

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director (Change and Delivery) Introduced by (Executive Member (Resources))	Council	Tuesday 17 September 2024

Acceptance of Wolfson Foundation Funding of £100k

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	No
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Purpose of the Report

1. To advise of the council's successful bid to the Wolfson Foundation to support West Wing Renovations to Astley Hall and to seek approval to accept a grant of £100,000.

Recommendations

2. To accept grant funding of £100,000 from the Wolfson Foundation to carry out renovations to the West Wing of Astley Hall.
3. To approve an increase in the capital budget at Astley Hall for an amount equivalent to the grant sum to reflect the receipt.

Reasons for recommendations

4. Good management and maintenance are crucial to the long-term care of heritage sites. Astley Hall is a key public amenity site for the town and conservation of the building is necessary to prevent the building falling into serious disrepair. Acceptance of the Wolfson funding will mean that we can complete the final phase of planned works at Astley Hall.
5. External funding opportunities for capital projects in the museums sector are scarce. The council has tried twice to secure funding through the Arts Council, the primary funder of cultural and heritage projects, but has been unsuccessful. Our bids to the Museum Estate Development Fund have been rejected due to a high volume of applications from buildings at serious risk and Astley is not on the buildings at risk register. To have money offered for a building that is not on the 'at risk' register is a notable achievement and shows that it is regarded as a building of significant culture and heritage.

Other options considered and rejected

6. The council fully funds the renovations – There has already been significant investment in Astley Hall, funded by the council, thus this option was rejected in favour of exploring external funding opportunities.

7. To not accept the grant funding – Funding for just capital infrastructure in the arts, museum and cultural sector is rare. The council has spent significant time working in partnership with The Friends of Astley Hall to prepare an eligible bid.

Executive summary

8. This project is for renovations to the West Wing, the final phase of planned works at Astley Hall. Earlier this year the council submitted an application to the Wolfson Foundation to carry out repairs and interventions to preserve evidential, aesthetic, historical and communal values which would be lost without intervention. The bid was successful, and the council has been offered £100,000 towards the total cost of the work, which has been calculated at £282,000. The Friends of Astley Hall are providing a £5,000 contribution, leaving the Council to fund the remaining £177,000. There is an existing budget, receipt of the grant will enable the delivery of the project.

Corporate priorities

9. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

Housing where residents can live well	A green and sustainable borough
An enterprising economy with vibrant local centres in urban and rural areas	Healthy, safe and engaged communities

Background to the report

10. The Council would like to see Astley Park and Hall become a regional heritage destination in the North-West of England. Our aim is to make the Hall a vibrant tourist attraction, and a versatile space for hosting weddings, education sessions, events, and guided tours that cater to local communities and visitors. There has been significant investment in the Astley site and earlier phases of renovation to preserve the Hall.
11. There have been three phases of work to Astley Hall since 2016. The first was the restoration of the sole plate within the Great Hall to ensure that the 17th Century Cornice plasterwork did not collapse. This was accompanied by the renovation of the Great Hall Staircase. In 2020, work started on the second phase of works, the restoration of the South facing façade of the Hall, including the return to brick, new hardwood windows, the restoration of the Leaded windows and a full redecoration throughout. In 2021 work then started on the restoration of the Cottage Roof (to the rear of Astley Hall). In total over £2 million pounds was spent on Astley Hall.
12. The West Wing renovations is the fourth and final phase of restoration. It involves carrying out urgent repairs to the west wall timber frame and infill panels. These are traditional looking but have failed due to inappropriate material being used in the 1950's to create plaster looking panels. Poor surface water run-off from the roof has also added to the problem and this will also be re-designed.
13. Two full building surveys were carried out in 2001 and 2011 together with a further report with costings. The Council considered these surveys, and the most urgent repairs were acted upon. The Condition Surveys noted the condition of the timber-framed walls to the west range, but these have deteriorated quicker than we would have liked due to prolonged and heavy rain over the last few years. The inappropriate 1950s cementitious infill panels direct rainfall directly onto the oak frame, and this has accentuated the problem. Extant infill panels in several areas have started to fall out of position as timber

rails have shrunk due to rot. It is urgent that these infill panels are replaced with traditional lath and lime plaster to prevent this over-wetting. Repairs are now required to secure the fabric and protect its historic interiors and collections.

14. A single contract is envisaged to undertake the work which will include repairs to external wall timbers and infill panels, a small area of roof extension, upgrading of rainwater goods and repairs to windows. We are unable to open more of the structure at this time due to its exposed position at this time of year, but it is expected that whilst the scope of work will not change, the degree/extent of the repairs will only be fully revealed on opening. This is often the case with timber frame repairs.
15. The total project cost is £282,828.56 (nett). A full breakdown of costs is included as part of the appendices. The Wolfson grant is a contribution of £100,000, with an additional contribution of £5,000 from The Friends of Astley Hall. This group exists to raise the profile of the Hall. They have raised the funds through various activities and membership fees, with an exclusive focus on aiding with the conservation and restoration of Astley Hall. They are an important partner in the Astley site. The council is required to fund the remaining £177,000 and an existing budget has been identified to cover the match funded element.
16. The Council is required to adhere to the terms of the grant around claims and reporting. The contract terms are included in the appendices. The award must be claimed as a single instalment within two years of the grant award letter (issued 10 June 2024). Progress reports are required to be submitted by 30 April and 31 October each year.
17. Effective procurement will be central to delivering a high-quality programme of work. In line with contract procedure rules for contracts over £100,000 a competitive tender process will be applied. Because of the exposed position of the west wall of the Hall, it is considered that the most sensible start time would be March 2025 so that we get the best of the weather through the summer months. The timeframe for completion of the works is estimated as 5 months in total.

Climate change and air quality

18. In particular the report impacts on the following activities:
 - a. net carbon zero by 2030,
 - b. energy use / renewable energy sources**
 - c. waste and the use of single use plastics,
 - d. sustainable forms of transport,
 - e. air quality,
 - f. flooding risks,
 - g. green areas and biodiversity.
19. The work noted in this report has an overall positive impact on the council's carbon emissions and the wider climate emergency and sustainability targets of the council. Improved conditions will result in lower energy use. To control the humidity, we need to increase the temperature. Heat is lost via gaps and holes in the building. De-humidifiers are deployed to tackle the high humidity. Overall, the conditions will improve following the conservation of this wing and as a result, the environmental sustainability of the hall will be better.

Equality and diversity

20. We aim to ensure that the Hall remains open to the public where possible. An impact assessment will be undertaken prior to commencement of any works to understand and mitigate any impacts

Risk

21. There is a risk that the costs may increase for the project due to some uncertainties around the extent of repairs needed. To mitigate this risk, a contingency of 10% has been built into the budget in addition to the £177,000. The costs were also devised with the input of a Conservation Officer with experience in these types of renovation work. Cost estimates and a schedule of works have been received, which provide additional reassurance that the budget and level of contingency is set at a reasonable level.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

22. The increase to the existing Astley budget of £100K will take the budget within the approved capital programme to £308K. This combined budget should be sufficient to meet the costs as detailed in the report.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

23. The acceptance of the grant will enable the delivery of an identified project which will improve the offer at and fabric of the building at Astley Hall. In order to properly account for the grant it is necessary to increase the budget to reflect the receipt.

Background documents

There are no background papers to this report

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