

Cabinet

15 May 2012

Report of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services

Exploring opportunities for the Future of the Guildhall

Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to :

- provide Cabinet with a summary of the recent options appraisal and heritage significance / views analysis study undertaken for the Guildhall complex – the complete reports are available (in the members library and on line with this report)
- confirm Cabinet support for running a Royal Institute of British Architects RIBA Open Ideas Competition where the timetable would see the results available in December 2012 to coincide with the first moves in the new council office.

Background

2. Cabinet resolved on 4 December 2011 to minimise the council's future use of the Guildhall and authorised the director of City Strategy to investigate options for the future of the Guildhall.
3. This generated some debate in *The Press* (30/1/12) which necessarily confirmed the strength of local feeling about this important and historic public building in the City.
4. Following a tender exercise in autumn 2011, architects Purcell Miller Triton PMT were commissioned to undertake an assessment of heritage significance, a views analysis and an informed options appraisal of the Guildhall complex*. The study was funded by Yorkshire Forward, English Heritage and CYC and has delivered on the brief objectives – setting out :

- The Heritage Significance of the Guildhall Complex
- A views analysis with respect to the Guildhall's location on the Riverside.
- An options appraisal highlighting opportunities for possible future uses / configurations.

5. *For the purposes of the study we defined the Guildhall complex as :

- The Guildhall itself (the medieval Hall)
- The Council Chamber, committee rooms and ancillary offices
- The C20th office annex and hutments.
- The surrounding spaces including the Guildhall Yard and the Riverside.

6. The Guildhall and associated riverside committee rooms are listed grade I and the council chamber and associated offices are listed grade II.

7. The headline findings :

- Overall the fabric of the buildings is of national significance, but the Guildhall itself was extensively re-built post-war following the bomb damage so it is not a pristine medieval guildhall.
- The complex has very high communal value and significance reflecting its integral role in the History of the City.
- The Guildhall is an important part of the York Riverside and is seen in views from City Bridges and across / along the river.
- There are some genuinely exciting opportunities and possibilities for creative re-use and the potential for redevelopment of parts of the site where there are lower levels of heritage significance in the existing fabric.

Summary of Key Issues

8. Planning for the future of the Guildhall complex is critical for the council where the costs of continuing to operate the buildings are significant, and where the future use options for the majority of the office floorspace and the intensity of use of meeting rooms beyond the move the new HQ are uncertain.
9. The 'do nothing option' simply does not exist, because of the future cost to the council and the need to secure beneficial use for this key heritage asset and to ensure that there is no longer term deterioration in condition.
10. The council must therefore plan pro-actively to secure the future of the complex. The relationship with the Mansion House is recognised and has been integral to the options appraisal study.
11. Where 'the guildhall' is actually a complex of buildings the options appraisal clearly splits the guildhall complex into 4 elements :
 - The Guildhall itself (the medieval Hall)
 - The Council chamber, committee rooms and ancillary offices
 - The C20th office annex and hutments.
 - The surrounding spaces including Guildhall Yard and the Riverside.
12. The study highlights the strengths and weakness of each aspect
 - The Guildhall itself – a large capacity city centre venue but with poor ancillary facilities / cross circulation / poor thermal and acoustic performance. Very significant and to be retained with upgrading needed.
 - The Council chamber / committee rooms and ancillary offices -a purpose built council chamber and imposing meeting rooms with the layout , capacity and gravitas necessary to best facilitate formal meetings – but suffering from poor IT facilities / thermal / acoustic performance and below standard physical accessibility / legibility. Very Significant and to be retained, but improvements are needed to improve the facilities.
 - The C20th office annex and hutments – office accommodation adjacent to the other elements and in a prime city centre location – relatively poor quality and limited

flexibility – no distinct access. Not significant apart from the River frontage, some opportunity for re-development.

- The surrounding spaces including Guildhall Yard and the Riverside. The Riverside setting is a key asset and there is a longstanding council aspiration for a Riverside Walkway. The Guildhall Yard should be seen as a City space. And the York Boat Yard which is owned by the Council currently has restricted access. A holistic approach would add value to the whole area.

An RIBA Open Ideas Design Competition

13. A meeting with the RIBA competitions office (based in Leeds) has confirmed that an **RIBA Open Ideas competition – see annex 1** - is likely to attract significant interest and almost certainly attract interest from high profile practices and potentially including international interest.
14. The key benefit of an open ideas competition is as a design exercise to stimulate ideas and encourage 'blue Sky thinking' to explore the opportunities afforded by this unique setting.
15. The 'Open Ideas' format allows for exhibition of creative thinking, but with no commitment to proceed beyond the competition stage by the council.
16. There is a cost to running such a competition, and this is set out at annex 1. However the RIBA format is the industry standard and the RIBA brand is nationally and internationally recognised. The cost to the council could be reduced through sponsorship contributions from across the City.
17. Informal discussions with potential partners have indicated support in principle for sponsoring a competition to make it a 'City' competition as opposed to a 'Council' competition. Contacts should be individually followed up if this approach is agreed. A recent RIBA Housing Design Competition in Salford involved partners including Council / NHS / University / BRE.
18. York Boat have confirmed a willingness to engage with a process that considers the future of the whole area, including the York Boatyard and buildings, where the potential to look at the area

holistically is clearly 'good planning'. This is clearly on a without prejudice basis.

19. The competition has the potential to attract media coverage, especially in the design / architectural / planning / property journals and to raise the profile of the City. A clear demonstration of the potential of this part of the City could significantly increase interest in the Guildhall complex which may be key to securing investment in its future.
20. The competition brief would directly respond to the council's aspirations to be a leading environmentally friendly City and a centre for conservation excellence by specifically asking for entries to consider how new elements could combine with effective retro fit to the existing fabric to achieve a zero carbon development.
21. There is also significant interest in economic development terms for securing a location for high quality serviced office accommodation in the City centre for creative / digital businesses to capitalise on York's leading broadband offer. The guildhall offers a great location and the competition brief could specifically include this.
22. Key here is seeing the '**Connectivity**' as both physical – achieving a better integration between the site and the wider city and realising the wider ambition of a riverside walkway. But also ensuring that the competition showcases the City's digital connectivity potential as part of a world class business network.

Consultation

23. The RIBA Open Ideas competition option has been discussed informally with :
 - the RIBA competitions office – to confirm the suitability.
 - CYC Property Asset management team
 - York Boat as being directly affected and as a CYC tenant.
 - Potential sponsor organisations
24. There is agreement and support for the idea which would enable a wider debate across the City about the future of the Guildhall

complex, where entries can be exhibited (in the Guildhall itself) and for a process which should see imaginative solutions proposed which both respect the central role of the Guildhall in City life and its status as a listed building, and reinforce this with modern and vibrant new use patterns and better connectivity to the Riverside as a key city asset.

Options Appraisal

25. If the options for the future of the Guildhall as set out in the PMT report are to be carefully considered and progressed. The question is how best to do this?
26. This could be done in a more traditional way by directly commissioning further and more detailed feasibility studies to build on the options appraisal work already undertaken.
27. However, appointing a project team to undertake a detailed feasibility to take forward the suggestions in the options appraisal would require a clear CYC lead and would also require some decisions to be taken now re requirements, specifically for the council chamber and ancillary offices / meeting spaces, and the other requirements.
28. This option would also require the identification of a specific project budget
29. The option to launch an RIBA open ideas competition would cost approx. £35,000 and has the following advantages :
 - Management of the process by RIBA competitions office in accordance with RIBA standards securing
 - National and potentially international interest and the opportunity to benefit from a range of innovative design ideas and approaches for the most beneficial use of this key part of the City on a without prejudice basis.
 - Significant publicity about the project which has the potential to translate into interest in taking a project forward.

- The clear potential to enhance York's reputation as being open for business and receptive and responsive to high quality contextual contemporary design.
 - A relatively low cost option which allows other considerations to progress in parallel.
30. The ability to link the ideas and principles of **physical connectivity** with **digital connectivity** as a means of building on York's dual strengths of world class heritage and world class digital connectivity can be exploited. - York was founded on the basis of being a key location for communications routes – there is a clear aspiration to build its future success on digital connectivity.

Options

31. Option 1 – to note the options appraisal work carried out by PMT and agree the proposal to proceed with an RIBA Open Ideas Competition. An officer group working would prepare a detailed brief for the RIBA Open Ideas Competition to be launched in September 2012.
32. Option 2 – to note the options appraisal work carried out by PMT and commission further detailed studies as suggested to investigate the potential for future uses and ownership options by directly commissioning additional feasibility work.
33. Option 3 – to note the options appraisal work and take no further action.

Analysis

34. Option 1 – offers an approach which considers the future opportunities for the Guildhall complex in a more innovative and open way and which may generate interest in a long term solution – initially at low cost to the council. Although some additional work may still be required on specific aspects relating to the council's future use requirements.
35. Option 2 – offers a route to securing the future of the Guildhall complex which requires a greater level of direct involvement by the council immediately and funding for additional studies.

36. Option 3 – acknowledges the work to date but takes not further action to secure the future of the Guildhall complex.

Council Plan

37. The (option 1) proposal will deliver on the Council Plan objective of holding an RIBA design competition and deliver on the objective of promoting the highest standards of sustainable contemporary design in the City to complement our outstanding architectural legacy. The location on the City Riverside and adjacent to the award winning (in 2001) City Screen development to the east of the Guildhall can be used to maximum advantage.

Implications

38. The report has the following implications:
- **Financial** – running and RIBA competition would cost the council a maximum of £35,000, but these costs should be reduced where partners across the City contribute to these costs by sponsoring the competition. Funding has been secured from the Delivery and Innovation Fund.
 - **Human Resources (HR)** – There are no HR implications – the competition is effectively run by the RIBA competitions office based in Leeds with the Head of Design Conservation and Sustainable Development as the main council contact.
 - **Equalities** – There are no direct Equalities implications – Accessibility will be key to the future use requirements
 - **Legal** – Although there is no obligation to proceed with the winning entry the Council need to ensure that the competition is run in a way that gives it the option to proceed. The application of EU procurement rules will therefore need to be taken into account in the management of the competition. The legal rights of the tenants of the York Boat site will need to be respected in moving forward with any proposal and their involvement at this stage is clearly sensible.
 - **Crime and Disorder** – There are no Crime & Disorder implications – any future scheme would have to meet appropriate standards.
 - **Information Technology (IT)** – There are no direct IT implications
 - **Property** – The council own the Guildhall complex and York boat yard. The option proposed is to pro-actively consider the

future of the complex, by seeking innovative solutions for its retention/ redevelopment.

- **Other** – There are no other implications

Risk Management

39. There is a real risk to the council's reputation of not securing the future of the Guildhall and of significant ongoing costs and liabilities accruing where a viable future use is not secured.

Recommendations

40. Cabinet are asked to agree option 1 as set out in the report above.

Reason – To facilitate the exploration of options for the future of the Guildhall in an innovative and cost effective way – that will generate publicity for the City and the site; facilitate a level of consultation and with the potential for securing interest in progressing a solution.

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Report
Approved

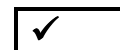


Date 04 May 2012

Cabinet Member
responsible for report:
Cllr J Gunnell, Cabinet
Member for Corporate
Services

Specialist Implications Officer(s): N/A

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all* **All**



For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

PMT Options appraisal report available online / in members library.

Annexes

1. RIBA open ideas competition format
2. York Guildhall Options Appraisal and heritage significance / views analysis study undertaken for the Guildhall complex (attached online to the report and copies in the members' library)