

CABINET MINUTE – 6TH OCTOBER 2015

37 STOREY - TASTING GARDEN

(Cabinet Member with Special Responsibility Councillor Hanson)

Cabinet received a report from the Chief Officer (Environment) which sought a decision on the future of the Tasting Garden.

The options, options analysis, including risk assessment and officer preferred option, were set out in the report as follows:

OPTION 1- Consider that restoration of the artwork is a priority for the Council and that in its role as a steward the Council should properly lead on it.

In order to arrive at this option Cabinet would need to consider the following-

- What actual evidence is there that this is generally what our citizens want?
- How would the restoration be funded? If the Council was to allocate resources for the Garden, in effect they would need to be redirected from another initiative or activity. Realistically, the Council does not have the resources to directly fund restoration and if so, external funds would need to be raised. We have been told that there are likely to be funds available out there. Experience tells us that obtaining external funding is a complicated and time consuming exercise and match funding may well be required.
- How would the project be resourced? As stated above just raising the funds is likely to be time consuming and complicated. Due to the need to prioritise and focus on core activities the Council does not currently have available officer time or expertise that could be allocated to this, if such a route was chosen. Therefore, in theory Cabinet would need to consider this as an area for growth. In practice budget reductions from central government mean that 'growth' is not an option that can be realistically considered, so Cabinet would have to consider redirection of resource.
- How would the restored project be maintained? The ongoing maintenance of the artwork would be intensive and would again require ongoing growth – this need is a very real difficulty given the financial outlook and the same point referred to above would apply.
- Even if external funds are available obtaining them could take a number of years, depending on the route chosen, and in any event the timescales would not fit with the review of the Storey operation, required by 2017/18. What does the Council do with the garden in the interim and how will that support the Storey business plan? What about the future? What would need to change?

OPTION 2- Consider that restoration of the artwork is a priority for the Council, but only on the firm basis that it was resource- and risk- free for the authority, and so could only take place if full responsibility could be transferred, in some way, to a third party.

There are some examples of this type of model that work well within the District (e.g. Fairfield). Typically land is leased to a community group for a specific purpose, with strict stipulations. However, the examples we have are ones where the risks are much less than this and the projects are of much lower profile.

In order to arrive at this option Cabinet would need to consider the following-

- The Council are properly stewards of the garden. How would transferring/delegating this responsibility to a third party fit with that?
- What evidence is there that the general desire of our citizens is that a valuable space is delegated to a third party to manage in the hope that funds can be raised to restore the artwork therein?

- What would happen if the third party lost interest in the project, or got into difficulties, especially bearing in mind previous experience?
- How would the long term maintenance of the project be funded and managed?
- How would this fit in with the business plan of the Storey, and the requirement for the operation to be reviewed prior to 2017/18?
- This is the most risky of all the options. Does the Council really want to agree to a project that creates so many potential risks?

Cabinet need to be aware that gaining satisfactory answers to these questions may prove impossible – there is no guarantee that this option is viable and it could tie up much Officer time pursuing it, to no avail.

OPTION 3- Consider that restoration of the artwork is a priority for the Council but on the basis that the work involved in identifying funding and then bidding for it is undertaken by a specifically constituted ‘Friends of’ group, supported by an officer. In this case the ownership and ongoing management would still rest with the Council.

In order to arrive at this option Cabinet would need to consider the following (much of which is in common with the considerations of previous options)-

- Where would the funds and resources for the long term maintenance of the project come from?
- What would happen if there was not enough interest to form a Friends Of group and if formed there was not sufficient capacity to identify and put together funding bids etc. This would be supported by an officer but the Officer would only have time to advise as opposed to doing the actual work. Were the Officer to do the actual work then it would be effectively OPTION 1.
- How would this fit in with the business plan of the Storey, and the requirement for the operation to be reviewed prior to 2017/18?

OPTION 4- Accept that ideally the artwork would be restored and would support the wider aims of the Storey and provide an attraction for our citizens but that the reality is that the policy and financial context of the Council mean that this is an unrealistic option. Therefore the most pragmatic option is to make the very best of the gardens, within the resources we have, and in a way that goes to meeting the needs of our citizens and the business plan for the Storey. The details to be determined through the master planning process that Cabinet have already agreed.

In order to arrive at this option Cabinet would need to consider the following-

- What is the current and future financial position of the Council and what are the competing priorities?
- This option may be seen by some as not supporting wider aims and objectives for arts and culture in the District. However, this needs to be balanced by the fact that the Council already provides considerable ongoing support to arts and culture within the District.
- The view expressed by many citizens is that what really matters is that the gardens are brought back into use. Done properly this option could support the wider plans for the Storey and could (subject to testing through the masterplan process) reasonably include use of the garden to promote arts and culture.
- There is already an active ‘Friends of’ group who the Council could continue to work with to improve the gardens in the short term and deliver aspects of the masterplan once agreed.
- This option is based around the current financial realities facing the Council so would be designed to be delivered within existing resources, and could fit with the future review of the wider Storey operation.
- As this option would be accompanied by a Masterplan it provides the opportunity

for the Council and Friends Of Group to bid for funds as they become available. Working in this way is far less intensive and resource draining as the options that are focussed on the main aim of restoring the Tasting Garden.

Whatever option is chosen it is expected further more detailed reports will be brought back to Cabinet.

Councillor Hanson proposed, seconded by Councillor Leytham:-

“That the recommendations, as set out in the report, be approved with Option 4 being the preferred option.”

Councillors then voted:-

Resolved unanimously:

- (1) That ideally the artwork would be restored and would support the wider aims of the Storey and provide an attraction for our citizens but that the reality is that the policy and financial context of the Council mean that this is an unrealistic option. Therefore the most pragmatic option is to make the very best of the gardens, within the resources we have, and in a way that goes to meeting the needs of our citizens and the business plan for the Storey. The details to be determined through the master planning process that Cabinet have already agreed.
- (2) That further reports on how the decision will be delivered be brought back to Cabinet as required.

Officer responsible for effecting the decision:

Chief Officer (Environment)

Reasons for making the decision:

The financial position of the Council is very bleak. The decision to pursue option 4 is based around current financial constraints and can be delivered within existing resources.