

Dover Town Hall Refurbishment Project - An Update

Derek Leach

The Dover Society's decision in 2011, supported by Dover District Council and Dover Town Council, to organise guided tours of the Town Hall had the aim of making the local community and visitors to the town more aware of the building's 800 years of fascinating history and its architecture. It was intended as a precursor to a major Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid to assist in the much needed restoration of the building, as far as possible, to its Victorian glory. A dedicated band of volunteers continues to offer guided tours from April to September and guided tour income plus donations has enabled the Society to pledge £10,000 toward the project.

A desire to restore an historic building is not, unfortunately, sufficient reason to merit a HLF grant. Any such grant application has to include, amongst other criteria, proposals for a sustainable future use. Consultants were appointed and

following consultations and workshops with the community an exciting project costing some £13 million emerged. The project included all urgent repairs, a new entrance at street level to the Connaught and Stone Halls, converting the former civic offices block, including the Mayors Parlour, into self-catering holiday lets, reinstating the interior decoration as far as practicable and costs allow, a new kitchen and back of house space, a new café in the former Visitor Information Office as well as a wide range of activities to engage the local community.

A £10 million Heritage Lottery Fund bid was submitted in December 2016, but was unsuccessful despite Dover District Council, Dover Town Council and The Dover Society pledging a substantial sum. HLF was keen on the project and said that we had a strong case, but insufficient funds were available. We were advised to resubmit the application in December 2017, but by then HLF had imposed a £5 million maximum for any grant. We decided to retain virtually the whole scheme, trimming off some costs, but dividing it into two separate phases for grant purposes. A £4.7 million grant application to the HLF for the first phase (total cost £8.4 million), covering mainly the repair and construction work, was submitted in March 2018.



Banquet opening of Connaught Hall 1883

Despite HLF considering 37 applications totalling £105

million and only £15 million available, our bid was one of only four successes. This decision in itself does not guarantee the grant, but allows us to carry out the Development Phase (£627k of which HLF is providing £427k) in order to produce detailed plans by March 2020 for HLF approval.

We are now in the Development Phase. Project Coordinators and an Activity Planner have been appointed and I am pleased to say that the consultants, Ingham Pinnock Associates, who have served us so well preparing the scheme and the HLF bid, were the successful applicants. The required comprehensive Design Team should be in post and starting work in February 2019. An Interpretation Specialist should also be in place about this time.

Once the Design Team is in place and has carried out the necessary research and consultation, work will include creating the Management and Maintenance Plan and the Conservation Plan. The Design Team will also have to procure a large number of specialist surveys etc. e.g. fire engineer, lighting consultant, detailed condition survey, interior finishes and fixtures survey, stained glass specialist, structural investigations and below ground drainage survey. The Project Coordinators will be making contact with all those previously involved with the project as well as planning public consultation events as part of the Activity Plan.

There is a funding gap of 650k to deliver this phase of the overall project and a Funding Plan will include securing grants from other national organisations. There will also be opportunities for the local community to contribute to this exciting project, which will secure the future of this fantastic historic building for many years

to come and provide an even better venue for the local community to enjoy.

Derek represents The Dover Society on the Town Hall Project Steering Group along with Dover District Council and Dover Town Council representatives.



Mayor's Parlour



Hall