

Full Council

Report Title:	Community & Youth Building Project Update
Meeting Date:	14 November 2023
Contact Officer:	Mandy Sturdy, Town Clerk

Purpose of the Report

1. To update the Council on the progress of the Community and Youth Centre Project and recommend 3 areas for the council's consideration to enable the project to progress to construction tender stage:
 - a) Forward funding for RIBA stage 4 of the Project
 - b) Commissioning a Business Case and Funding Strategy
 - c) Employing an External Funding Lead

Background

2. Initially a project started to find a permanent home for the youth of Thame to meet; The Project Team soon recognised that a large community facility, a need which had been identified in Thame's Neighbourhood Plan (1 & 2), could be incorporated within the project to create a community facility serving the whole community with a heart for the youth.
3. Planning permission¹ has now been granted based on designs created by Acanthus Clews architects, working with the Community and Youth Centre Working Group. The current estimate provided by our Quantity Surveyor for the whole project is c£4 million.
4. The building will be owned by Thame Town Council who plan to lease it to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) to manage and run the building.
5. Thame Town Council have so far committed c£141K, partly forward funded from Capital Reserves with some invested from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL); as well as a significant amount of officer and councillor time.
6. There are S106 funds earmarked for this project of c£742,340, an application for these funds is being drafted although only 5%, £37K can be claimed before we have evidenced how the full project costs will be funded.
7. Acanthus Clews confirmed: with planning permission now secured it is important to maintain momentum on the project and ensure the hard work undertaken to date is capitalized on. This is *especially important as construction inflation is still a very real issue.*

RIBA Stage 4

8. *The next phase of the project is the Technical Design Phase which in the RIBA Plan of Work is called RIBA Stage 4. This phase involves preparing all the various design information required to manufacture and construct the project and it concludes with tendering the project to selected building contractors. This phase involves the full design team of specialist consultants, including engineers, quantity surveyors, landscape architects and BREEAM assessors to name just a*

¹ [P23/S0644/FUL](#)

few. The quantity surveyor is integrated within the design team but appointed directly to the client and will review project costs during this phase as the design develops. As well as an interim cost plan mid process a pre-tender estimate can be undertaken prior to tendering the project if necessary. When tenders come back from contractors it is not uncommon to then undertake a value engineering process to bring the project scope back on budget prior to signing a contract.

9. *Funding for the construction process normally continues during this phase of design work, very few projects have the full funds in place during the design phase and in reality, clients will often continue to fund raise during the construction process. This can be done to fund things out of the contract such as the furniture and fittings and it is always a good idea to raise an additional contingency sum.*
10. The fees for RIBA stage 4 are £178,330, payable in instalments during the phase. It is **proposed** that the Town Council forward fund this stage whilst work to raise funds for the whole project continues.
11. Historically the Council have ensured the success of local projects by supporting them through forward funding, this has either been through capital reserves (either to fund or to help with cash flow) or by drawing down from our investment funds, this has included:
 - a. The Thame Cricket Pavilion (our building, leased to the Cricket Club)
 - b. Thame Football Club and Astro turf Pitch
 - c. Thame Sports Club
 - d. The Skate Park
12. For the £178,330 required for RIBA stage 4 it is **proposed** that the funds are drawn down from our investment fund aiming to be ready to tender the construction phase by Winter 2024, subject to securing further funding.

A Business Case and Funding Strategy

13. Whilst there is much data already available to justify the need for this building; there is a need to enhance and define the business case including the operational funding element and the full capital costs. This evidence is crucial for all funding applications, including S106.
14. The **proposal** from the Community and Youth Centre Working Group is for the Council to support using a consultant to pull together the data and draw up these documents. The cost of this would be in the region of £12K and would be funded from CIL.
15. By employing an expert to complete this work we will have the relevant data to progress this project and clearly communicate the benefits to the community as well as provide suitable data and narrative to support grant applications.

External Funding Lead

16. This project is by far the largest undertaking by Thame Town Council. The project needs to raise more than £3.2m above the S106 funding. As the council do not have the internal resources to do this, it is **proposed** that the council carry out a recruitment exercise to employ a professional fundraiser.
17. This post would **not just look to raise the funds needed for this project** but would look **to all external funding opportunities** for the council and community (including partnerships such as the Museum). The post holder would be required to research and co-ordinate the writing of funding bids to secure external resources which will enable the council to deliver on its strategic priorities, and

projects. This would enable the development of a consistent and cohesive story for Thame Town Council.

18. Organisations, including South Oxfordshire District Council have taken this approach to increase their income to enable them to deliver the additional projects and services required by the community, they have listed benefits including:
 - a. helped to secure the external funds valued at around £10 million for SODC and VoWHDC in first two years. The largest of these have been multi-million pound bid successes of government funding to deliver decarbonisation at the Councils' leisure centres, enabling the major win-win of progress towards achieving the Councils' net zero carbon targets
 - b. leading the way to applying for further potential awards. Currently awaiting results of further bids valued at £1.8 million for SODC and VoWHDC, with more bids in development
 - c. providing a specialised resource that constantly horizon scans a variety of funding sources and grant giving bodies and alerts relevant managers of current and upcoming opportunities so that the organisation is bid-ready
 - d. evaluating likely success, saving time by steering the councils on bid opportunities that are worth applying for
 - e. coordinating cross-functional teams to develop and submit grant applications, working with subject matter specialists across all council teams who know the funding needs but do not have expertise in how to achieve bid success
 - f. ability to partner with other tiers of government to apply for bigger funding opportunities. For example with Oxfordshire County Council to secure electric vehicle charging infrastructure in South and Vale, and with parishes and community groups to identify opportunities to roll out EV chargers at village halls.
 - g. leading the evaluation of bids to learn lessons that can be implemented with further applications.
19. This would be a senior officer role reporting into the Corporate Services Manager / RFO and working closely with all council departments and community stakeholders. Whilst the post would need to be formally graded it is expected to cost up to £52k pa (including NI employment / pension costs); This post would be expected to bring in funds to easily offset their salary costs.
20. This position was discussed at a meeting of the Personnel Committee on October 2 2023 as per the draft minutes, their recommendation is to include the role in the 2024/25 budget.
21. Subject to approval, the Clerk will produce a Job Description and Specification for the Personnel Committee to consider at their January Meeting with the aim to have someone onboard by April 2024.

Resource Appraisal

22. Forward funding of up to £180K from investments. The funds will aim to be repaid as part of the funding strategy.
23. Officer time will be required to manage the project, all procurement exercises, and the recruitment process.
24. Promotions and marketing will be required to reach a wider audience for both the building consultation and fundraiser position, this will require a small budget and staff time.
25. Use of £12K CIL to commission the Business Case work.

26. Initial Increase in precept to cover additional staffing costs.

Risk Assessment

27. The project does not progress, and the funds invested to date are lost – further investment will ensure the project moves forward.
28. Increase in build cost – the next phase will enable any need for value engineering to be identified and provide more defined costs.
29. Further funds taken from General Reserves would show a larger deficit budget; using investment funds will prevent this.
30. The funds are not found for the project and the project stops or is fully funded through Public Works Loan if approved. This would mean the investment funds are and initial funding is not replaced.

Legal Powers:

- **Local Government Act 1972 s133**
- **Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 s16**
- **Localism Act 2011 s1 General Power of Competence**

Recommendation:

- i) That the council approve to forward fund £180,000 from their investment funds to allow the next phase, RIBA Stage 4 of the Thame Community and Youth Centre project.*
- ii) That the council approve procurement and commissioning of a specialist to write a business case and funding strategy for the Community and Youth Centre project with a budget of £12,000 to be paid for from available CIL funds.*
- iii) That the council support starting the recruitment process to employ a full-time Funding Lead with the Job Description and contract details to be approved by the Personnel Committee and Full Council in January.*