

OTFORD PALACE TOWER

Council – 21 July 2015

Report of Chief Officer Corporate Support

Status: For Decision

Also considered by: Cabinet – 16 July 2015

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This report outlines the immediate requirement to maintain the structural stability of the Otford Palace Tower and requests that the works are authorised with the appropriate budget totalling £130,699 to be allocated from the General Fund Reserve.

As a separate piece of work, options regarding the future use of the building, including funding available to support any proposal, are being looked at and will be reported back to Members at a future date.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Searles

Contact Officer Emma Vincent Ext. 7304

Recommendation to Cabinet:

To recommend to Council the allocation of £130,699 from the General Fund Reserve for the completion of essential stabilisation works at the Otford Palace Tower.

Recommendation to Council:

That Council approve the allocation of £130,699 from the General Fund Reserve for the completion of essential stabilisation works at the Otford Palace Tower.

Reason for recommendation: Under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 Sevenoaks District Council have a responsibility to ensure any scheduled monuments in its ownership are structurally maintained.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Otford Palace Tower is located by the Otford Pond and St Bartholomew's Church in Otford. A plan of the site and the surrounding area is included at appendix a. It consists of the remains of a tower, a gatehouse and other ruins at a site on Bubblestone Road. The actual date of its build is not confirmed but it has been suggested that it could date back to the Saxon era, however it was rebuilt in 1515 and intended for the use of the Archbishops of Canterbury. King Henry VIII

seized it for himself in 1537 and used it to house his servants whilst he used Knole House as accommodation when he visited Sevenoaks.

- 2 The District Council has been in possession of the Otford Palace Tower since 5 June 1935 (then the Sevenoaks Rural District Council). The tower has been listed as a scheduled monument since 5 December 1928.
- 3 This monument is scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as it appears to the Secretary of State to be of national importance.
- 4 Only some 150 bishops' palaces have been identified and documentary sources confirm that they were widely dispersed throughout England. All positively identified examples are considered to be nationally important.
- 5 The structure had been maintained since acquisition including removal of vegetation and structural repairs to the gatehouse. The flat roof was installed on the tower in the late 1970s. More recently, guttering works commenced in 2003 at the tower and tree removal/fence replacement commenced in 2008 at the Bubblestone Road site. Due to financial constraints, works such as repairing the pigeon netting have not been completed, and the exercise of gaining consent for works from English Heritage (now needing to be obtained from Historic England) under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 means maintenance has been delayed. During this time, the structure has deteriorated further.

Work carried out in 2014/15

- 6 In recognition of this deterioration, in January 2015 a condition survey was conducted by Thomas Ford and Partners (Chartered Architects and Surveyors) to ascertain the condition of the building structure. A report has been produced by them outlining essential works that should be completed to improve the integrity of the structure, such as fixing the flat roof which has fallen in on one corner, allowing rain water and pigeons into the building, causing further damage. This report is included for information at appendix b. Thomas Ford and Partners have subsequently completed a tender process on behalf of the Council and have gained consent from Historic England for the necessary works. Four tenders have been returned ranging from £116,667 to £148,088. Thomas Ford and Partners have evaluated the responses to the tender and advise that the bid from Pierra Restoration Ltd at £116,667 is an effective option offering the greatest value for money. Advice from the company suggests that works will take 4-8 weeks to complete.
- 7 Alternative sources of funding have been investigated but none are available to assist the currently required works to be carried out.
- 8 The option of delaying the works further is not considered appropriate as the likelihood is the structure will deteriorate further.

Planning feedback on Enabling Development

- 9 Advice from the Development Management team has been sought relating to the possibility of enabling development to offset the current and ongoing costs of works relating to the areas highlighted on the plan in appendix a.
- 10 This advice states that there are a number of designations/considerations that apply to this site. These are:
- Scheduled Ancient Monument
 - Allocated Open Space
 - Conservation Area
 - Setting of listed buildings
- 11 Taking the first of these constraints, development within the site of a Scheduled Ancient Monument would require planning permission, administered by the District Council as the Local Planning Authority and Scheduled Ancient Monument consent which is managed and determined by Historic England. Initial feedback has been sought from Historic England and it is highly unlikely that a development proposal would be supported by them.
- 12 The other constraints present their own challenges. Even if the Historic England concerns could be overcome, policies from a National through to a Local level are not supportive of development on this site.

Possible future options

- 13 It is acknowledged that a separate and more detailed piece of work is required to look at a sustainable future use for the building. This will be undertaken and reported back to Members as appropriate.
- 14 As part of this work, the Communities and Business team are researching possible sources of future funding for the tower. It is clear however that any monies that may be achievable are based on the future preservation of the structure once this initial maintenance is complete.
- 15 Initial legal advice has been sought regarding the future transfer of the site once these stabilisation works have been completed. This initial advice suggests it may be possible to transfer the ownership of the site as part of any future use, however further clarification is to be sought as part of the wider work in investigating future options for the site.
- 16 The essential works outlined in this report are therefore a minimum requirement and pre-requisite to any future use.

Key Implications

Financial

- 7 The tender process indicated Pierra Restoration Ltd as the preferred applicant at £116,667 to complete the works. A further £14,032 is required for allocation of bat liaison, architects, Principal Designer and Archaeologist. A total sum of £130,699 is therefore requested for the stabilisation works at the Otford Palace

Tower. These works are those referenced in sections 6.1 and 6.3 of the report at Appendix B and exclude the items in sections 6.2 and 6.4.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

- 8 Under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, Sevenoaks District Council has a responsibility to continue maintaining any scheduled monuments in their possession.

Equality Assessment

- 9 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Community Impact and Outcomes

- 10 The community have shown a high level of interest in the Otford Palace Tower for a number of years. It is seen as a tourist attraction that potentially brings trade to the area. It is also of historic interest due to it being used by Henry VIII, therefore linking Otford to Knole House and Hever Castle. Members of the Otford Historical Society along with local Ward members of the District Council have been liaising with the Council throughout this process.

Conclusions

- 11 For the works to be completed a sum of £130,699 is required. This will stabilise the fabric of the Otford Palace Tower. Future use of the building and any subsequent works required will be looked at separately with Members and in conjunction with the community.

Background Papers: None

Jim Carrington-West
Chief Officer for Corporate Support