lottery funding towards a project of over £1.1m.
- 3.5 The SOL group have shown tremendous drive and determination to reach this point and the RLA report is a very positive endorsement of their ambitions on behalf of the City.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Consultation to Date - SMT, Portfolio Holder, SOL Group, JMT.
- 4.2 Consultation proposed - Executive, Community O&S, SOL Group, Arts Council, Theatre Trust, Cumbria University, Cumbria Cultural Forum, County Council.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive is recommended to:-

1. Forward the consultants report to Community O&S at its meeting on 26 March for comments
2. Members consider the information contained within the report

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

They enable the RLA study to be received by the Council and it can now be subject to scrutiny and consultation.

7. IMPLICATIONS

- Staffing/Resources – To date the Council has contributed financially to this study plus officer time to help the group, a budget of £30,000 was made on available behalf of the group for the study. The provision of officer time in the future may depend upon the outcome of restructure proposals within the Council and the priorities of work that could arise from any changes. At the outset of the joint Council/Arts Council study, the latter body indicated they would be

receptive to a request for revenue funding. However, since that time public finances are likely to face many additional calls upon available funding, which could affect the original position that the Arts Council took.

- Financial – The Council approved the revenue and capital budget for the five year period 2009/ to 2013/14 at its meeting on 3rd February 2009. As stated in the report, no further resources have been allocated as part of that Budget. The Budget resolution clearly shows that capital reserves reduce considerably from £12.5m as at 31st March 2008 to £3.6m as at the 31st March 2012. As also stated in the resolution, the revenue budget is under even greater pressure, with significant savings built in. There are no resources available to fund issues not currently included as enabling the Council to deliver its priorities.
- Legal – The Council has power under section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 to do anything which it considers likely to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of its area or part, or some or all of its inhabitants. This includes power to give financial assistance to any person, incur expenditure and provide staff, goods, services or accommodation to any person. The powers are widely drawn and should be sufficient to enable the Council to assist as mentioned in this report.

In determining whether to exercise these powers, the Council must have regard to its own community strategy and any relevant guidance issued by the Secretary of State regarding the use of the powers. As with any decision, the authority also has to have regard to its overarching fiduciary duty to its taxpayers.

- Corporate – The Council is considering a number of potential options currently e.g. The Sands/Tullie House, which at some stage will need to be prioritised as the financial/staff resources do not exist to deliver them all. Given the potential scale for some of these schemes, delivery of any of these by the Council will be a challenge given the financial position.
- Risk Management – At this stage a full risk assessment of the project has not been undertaken.
- Equality and Disability – Not applicable in the context of the report.
- Environmental – Not applicable in the context of the report.

- Crime and Disorder – Not applicable in the context of the report.
- Impact on Customers – Considerable expectation has been generated through the studies completed to date. A latent demand exists for the facilities proposed and many people would like to see the City have a theatre.