

BALDOCK TOWN HALL TEMPORARY REFURBISHMENT

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF FINANCIAL SERVICES
Portfolio Holder – Councillor Terry Hone

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 To seek Members views on options to refurbish Baldock Town Hall, and to agree the next steps in the process.

2.0 FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council adopted the Baldock Town Centre Strategy together with its supporting Action Plan on 19 January 2006 as the Councils Statement of Policy.

- 3.2 Included in the adopted Strategy and the Action plan was the requirement to undertake a feasibility study of the Baldock Town Hall to identify:

- (a) alternative community uses for the building including renovation and maintenance costs
- (b) other uses that will contribute to the economic viability and social vitality of the town centre should no alternative and sustainable community use be found.

- 3.3 The Strategy stated that such a study should include community involvement, working in partnership with key organisations to investigate alternative community and non-community uses and appropriate funding arrangements. The Baldock and District Committee agreed a brief for consultants at their meeting on 23 January 2006. A local architectural firm by the name of Widdup/Amer was appointed to carry out the feasibility study. Following the study, the Area Committee agreed to pursue the following options:

- Option 1 – Baldock Community Association in partnership with the Baldock Museum and Local History Society be invited to prepare a business case for the running of the Town Hall, in full or part, with officer and, if necessary, financial support towards its preparation to determine the viability of a two centre community facility. The Baldock Town Hall Independent Stakeholder Group is

currently developing a business case for the use of the building as a theatre and art centre.

- Option 2 – That market testing is carried out to determine what commercial ventures may be available and the extent if any full commercial viability exists for either full commercial or mixed commercial/community use. No interest was found following market testing.

3.4 Following a fire risk assessment in December 2007 defects were identified that classed the building as a health & safety risk under the Regulatory reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, this required the building to be closed for community use. Because of the nature of use and through some remedial measures the building remained open for use by the Baldock Museum Society. All other groups that used the facility have been found alternative venues for their activities.

4.0 CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 Currently there is insufficient budget to carry out the necessary remedial works to allow the building to be put back into full use. Subject to cabinet approval for the necessary budget, the committee is asked to consider the following options to bring the building back into community use:

- Essential compliance works to enable safe use of building and bring the building back into use to the previous level of activity is £29K. The majority of work is to make the facility safe under the Regulatory reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, of which the major item is the installation of a fire alarm and emergency lighting system.
- To allow a proposal by the Baldock Town Hall Independent Stakeholder Group to pilot activities from the hall later in the year as part of the development of their business case to take possession of the building and fund its major refurbishment. To bring the building into temporary use to facilitate the Group's plans would require an additional budget of £16K. This would involve removing non load bearing walls in the former area office to provide more open reception areas for the proposed temporary use and make good walls and decoration as necessary.
- Other works to support more active use of the building, estimated at £5K, this would include a general overhaul of the ground and first floor kitchens and redecoration.

4.2 The total cost of works could therefore range from £29K to £50K. Repair and maintenance budgets allocated to the Hall for 2008/09 total £7K. Most of the above works would classify as capital expenditure.

5.0 THE NEXT STEPS IN THE PROJECT

5.0 The Stakeholder Group requires more time to develop their proposal and the continued use of the building is judged critical to the development of their business case and further interest as a community facility. Thus it is suggested that works are carried out that not only bring it in to use but also provide improvements/decoration that will attract other users.

- 5.1 To justify the above level of investment up to two years use would be applicable and may allow the Stakeholder Group to work up a robust financial bid to take over the premises, otherwise alternative use of the building/site may come into play.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Continuing use of the building by the various community groups requires formal legal agreements to manage their use.
- 6.2 Implications regarding any restrictive covenants on the land and building will be addressed as part of any alternative options should community cease.
- 6.3 It is further noted that a planning application would be required if there were to be a change of use for the building and/or alterations to the external façade of the building, given that it lies within the Baldock Conservation Area and is on the District Council's adopted register of Important Local Buildings.

7.0 FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 As stated in the main body of the report the total cost of works could range from £29K to £50K, as follows:

Option	Estimated Cost
1. Essential compliance works	£29k
2. Additional community use	£16K
3. Redecoration	£5K

Repair and maintenance budgets allocated to the Hall for 2008/09 total £7K. Most of the above works would classify as capital expenditure and requires Cabinet approval.

- 7.2 The future use of Baldock Town Hall is identified as a risk on the Council's risk register.

8.0 HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None other than officer time involved in project managing the next steps in the project as outlined in Section 5 of this report.

9.0 CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 9.1 None.

10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 That the Baldock & District Area Committee notes the content of this report and agrees the level of investment it wishes carried out to the building. That once determined, it requests that Cabinet considers capital approval for the work to commence as soon as practicable.

- 10.2 That the Baldock & District Area Committee agree that the Baldock Town Hall Independent Stakeholder Group is allowed shared use of the building to further develop their business case.

11.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 To allow continuing community use and to meet the aims of the adopted Baldock Town Centre Strategy, and in doing so contribute towards achieving the Council's strategic objectives.

12.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 12.1 That the building remains unused other than by the Baldock Museum Society until a decision is made on the viability for full community use.

13.0 APPENDICES

- 13.1 None.

14.0 CONTACT OFFICERS

- 14.1 Jim Turner - Property Manager, Financial Services, ext. 4540
14.3 Barrie Jones, Head of Financial Services, ext. 4243

15.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 15.1 Baldock Town Centre Strategy Final Version (adopted 19 Jan 2006).