
Subject:	REFURBISHMENT OF DOVER DISCOVERY CENTRE
Meeting and Date:	Cabinet – 12 April 2021
Report of:	Roger Walton, Strategic Director (Operations and Commercial)
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Oliver Richardson, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Corporate Property
Decision Type:	Key Decision
Classification:	Unrestricted

Purpose of the report: This report provides a summary of the works proposed to be undertaken in refurbishing the Dover Discovery Centre, and seeks Cabinet approval for the Council's involvement with the project, to the drawing down of the funds included within the Medium-Term Financial Plan Capital Programme and to entering into an agreement with Kent County Council to contribute the sum of £550,000 towards the cost of delivering the project.

Recommendation: Cabinet agrees:

1. To note and welcome the proposed investment by Kent County Council in the refurbishment of the Dover Discovery Centre.
2. To agree to the proposal to include the provision of a walk-in archive facility and education room within the Dover District Council-owned area, as part of the project.
3. To agree to the allocation of £700,000 from the Capital Programme to support the delivery of the project.
4. To agree to enter into an agreement with Kent County Council to contribute the sum of £550,000 towards the cost of delivering the project.
5. To delegate authority to finalise agreements and the associated decisions involved in delivering the project to the Strategic Director (Operations and Commercial), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Corporate Property.

1. Summary

- 1.1 Cabinet considered a report on 1 October 2018 concerning plans being developed to reimage and enhance Dover Museum in support of the regeneration of the town centre and agreed to a proposal to undertake an audit of the current Dover Museum collection and bring forward proposals to resolve the long standing issues of museum storage; a project which is now progressing well.
- 1.2 The 2018 report also noted that the Council was in discussion with Kent County Council (KCC) over plans that they were developing for the refurbishment of the adjacent Discovery Centre, which would potentially provide an opportunity for more ambitious plans to be brought forward including:

- The co-location of the KCC Local Studies Library and the Council's own archive of ephemera and local history into a single reference facility.
 - The potential for providing some space within the premises for storage of parts of the collection, especially the more valuable and delicate items, recognising that the museum has a vital role to play in educating and informing residents and visitors alike by facilitating access for researchers to view and study items within the collection, and provide working space for the museum's growing team of volunteers.
- 1.3 The KCC plans for the Discovery Centre have now advanced to the point where the RIBA Stage 2 proposals have been agreed, detailed designs are being prepared with the works due to be tendered later this year.
- 1.4 This report seeks to set out the proposals in more detail and seek approval for Dover District Council's involvement with the project for drawing down the funds included within the MTFP Capital Programme and to enter into an agreement with KCC to contribute the sum of £550k towards the cost of delivering the project.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Kent County Council (KCC) has for several years now been working on plans for the refurbishment of the Discovery Centre, which was acquired from this Council in 2001 upon the closure of the White Cliffs Experience. The Council's Museum and the Discovery Centre still share some mechanical and electrical services, which are common to both buildings and the internal property arrangements also see elements of the building leased to DDC and vice versa.
- 2.2 The KCC plans for the Discovery Centre, in broad terms, involve the relocation of their Children's Services team to the site and thus a significant reconfiguration of the internal layout to facilitate this. The library remains on the ground floor, but the layout will change slightly and the KCC proposals have the added benefit of offering improved public access to both the archaeology which sits below the building and the external ruins of the St. Martin's Le Grand Church and the Classis Britannica fort.
- 2.3 The works proposed are a £7.45m investment by KCC, which in addition to the reconfiguration of the building will see improvements to the mechanical and electrical services and more general refurbishment of this building, which is now more than 30 years old.
- 2.4 This is a welcome investment in Dover by KCC with the added benefit that locating the Children's Services team in the town centre will potentially bring to surrounding businesses in terms of increasing footfall.
- 2.5 Noting as mentioned above that the Discovery Centre and the Council's Museum are interlinked, the KCC proposals have provided an opportunity to incorporate the proposals within the design involving the provision of a walk-in archive facility and education room within the DDC owned area, which offers an opportunity to co-locate the DDC & KCC local studies archive within one single space as proposed in the 2018 report.
- 2.6 It is intended that the proposed archive facility will provide improved facilities for those undertaking local studies research and allow enhanced access to the extensive artefacts and ephemera held by the Museum.

- 2.7 Work on the project has been developed in partnership with KCC through a joint KCC/DDC Partnership Board, which includes representation from both KCC and DDC members, the DDC representatives being Cllr Holloway and Cllr Richardson.
- 2.8 At the Partnership Board Meeting on 23 November 2020, a paper was presented to the Board seeking approval to the RIBA Stage 2 Design Report and to instructing the professional team to commence RIBA Stage 3. The RIBA Stage 2 Cost Plan presented to the meeting, based upon the proposed scheme, indicated a project cost of £7.45m, including a financial contribution of £550k from Dover District Council to reflect the cost associated with the Council's element of the project.
- 2.9 A breakdown of how the £550k sum has been calculated has now been shared with the Council explaining the apportionment of costs, which are on a floor area basis and do reflect the actual costs related to the specific areas related to DDC activities.
- 2.10 The KCC works will provide DDC with a completed suite of rooms, which will of course require furnishing, which has been estimated to require an additional budget of c£150k, meaning the total project cost to DDC is c£700k, which was included within the approved Capital Programme agreed by Council on 3 March 2021.
- 2.11 The current project programme sees work starting on site in March 2022, with enabling works involving the replacement of the Discovery Centre roof being undertaken ahead of this date. Project completion is planned for February 2023 and so from the DDC perspective, it is hoped that the new walk-in archive facility and education room, will be opened a few weeks later.
- 2.12 This report therefore seeks Cabinet approval to draw down the allocated funds to support the delivery of the project and to entering into an agreement with KCC to deliver the project as outlined above.

3. Identification and Evaluation of Options

- 3.1 Option 1: To agree to the proposals outlined above and enter into an agreement with KCC to provide funding of £550k towards the delivery of the project.
- 3.2 Option 2: To make alternative proposals for consideration by KCC.
- 3.3 Option 3: To decide not to progress with the proposal and to thus not enter into agreement with KCC.
- 3.4 The preferred option is Option 1 as this will deliver enhanced facilities for those undertaking research into local studies and will support the delivery of a major investment within Dover Town Centre by KCC.

4. Resource Implications

- 4.1 As outlined above the approved Capital Programme agreed by Council on 3 March 2021 included an allocation of £700k for the project.

5. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

- 5.1 The project will deliver improvements to the energy efficiency of the building and thus contribute to the Council Climate Change objectives.

6. Corporate Implications

- 6.1 Comment from the Director of Finance: 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)

- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 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 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>. (KS)
- 7. **Appendices**
 - 7.1 None.
- 8. **Background Papers**
 - 8.1 Report to Cabinet on 1 October 2018

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