

Subject: The Winter Gardens Progress Update

Report to: Executive Leadership Team – Monday 5th November 2018
Policy and Resources Committee – Tuesday 27th November 2018

Report by: Kate Watts, Strategic Director

SUBJECT MATTER & RECOMMENDATIONS

This report updates Members of the progress made in relation to work that has been on-going to repair, renovate and bring the Winter Gardens back into use.

As part of this paper it is recommended that Members are asked to resolve to the commencement of a procurement process with the aim of identifying a future commercial operator for the Winter Gardens (subject to sourcing the necessary funding) which would provide a sustainable end use for the building and support any future potential funding opportunities.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Winter Gardens is a grade II* listed building, a very rare surviving example of a seaside glass house. The building is of national significance and this importance is reflected in the grade II* listing.
- 1.2 The heritage asset is at risk for a number of reasons both tangible and intangible. The building appears on Historic England's Buildings at Risk Register. It suffers from a range of decay mechanisms affecting the metal frame and the timber fenestration holding the glazing in place.
- 1.3 In December 2017 a major batch funding application was submitted to the Heritage Lottery Foundation (HLF) for funding to repair and bring the Winter Gardens back into use. The funding request for was approximately £11.5 million. This was a significant piece of work with detailed reports ranging from a business case, activity plans to detailed financial information being submitted.
- 1.4 The HLF visited the Winter Gardens in February 2018 to further assess the application, with officers receiving positive feedback of how the application was presented to the HLF during this visit.
- 1.5 Unfortunately in May 2018 the Council was notified that the application had not been successful. In addition to this, further funding of such size was put on hold by the HLF, with the HLF likely to announce in early 2019 what a new and updated funding programme will look like.

- 1.6 As a result of this funding not being awarded, senior officers of the Council met with the HLF in Cambridge to discuss the reasons for this and to identify potential next steps. This was a positive meeting and clearly identified the need for the Council to better identify a sustainable end use of the building that would justify the on-going costs of repair and maintenance of the building. This, in real terms, means it will be necessary for the Council to consider who will occupy the premises going forward (and on what basis) to be able to put in another bid.
- 1.7 Further to section 1.6 above, the HLF also asked us to note that they still had a funding scheme, capped at £5 million, to help support the cost of any building renovation and repair subject to suitable end use with any future operator being clearly identified. This funding may continue to be available during 2019.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report provides Members with an update of the work that has happened in trying to identify a potential investor and/or operator for this building since the feedback meeting in Cambridge.
- 2.2 Firstly, the Council has done some preliminary market engagement with a number of commercial operators to consider the appetite of the market for a project of this nature and the viability of being able to get to a point where the Council is able to resubmit a funding application for the Heritage Enterprise Fund in August 2018. In order to do that, a commercial operator would need to work in partnership to both support the development of the application and to ensure the building could be run, managed and maintained in the long term. Unfortunately due to the timescales involved the Council was unable to submit such a bid in August 2018.
- 2.3 As part of the market engagement, officers also held two open days to meet with potential commercial operators where the heritage of the Winter Gardens was explained and the operator's interest in the building further explored. These days provided the Council with much feedback about the building, and specifically have identified some commercial appetite.
- 2.4 In addition, the council has undertaken significant proactive communications work, on both regional and national levels, to raise awareness of the search for an investor and the exciting opportunity the Winter Gardens represents. In June, the council worked with BBC One to put together a positive film about the Winter Gardens which aired on the One Show in October and referenced the appeal for an investor.
- 2.5 The council subsequently collaborated with the Victorian Society in September and the Press Association in October to secure positive coverage for the Winter Gardens across various regional and national media organisations. Media which have featured the Winter Gardens include the Daily Telegraph, Daily Mail, BBC Look East, BBC News Online, ITV Anglia, ITV News Online, EDP/Mercury, BBC Radio Norfolk and even the likes of AOL News, Heart FM, the Yorkshire Post and the Isle of Wight

County Press.

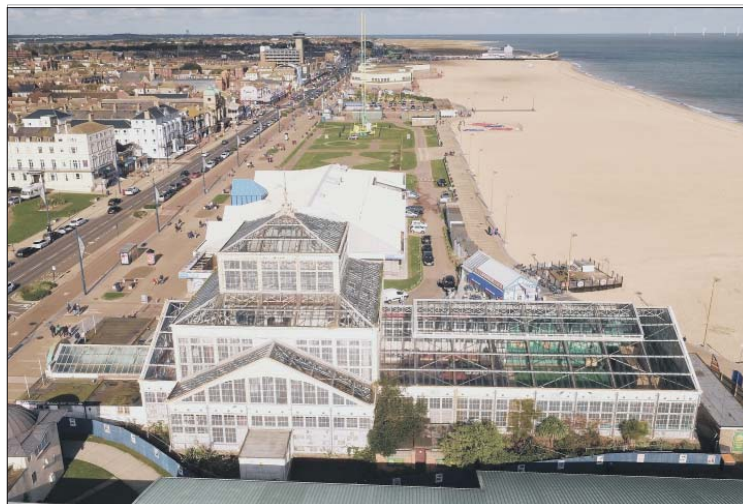
3. NEXT STEPS

- 3.1 Whilst it is still unknown what the future HLF major funding opportunity will be until early next year, it is essential that the commercial interest received so far is now more formally opened up and assessed so that a bid can be put together in good time and we overcome the issues that led to the Council's failures in the last HLF funding round.
- 3.2 It is important to note that there will be a number of legal issues to consider as we scope the opportunity that will be offered to, and in selecting, a commercial party to work with the Council in such a project, for example, to ensure that the Council does not grant unlawful state aid and that it is able to demonstrate that it has achieved best value, legal advice has therefore been sought from nplaw (See attached briefing note, appendix 1) which essentially advises that a competitive process is undertaken to ensure transparency and fairness to any interested parties.
- 3.3 It is in the Council's interest to attract the widest range of operators to tender for the opportunity to operate out of the Winter Gardens. As such, the procurement process, the evaluation criteria and the necessary documentation will be designed to allow the Council the flexibility to choose the best solution.
- 3.4 It would be made clear from the outset of this procurement that any formal arrangement would be conditional – it would be subject to the appropriate funding being in place.
- 3.5 The project plan for this next stage of the project is attached at appendix 2, but essentially we would plan to start the procurement process on the 3rd December 2018 and have it concluded by the end of March 2019, with the Winter Gardens Members Working Group being updated regularly with the progress of this work, and with this Committee receiving a formal update once the procurement has been completed.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 This report updates Members of the progress made in relation to work that has been on-going to repair, renovate and bring the Winter Gardens back into use.
- 4.2 As part of this paper it is recommended that Members are asked to resolve to the commencement of a procurement process with the aim of identifying a future commercial operator for the Winter Gardens (subject to sourcing the necessary funding) which would provide a sustainable end use for the building and support any future potential funding opportunities.

Area for consideration	Comment
Monitoring Officer Consultation:	N/A
Section 151 Officer Consultation:	N/A
Existing Council Policies:	The Plan
Financial Implications:	N/A
Legal Implications (including human rights):	N/A
Risk Implications:	Risks will be managed as part of project management of this work
Equality Issues/EQIA assessment:	Equality will be considered as part of project management of this work
Crime & Disorder:	N/A
Every Child Matters:	N/A



Seaside town seeks investor to save its Victorian glass winter gardens

A COASTAL council is seeking an investor and operator to run the UK's last surviving seaside Victorian cast iron and glass winter gardens as a tourist attraction.

The Grade II*-listed Winter Gardens in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, was listed as one of the UK's 10 most endangered buildings in 2018 by the Victorian Society, and it has been closed since 2008.

It was built in Torquay, Devon, between 1878 and 1881 then dismantled in sections and transported by barge to Norfolk in 1904. The structure was re-erected by Wellington Pier in the resort's Golden Mile and not a single pane of glass was broken in the removal, it is said. Its pyramidal roof stands



LISTED BUILDING: An aerial view of the Winter Gardens in Great Yarmouth, top, and, above, its distinctive roof.

PICTURES: PA

83ft high above the west end. Originally used to house plant life, the structure has also served as a roller skating rink, concert hall, children's amusement venue

and even a German beer garden over the years.

Great Yarmouth Borough Council is seeking an investor or an operator, or even both to

restore the Winter Gardens as a temperate plant house or for another suitable use.

The Heritage Lottery Fund has recognised the Winter Gardens as an iconic building at risk and has indicated that funds would be available for repairs with a suitable operator on board.

Graham Plant and Trevor Wainwright, the council's political group leaders, said: "The Winter Gardens represents an exciting and rare opportunity to get involved in breathing new life into a rare-surviving historic icon of the British seaside, and we would love to hear from representatives of any organisations interested in visiting and investing in the building and discussing the possibilities."



Golden opportunity

England's last surviving Victorian winter garden could be brought back to life after a campaign was launched to revive the crumbling tourist attraction. The Grade-II listed seaside attraction in Great Yarmouth has dominated the Norfolk town's Golden Mile since 1904 but was closed in 2008 after falling into disrepair. Now Great Yarmouth Borough Council is seeking an investor or operator to regenerate the building and breathe life into the eroding glasshouse. Listed as one of the top 10 endangered Victorian and Edwardian buildings by the Victorian Society, the cast iron and glass structure was built in Torquay and transported to Norfolk by barge, reportedly without a single pane of glass breaking.

