

Report to West Oldham District Executive

Werneth Park Music Room

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Shah, Neighbourhoods

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Reason for report

To update the District Executive on discussion regarding Werneth Park Music Rooms

Recommendations

That the District Executive note the report and decide whether resources should be allocated to pursue an Architectural Heritage Fund bid with a view to undertaking a feasibility study.

1. Background

- 1.1 Last year the District Executive requested that Officers revisit our approach to Werneth Park Music Rooms and explore options for the site.
- 1.2 Werneth Park along with the Music Rooms was gifted to the Council on the 8th January 1936, by Dame Marjory Lees. The Council consequently holds the park and its associated buildings in Trust and this is registered with the Charity Commission under Registered Number 521273 (described as Werneth Park).
- 1.3 The Music Rooms are a derelict Grade II Listed Building described as the 'Conservatory in Park' on Historic England's Register under List Entry Number: 1201653, which have been closed since 2001.

2. Current position

- 2.1 Currently there are no active proposals to renovate the buildings. Consequently:-
- (i) The buildings continue to deteriorate
 - (ii) Whilst no current cost information is available it is expected to have increased. A report prepared in July 2007 refers to renovation costs estimated between £2.85m and £4.1m depending on which option was selected.
 - (iii) There remains no identified end use or business model for the property that could potentially support any application for external grant funding.
- 2.2 Due to the amount of time that has elapsed since the last feasibility study a new study would be advisable if the Council wish to review options for the property. The Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) offer Project Viability Grants for this purpose for the conservation and sustainable re-use of historic buildings.
- 2.3 The AHF Project Viability Grants (PVG) are to fund studies to look at potential use for a historic building and at its current condition, and produce a Viability Report to a standard template. This would help identify whether there is a feasible end use or whether other options for the site would be more appropriate.
- 2.4 The application for the fund must be made by a local community group who has a vested interest in the building. As there is no such current group officers made contact with the Greater Manchester Building Preservation Trust, who have visited the site and have stated they would be willing to make the application. However, a group of local people with a connection to the area will need to be identified and significantly involved.
- 2.5 The maximum funding that the AHF will approve for a successful PVG is £7,500, which would have to be match funded by an equivalent amount by the Council.

If the option to proceed is approved it is proposed that the match funding be allocated from the District Executive capital budget.

3 Risks

- 3.1 The Council has previously undertaken 2 studies for the Music Rooms: a Feasibility Study in 1996 and a conservation management plan in 2007 (instigated under SRB6). However, neither resulted in a viable outcome for the Music Rooms and the building has remained in a disused state.
- 3.2 The estimated cost to undertake any renovation work to the buildings is too high to obtain 100% external funding, and the Council would at some point need to assess if it is willing to invest a significant amount in renovating the Music Rooms.
- 3.3 The risks of proceeding with the AHF bid are that the funding, cost, officer time, and lack of identified end use may leave us in the position where there still isn't a viable outcome for the buildings.

4 Options

- 4.1 Option 1 - Allocate match funding (See separate District Executive budget report), identify a local group of people to engage with the viability study, and work with Greater Manchester Building Preservation Trust to make an Architectural Heritage Fund PVG application.
- 4.2 Option 2 – Make a recommendation to the Charitable Trust Committee to allow Estates to soft market the site to test if there are interested parties that are willing to invest in the site.
- 4.3 Option 3 – Do nothing