

Subject: The Winter Gardens

Report to: Scrutiny Committee – 25 February 2016

Report by: Principal Conservation Officer

SUBJECT MATTER/RECOMMENDATIONS

Great Yarmouth Winter Gardens

Introduction

The Winter Gardens is a grade II* listed building, on Great Yarmouth's seafront and set within the Seafront Conservation Area. It is a landmark building and one which can be justifiably described as iconic.

The building has been vacant and deteriorating for a number of years and before that was under maintained and tied up in a lease agreement with the organisation Family Amusements, that lease has now ended by negotiation and the council have full control.

There has been spasmodic repairs undertaken by the Council over the last 25 years these have been reactive in nature, rather than part of a managed approach.

The Winter Gardens is a dangerous structure and appears on Historic England's Buildings at Risk Register

After the St Georges project was completed the Winter Gardens was made the priority for repair and reuse, as the last significant "building at risk" in the borough and especially as it is in the Councils ownership. The building and its condition is a concern of national heritage agencies including the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Condition

The last survey and cost report in 2014, undertaken by the Morton Partnership, who are recognised as the nation's leading experts on cast iron structures, downgraded the amount of repair required. Although a substantial amount of repair is needed to the metal frame, the immediate danger is the deteriorating timber window frames which hold the glass in place.

At the time the estimated cost of repair was between £2.5 and £3 million.

However it is likely that this cost has risen due to the continuing deterioration of the building.

In 2013 Historic England were asked about demolition, their advice was that the danger (the glass) should be removed, and that demolition of a grade II* listed building was not an option as the building is not beyond repair.

They also suggested that the cost of demolition, estimated at £800,000 should be used for repair or as match funding for a HLF bid.

Sustainable Reuse

In 2014 officers met with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to discuss potential funding, the HLF indicated that this was a project that could meet their criteria for funding and provided sound pre-application advice. This advice was extremely helpful and highlighted the need for a viable and sustainable end use.

It is extremely unlikely that any funding body will support such a project without a robust and convincing end use.

In 2013 a consultant undertook some work and produced a report considering reuse of the building, this focused on a horticultural/botanical reuse. The report indicated that horticultural/botanical reuse was an option but needed more detailed research and development to prove viability.

Business Planning

In order to make a serious application for funding and to progress the project business planning is required. This fundamental work will present the business case for reuse options and reduce the risk of investment by funders and the Borough Council.

Prompted by a visit to Great Yarmouth in 2012 by the Prince of Wales, a discussion was had with the Princes Regeneration Trust about assisting the Winter Gardens project. The Princes Regeneration Trust offered to help move the project forward by acting as a "critical friend", the Royal Horticultural Society also visited the building and offered design and technical advice.

Unfortunately the amount of time the Princes Regeneration Trust could invest into the project was limited, and although we received excellent support, advice and mentoring it did not lead to a robust business plan. Their assistance did however provide officers with the important ground work needed to move forward with business planning and options appraisals.

Current Position

The Borough Council is therefore in a situation where funding could potentially be secured for repair and reuse. However there is a need for thorough business planning, and following further advice from the HLF, the need for sound governance for the future operating and managing of the building.

We have the support and good will of people at many levels.

A concept for reuse has been developed. This concept will provide an alternative year round offer on the seafront one which is aspirational, educational and inspirational, and if handled properly has the potential to be a regional attraction, perhaps even a national attraction, with significant tourism and regeneration benefits.

The Winter Gardens has been highlighted as a key priority for the council within the corporate plan. The Conservation team will therefore be developing a work programme to deliver this drawing upon support from other parts of the council as necessary.

Program

An application for a HLF, Heritage Grant will be made to meet the application deadline of the 6th of June 2016.

This is a two stage application process with a decision made in September 2016. If the first stage is successful it is also possible that “development study” funding is made available. This funding will be used to develop the application and to fund important elements such as the business plan, conservation plan and management plan.

With a successful stage two application, work would start on the building in 2017.

Funding will also be sought from other external agencies including Historic England. As the property owner, the borough council will also be expected to make a financial investment into the project, although at this stage the level of funding required is unclear.

Darren Barker
Principal Conservation Officer

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Details above

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

EXECUTIVE BOARD OR DIRECTOR CONSULTATION:

Does this report raise any legal, financial, sustainability, equality, crime and disorder or human rights issues and, if so, have they been considered?	Issues	
	Legal	Yes
	Financial	Yes
	Risk	Yes
	Sustainability	Yes
	Equality	No
	Crime and Disorder	No
	Human Rights	No
	Every Child Matters	No