

MARL Strategic Review Paper

MELBOURNE ASSEMBLY ROOMS Ltd.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August 2011 SDDC approved capital funding (£125K) as part of the development plan of the Melbourne Assembly Rooms (MARS). A significant portion has been used alongside other available capital, (Growth Point funds), to replace the ancient and grossly inefficient boilers and to install new radiators in the Main Hall and the front of the building along with a sophisticated control system. The balance of the capital, some £80K remains and this submission is to seek approval to release those funds to support essential planned improvements.

The 2011 funding assumed match funds would be attracted up to a total of £325K to support a major bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The reason approval is sought is that the HLF bid has been delayed as the key resource, Philip Heath, is no longer able to devote any unpaid time to the bid process. Although the board of MARS is committed to the HLF bid and despite the significant enhancements already made to the facilities, it believes the public deserve to see visible improvements in the structure and appearance of MARS now and not in 3 years' time, the realistic timescale for HLF approval and implementation.

The aims of the Phase 1 Development are:

- To dramatically improve the 'look and feel' of the centre away from 'the old school' to a welcoming community centre.
- To create a reception space where all visitors can sit and get a drink or snack whilst waiting for an event or delivering children. The room is unlikely to be available for hire but will release potential for improved services throughout the centre; e.g. as a bar during a performance interval.
- To create an Information Hub in the east foyer to complement the Library. This will include National Forest, Community Care, local history and community event information.

This will be achieved by:

- Implement phase 2 of the heating project, a heating upgrade to the Melbourne Room, a large room at the back of the building used by many groups, particularly mothers and toddlers. This will make this under-used room much improved and attractive to new customers. Cost £8,500.
- Installation of blinds to the roof windows in the Main Hall to allow cinema evenings, (and other events that require darkness), to take place during light evenings. Cost £4,000.
- Reinstate double doors from the Main Hall into the current store room and the current kitchen. This is to enable large items to be moved easily depending on function. In particular it will allow the raised seating trolley, currently stored in the east foyer, to be re-located. Cost £5,000.
- Renovate the east foyer by the Library entrance to create a well-lit, welcoming area for local information and small exhibitions. Cost: £8,000.
- Renovate the kitchen to provide a kitchen/bar/reception area in line with our long-term plan. Cost: £50,000.
- Install new fit-for-purpose moveable kitchen equipment to dramatically improve the catering capability of the centre. The current equipment is old and useless. Cost £12,000.

MATCH FUNDING

The original grant was part of a funding plan, which combined with a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, would attract other match funders. As detailed in this report the HLF bid has been delayed and the major match funds from the landfill grant providers has not, so far, been successful. The funding plan for the renovation and renewal of MARS has not, however, changed. What has changed is that instead of a 'Big Bang' approach with all the funds becoming available in a single shot, the board now wishes to implement the plan in stages. An over-riding consideration is to demonstrate to the public and SDDC, who provide annual revenue support, that progress on the strategic plan is being made.

The current position on the HLF is that MARS is able to fund and resource the bid for Phase 1 of the HLF process. HLF recognise that most organisations cannot self-fund the full (Phase 2) bidding process. The Phase 1 bid, if successful, will fund this work. We have 90% of the work done and are confident we can complete the balance in a few months.

The match funding for the work described above will come from:

- MARS Reserve Fund 2014/15: £8500.
- MARS Reserve Fund 2015/16: £8500.
- Awards for All: £10,000.
- Paul Hamlyn Foundation: £5,000.
- Local fundraising: £5,000.

In addition, a bid is being prepared to the current SDDC Community Partnership programme for £33,500.

In view of the recent awards of Section 106 money towards Open Space and Leisure in housing development bids, it is also anticipated that a strong case may be made for contributions to Built Facilities under this heading from any future planning approvals.

CURRENT POSITION

In the Capital Investment Business Case Appraisal produced by the Head of Community and Planning – August 2011, the aim of the investment was defined.

To provide the people of Melbourne and the surrounding areas with a high quality, multi-purpose community centre.

The priorities were also stated.

Phase 1 will be to renovate the north end of the building that faces the road and car park. This will provide:

- Fully equipped kitchen facilities.

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- Foyer space that will greatly improve the appeal of the building leading people to existing and new services.

- A changed layout that will enable different areas of the building to be used independently of each other, accessed from the front rather than through the main hall.

It is also important to bring the tenanted property to modern standards which will ensure that the property can be let to generate revenue income in support of the business plan. This building will require upgrading, which is the responsibility of the District Council as land owner.

Additional phases will:

- Improve sound insulation between areas and general improvements to the acoustics.

- Restore glazing internally to improve natural lighting within the building.

- Create additional community meeting space and

- Upgrade the areas that are not directly impacted upon by the proposed physical changes to the building.

As is shown below, significant improvements to the centre have been made following successful grant applications, local fund-raising, improved financial management and voluntary support. What has not been possible is to implement the major changes despite strenuous efforts to raise the significant funds necessary. Capital funds are held by SDDC that the board hoped could be matched against these capital grants. The board has now concluded that we need to apply the SDDC held funds to meet the aspirations of the people of Melbourne and to implement a number of development priorities.

GRANTS, INVESTMENTS & FUNDRAISING

2012: LEAF Energy Grant for £3,933 to conduct an energy audit and run community engagement sessions. This provided the basis for replacement of the old boiler and radiators in the Main Hall and front, north end, of the building.

Awards for All for £9,876 to install a hearing loop system and an open broadband connection. These developments dramatically improved the services available.

A Youth Action Grant of £1,000 to provide coaching and equipment to promote squash and table tennis. We now have a thriving table tennis club and bookings for the squash court have also increased.

A Derbyshire County Council bid for £135,668 for the Phase 1 capital works outlined above was applied for. Despite being fully compliant it was not successful.

2013: A landfill grant application to Lafarge for £18,000 to improve the entrance and reception foyer was refused because "Melbourne is not directly impacted. For the same reasons of eligibility, applications to Biffa and Veolia were begun but not submitted. There may be an opportunity in the future, but the chances of success are slim.

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An SDDC community fund granted £1,278 toward acoustic improvements in the Main Hall costing circa £8,000. The balance was raised by fund-raising and a private donation. This has hugely improved the environment for concerts, plays and cinema nights.

£45,374 of the DCC capital grant from 2012 was used replace the old boiler and the radiators in the Main Hall, which together with a modern, flexible control system should yield significant savings.

2014: Significant progress has been made on the Heritage Lottery bid and the feedback is positive. However, from the middle of 2014 work ceased because of the inability of the key resource, Philip Heath, to continue working on it. The board still plans to proceed but access to skilled resource is key.

£19,500 has been invested in tiered seating, £11,000 for flexible staging plus £10,500 for acoustic panelling and curtaining, all of which has made the centre a superb venue for the performing arts. This was funded by donations from the local amateur dramatics group, St Michael's Players and the local mixed choir, A'Choir'd Taste. This was installed in time for a superb production of Oh What a Lovely War.

Efficiency savings have funded a £1,020 installation of an emergency lighting system resulting from the comprehensive Health & Safety survey completed in 2014.

Efficiency savings have also funded a £1,730 upgrade to the internal and external signage. For a relatively small amount of money this has had a dramatic impact on the public's perception of the centre.

It should be noted that the Board has submitted all these bids and made all these improvements itself, without recourse to consultants.

CURRENT BOARD

When the original business plan was approved, part of the 'package' was the calibre of the team presenting the plan. This consisted of 5 local people. Since then the board has been increased in size and the consequent range of skills available to manage both the operational activities and the capital projects is as good as any major commercial or government organisation.

Phil Dobby – Chairman

A professional life spent in computing and telecoms running companies and projects. He started the Melbourne Festival in 2005 and is still the Chairman. He was a member of the original team that presented the business plan to run the centre. He is also a trustee of Melbourne Community Care.

John Robinson - Director

John is a Chartered Mechanical Engineer and an Associate Member of the Institute of Building Services Engineers. His experience includes design of advanced facilities for food manufacture, drug manufacture and bio-technology research. He has extensive experience of project management of design & construction of new facilities in the UK and overseas. John had overall control of the specification of the new boiler and heating system and managed the installation. John was a member of the original planning group.

Frank Hughes - Director

Frank is a retired civil servant who held senior positions managing huge teams of staff and large budgets. He is associated locally with St Michaels Players, A'Choir'd Taste (the mixed voice choir), Fit Fat Blokes (the local circuit training club), The Village Voice, Melbourne Festival and Royal British Legion. He has organised a range of events, including the regular comedy night, choir concerts, youth rock nights, social nights. Replacing the old stage was his idea and he involved people and groups to ensure the stage would meet the needs of a range of groups and that it would get funded.

David Carpenter – Parish Council Representative

He was elected to the Melbourne Parish Council in 2011 and became Vice-Chair of the Leisure Centre Committee, during the latter stages of its transfer from the Parish Council's control. He is a Chartered Fellow of The Geological Society of London specialising in coal and near-surface geophysics working in a consultative capacity for a small number of clients.

Joanne Rost - Director

Jo is a secondary school Arts teacher in a Derby 11 - 18 school. In Melbourne she has been involved in the Melbourne Festival since it began giving her superb links to visual arts organisations. She was a volunteer at the Athenaeum Youth Centre for many years. She is also a Milliner and has got to know a range of local people through her hat making.

Margaret Gildea - Director

Margaret was the Director of Human Resources at Rolls-Royce plc, in which position she was awarded the OBE. Subsequently she led the Bombardier task force for the government. She currently runs her own business consultancy. She has lived in Melbourne for 30 years and has been a school governor at the Infants and Chellaston schools. She has also co-written rock musicals for local youngsters and raised money for local schools and charities. She has been part of the team who helped to buy the new stage and raised seating.

Jane Carroll - Director

Jane has a strong commitment to the local community. She has served as a District Councillor for Melbourne and has a wide knowledge of committee work and local government. She is currently a Parish Councillor and has recently been the Chair. She was for many years the Practice Nurse for the local GP Surgery and is the Secretary for Melbourne Community Care. She is also the current agent for the Labour Party in South Derbyshire. Everybody in Melbourne knows and respects Jane Carroll.

STRATEGY SUMMARY

The strategy includes the following themes:

A Sustainable Centre:

We wish to see the Assembly Rooms retain the character of a village hall, whilst preserving the rich heritage of the building. We aim for it to be safe, welcoming, legal and compliant with regulations required of a modern public meeting space. We wish to see investment in the building not just to maintain its character but to bring as many of the facilities as is affordable up to modern standards.

We wish to secure MARS on a financially sound and sustainable basis for use by our community for the long term which includes agreeing with SDDC the strategic direction and business plan for the centre.

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The Assembly Rooms must aim to be financially viable. The present sources of funding include a district council grant, leasing from the rental property and lettings. The prices were increased in 2014 and will be further reviewed in 2015 with the aim of having a competitive room rate comparable with other local venues. Longer term the centre needs to find other revenue streams for running costs and to create a surplus of income over costs to spend on the building to prevent further dilapidation of the heritage building and to make improvements.

Potential strategic elements to achieve sustainability include:

- o Review revenue streams and determine growth potential.
- o Review physical changes to evaluate contribution to increased revenue.
- o Realign the Development Manager's focus towards development work, including networking with potential and future partners.
- o Energise the membership to support the Development Manager and activities and events.

Community Engagement:

The proposed strategic action to position the Assembly Rooms at the centre of our community relates to the user survey of 2011 and its completion. The user survey of 2011 informed and supported the transfer of ownership from the Parish Council and there is a need to update this information, and consult again with the members to ascertain what our users want from the centre (members and users are overlapping groups, but are not really the same) and secure their active engagement in it. The background of the governing board is representative of a number of local areas of interest, but further engagement of the wider community is essential to shape the direction.

A further strategic element of community engagement is to make the Assembly Rooms a meeting point for people. This will combine the elements of a foyer with information and displays, the library, the reception with seating and possibly refreshments and, of course, good toilets.

Agencies and Service Providers

There is a need to create links and partnerships with other agencies and service providers to enable the centre to be a focus of delivery for services to the community. In the past three years there has been some development in this direction but we need to explore and deliver further in this area. In particular we wish to forge closer links in the following community areas:

- a. Workshops and events for disability groups.
- b. 'Back to work' seminars.
- c. Business networking events.
- d. Health.
- e. Isolation (especially of the elderly)

Local Businesses

Whilst we do have some local businesses making use of the centre, (e.g. Amalfi White staff training course), we wish to promote closer and stronger ties to local businesses to ensure they are aware of the opportunities the centre offers. We wish to upgrade our facilities to a sufficient standard to encourage local business use; this will also benefit local community activities where these facilities can also be used by them.

Indoor Sport and Fitness

Indoor sport and fitness activity is integral to the activities in the centre and we shall continue to encourage and promote a range of sporting activities. Some of the facilities are under-used despite efforts to attract additional occupancy (squash and racquetball). Other activities have been attracted (table tennis) and the key appears to be a clear delineation of the spaces which are suitable for sporting activity and a close alignment to the specific needs, (e.g. storage; regular availability).

It is recognised that the Melbourne Sporting Partnership facilities and the proximity to commercial gym activities will continue to be challenging competition for sporting customers and investment in improved facilities would not be a high priority whilst the future remains so uncertain. There are a number of areas we would wish to explore to see whether additional use can be made of the centre, including, for example, indoor bowling.

We do, however, wish to secure and encourage the existing use of our facilities for sporting and fitness activities by providing a basic standard that includes secure segregated changing rooms with locker storage, showers and storage for equipment.

Community, Civic and Cultural Events

The venue's overarching role is as a community centre, and has a vital part to play in ensuring a wide range of cultural and popular events take place in the village. This has been a major success in the past two years with events as diverse as wrestling and opera taking place. Local film nights have provided unique opportunities for the less mobile to see current release films.

Our aspiration is to provide a venue which can promote and host theatrical and musical productions, live performances and exhibitions. With the provision of a stage, lights, backdrop and acoustic curtains, and acoustic treatment on the walls, there have been some impressive changes to the style and quality of production in the main hall. Unlike most other similar facilities, our building lends itself to being able to host two significant events simultaneously (through the use of the Assembly Hall and Melbourne Room). We wish to develop this capability by investment in each hall and its supporting areas to provide greater use of them at a higher return from more prestigious and financially remunerative events without losing the ability to host community events.

We wish to make the centre "the go-to centre" of the village for weekend events.

The centre has seen an increased use for family social functions and for craft and food fairs, events which are clearly popular with local businesses and the local population. Local farms, brewers, chocolatiers, cheese and pie manufacturers have welcomed the opportunity to not only sell produce but also raise awareness of their product range

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We wish to develop the lounge area to be a more welcoming bar area to be adjacent to the main hall, to improve our kitchen facility to enable the provision of food, and to continue to make the halls better spaces for the widest range of activities.

Support areas tend to get overlooked, especially storage. We wish to ensure that we have sufficient dry storage space both for our own needs and to sub-let to our users to facilitate their use and to provide a further income stream.

We intend to engage more with the membership of the centre, tapping into the 300 current members and expanding it if we can. We would like to make increased use of volunteers in running events, and helping at them. The intention is that the centre is “owned and run” by the members.

RISK ANALYSIS

External Risks

- Match funds unobtainable
 - There are no risks to the funds coming from MARS efficiency savings or from members’ fundraising.
 - There is a low risk of not securing Awards for All funding. We have been successful in the past and the planned projects are consistent with the criteria.
 - If a particular fund does not come available, we will adjust the programme to suit the funds.
- Costs over-run
 - The contractors and suppliers we use are known companies and the quotations are fixed price.
 - A number of the board members have extensive experience of overseeing major projects.
- Unforeseen problems with the building
 - All work will be reviewed by SDDC and subject to prior expert consultation.
 - Members of the board have experience of structural and mechanical work of this nature.

Internal Risks

- Delays affecting revenue and customer satisfaction
 - Provision will be made in the budget and all users will be consulted.
 - Contingency plans will be in place, including use of other rooms at MARS and use of other rooms in Melbourne.
- Delay in approving grant release
 - The current board of MARS are committed to redeveloping and renewing the centre as the centre of village life, not simply administering the status quo. This risk lies with SDDC.
- Delay in granting a lease extension
 - This will affect the board’s ability to apply for match funds. This risk lies with SDDC.

Appendix

2015 Spending Options

No.	Item	Room	Decision / Comment
1	Printing facilities	General	Revenue item
2	Kitchenette: Melbourne Room	Kitchen	Phase 2 priority
3	Line out car park c. £700	General	SDDC / MPC responsibility
4	Tracks/hangers in Lounge	Lounge	Revenue item
5	Blinds in Melbourne Room	Other	Revenue item
6	Replace cutlery	Kitchen	Revenue item
7	Acoustics in Melbourne Room c. £7k	Melbourne	Phase 2 priority
8	Blackout blinds c. £3k	Hall	Phase 1 priority
9	Marquee lining	Hall	Revenue item
10	Phase 2 heating: Melbourne : Studio	Melbourne Studio	Phase 1 priority Phase 2 priority
11	East Lobby refit	General	Phase 1 priority
12	Locks & keys	General	Revenue item
13	Secondary glazing in Board Room	Board	Low impact and low revenue
14	Main Hall Joinery modifications	Hall	Phase 1 priority
15	Extractor hood in current kitchen	Kitchen	Phase 1 priority
16	Re-decorate south and west lobbies	Other	Revenue item
17	Renew floor covering in WCs	Other	Revenue item
18	Main Hall floor – sand and polish £3k	Hall	Revenue item
19	Curtains and track for lounge	Lounge	Revenue item
20	Range cooker for current kitchen	Kitchen	Phase 1 priority
21	Move kitchen to current store room	Kitchen	Phase 2 priority
22	Servery in current kitchen	Kitchen	Phase 1 priority
23	Lounge upgrade	Lounge	Phase 2 priority
24	Connect East Lobby to current kitchen	Kitchen	Phase 1 priority
25	Lighting in main hall - halogen	Hall	Revenue item
26	Decoration of hall	Hall	Revenue item
27	Major refurb of lounge	Lounge	Phase 2 priority
28	Install double doors: & store to hall	Hall	Phase 1 priority
29	Projector equipment	Hall	Revenue item
30	New gantry in south end of hall	Hall	Revenue item
31	Refurb toilets.	General	Phase 2 priority