

CABINET

11 June 2003

BAPSY BEQUEST – CONCLUSIONS OF FEASIBILITY STUDY

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

Contact Officer: Steve Tilbury Tel No: 01962 848292

RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB 380, 29th May 2002 Bapsy Bequest - Project Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The report summarises the findings of the recently completed feasibility study into the use of the bequest to the Council by Bapsy, Marchioness of Winchester. It concludes that the Council cannot proceed with the project envisaged within the amount of the bequest. It must therefore choose between five options as to how to proceed. In view of the issues these raise it is suggested that further consultation is necessary before a final decision is made.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That the Cabinet note the five options available in relation to the use of the bequest.
- 2 That the Community, Arts and Social Performance Improvement Committee be invited to consider the implications of these options in detail.
- 3 That a consultation event be organised for all Council Members and representatives of key community organisations to consider the implications of these options.
- 4 That the Cabinet receive in due course a further report containing specific recommendations from the Community, Arts and Social Performance Improvement Committee on the issues raised in the terms of reference set out in paragraph 3.4 of the report.
- 5 That further work be commissioned to examine the options and implications for re-ordering existing ground floor accommodation from within the approved budget.
- 6 That the Cabinet approve the carrying forward into the Community Services revenue budget for 2003/04 the £10,000 remaining from the funds allocated to the feasibility study in order to pay for this further work.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Members of Cabinet will be familiar with the nature of the bequest made by Bapsy, Marchioness of Winchester. A summary of the background can be found in previous committee reports. Following public consultation and consideration of various possible uses for the bequest Cabinet agreed to seek further information on the feasibility of providing an extension to the Guildhall on the site between the King Charles Suite and Abbey Passage. The need to improve access for disabled people to the upper levels of the Guildhall was also a major consideration.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings of the feasibility study commissioned from architects Chaplin Farrant Wiltshire which has now been received. A copy of the full report has been placed in the Members' Library.

2 Feasibility Study

- 2.1 The purpose of the study was to test the likelihood of achieving the type of project agreed by Cabinet within the £1 million or thereabouts which the bequest is now worth. It is important to note that the consultants were not asked to test every possible option, but to consider the implications of achieving a limited range of defined objectives on the site identified adjacent to Abbey Passage. A copy of the brief given is included in the consultant's report.
- 2.2 The feasibility study shows that there is no technical reason why the proposed site could not be used although access for construction is difficult. Based on the figures contained in the study it would appear that a building of two floors which goes some way to meeting the requirements set out in the brief could be constructed within the budget available. This would provide a first floor public space similar in size to the Walton Room, above a ground floor incorporating storage for the Civic Art collection and administrative accommodation. The cost would also provide for a lift to be installed to give access to the Walton Room, which is essential to meet the Council's obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act. These facilities would be a worthwhile addition to the Guildhall. The other options in the feasibility study either exceed the budget ceiling or are far too close to it to be sure that they would stay affordable.
- 2.3 However, as requested, the study draws attention to the implications of adding new facilities of any description to the Guildhall in this location. To ensure effective management internal access to the new accommodation is essential. At ground floor level the only reasonable method of doing this would be through the existing Saxon Suite. This would require extensive remodelling of the Saxon Suite and would have a serious impact on its ability to hold the functions it does now. If the Saxon Suite were lost as a room for private hire and functions it would either have to be replaced

by something similar (which could be in the new build) or its loss accepted as a consequence of the project.

- 2.4 An assessment of the cost associated with the reordering of the existing parts the building was excluded from the requirements of the feasibility study because the range of options is so large and will depend on what, if anything, the Council wants to achieve. Even the simplest works to achieve internal access to new build in the proposed location are likely to add a significant sum to the cost of the project. If larger scale reordering were to be considered, such as relocating the Tourist Information Centre, then the costs would rise still further.
- 2.5 It should also be noted that the version of the new “wing” costed as part of the feasibility study is of the simplest design and construction. The consultants note that a substantial additional cost might be incurred to provide the same floor space but to a design which is likely to have community support (and gain planning and listed building consent).
- 2.6 Taking all these factors into account it is concluded that it is unlikely that the Council could hope to deliver a complete scheme that provides the space or facilities envisaged in the brief within the amount of the bequest. Were the Council to proceed with a design competition or other procurement process it would almost certainly find that the likely costs exceed the available budget. This is not an entirely unexpected outcome but it is useful to have confirmation based on a proper cost appraisal.

3 Options Available

3.1 The Council now has five options:-

- i) Abort the project now and “return” the bequest on the basis that it is not possible to achieve in 2003 what the Marchioness of Winchester had intended when she wrote her will in 1953.
- ii) Proceed with a design competition based on the requirements in the brief to test the outcome but without reconsidering the financial position.
- iii) Reconsider the Council’s requirements and reduce them to a level where the bequest is sufficient to meet all the costs.
- iv) Provide or obtain additional funding to enable a project that meets all expectations to proceed.
- v) Consider options other than the Abbey Passage location for the use of the bequest.

3.2 Officer comments on the five options are as follows:-

Option i) It would be premature to abandon the project before all avenues have been exhausted. This should only be a last resort if it is clear that there is no workable or affordable option.

Option ii) This option, which might be described as ‘hit and hope’, would be highly risky. It is unlikely that a feasible scheme would be offered and the Council would lose credibility if it did not have the intention or the

means to proceed with any option. Cabinet is advised that this option should not be pursued.

Option iii) This option would reduce the new build element to an absolute minimum consistent with the bequest. Given the other costs that would have to be incurred to make even a minimal new build scheme accessible the value for money of such an approach would have to be considered carefully. This option could be evaluated further, but is not likely to produce a satisfactory result.

Option iv) This option would involve additional funding from the Council and/or from other funding partners to produce a scheme which could not be paid for by the bequest alone. The scale of the scheme and therefore the additional cost to the Council is not yet quantifiable but would be subject to a judgement about objectives and the priority for funding. This option could be considered further.

Option v) It may be that there is another way of constructing or providing additional facilities at the Guildhall which meet the terms of the bequest. This option could be pursued further although doing so would clearly involve further cost and delay.

3.3 As Cabinet will note the range of options is diverse and they have very different implications. It is suggested that rather than endeavour to weigh up all the issues on the basis of this report, some further opportunity be given for input from Members and from representatives of key community organisations. Although this will mean further time consumed it should help to ensure that all possibilities are considered and a consensus generated.

3.4 It is therefore suggested that the Cabinet agree to further consultation on the basis of the options outlined above. The first step would be a consultation meeting with all Members, together with representatives of key community organisations (eg Southampton University (School of Art), the City of Winchester Trust, the Chamber of Commerce). At this meeting, the consultant's report and the options would be presented for discussion and comment. Following this, and taking account of comments made, it is suggested that the Community, Arts and Social Performance Improvement Committee be asked to consider the options and make appropriate recommendations to the Cabinet. The Community, Arts and Social Performance Committee would be charged with:

- a) exploring in full the relative merits and disadvantages of each option outlined in paragraph 3.2 above, with particular attention to the operation of the Guildhall and the Council's own financial position;
- b) considering additional sources of funding which might be available to the project directly or indirectly (for example, were other Guildhall facilities to be relocated as part of the project);
- c) considering the comments arising from the consultation meeting referred to in paragraph 3.4 above in order to obtain a perspective on the implications for the town and the District of each of the options, and
- d) reporting back to the Cabinet their comments and those of the key community organisations, with a recommendation for a preferred option for the Bapsy bequest.

- 3.5 To inform these discussions more fully, it would also be worthwhile investigating some of the implications and costs of reordering key parts of the ground floor accommodation. This would give a clearer picture of the likely total cost of a comprehensive scheme. It is therefore proposed to commission a short study of the options for the Guildhall assuming, for the time being, that the Saxon Suite does have to provide access to a new Bapsy Wing. The original budget for feasibility work was £25,000, which was funded from managed savings carried forward from the Community Services revenue budget for 2001/02 (report CAS 1, 17 June 2002 refers). Of this, only £15,000 has been spent so far, and it is therefore suggested that the Cabinet approve the carrying forward of the remaining £10,000 into 2003/04 to fund this further study.
- 3.6 The City Secretary and Solicitor advises that the bequest was to provide a public hall in conjunction with the Guildhall, to be known as the Bapsy Marchioness of Winchester Memorial Hall. It was to be used for educational/recreational uses in the nature of a civic community centre. The final form of the proposed scheme, and the element that is funded by the bequest, will have to be considered against these objects.
- 3.7 Officers believe that by giving further consideration to the five options, a viable and desirable way forward will be established for the use of the bequest. However, it is acknowledged that there is one further possible option. This is to request the Charity Commission to consider the possibility of altering the terms of the bequest if it can be demonstrated that the original terms cannot be complied with. However, because of the length of time this might take and the fact that the Charity Commissioners look to keep proposals as close as possible to the original bequest terms, it is both necessary and desirable to give proper prior consideration to the other five options.

4 Conclusion

The feasibility study now completed has been very helpful in answering some of the questions about the options open (and not open) to the Council. There is no reasonable prospect of a new build project which achieves the objectives set in the brief on the preferred location without increasing the funding available. A decision has to be taken on which way to take the project in the light of this information. The process outlined in the report is designed to help to ensure that there is widespread debate about the merits of the options before any firm conclusions are reached. Some further information regarding costs for the layout of the ground floor is certain to be needed in making a final decision, and this should be commenced immediately.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

5 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 5.1 The project is in accordance with one of the Council's four principle aims:

"To encourage more varied cultural and sporting activities for all across the district."

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 6.1 The direct resource implications of the report are limited to further expenditure of up to £10,000 from the approved budget for feasibility work.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

'Bapsy' Project Guildhall Winchester Feasibility Study 2003 – held on file by Director of Community Services.

APPENDICES:

None