

THURSDAY, 21 MARCH 2019

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**PROGRESS REPORT ON TAMWORTH ASSEMBLY ROOMS****EXEMPT INFORMATION**

None

PURPOSE

To provide members with a comprehensive update in respect of the Assembly Rooms project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Members endorse the update as detailed within the report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Project in its entirety is progressing well in part however, there are currently health and safety issues concerning the condition of high level lime plaster in the main auditorium. Both internal and external Project Teams meet regularly to monitor progress, resolve issues and provide regular updates to the Executive Leadership Team.
- The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) continue to support the Project with regular project meetings and visited earlier this week on 18th March
- Plans for the soft launch opening together with the Official Opening are underway but not yet confirmed. A further update will be brought to Cabinet on 4th July 2019.

BACKGROUND

On 20th December 2018, Cabinet considered a detailed update with regards to Tamworth Assembly Rooms. At that time:

- A design freeze had been achieved
- A gap in funding had been identified (the request was approved)
- The project plan was updated to account for previous delays and variations from the original bid
- Final costs from the Contractor (Novus) were awaited together with a revised completion programme
- A revised Communications Plan and newly developed Marketing Plan were underway
- A potential health and safety risk (plaster to walls of main hall) and effective treatment measures were being considered with regards to high level plastering
- Approval of the release of Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) contingency remained

- outstanding thus rendering us unable to progress any invoice payments
- Confirmation from SCC on Public Realm Works had not yet been received

Since the report was considered and approved:

- The Arts & Entertainment Manager has left the authority
- A new organisational restructure was announced on 29th January which created a new post of Theatre & Events Manager (Job Profile attached) with the remit to co-ordinate all events across the authority (external and internal) as well as providing a strong commercial focus to the business development and programming of the Assembly Rooms activities.
- The provision of the approval of additional funding by Cabinet has meant that
 - HLF agreed the release of their contingency and subsequent processing of payments
 - The Councils commitment to completing the programme was declared
- The main externally appointed Contract Project Manager has been transferred to another project within the company, resulting in 2 x Project Managers now being appointed to deliver the completion of the build project.
- The issue of the risk / safety of plaster (previously referred to) is currently being resolved. From Monday 11th March scaffolding was being erected around the entire circumference of the auditorium to enable the Specialist Plasterers to safely access the unstable high level lime plaster. It is envisaged that this work could potentially delay the completion date further. The project team has been advised that a revised completion programme will be available by the end of March which will confirm the extent of the delay. To mitigate this, weekly meetings of all parties will now be held. The Contracts Manager for Novus is working hard with the project team to identify any further potential areas where time allocated within the programme could be reduced. In addition, with the weather improving we are looking at time worked on site i.e. a longer working day as well as work on weekends and bank holidays.
- A further issue has been identified with a water egress into the building from the adjoining private car park. This has been fully investigated by both BWB (the site structural engineers) and by an independent contractor. Options have been drawn up to resolve the matter and are being discussed.
- The BT broadband line was inadvertently 'cut through' during the earlier construction stage and needs to be repaired as a matter of some urgency. Discussions are ongoing with BT to expedite the remedial works.
- Value re-engineering continues to ensure costs remain stable and/or reduced further where possible. Examples of where this has worked exceptionally well are: tiling to the toilet areas, reduced wainscoting, amendments to the curtains, heritage paint, together with CCTV and intruder alarm systems.
- With regards to the public realm works, we are still awaiting final confirmation of timelines from SCC. Novus have been appointed by SCC to undertake the first phase of the works to the Library which have to be completed before Phase 2 of the public realm works which is within St Edithas churchyard (provisionally due to commence in June). Phase 3 (nearest to the building) will be completed last. Work on Phases 2 and 3 will be undertaken by Amey. The situation is being closely monitored to minimise disruption/impact.
- Both the Communication and Marketing plans are already well developed and making use of a 'whole Council' approach to utilise skills and knowledge throughout the organisation. Work on the website, products, bookings, facilities and the What's On guide are all key activities in order to achieve the aspirations of the business plan.

- Programming is well underway with the aim to maximise sales, entrance fees and delivery of community and conference facilities. Acts are now being confirmed including 'trial and tested' old favourites.
- The fees and charges have been reviewed and market tested against our local competitors as well as giving consideration to the enhanced offer of both the Theatre and its conference facilities. The revised fees and charges reflect both a full commercial rate and a reduced community rate.
- The reorganisation announced on 29th January now provides a detailed structure for the management and operational aspects of the building
- Site visits and hard hat tours have commenced for Members, Theatre Ambassadors and Community Champions/Groups as well as a general offer to all members of the public.
- The oral history project has commenced together with the 'Assembly Rooms' on tour which is currently in Ankerside Shopping Centre. A video has also recently been launched showing progress on site.
- Operational procedures are being developed and will be finalised in the next few months prior to building handover.
- Staff are to be mentored by Birmingham Hippodrome to assist with the programming strategy.
- Work has begun on developing an associated schools programme with a consultant which will include education workshops, access to Assems' loans box, after school programme, ticket credits, meeting room access, end of year shows and back stage tours.
- IT Systems including:
 - Wi-Fi for staff and visitors
 - Facilities for conferencing
 - New EPOS system for Lounge and Bar area
 - On-line booking for tickets
- The Food & Beverage provision is currently being developed in order to ensure the "offer" meets all needs both now and for further events. An external catering consultant is supporting the project team with the internal fit as well as menu and interior design.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

All resource implications remain unchanged as of the Cabinet report of 20th December 2018

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APPENDICES

1. Theatre and Events manager Job Profile