

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	12 March 2018
Report of the	-	Executive Director of Business Operations
Subject	-	The Landgate, Rye

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**Recommendation:** It be **RESOLVED:** That Rother District Council carry out urgent works to the Landgate Rye up to £74,000 to be met from the Repairs and Renewals Earmarked Reserves and to include a contribution of at least £7,000 from local stakeholders including Rye Town Council and continue negotiations with local stakeholders to secure a long-term solution.

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**Service Manager: Brenda Mason**

**Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Lord Ampthill**

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## **Introduction**

1. At its meeting on 5 October 2015, Cabinet approved a recommendation that officers explore options for devolving ownership of the Landgate, Rye, a fourteenth century Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) belonging to the Council. The building was not considered central to the Council's core business and maintenance costs were likely to prove a burden in the future, without recourse to grants funds such as Heritage England. The report of October 2015 contains a summary of the history and current condition of the Landgate (Minute CB15/33 refers). The purpose of this report is to update Members on the activity undertaken in pursuit of the devolution objective with stakeholders and to propose a way forward that deals with the challenges encountered.

## **Recent Activity**

2. Over the course of 2016, officers commissioned a paper from John Bailey of Thomas Ford and Partners (architects and authors of the 2015 condition survey) setting out a future vision for the building, attached at Appendix 1. The paper provides a very useful assessment of the history and cultural significance of the building, bringing together an authoritative account that contributes to the sum of local historical knowledge. In addition, the paper explores options for the future of the building and its guardianship. Members are reminded that the Council has a duty under legislation to look after SAMs and Grade I listed buildings in its ownership.
3. In summary, the options for the future maintenance of the building are set out as:
  - A. Do nothing
  - B. Controlled pragmatic repair as a 'managed ruin'
  - C. Repair and alteration adding value with public access

4. It is intended that the discussion paper supports decision-making and funding applications. John Bailey took the opportunity to open channels with Historic England (HE) about the possibility of funding for the works required for option C above. Unfortunately, due principally to lack of HE funds, this option was discounted. Equally an approach to the Heritage Lottery Fund was considered to be problematic in that lottery funding generally only awarded where public access was made available, in which the degree of difficulty and cost was highest. For this reason option B, controlled repairs as a 'managed ruin', was considered by local stakeholders as the preferred way forward.
5. The options for future ownership are:
  - A. RDC continued ownership
  - B. Disposal to a third party in current condition
  - C. Enter into a deal to pass to a third party on completion of works by RDC
6. A number of meetings were also held with local stakeholders to discuss the option to transfer guardianship of the monument to local ownership. Not surprisingly, there is a marked degree of reluctance to take on responsibility for the monument when there are known works to be undertaken and there is no regular source of income to cover the costs of annual maintenance. The question has been frequently asked of officers – why would anyone wish to take the building on?
7. With local concern for the future and safety of the monument growing, a group of local residents have formed the Friends of the Landgate with the objective of supporting endeavours to safeguard the building and spurring this Council as owner of the asset into undertaking remedial works. At the same time, with the involvement of a local architect, a further option of exploring the potential for reuse of the building for private or commercial habitation such as a permanent residence, holiday, hotel or studio accommodation has received qualified local support. This option is still in very early days of consideration and clearly would need to meet conservation criteria and not compromise the historic fabric in any way.

### **Landgate Action Group**

8. In order to drive a sustainable solution to the issue, a Landgate Action Group has recently been set up under the inaugural chairmanship of Councillor Lord Ampthill, comprising members from the District Council, Town Council, Rye Conservation Society, Rye Museum and Friends of the Landgate. With a focussed membership bringing together expert knowledge and working in partnership, it is hoped to identify and enact the steps required to safeguard the building, within all the constraints of affordability. The draft Action Group Terms of Reference are attached at Appendix 2.

### **Urgent Works**

9. In order to assist in this drive towards a sustainable future for the Landgate, there is much to be gained by this Council undertaking works to put the building in a condition that gives breathing space to pull together the forward strategy. These works comprise the most urgent works identified in John Bailey's repair specification of 2015 and the works will be carried out in accordance with those details. The Council will need to apply to HE for

Scheduled Monument Consent for certain of the works. Preliminary cost estimates for these works have been calculated in the region of £74,000 using the following breakdown:

Preliminaries and access	£18,000
Cleaning and anti-pigeon measures	£12,000
Removal of debris, woodwork, flagpole, repair of masonry and rainwater pipes	£25,000
Remedial electrical works	£5,000
Fees and consents	£4,000
Contingency	£10,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£74,000</b>

10. Councillor Mike Boyd representing Rye Town Council has indicated that they would be prepared to underwrite a sum of £7,000 to the repair bill, subject to conditions.

### **Finance**

11. Currently there is no provision for the Landgate in the revenue budget and whilst the works have been described as urgent in the study report, HE has not pursued their enforcement powers. If Members are minded to support the expenditure it will require use of Repairs and Renewables Earmarked Reserves to meet this cost.

### **Conclusion**

12. Should Members be minded to approve the expenditure, it is anticipated that the works would be commissioned over the course of the coming year. On completion of these works, the challenge will be for the Landgate Action Group to take forward a sustainable approach to the future of the monument. There are some exciting new ideas emerging for this and the breathing space acquired by completing the urgent works will enable this to take place in a positive and forward looking environment. The Council's role on the Group will be that of promoting and facilitating the transfer of the asset to a suitable new public or private guardian, in accordance with the HE's guidance 'The Disposal of Heritage Assets'.
13. Should the Landgate Action Group not be equal to this mission, then officers will pursue disposal to a third party with the opportunities for reuse making this a potentially attractive albeit costly option.

Dr Anthony Leonard  
Executive Director of Business Operations

### **Risk Assessment Statement**

The Council has a duty to look after its heritage assets and securing a sustainable way forward for the Landgate will be advanced by the approach set out in this report.