

CABINET

Roman Bath House & Vicarage Field, Lancaster 19 January 2010

Report of Corporate Director (Regeneration)

PURPOSE OF REPORT			
To advise cabinet on the condition of the Roman Bath House and surrounding land and to seek future funding to improve and maintain that condition.			
Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	Referral from Cabinet Member
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Date Included in Forward Plan	January 2010		
This report is public			

RECOMMENDATIONS OF COUNCILLOR THOMAS

- (1) That cabinet consider the proposals to improve the maintenance of the Roman Bath House and surrounding land in the light of emerging priorities of improving the cultural heritage of the district.
- (2) If cabinet approve proposals to improve the maintenance proposals as in recommendation (1) a general fund revenue growth bid for funding will need to be included in the current budget process for an amount of £17,700 in 2010/11 and £2,000 per annum in subsequent years.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Roman Bath House and Vicarage Field are situated to the north of Lancaster Castle and Priory Church. The land was part of the historic vicarage glebe lands and was sold to the Borough of Lancaster c.1948 by the Priory Church. The site is a Scheduled Monument no. 34987 comprising of 'Part of a Roman fort and its associated vicus (civilian settlement) and remains of a pre-Conquest monastery and a Benedictine priory on Castle Hill'.
- 1.2 Salvage excavations on the eastern part of the Mitre Yard site in 1973 revealed the remains of a hypocausted, stone-built structure of at least two structural phases. Few details could be salvaged, but a second-century and/or later date seems likely. In view of the building's character, and its proximity to the eastern defences of the early Roman forts, it has been interpreted as a military bath house, presumably associated with either the second fort of the first half of the second century AD, and/or the putative third fort of the later 2nd to 3rd century. There is a complex

sequence of buildings in this area, and it is conceivable, though it cannot be proven, that this was the bath house that is recorded on an inscription as having been rebuilt c AD 262-266 after it had collapsed through age. There were indications that the building had replaced one or more timber structures on the same site. The extant section of the 'wery wall' is a part of a bastion that formed part of the roman fort constructed c.330AD.

- 1.3 The Bath House is showing signs of some deterioration to the remaining structure as is the adjoining wery wall. The protective fencing that surrounds the Bath House is in poor condition as is the interpretive signboard which has been badly vandalised. These issues were raised initially by the Young Archaeologists Club who have been assisting with the cleaning and minor maintenance of the site.
- 1.4 The surrounding land is now in very poor condition. It is deteriorating into scrubland with very long grass, self set saplings are thriving as is Japanese knotweed whilst many mature trees need maintenance to improve the area and the amount of light that is available at the Bath House. Only minimal maintenance is now carried out consisting of 16 cuts during the annual growing season within the Bath House fenced area only.
- 1.5 As a result, English Heritage has identified the property on their Heritage at risk register. The entry in the 2009 North West heritage at risk register states that the condition is generally satisfactory but with minor localised problems. The principal vulnerability is shrub / tree growth. The trend in condition is described as declining.
- 1.6 As emerging council priorities lead towards improving the cultural heritage offer of the district, the condition of one of the main attractions can only detract from this and be counter productive.

2.0 Proposal Details

- 2.1 A number of surveys have been carried out which have identified that the following work is required (individual estimates are identified):
 - The felling of sycamore and elderberry trees together with some crown raising works to prevent overhanging and to open up views of the site; removal and treatment of Japanese knotweed; weekly mowing of Vicarage Field during the growing season (which will have a significant impact on reducing knotweed); regular mowing of adjoining Castle Hill areas to prevent the establishment of scrubland (£3500)
 - Maintenance works to the fencing surrounding the Bath House (£2,900)
 - Replace the interpretive signage (£800)
 - Consolidate the fabric of the Bath House and wery wall (£10,500)
- 2.2 The estimated cost of these works would be approximately £17,700 in 2010/11. In future years this amount should reduce to £2000 per annum for grounds maintenance (estimated at £1,700) and any minor works that would be necessary to maintain signs, fencing etc. (estimated at £300). It is anticipated that should there be a greater promotion of the area as a result of the council's emerging priorities that this would bring more people to site which would help with a degree of self policing and thereby reducing the need to maintain the different elements because of vandalism or misuse.

- 2.3 The proposals would require a reversal of the council's existing "policy" for the area which is one of limited maintenance as a result of budget reductions in previous years.

3.0 Details of Consultation

- 3.1 This report has been prepared with the assistance of those council services which have an input to the maintenance of the area. In addition the discussions have involved the council's conservation officer, the County Council's museum and archaeological staff. Initial discussion has been held with representatives of English Heritage
- 3.2 Ward councillors have been consulted and raised concerns that the proposed maintenance regime on Vicarage Field in particular would be detrimental to the wildlife amenity of the area if for example the grass was cut too frequently and to a low level. Grounds Maintenance have agreed that 16 cuts a year would be applied to specific areas only and other parts of Vicarage Fields left as wild life havens.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

- 4.1 Option 1 – That increased maintenance regimes to the Bath House and surrounding land are undertaken to ensure that the property would be of an appropriate standard to feature as one of the city's main historic attractions. This would require increased funding being made available and is a reversal of the council's previous views on the maintenance of the area. Despite increased funding for maintenance there remains a risk that because of the remote location of the site, there could still be some vandalism in the vicinity.
- 4.2 Option 2 – do nothing. This would result in the continued deterioration the site with council failing to meet the requirements that English Heritage place on the owners of monuments such as this. If the council is to improve promotion of the cultural heritage of the district, the current poor condition of one of the main attractions would detract from that and lead to public criticism. In addition there would be continued growth of species such as Japanese knotweed over areas of the site.

5.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

- 5.1 Option 1 is preferred as this would lead to the consolidation and improvement of a major historic attraction in the district.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Cabinet agreed at its meeting in November 2009 (minute no. 75) that for the purpose of forming the basis of the budget, the priorities for the revised corporate strategy for 2010-13 is to include Economic Regeneration supporting our local economy, with particular emphasis on heritage and cultural tourism for the District (City, Coast and Countryside) – to include creative industries and 'high end' employment too.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

If maintenance does not take place at the Roman Bath House and surrounding land, the historic assets would continue to be damaged by continued growth of vegetation in the area whilst the impact of lack of maintenance on the Roman Bath House structure would cause further deterioration impacting on the tourism potential of the area.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The history relating to budgets in respect of the Roman Bath House and Vicarage Field is set out in the report. No existing funding is in place to maintain these facilities other than £100 per annum for mowing within the Bath House fenced area only, yet heritage and cultural tourism is identified as a priority for the period 2010-13.

If members support option 1 the associated additional funding requirements of £17,700 in 2010/11 (£3,500 for grounds maintenance and £14,200 for general repairs and maintenance) and £2,000 per annum thereafter (£1,700 for grounds maintenance and £300 for general repairs and maintenance) will need to be treated as growth in the future years' budgets and therefore be considered further as part of the 2010/11 budget process.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

Members are advised to consider any growth proposals in context of their proposed priorities, relevant existing or emerging policy, and the Council's financial prospects. In particular, this is to ensure that value for money is considered, as well as affordability.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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