

ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE, OTFORD

Finance Advisory Committee - 4 September 2018

Report of	Chief Officer, Environmental and Operational Services
Status	For recommendation to Cabinet
Also considered by	Cabinet - 13 September 2018
Key Decision	No

Executive Summary: This report provides the background to the Archbishop's Palace in Otford and recommends the granting of a lease to the Archbishop's Palace Conservation Trust to pursue their ambition to convert, of what remains of, the North West corner tower and part of the northern gatehouse into a self-sustaining centre for the dissemination of knowledge about the heritage of this building and area.

This report supports the Key Aim of a sustainable economy.

Portfolio Holder	Cllr. John Scholey
Contact Officer(s)	Alex Dawson, Ext. 7368 Emma Burdett, Ext. 7304

Recommendation to Advisory Committee:

That it be recommended to Cabinet that a 99 year lease, at one peppercorn, per annum, if demanded, be granted to the Archbishop's Palace Conservation Trust to allow the Trust to develop their objectives with a five year review dated inserted into the lease to allow progress to be considered by both parties and such other terms as agreed.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

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Reason for recommendation: To allow the Archbishop's Palace Conservation Trust to develop their mission and objectives for the Palace to assemble the talent, finances and management skills to build and manage a self-sustaining centre for this heritage asset.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The historic environment of the Palace building and its grounds are well documented and constitute a common heritage dating back to Offa, King of Mercia and for the next 600 years the manor house was built and enlarged by 52 subsequent Archbishop's.
- 2 In 1537 Henry VIII became its owner and spent lavishly on it. After Henry's death the palace fell gradually into disrepair until, by the 17th Century it was largely a ruin.
- 3 Now all that remains is part of the North Range - the North West Tower, part of the Northern gatehouse and connecting wall, which was turned into a row of three small cottages.
- 4 There are further remains on private land, and a section of the boundary wall can be seen, where, was previously the site of the Palace moat.
- 5 In November 2016, the Council appointed Thomas Ford and Partners (Chartered Architects and Surveyors) to carry out an options appraisal to define long term sustainable solutions for this scheduled monument, which will be compatible with preservation and enhancement of the heritage value, will enhance the Palace as a tourist destination and could be implemented in phases or as discrete projects.
- 6 This appraisal also comprised of an extensive Consultation between February and March 2017.
- 7 Responses were received from 36 local residents and substantial proposals were received from the Archbishop's Conservation Trust, the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership and the Parish Council.
- 8 Following two extensive programmes of repair undertaken in the last two years, partly funded by a Historic England Grant, the condition of the tower is now much improved with all significant urgent repair issues tackled, including the repair of the roof, rebuilding of internal brickwork and masonry and the almost complete repointing of the tower.
- 9 The final part of the work was to make the tower pigeon proof which will dramatically reduce the maintenance burden.
- 10 The recently completed work has stabilised the monument for the short to medium term, say 5-10 years, allowing a longer term strategy to be identified, organised and funded.

Option Appraisal

- 11 The Consultant considered 14 options, covering a 'do nothing' option, to a Visitor Centre with or without a Parish Office, a small Community Centre, various residential options and transfer of ownership from the Council.

- 12 Of the 14 options only three were considered, by the Consultant, to be viable. These were:
- 1 Transferring ownership from the Council
 - 2 Convert Gatehouse to one bed residential
 - 3 Convert Tower to small two bed residential

Archbishop's Palace Conservation Trust

- 13 The Trust was founded with five trustees in 2017 and is a Charitable Incorporated organisation, Charity Registration number: 1173486. The Trust has an agreed Constitution by which it operates.
- 14 In April 2018 the Trust presented to the Council a Business Plan with a mission and objectives to:-
- 14.1 have the freedom to maintain and develop the Palace building and ground.
 - 14.2 To assemble the talents, finances and management skills to build and manage a self-sustaining Centre for the dissemination of knowledge about our Tudor and our Valley's heritage.
 - 14.3 To develop a lasting heritage landmark within the Sevenoaks region.
- 15 The Trust's specific objectives are to carry out the development of the Palace as a Visitor Centre for Otford and Darent Valley for educational, information and tourism opportunities. A key requirement of the proposed programme is that the site and building should be self-sustaining and to identify income streams that cover the cost of operation.
- 16 The Business Plan identifies potential sources of funding and involvement of the Community.

Key Implications

Financial

With support from Historic England the buildings have been brought to a stabilised condition for the next 5-10 years. If a lease is granted to the Trust, responsibility for future maintenance and improvement would pass to the Trust for the duration of the lease thus removing the Council from future maintenance liability.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

A 99 year lease for the Palace buildings in Council ownership, between the Council and the Trust, would be entered into with a review clause after five years to determine whether the progress made by the Trust is tangible and viable for the lease to be continued to enable them to achieve their objectives.

If following this review, this is not the case, the lease to be determined and responsibility revert back to the Council.

If this was necessary the Council could pursue the residential options outlined in the options appraisal report.

Equality Assessment

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.

Conclusions

By granting a lease to the Trust, it enables them the opportunity to develop and deliver their Business Plan and to secure the necessary external funding required to achieve their vision and objectives, creating a self-sustaining Centre for educational, information and tourism use and preserving this valuable heritage asset. The granting of a lease to the trust removes the Council from future maintenance liability.

If, after a review, sufficient progress cannot be made, the lease can be determined and responsibility reverts back to the Council. If this was necessary the Council could pursue the residential options outlined in the options appraisal report.

The Council maintains the freehold of the existing Palace building currently under its ownership.

Appendices

Appendix A - Feedback from Public Consultation

Appendix B - Letter from Ancient Monuments

Appendix C - Conservation Statement

Background Papers

Oxford, Archbishop's Palace
Option Appraisal - August 2017

Archbishop's Palace Conservation Trust
Business Plan - April 2018 (Some information
exempt under paragraph 3 of part 1 of Schedule
12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Richard Wilson

Chief Officer, Environmental & Operational Services

