

Almonry Development Working Group

Notes from a video-conference meeting on 27 April 2020

Present:

Cllrs Favell, Kiloh and Sharman and Mr Stephen Gray

Update on feedback on background work needed to support the Strategic Plan

As it had been agreed that the group will recommend that Council seeks costs for Value Engineering in relation to the heating, SG has kindly provided a picture of a suitable electric heater that could be sprayed a dark colour.



MK and GF talked to Veronique Poutrel at ESCC on 11th March, regarding EU funding. Itals agreed that the working group should take up her offer of help and that the M&TD Officer could liaise with her to research Veronique's suggestions.

GF had looked through the HLF grant documents to see if research had already been undertaken into residents' views about whether The Almonry should be open to the public, but without success. MK will ask Lesley Samms if any research was undertaken.

Talks need to be held with RDC regarding capital funding support. MK, HS and GF will arrange to meet with Kathryn Field, Kevin Dixon and Vikki Cook as soon as is practical.

Consideration should be given to the possible income from sales in the TIP - BMLH needs to be consulted. It could be possible to share profits and it would benefit BMLH if the TIP sold their goods during the winter months. The Town Clerk will contact the museum group to discuss.

Access to The Almonry

In 2019, Council agreed a disabled access via Western Avenue with ramps to access the courtyard and proposed (rebuilt) south wing. This was included in the tender as 'refurbishment'.

Concerned about some visitors having to use a side entrance and the signage that would be necessary, MK had previously suggested that a lift could be sited at the back of the porch. The earlier proposals for a ramp to the rear of the porch and various designs for bridges had been ruled out (due to gradients and because works could necessitate improvements to the drive and access to the Museum to fall in line with the Equality Act).

For this meeting, SG had provided a draft sketch plan of a modern **replacement porch, accessed via a bridge from the pedestrian entrance, which would provide access for all through the same door and include a fully accessible lavatory.**

SG feels that the main door should always be in the middle of the front aspect of a building whenever possible. Though the entrance from the High Street cannot readily be reopened, the western aspect of The Almonry would suffice.

Access via the current door would ensure visitors would see the front garden and the Museum (which needs better signage).

The accessible toilet could also be used by visitors to the Museum, but would also be available to the public in general, too. Concerns were raised that a lavatory in the porch would become a public facility, so it was suggested that it could be accessed using a Radar Key. However, the lavatory would then not be available to visitors, staff and Members. The group were not sure that visitors should enter the main entrance past a toilet.

People with mobility difficulties needing to use the bridge to access The Almonry would have to leave the property via the bridge and re-enter using the drive to access the Museum.

Further information is required regarding whether works to rebuild the porch would necessitate improvements to the access to the Museum via the drive with regard to the Equality Act.

There was a subsequent suggestion regarding equal access to all - the current plan for ramps from Western Avenue will enable full access the courtyard, the proposed (rebuilt) south wing and the Museum. This could also facilitate full access to the current meeting room. This entrance, via the courtyard, could become the main entrance and the current entrance could become an exit only. The incongruous porch could then be removed if planning consent was given.

The Museum would then be accessible via both the High Street and Western Avenue.

Signage at the entrance from the High Street would direct people to an alternative, fully accessible entrance via Western Avenue if required. (A sign on the side of the Museum could direct visitors to the entrance.) Entering from the High Street, at the end of the drive, visitors would be directed left to the Council Offices and would pass right by the Museum. They would also pass by the front garden and the rear gardens when coming to The Almonry.

If the path to the lower garden was constructed at a later date, it may be possible to negotiate access from Market Square in the future.

There was concern about accessing the rear of the building in the dark, but suitable security and lighting could be investigated.

If necessary, an accessible toilet could be constructed in the area of the current storage area adjacent to the kitchen, subject to planning permission.

Delays for decisions will require delays to the acceptance of a tender and the work start date:

Either the bridge, porch (options 1 & 2) and toilet (option 2) or the inside accessible toilet (option 2 only) would need to be designed and agreed by Council

Planning consent will need to be obtained (and also for changing heating to electric)

The Quantity Surveyor will need to provide documentation for V-E and Walker's

Costings will need to be obtained from tenderers

Costs - additional architect fees, quantity surveyor fees, planning application fees.

These suggestions both provide alternatives that would ensure the full accessibility needed for 'Option 2' to become viable, should this option be decided upon for financial reasons.

Discussion of information and recommendations from JDC and Blade Consulting did not take place because further information is likely to be needed as a result of the discussions above.

Draft Strategic Plan

A review of the draft dated 16th March, which includes figures based on Walker's tender was not undertaken. The group needs to discuss:

whether to recommend that a draft Plan be published, since BTC was unable to finalise and adopt it prior to the date of the cancelled Parish Assembly planned for 25th April.

It was noted that both County and District Councils will need to reduce their services as a result of a loss of income due to the pandemic. This may result in BTC taking on additional services, e.g. providing information/library services, resulting in a need for space at The Almonry.

There may be less office space required following the pandemic. If the first floor offices are required for BTC staff/facilities, SG noted that it may be possible to install a lift in the future.

Notes:

We must remember that an extension to the Planning consent should not be left until the last minute.

It was agreed that the group should continue working towards making a recommendation to Council regarding which option is best for Battle. The group will meet again for further discussions during the week commencing 04 May 2020.