

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES

**BIRKENHEAD PRIORY AND ST MARY'S CHURCH TOWER
PROPOSED STABILISATION AND IMPROVEMENTS
SCHEME AND ESTIMATE REPORT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes proposals and sets out the estimated costs of a scheme to undertake stabilization, improvements and necessary repairs to Birkenhead Priory and St Mary's Church Tower. Cabinet is asked to consider and approve the proposal within the budget agreed by Cabinet on 14 January 2010 (minute 279 refers).

This report is identified as item 39 on the Forward Plan for August - November 2010.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Birkenhead Priory is believed to be the oldest range of surviving buildings in Merseyside, dating from approximately 1150AD.
- 1.2 The remains of the Priory is Grade I listed, the Chapter House Chapel is Grade II* listed, and the remains of the Church of St Mary is Grade II listed. The combined group of buildings is scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archeological Areas Act 1979 (as amended) as a National Monument, no.32571.
- 1.3 The site is mostly in the ownership of Wirral Council, but the Chapter House Chapel and former Scriptorium above, which are only accessed through the Council-owned Priory grounds, are owned by the Diocese of Chester.
- 1.4 The Priory was founded in the 12th century by Hamo de Massey of Dunham Massey in Cheshire. The Priory Lands included most of what is now Birkenhead, and had the use of Pasture in Bidston, Moreton, Claughton, Saughall and Tranmere. The Priory also claimed rights of fishing and retrieving wreckage in the Mersey, and by the 13th century the monks obtained a royal charter to run the first official ferry service across the Mersey.
- 1.5 The scheduling as an Ancient Monument states that the site is historically important because of the 13th century visits of Edward I, in order to launch his campaigns in Wales, that show the political importance of the Priory.
- 1.6 The Priory was dissolved by Henry VIII, and the largest of the buildings, the Priory Church, was destroyed. The site subsequently passed hands several times.
- 1.7 In 1820 the ground level over the site of several ranges of buildings was built up, and these continue to remain buried under the built-up ground. The reason for the built-up ground was in order to transfer graves from the eastern section of the complex so that a new parish church for Birkenhead, St Mary's, could be built on the site. St Mary's Church was built in 1821, designed by nationally-renowned church architect Thomas Rickman – a Liverpool-based architect.

- 1.8 Money was raised by public subscription in the late 19th century to buy the remaining Priory buildings and land and donate them to Birkenhead Corporation. As a consequence, a substantial restoration and archeological survey was undertaken by the Corporation in the 1890s.
- 1.9 The grounds of Birkenhead Priory and Parish Church of St Mary remained intact until the early 1960's, when much of the site was sold to Cammell Laird shipyard for the construction of the Princess Dock. Most of the graveyard and a substantial part of the site of the original Priory Church were lost by this deep excavation, and a sandstone wall was constructed to mark the new southern boundary of the site.
- 1.10 By 1975 St Mary's Church had become redundant as a place of worship, and, after a campaign by Birkenhead History Society was itself acquired by the local authority – now Wirral Council. The greater part of the church was demolished, and the remaining structure, comprising the west tower, part of the nave, transepts and two flanking porches was stabilized.
- 1.11 In the early 1990s two major schemes to enhance the site were undertaken by Wirral Council:
1. The restoration of St Mary's Tower to open it as a visitor attraction, including a new staircase with access to the upper parapet of the tower and toilet accommodation in the base of the tower, and
 2. The restoration of the North Range, including the construction of a modern roof over the Refectory, new staircase accesses, and the internal restoration of the Undercroft and Buttery to form an interpretation centre for the site.
- 1.12 The latter works included further archeological investigations and improvements to site drainage.
- 1.13 Since the 1990s basic maintenance has been undertaken at the Priory, but there has been no major capital investment. English Heritage has determined that repairs are urgent, and that any further delay will only incur far greater costs at a later date. The building is now on the Heritage at Risk register, and, if the repairs are carried out, it can be removed from the register.
- 1.14 At its meeting on 14th January 2010 Cabinet agreed to allocate £2M for capital investment in the Priory site and the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum (minute 279 refers). A Scheme and Estimate report for proposed works to the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum in the sum of £1,256,860 was presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 22 July 2010 (minute 83 refers), stating that a report on proposals for the Priory would be presented to a future meeting of Cabinet.

2.0 PROPOSALS

- 2.1 The existing features at the site of Birkenhead Priory owned by Wirral Council include:
- The North Range, comprising the restored Refectory, Undercroft and Buttery, complete with two external timber stairs,
 - The West Range, comprising the roofless ruin of the former Guest Hall and accommodation above. The West Range includes an open storage area for various mediaeval stone artefacts.

- The Cloister between the North Range, West Range, Chapter House Chapel and site of the former Priory Church. The Cloister includes areas of mediaeval pavings with largely 19th century gravestones and tombs,
- St Mary's Tower and ruins of St Mary's Church,
- Car Park, comprising a gated-off area formerly part of Church Street. The Car Park has over the years become a storage area for predominantly 19th century large artefacts.
- Boundary walls, railings and gates, and internal stone steps, walls, railings and gates.
- 20th century landscaping features including tarmac driveway, pavings, grassed areas, trees and shrubs.

2.2 Late in 2009 a Conservation Management Plan, Condition Survey and Gazetteer were undertaken by consultants Lloyd Evans Prichard on behalf of Wirral Council, with financial support from English Heritage. The proposals for capital investment on the site of Birkenhead Priory emanate largely from the recommendations within the Conservation Management Plan.

2.3 The Conservation Management Plan (CMP) has been shared with the Diocese of Chester, and discussions have been held with representatives of the Diocese and officers of the Chapter House Chapel, who are separately addressing the recommendations within the CMP that relate specifically to the Chapter House Chapel and former Scriptorium over.

2.4 A bid for Heritage Lottery Fund support has been submitted in regard of the recommendations within the CMP relating to the West Range, improved visitor facilities and improved interpretation across the site. In anticipation of the success of this bid, an appropriate element of match funding has been included in the Financial Implications within this report.

2.5 This Scheme and Estimate report has therefore concentrated on proposals for the stabilization, restoration, protection and improvements to:

- The North Range, including structural repairs, archeological survey, improved access including a new covered staircase and lift,
- St Mary's Tower and ruins of the Church, including structural repairs and stabilization, rebuilding pinnacles, lime-rendering to exposed bare brickwork to former internal façade of nave, repair to cast-iron and wrought-iron window frames and tracery, and refurbishment of toilet accommodation,
- The Cloister, including relaying mediaeval pavings to avoid trips, improved drainage to avoid ponding in front of the Chapter House Chapel, and pruning the over-mature trees within the site of the former Priory Church,
- Boundary and internal walls, including removal of invasive vegetation, removal of hard cappings, removal of redundant metalwork and railings, overhauling remaining railings with new additional railings and gates as appropriate, stabilization, repair, and new sacrificial lime mortar cappings,
- Site Drainage generally, including ensuring that drains are all running adequately,
- Car Park, including removal of inappropriate artefacts and construction of new pedestrian ramp to the main site level,
- Mediaeval artefacts, grave stones and tombs, including recording, cataloguing and the construction of a new protective artefacts store.

- 2.6 It is intended that the works above be tendered as a single contract of works to maximise procurement and operational efficiencies. The programme will be dependent on Listed Building Consent, Scheduled Monument Consent and the result of archeological investigations but, once these have been obtained, is anticipated to be able to start on site in March 2011, with a view to completion in November 2011.
- 2.7 The construction of a new stair enclosure and lift to the Refectory will require the closure of that facility for approximately 12 weeks; the works to St Mary's Tower will require a closure of the Tower for approximately 6 weeks; and works within the Cloister will require a closure of the Chapter House Chapel for approximately 4 weeks. It is anticipated, however, that no extended closure of the site as a whole will be required to undertake the above works, although short-term closures may be required between stages of development for public safety reasons.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Estimate for this work is set out below. All costs are estimated for the commencement of construction within the first quarter of 2011.

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| Building costs plus Contingencies | £ 527,973 |
| Provisional Sum for HLF bid match | £ 20,000 |
| Preliminaries | <u>£ 65,757</u> |
| BUILDING CONTRACT WORKS | £ 613,730 |
| Departmental Charges @ 16% including: Professional Fees, Clerk of Works salary, CDM Coordinator, Planning & B Regs fees | £ 98,197 |
| Surveys, including: Feasibility costs, Structural surveys, Drainage surveys, and Archeological investigations | <u>£ 31,213</u> |
| TOTAL | £ 743,140 |

- 3.2 The scheme is to be funded from the Capital Programme which includes investment in Cultural Services assets with £2 million specifically for works to the Williamson Art Gallery and the Birkenhead Priory.
- 3.3 Scheme and Estimate proposals for the Williamson Art Gallery were reported to Cabinet on 22 July 2010 in the sum of **£1,256,860**
- 3.4 It is anticipated that the proposals for the Priory and St Mary's Tower will go out as a two stage selective competitive tender based on quality and price in January 2011 and the selected contractor will commence work on site in March 2011 with anticipated completion by November 2011.
- 3.5 There will be some additional minor revenue costs associated with scheme, including the maintenance and servicing of the proposed lift, and the maintenance of the staircase enclosure, ramp from the car park, and additional

drainage which can be provided for from the Departments existing property maintenance budgets.

4.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Professional Services for the scheme will be provided by staff within the Technical Services Department, other than the specialist surveys outlined in 3.1 above. The Structural Survey of St Mary's Tower and ruins of St Mary's Church has been undertaken by Capita Symonds, within the terms of the framework agreement for such services .
- 4.2 In accordance with the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations the Director of Technical Services is carrying out the role of CDM Coordinator.
- 4.3 There are no full-time staff implications for Birkenhead Priory and St Mary's Tower arising from this report.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 At present non-ambulant access is available to the Buttery, Undercroft , West Range, Cloister and site of St Mary's Church. As part of this scheme non-ambulant access will also be provided from the Car Park to the main site, and to the Refectory.
- 5.2 Access up the Tower will remain by stairs only. Should the HLF bid be successful, virtual access to the tower will be provided by positioning a web cam on the tower and accessible viewing points at the bottom and/or in the proposed new visitors centre.
- 5.2 The existing accessible WC within the base of the Tower will be refurbished to current DDA recommendations.
- 5.3 There are no implications in this report specifically for women, ethnic minorities or the elderly.

6.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The design of this project will take account of best practice to reduce the risk of crime and the local Crime Reduction Officer will be consulted.

7.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 All timber used will be from sustainable sources regulated by the Forestry Stewardship Council.
- 7.2 The successful contractor will be encouraged to employ local labour and source materials from local suppliers once construction commences

8.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Planning, Listed Building Consent, Scheduled Monument Consent and Building Control approval will be required for this project.

9.0 ANTI POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no specific anti poverty implications within this report.

10.0 SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The building improvements will assist in providing an integrated approach to children's education, and open up cultural awareness for the entire community.

11.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Birkenhead Priory and St Mary's Church Tower is in the Birkenhead and Tranmere ward, but due to its unique status is of interest to all Members.

12.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 The information used in the preparation of this report is held by the Technical Services Department. No background papers have been used in the preparation of this report other than those contained in the Architects file B02400 and the Quantity Surveyors working papers.

12.2 Cabinet report dated 14 January 2010 and associated minute 279.

13.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 That the Scheme and Estimate, as presented, be accepted,

13.2 That the Director of Technical Services be authorised to obtain all necessary statutory approvals for the project.

13.3 That the Director of Technical Services be authorised to seek tenders for the project, and report such tenders to a future meeting of Cabinet with a recommendation for acceptance of the most economically advantageous tender received.

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Director of Technical Services

The initial draft of this report has been prepared by Andy Nash, Group Architect, who may be contacted on 606 2425

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