
Subject: REFURBISHMENT AND EXTERNAL REDECORATION OF THE TIMEBALL TOWER, DEAL

Meeting and Date: Cabinet – 7 December 2020

Report of: Roger Walton, Strategic Director (Operations and Commercial)

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Oliver Richardson, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Corporate Property

Decision Type: Non-Key

Classification: Unrestricted

Purpose of the report: To seek authority to refurbish the Timeball mechanism and redecorate the Timeball Tower externally.

Recommendation: To confirm agreement for the works required at the Timeball Tower to proceed using the £80,000 allocation in the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

To authorise the Strategic Director (Operations and Commercial), in consultation with Portfolio Holder for Environment and Corporate Property, to take all necessary actions, including but not limited to the awarding of contracts, to deliver the works that are the subject of this report.

1. Summary

- 1.1 The provision of £80,000 identified in the current Medium Term Financial Plan will be used to refurbish the Timeball mechanism. The tower will also be redecorated externally.
- 1.2 The Timeball mechanism is not currently operating as it is no longer safe to do so (due to corrosion). Draw down of funds is requested now so that DDC can have the Timeball and its mechanism removed in advance of the harshest winter weather to help prevent further deterioration.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The historic and listed Deal Timeball Tower, owned by Dover District Council, is one of only a handful worldwide with a functioning Timeball mechanism. The building is run successfully as an award-winning museum.
- 2.2 The Timeball Tower was constructed in 1820 as a semaphore tower with a semaphore mast at the top, used to signal to ships at anchor in the Downs and ships passing through the English Channel. It was also used by the coastguard to pass information along the coast for the purposes of suppressing smuggling. In 1855 the Timeball mechanism was added by the Astronomer Royal, George Airy. The Timeball, which is similar to the Greenwich time ball was designed to fall at 1 pm precisely, triggered by an electronic signal transmitted along the telegraph lines of the South Eastern Railway Company.

- 2.3 Although owned by Dover District Council the Timeball Tower is run as a museum and visitor attraction by the Deal Museum Trust and its local volunteers. Fascinating exhibits about the history of the tower and its use for navigation aid, the fight against smuggling, signalling and the mechanics of the Timeball together with a warm welcome led to the award of a Tripadvisor Certificate of Excellence in 2019.
- 2.4 Due to its coastal location without regular maintenance both the Timeball mechanism and the exterior of the tower deteriorate rapidly. The condition of the mast which supports the Timeball mechanism, the mechanism itself and the exterior of the tower warrants immediate intervention as further delay will see the speed of deterioration and resulting damage accelerate. The rendered exterior has cracked leading to water ingress and the Timeball mast has corroded to the extent that engineers working for the Trust advised this summer that it was no longer safe to operate the Timeball. Further delay will see the speed of deterioration and resulting damage accelerating with the inevitable result of not only significantly increased future repair costs but also avoidable damage to a grade II listed building. See photos in Appendix A.
- 2.5 It makes sense financially to address both elements in the same project because the arrangement means scaffolding is required just once. Similarly, the cost of tendering the work, site set up costs and other overheads can be shared.
- 2.6 Deal Museum Trust have stated publicly and have posted on its web site that “The mast replacement will be a significant cost which we will share with DDC” and have asked supporters to contribute. To date the Trust have raised approximately £5k, which will go toward funding the Timeball works.
- 2.7 Assuming that Cabinet gives authority to proceed, work to remove the Timeball mechanism and mast will commence immediately in order to remove any risk of structural failure and prevent further corrosion over winter. The main works will then be tendered with delivery of the project due in Spring 2021.
- 2.8 As the building is grade II listed the proposed works have been reviewed to determine whether planning permission and/or Listed Building Consent is required. Records show that the original 1855 mast was replaced in the 1940’s following war damage and that mast was again replaced following storm damage in the 1950’s. The current mast, though not of historic fabric, is integral to the understanding of the function of the Timeball Tower and is therefore a highly significant feature of the listed building. As the works do not affect historic fabric it is an officer level view that they can be considered a repair which does not require consent, however it is necessary that an exact replica is reinstated to ensure that the special interest of the listed building is protected.

3. Identification of Options

- 3.1 Option 1: To do nothing
- 3.2 Option 2: For the repairs to be given approval to proceed

4. Evaluation of Options

- 4.1 Option 1: To do nothing. Whilst cancelling the project would reduce pressure on the capital programme the consequences would mean that avoidable damage to the fabric of a grade II listed building occurs. The draw for visitors will diminish since the heart of the museum is the working time ball. It will also cause upset to a hard-

working, successful and dedicated local trust team. This is not the recommended course of action.

- 4.2 Option 2: To approve the proposed repairs. Proceeding with the maintenance works now will avoid escalated costs in the future. It will conserve the historic fabric and will ensure that Timeball mechanism continues to operate drawing visitors to this award-winning museum. This is the recommended course of action.

5. **Resource Implications**

- 5.1 It is proposed to use the £80k provision in the current Medium Term Finance Plan (along with funding currently in the region of £5k obtained by the Deal Museum Trust). There are no revenue implications.

6. **Climate Change Implications**

7. The maintenance nature of this project together with the listed building status means that there is little opportunity to introduce specific climate change mitigations. Timely intervention now will alleviate more extensive repairs later. The specification will seek to avoid the unnecessary use of plastics and seek to employ renewable materials wherever possible, provided that they produce the required performance and durability. The tendering process includes weighting towards local businesses, which is likely to have the effect of reducing the overall emissions from the transport associated with the project.

8. **Corporate Implications**

- 8.1 Comment from the Section 151 Officer: Members are reminded that the Council's revenue and capital resources are under pressure and so they will wish to assure themselves that all proposals progress the Council's priorities, are the best option available and will deliver value for money. (DL)

- 8.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Solicitor to the Council has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no further comments to make.

- 8.3 Comment from the Equalities Officer: This report does not specifically highlight any equality implications, however in discharging their duties members are required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>

- 8.4 Other Officers (as appropriate):

9. **Appendices**

Appendix A (Photos showing deterioration)

10. **Background Papers**

None.

Contact Officer: David Parish (Principal Design Services Officer) - x2433

Appendix A – Photographs showing deterioration

