

Annexe A – Observations of York Hospitality Association

A Case for Capital Investment in York Guildhall

The Guildhall has a huge potential for presentations, exhibitions, dinners, concerts etc. We have spoken with staff members at the Hall and members of the Council, who both have expressed regret that the Hall is a fantastic venue but that it does not attract the range of prestigious public events that it might. We found the staff at the Guildhall to be highly approachable and helpful. However our discussions with other users, both within CYC and outside it, suggest that the lack of facilities deters bookings.

Among those who are not deterred, and these are often branches of the local authority, there are considerable additional expenses needed to meet the standard requirements of any hirer.

The proposal of this paper therefore is that some investment in the Hall's facilities would make it a more useable, and consequently saleable, venue. Equally, given that many current and potential users are other City of York Council departments / projects, investment would ultimately save the City money.

These observations are written in the light of the 2005 York Festival of Food and Drink. Although the Festival has a Director drawn from the private sector, the brand and its liabilities belong to the City of York Council. Ultimately, the Festival's expenses are a drain upon the public purse.

The principle observations are:

The PA system in the Hall is antiquated and of poor quality. The equipment should be replaced with modern alternatives.

The power supply to the Hall is inadequate. A superficial inspection of the Hall suggests that it is full of power points. Unfortunately they are all spurs drawn from the same source. Collectively they have the power to run 2 or 3 electric kettles before blowing the fuses in the surrounding offices and committee rooms.

The tressle tables are of very poor quality. Even for very humble events the users will feel obliged to provide their own tables or supply tablecloths.

Signage of the Hall from St Helen's Square is virtually non-existent.

Many hirers (including the Food Festival) needed to supply additional ***pole and panel partitions***. Additional panels (there is one red five panel set in the Hall) would provide or allow the hall a better ability to screen off when staff and members need to access the committee rooms.

Heating: Is generally inadequate, although not during the Food and Drink Festival, because the cooking equipment used generates waste heat.

Toilet facilities: for a hall which can hold 180 people there are only two toilets at that side of the hall and this of course can cause major problems for events especially when comfort breaks are timed.

Security: Currently the areas external to the hall cannot be secured at night. The staff of the Hall have to contend with rough sleepers and drug use in the alleyways around the Hall. A solution is needed that is compatible with emergency fire evacuation from the surrounding buildings.

Audio Visual equipment: This would represent a more substantial investment. However many other conference venues in the city, the Royal York and University for example, have their own facilities available 'in house', which gives them a considerable advantage selling their venues. A solution has been implemented at the National Centre for Early Music which has proved perfectly compatible with the historic building and can be operated by staff without any particular technical expertise.

Costs

The various items outlined here will vary substantially in cost, although some can clearly be achieved fairly cheaply. Others, like the electrical situation would need a technical report for cost to be accurately established.

This paper establishes that there is a strong case for further investigation. It is proposed that the City Council commission a more thorough report on the potential costs and benefits of investment.