

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Strategic Lead – Communications, Culture & Communities

Cultural Committee: 27 January 2020

Subject: Re-development of Bruce Street Baths, Clydebank

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report updates Committee on activity linked to the redevelopment of Bruce Street Baths, and requests approval to commission an external report exploring the future uses of the building.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Committee is invited to:
- note the contents of this report;
 - approve that an external expert is appointed to consider deliverable and sustainable options for the adaptive re-use of Bruce Street Baths;
 - that funding of up to £20,000 is allocated from the Cultural Capital Fund to pay for this activity;
 - approve that officers can proceed to go to tender for the external support; and
 - agree that a report comes back to a future Cultural Committee with recommendations on the redevelopment and future use of Bruce Street Baths.

3. Background

Bruce Street Baths

- 3.1. The Bruce Street Baths were built in the 1930s to cater for residents living in the significant number of homes in Clydebank at this time with no bathing facilities. The Bruce Street Baths were designed to replace the nearby Hall Street Baths (now demolished) which were becoming too small. The plans were approved by the Council in 1929 and the baths were opened in 1932. The baths originally housed a variety of facilities, including Turkish Baths, Russian Vapour Baths, a laundry and a massage room.
- 3.2. Much of the Baths is made from sandstone ashlar and features a 3-bay swimming pool. It closed to the public in 1994 when the Playdrome Leisure Centre opened in Clydebank.
- 3.3. The Baths are Category C listed with Historic Environment Scotland commenting that they represent a good example of former public baths. The statement of special interest goes on to say: *“The retention of the public baths façade is a reminder of the importance of this building type. The building is a significant addition to the streetscape and it was purposefully designed to match the style of*

the earlier, 1902 Municipal Buildings in Dumbarton Road (see separate listing) by the Glasgow architect James Miller. Together, the buildings form the major part of a complete block and form a coherent civic centre in Clydebank. The Baroque Revival design gives the building a distinctive appearance and the street elevation of the whole has significant streetscape value. The interior has interest in particular for its little altered swimming pool hall with decorative metal railings."

- 3.4.** Since closure the Bruce Street Baths have largely remained unused although some exhibitions have been held there. The most recent of these was the Brick History event in 2017 when 7,000 visitors paid to see a collection of Lego® displays.
- 3.5.** The building is currently largely wind and watertight but internally is in a state of disrepair making it unsuitable for regular public use. There is degradation to the paintwork and most fixtures and fittings; there are signs of water ingress in the original toilet block; there is no working toilet facility in the block and additional capacity may be required depending on future uses; the pool area is covered over with a temporary wooden floor that has a limited load-bearing capacity which restricts future use; there is no public access to the first-floor or the surrounding original features such as changing cubicles; assessment in relation to electrical elements will be required given that only some elements were upgraded in 2017 for the temporary exhibition; and finally there are significant heating and ventilation issues to overcome which would necessitate a full assessment given that there is no central heating within the Baths. At present the nature of the building means that without a heating solution the venue would be unsuitable for use outside of the warmer months of June to September.
- 3.6.** On 5 March 2018 Council earmarked £4 million of capital funding within the budget for 2018/19 to invest in its cultural and heritage infrastructure in order to unlock regeneration, increase tourism and raise the reputation of the area. The decision recognised the fact that between 2017-22 the waterfront area at Clydebank would be transformed, and that the Council should use this opportunity to undertake and create bold and exciting projects that would help revitalise Council assets and change the perception of the local area.
- 3.7.** In May 2018 the Cultural Committee noted that officers were looking to develop projects for Elected Members to consider which would enhance the historic environment, and also deliver wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits to the West Dunbartonshire Council area.
- 3.8.** One of the projects listed for the attention of Committee was the Bruce Street Baths. Committee noted that officers would develop detailed proposals for this project and include where possible how this investment could be match-funded from external sources. It was recognised that the Baths were in a second phase of improvement works after the priority Town Hall redevelopment had been agreed. Committee approval for redevelopment of the Town Hall was given in November 2019 and so attention can now be given to the Baths.

- 3.9.** Consideration of Bruce Street Baths is also timely given the significant progress on the neighbouring Queens Quay site. Construction is currently underway across the site with housing, retail, care home, health centre and district heating facility all being designed and developed. Bruce Street will be an important pedestrian thoroughfare between Queens Quay and Clydebank town centre, and as such it is considered a priority that it is redeveloped and brought back into use. Leaving the building empty and in a poor state could have a negative effect on the visual impression of this key regeneration area. It would also fail to capitalise on opportunities presented by the influx of new residents and businesses.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** Officers have considered a number of future uses for the building including unique events space, exhibition space, operational baths, and restaurant and bar. Narrative on the merits of each of these are discussed in the following sections.

Events space

- 4.2** The historic architecture of the Bruce Street Baths could provide a unique backdrop for events and functions such as weddings, conferences, ceremonies, music gigs, performance art, and screenings. The historic style and also the smaller size could differentiate it from the existing market demand for the larger and more traditional Main Hall within the Clydebank Town Hall. The Victoria Baths in Manchester currently operate a similar model, and there are similar successful historic events venues operating within 20 miles such as Oran Mòr, Cottiers, Saint Luke's, and Pollokshields Burgh Hall. Operating costs could be minimised because staffing would only be required when bookings were received. These could be facilitated either from the existing Town Hall team – depending on what else is on at the Town Hall – or by bringing-in additional staff as required. Further clarity is required to establish if the Baths as an events space would create new and additional demand, or if the existing demand for the Main Hall would be simply be displaced to Bruce Street Baths. Should the latter be the case then this would limit the overall income benefit to the Council. It also needs to be considered if such an events space could operate in harmony with the neighbouring Clydebank Care Home currently under construction.

Exhibition space

- 4.3** The Bruce Street Baths could serve as a unique exhibition venue given its scale and the flexibility of the interior space. Equally, however, the size of the venue presents a challenge in terms of ensuring an appropriate exhibition environment – specifically with regards light levels, temperature and humidity. To maximise the potential of any such venue, additional infrastructure improvements would need to be considered to allow for environmental monitoring and control. In addition, security considerations would also have to be made. Should this be achieved, a programme of changing exhibitions would be required to fill the space. The scale of the Council's heritage and fine art collections would not be sufficient to support a programme on the desired scale. Instead, touring and/or

loaned exhibitions from other institutions would have to be brought in, and these would have a revenue implication for the Council. Again, any such touring exhibitions would be loaned contingent on an appropriate and acceptable exhibition environment, and necessary security measures such as alarms, CCTV and security doors and windows. Exhibitions would also need to be permanently staffed by at least one to two employees in excess of the team currently in place to support the Clydebank Town Hall. This would add an additional financial burden to the Council. Although entrance-fees could be charged for touring exhibitions, it is unlikely that ticket sales would generate enough income to cover the costs. A higher admission fee in line with other major touring or temporary exhibitions could be used but this would discourage a number of local residents. Consideration also needs to be given to the fact that in November 2019 Committee agreed to invest in significantly expanding the gallery space available within the Town Hall. It is not clear if there is current visitor demand in the local area and beyond for an expanded gallery space, as well as a new large exhibition space within the Baths.

Operational baths

- 4.4** The building could be transformed back into a working public baths creating a unique visitor attraction in Scotland. While examples can be found of outdoor lidos being re-opened in the UK, there are few examples of indoor public baths returning to their original use. Newcastle's City Baths will reopen this month as a 'lifestyle venue' following a £7.5m transformation that includes a pool, Turkish Baths and spa, as well as fitness suite. Govanhill Baths raised £6.7m in 2014 and work will begin in 2020 to re-open their smaller Ladies Pool and the Learners Pool, but not the large Main Pool. Their assessment is that the Main Pool is more suited for income generation as an events space. The Victoria Baths in Manchester has secured £5m of funding to date but re-opening the pool is still a long-term aspiration. The financial model in West Dunbartonshire appears challenging because the costs of refurbishing the pool would be significant, and would struggle to demonstrate value for money. It is expected that the operating costs would exceed income and have negative implications on the Council's revenue budget. In addition the Council has recently significantly invested to build the Clydebank Leisure Centre, just metres away, to meet the needs of local residents therefore it is unclear if there would be additional demand or a displacement.

Restaurant and Bar

- 4.5** The Bruce Street Baths would provide a unique setting for a restaurant and bar. The space is large enough to provide operational flexibility, and its setting would provide a local option to new homeowners on Queens Quay, as well as existing Clydebank residents. The venue is so large it would require a significant daily flow of customers to be operationally viable. Clydebank currently has a small night-time economy and so there could be a concern regarding the demand that might exist for this sort of venue. As a public sector organisation the Council has neither the experience, skills or mandate to enter the commercial restaurant and bar business. As a result the operating model would most likely be of a franchise nature. It is believed that such a use may lead to displacement of existing

customers of local businesses to this venue, but this would need to be explored further. Consideration also needs to be given to the Licensing Board's overprovision approach which may make future permanent applications for this building more challenging.

Other options

- 4.6** In addition it is recognised that there are a number of other options that could be possible for the Baths ranging from residential accommodation, office accommodation, commercial accommodation, civic hall, retail, dance or art studio, and community asset transfer. There is also the option to 'do nothing' at this time until development of Queens Quay is more advanced, and there is a greater clarity on future opportunities.

Next steps

- 4.7** Officers would now like to commission an expert consultant to lead a study team to assess deliverable and sustainable options for the adaptive re-use of Bruce Street Baths. This would assess a long list of possible new uses and thereafter, through a process of further analysis, narrow these down to a preferred option or options. A key objective would be for the Council to obtain a clear understanding of the potential level of intervention required, and associated costs to secure a productive, functional and viable re-use. The preferred option should be practical, cost effective and appropriate to the significant and historic character of the Baths. The appraisal process would involve consultation with key stakeholders to gather options on issues, needs and opportunities to ensure that local aspirations were considered. It would also include an assessment of market demand and additionality, competitor analysis, segmentation, and demographics. This would thereafter form a future options appraisal and assist with the development of a business case. A Committee report with final recommendations would then be brought to a future Cultural Committee – most likely in October 2020.
- 4.8** It is anticipated that the cost of the external report would be under £20,000 and it is recommended that it is paid for in full from the Council's Cultural Capital Fund. Some market testing has been carried out and this it is anticipated that this is achievable for this amount

4 People Implications

- 5.1** There are no direct people implications arising from this report.

6 Financial & Procurement Implications

- 6.1** It is the expectation of officers that this project can be delivered for less than £20,000. This would be paid in full from the Cultural Capital Fund.
- 6.2** In March 2018 the Council created a £4m Cultural Capital Fund. In January 2020 approximately £1.25m of this Fund remains unallocated. It is unknown at this

time how much any of the options outlined in this report for Bruce Street Baths could cost. This information would be reported to Committee as outlined at 4.7.

- 6.3** Depending on the final bids received, procurement will be progressed either via the Quick Quote process or in line with West Dunbartonshire Council's Best Value guidelines and a minimum of three quotes.

7 Risk Analysis

- 7.1** A number of risks have been identified:

- Research of this kind is a specific skillset and without external support development of the Bruce Street Baths proposal is likely to be compromised due to lack of in-house expertise;
- There is a risk that despite instructing external consultants this activity could be progressed to a conclusion which does not engender support from officers, elected members or the public. This risk will be mitigated by undertaking a rigorous procurement process to find the best fit professional input, working with the appointed consultant to develop a detailed and informed brief that clearly describes what the Council requires; and
- There is a risk that the Council could commission this work but that the report will identify that 'do nothing' is the most appropriate approach at this time. This risk is acknowledged but in that case the officer view would be that the report has guided the Council away from a major investment which would not have been sustainable.

8 Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

An Equality Impact Screening did not indicate any further action required in relation to any recommendations.

9 Consultation

- 9.1** This proposal has been consulted on with colleagues in the Town Hall, Arts & Heritage, Asset Management, Economic Development, Legal, Finance and Procurement.

10 Strategic Assessment

- 10.1** The proposals within this report support the following strategic priorities:
- Efficient and effective frontline services that improve the everyday lives of residents.

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Date 03/1/2020

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Background Papers: Cultural Capital Project Board Update – Cultural Committee
May 2018

Wards Affected: All