

Briefing Notes

Meeting between Sir Henry Bellingham & Ivor Rowlands

Thursday 12th April

6.00pm Knight's Hill Hotel

Contents

	Pages
Summary of Ivor's Guildhall Campaign	2 – 3
LArCH Letters to Borough Council	4 – 7
Correspondence to Informal Working Group	8 – 18
Email Correspondence with National Trust AGM	19 – 23
LArCH Vision	24 – 25
Historical Notes	26 – 27

Summary of Ivor's Guildhall Campaign.

Introduction

The first and most important thing to say is that I have no financial or business interest in any aspect of Art and Culture, nor do I have any political affiliations or ambitions. I have nothing to gain or lose personally from either the success or failure of the Guildhall, other than as someone who enjoys living and spending time (and money) in King's Lynn and who intends spending his retirement here. My interest in King's Lynn, The Guildhall, Art, Heritage & Culture is entirely due to a desire to use the benefit of my own experience and abilities to help find the best outcome for the town and the community.

Background

I have been a long standing advocate for King's Lynn ever since my wife and I moved from Manchester to work here 27 years ago. Throughout this period, we have been avid supporters of all of the wonderful cultural events in King's Lynn – from the Mart to the Festival and most things in-between! Our two children were both born and grew up in Lynn. As very keen theatre-goers and art lovers, we are regular visitors to the Corn Exchange and Guildhall and also travel frequently to Norwich, Cambridge, London and elsewhere for a wider range of performances and exhibitions.

More recently, since the children have grown up and left for university, and my work is based more reliably closer to home, I have had time to become involved in a number of Community based organisations. We joined the King's Lynn Community Cinema Club about 5 years ago and I was immediately asked to join the committee as Treasurer and, with my wife, to help out with their publicity. In 2015, I joined the KL Town Guides' training programme and became a qualified Guide the following year. I was elected to join the Town Guides' Committee as Publicity Officer. Since then, we have hardly been out of the local press (including a regular 3-page feature in the KL Magazine), have launched a Website and Facebook page and have increased our visitor numbers by over 20%. I have also been selected to represent the Town Guides on the West Norfolk Tourism Forum. I am a member of the Civic Society and enjoy attending many of the talks and lectures that are hosted by various interest groups in town.

Involvement with The Guildhall

After the unexpected closure of KLACT, I began to ask questions as to why it had to close and subsequently became drawn in to trying to help find a better alternative.

In January 2016, following the KLACT retrospective exhibition in the Shakespeare Barn, I wrote a dozen or so letters to various individuals and organisations, highlighting the rich cultural potential of King's Lynn and trying to raise awareness of the town. One of the more encouraging responses came from Antony Gormley. It was in relation to this interest that I first contacted the Borough Council and Festival and first became known to both of these organisations.

Following a period of uncertainty and anxiety amongst my committee colleagues in the Cinema Club, about what was happening to the Guildhall, I began asking questions of the few contacts I had in other organisations, and tried to approach the Borough Council to find out what was happening.

Eventually, due to a lack of awareness of what was happening, I called a meeting of interested parties and was overwhelmed by the response. This resulted in my introduction to many very experienced individuals with a huge collective knowledge of Art, Culture and Heritage as well as some of the nuances of the recent history of the St George's Guildhall and the King's Lynn Arts Centre.

A new group was set up under the name of Lynn Arts, Culture & Heritage (LArCH) with the intention of working with the Borough Council towards a better outcome for the Guildhall than was proposed in the first (unsuccessful) HLF bid.

My own views of the Guildhall have been developed with assistance from many people with different opinions, experience and perspectives, including but not limited to the following:

- BCKLWN – Chris Bamfield, Mark Fuller, Elizabeth Nockolds, Lesley Bambridge
- KL Preservation Trust – Nick Balaam.
- KL Festival – Alison Croose, Adrian Parker, Steve MacKee.
- KL Civic Society – Desmond Waite, Alison Gifford.
- KL Arts Centre Trust – Liz Falconbridge, Rod Duncan.
- Alive Leisure – Phillip Bayfield, Nina McKenna.
- National Trust – Dame Helen Ghosh, Caroline Pons, John Sell, Merlin Waterson.
- The Family of the late Lady Ruth Fermoy – Lady Jane Fellowes
- The Family of the late Alec Penrose – Antony Penrose
- Future Arts Centres – Chris Kirkwood, CEO of Lincoln Drill Hall, Gavin Barlow CEO of The Albany Arts Centre.
- KLODS, KL Players, KL Community Cinema Club, WN G&S, Lynn Dance Academy
- KL Arts Centre Volunteers
- Arts & Culture Specialists - Veronica Sekules, Director Groundwork Gallery, Robert Anderson, former Director of British Museum, Julian Litten, former Senior Curator of V&A Museum.
- Artists – Tim Mann, Michael Hankinson, Greyfriars' artists, Brian Falconbridge.
- Plus many local residents, friends, business owners and well-wishers.

Ivor Rowlands

February 11th 2018.

LArCH Letters to Borough Council

Cllr. Elizabeth Nockolds,
Cabinet Member for Culture, Heritage & Health,
BCKLWN.

cc: Chris Bamfield

27th September 2016

Re: The Guildhall of St. George Complex, King's Lynn

Dear Cllr. Nockolds,

We write as the representatives of the current users and other interested parties with whom you recently met to discuss the future of the Guildhall complex. We have collectively considered our responses to the issues, including those raised at that meeting so as to enable us to play a constructive role in a sustainable future for the Guildhall complex, starting with the scheduled meeting.

We feel it important to clearly state that we are sensitive to the difficult position that BCKLWN finds itself in with dramatic cuts in central Government funding and the existence of a long term lease on an expensive to maintain complex of unique buildings of national heritage status and local/regional significance to the arts. Despite our late involvement in the Council's development of solutions to the sustainable maintenance, repair and use issues of the complex we are determined to make a positive contribution. It is our belief that our formal support for an eventual mutually beneficial solution would enhance any BCKLWN bid or bids for funding and significantly enhance the chances of success.

Our collective consideration of the issues has led us to a series of conclusions which we wish to discuss with you at the next meeting. While these points may initially appear to be at odds with the Council's draft options and bidding timetable they are based upon advice and guidance provided by experienced, informed sources.

- It is our view that any solution should be one which addresses the arts and heritage issues of the complex as a whole and in the context of that whole. It should be based upon a clear strategy for the sustained development of the arts and culture in King's Lynn and West Norfolk, including the Guildhall complex and which is founded upon a comprehensive robust business plan which can deliver the strategy for the long term. We are ready and willing to contribute our experience and expertise to this end. We believe that any funding bid which omits such a holistic approach to the entire Guildhall complex is likely to encounter difficulties.
- That the Council should reconsider its decision to proceed with a **regional** HLF bid on the basis that this would be easier to win and that the complex would not be able to compete on a **national** stage, as this fails to acknowledge that the Guildhall complex **is of national heritage importance**. If the concern is that a comprehensive Guildhall complex **national** level HLF bid would, in these financially difficult times, require unachievable levels of

BCKLWN matched funding, then our view is that Arts Lottery support should be sought as additional matched funding (as is now permitted).

- As a consequence of the above we feel that the November bid timetable needs to be abandoned in order to allow time to realign the BCKLWN approach to the Guildhall complex issues to reflect the above views.
- None of the above is with prejudice to the consideration of any general or specific options that may form part of a definitive solution, rather it lays down a framework upon which a comprehensive mutually acceptable plan can be devised with the scope and above all the time needed to develop it.

We are concerned that what we envisage as the current draft HLF bid has been developed without the full and timely involvement of the current users. As a consequence we find ourselves in the difficult position of being consulted on the fine details of proposals that are parts of a bid that appears to approach the heritage arts and cultural aspects of the Guildhall complex in a piecemeal and narrow manner. As previously stated, we feel our formal support would enhance a mutually acceptable bid/bids that fund a comprehensive strategy for the structural, cultural and artistic future of the Guildhall complex. We urge you to approach our next meeting with an open mind to our suggestions and our willingness to help.

We look forward to your positive response to our proposal.

Yours sincerely

Ivor Rowlands

Alison Croose - Chair of KL Festival

Nick Balaam - Chair of KL Preservation Trust

Tim Mann - Artist

Amanda Arterton – Vice President of WN Gilbert & Sullivan Soc

Lesley Bambridge - St Margaret's & St Nicholas ward forum

Martin Little

Adrian Parker - Planning Consultant, Chair of Friends of St Nicholas'

Darren Taylor – MD of KLFM

Ema Holman - KL Festival administrator

Christine James - Former Chair of Governors and Volunteer

Michael Hankinson - Musician, Composer & Conductor

Chris Fox - Chair KL Players

Veronica Sekules - Director of GroundWork Gallery

Cllr. Brian Long, Leader, and Cllr. Elizabeth Nockolds, Cabinet Member for Culture, Heritage & Health, BCKLWN.

11th April 2017

Dear Cllrs. Long & Nockolds,

King's Lynn Arts Centre and Guildhall of St George

We write to you on behalf of LArCH (Lynn Arts, Culture & Heritage). This is a newly formed body comprising representatives of the user groups and other interested parties who have met with the Borough Council from time to time over recent months to discuss the future of the Guildhall.

We are intent on finding a sustainable arts-based solution to develop the complex into a worthy attraction and facility for the community of King's Lynn and its visitors, along the lines that were intended by Alexander Penrose in the original 1951 agreement.

To facilitate this, we ask you supply us with the following documents / information:

- The full application and supporting documents submitted by BCKLWN in late 2016 to the Heritage Lottery Fund in respect of the proposed improvement works to the Guildhall.
- The full correspondence with HLF in respect of the above bid, including the HLF's reasons for the decision not to provide funding, and all internal correspondence reporting comments or feedback or minutes from conversations, telephone calls or meetings with HLF regarding the original bid or any future revised bid.

We understand that certain limited details may need to be redacted due to reasons of confidentiality, but would expect that this will not inhibit our ability to understand fully the details of the proposals and any explanation as to its rejection by HLF.

Our next meeting will take place during the first week of May, so please can you supply these details before the end of April? Digital copies would be entirely suitable.

We will be using these documents in the coming weeks to develop a plan that will embrace the opportunity for

1. the development of a coherent strategy for the use of the whole site, including the river frontage, which will enable complementary and mutually supportive uses; and
2. the establishment of a coordinating organisation for King's Lynn, embracing the arts in ALL its forms, and whether professional or community-based, including provision for education and development activities that could provide a platform for the development and promotion of arts across the entire community.

We look forward to receiving your documents and working with you as our plans develop over the coming months.

Yours sincerely

Nicholas Balaam
Adrian Parker
Ivor Rowlands
Veronika Sekules

The Guildhall Informal Working Group
BCKLWN

14th February 2018

Dear Councillors

King's Lynn Arts Centre and Guildhall of St George

We write to you as representatives of Lynn Art, Culture and Heritage (LArCH) and as signatories to a letter sent to the Borough Council in September 2016.

We are pleased that the Council has formed an Informal Working Group to consider options for the future use of the Guildhall.

We would like to re-confirm our eagerness to use our collective widespread experience and active involvement in the community to be fully involved with your group over the coming months as your plans develop.

Yours sincerely, on behalf of LArCH

Amanda Arterton	– Vice President of WN Gilbert & Sullivan Soc
Nick Balaam	– Chair of KL Preservation Trust
Lesley Bambridge	– St Margaret's & St Nicholas ward forum
Chris Fox	– Chair KL Players
Michael Hankinson	– Musician, Composer & Conductor
Christine James	– Chair of KLSAS, Former Chair of Governors and Volunteer
Martin Little	
Tim Mann	– Artist
Adrian Parker	– Retired Planning Consultant, Chair of Friends of St Nicholas'
Ivor Rowlands	
Veronica Sekules	– Director of GroundWork Gallery
Darren Taylor	– Chairman BID, Chairman Town Centre Partnership, MD of KLFM

Correspondence to Informal Working Group

54 All Saints Drive
North Wootton
KING'S LYNN
Norfolk
PE30 3RY

Cllr Avril Wright
Chair
The Guildhall Informal Working Group
BCKLWN

2nd March 2018

Dear Avril

Encouraged by my recent meeting with you, and of reports in the press of the progress being made towards an improved option for the Guildhall, I have provided below some further detail on a few of the points I alluded to, for your fuller consideration.

National Trust involvement

Do not under-estimate the extent to which the NT could provide support to further a new venture at the Guildhall. Specifically, in the areas of retail, catering, heritage and marketing – all of which are important drivers of footfall and income for any new venture. In the Eastern region, the NT already operates at least 2 joint ventures in its properties – Bury St Edmunds Theatre Royal and Ickworth Hall, which is mostly occupied by a luxury hotel chain.

The NT will never freely agree to any significant involvement while the Borough Council has the legal obligation to maintain the Guildhall. I have studied the NT constitution and have had extensive correspondence, including at the very highest levels with two of the NT Trustees, and am confident that pressure could successfully be brought to bear on the NT to reasonably support an ambitious plan for the Guildhall:

- For a NT Members' Resolution to be put forward to the AGM, its constitution requires only the support of 50 members. It is likely that the Borough Council would get full support from The West Norfolk NT Association for an ambitious Guildhall plan that required reasonable support from the NT.
- Through all my dialogue with the NT, it has been recognised that the Guildhall is a hugely important complex of buildings on a national scale. It is therefore extremely likely that any resolution calling for reasonable NT support would get support of the wider NT Membership and be adopted as NT policy.
- John Sell, a NT Trustee, is a former director of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) and knows Lynn well. He is supportive of the need for appropriate usage for the Guildhall.
- Antony Penrose, the nephew of Alexander Penrose, is supportive of the need for appropriate usage and has offered his support to me and LArCH and written to the NT to tell them so. He has strong NT connections through his family's bequest of Peckover House in Wisbech (bequeathed to the NT at about the same time as the Guildhall by Alexander Penrose's Aunt, at Alexander's request).

- Because of the Landlord/Tenant relationship between the NT and Borough Council, it may be easier for the negotiations with the NT to be handled by a 3rd party. I am more than prepared to do this, as a NT member of some thirty years' standing, and have already been in correspondence with the NT from the highest level down to regional management and with the local Association.

Lease arrangements

Encouraged by the retired Regional Director of the NT, Merlin Waterson, I have been pursuing documents relating to the Guildhall leases. When I spoke to Merlin recently, he recalled that there was a change to the lease in the 1980's or 90's but couldn't recall the detail. I have a copy of the original 1951 lease, and it contains no reference to the Borough Council. **The 1951 agreement is between the National Trust and the St George's Art Trust.** Presumably, at some later point, the Borough Council took over the liability. It is important to understand the circumstances around this change, as it could have a significant bearing on the "moral" if not the legal responsibility for the NT to help the Borough Council.

I have been locked in an unfortunate and rather bizarre stand-off with the Council's legal department, Eastlaw, over a Freedom of Information Act request for these documents. To date, Eastlaw have refused to provide full disclosure and so I am now having to undertake a formal complaint in the hope of revealing the later lease amendments. I am deeply frustrated, not to say angered, by this intransigence and truly wish there was more openness from the Council in this matter. It would seem far more appropriate and sensible if someone on your group could access these documents and understand and share the details, if not already done so. **[SEE FURTHER UPDATE IN EMAIL COPIED BELOW]**

Arts Centres

I was encouraged by the reports of your visit to Snape Maltings – a great example of the successful conversion of a range of historic buildings into a thriving arts & performance venue, heritage tourist attraction, retail and catering outlets.

I would like to suggest a few other sources of inspiration that I have come across since my involvement, that I could put you in touch with:

- Future Arts Centres (formerly the National Association of Arts Centres) is a group of leading Arts Centres and a source for inspiration, ideas and support.
- Through contact with the FAC CEO, Gavin Barlow, I have visited The Albany – a successful arts centre in south London, which serves as a thriving venue for community arts projects and performances, professional productions and as a hub for local creative businesses to have office space. At the time of my visit – on a Thursday morning in November – the café area was bustling with people in either small social groups, or one-to-one business meetings or simply on their own.
- Also, through contact with FAC, I have spoken at length with Chris Kirkwood, CEO of the Drill Hall, Lincoln. He was very encouraging, supportive and understanding of the challenges of running a small-scale performance venue in the shadow of a larger "mainstream" theatre and happy to advise in relation to the Guildhall as a performance centre.
- Norwich Playhouse (and Norwich Arts Centre and Cinema City, to some extent) is a good example of how a small-scale venue can differentiate itself to thrive in the shadow of its

larger competitor (Norwich Theatre Royal). For example, the bar at the Playhouse is a destination in its own right.

Community Participation

King's Lynn (and West Norfolk) is a thriving centre of creativity and hosts a multitude of creative organisations from Orchestras to small and large Festivals, from Artists to Galleries and from specialist interest groups to individual practitioners. There is no support framework nor any organisation that represents all this creative energy, and so they exist in a competitive "every man for himself" environment.

There is an opportunity for an umbrella organisation to act in the collective interests of **all** these groups to promote and market them and act as a melting pot of ideas and support for collective endeavour. This would allow the maximum "noise" to be created in the conventional and social media and promote art and culture in Lynn across the board, as well as promote the town as a venue for creativity.

A good example, is the current dilemma of the Greyfriars Art Space group of artists. Their future is uncertain as the benevolent owner of their premises is being forced to sell the building to pay for care costs of an elderly parent. The Guildhall has ideal accommodation for their uses, but there has been a stumbling block created over rental costs. A "bigger picture" scenario might see this as an opportunity to create a vibrant, ongoing use for part of the Guildhall complex.

Norfolk Museums are sitting on a large archive of unseen works of Walter Dexter, Thomas Baines and other local artists, many of which are stored but not displayed in King's Lynn. Other bequests of entire collections of work have been offered to the Art Centre in recent years, but not followed through. Combined with some of the rarely seen work in the Town Hall, this could form the basis of a permanent collection of art, on public display in the Guildhall.

The Eastern Open annual art competition was the largest provincial art competition in the country until it ceased in 2015 with the closure of the King's Lynn Arts Centre. Nothing has yet replaced this, but the vacuum left by the demise of KLACTION has meant that no-one has come forward to re-instate it, losing for the town its most prestigious art event. An umbrella organisation could secure these kind of activities, independent of the success or failure of any one organisation or committee.

I have termed this group LArCH (Lynn Art Culture and Heritage) but am quite happy for it to take on any form. This would be a fantastic feature of a revitalised Guildhall / Arts Centre.

King's Lynn Festival

It is difficult to envisage a successful outcome for the Guildhall that doesn't include the current Festival being at the heart of things. Apart from the historical connections, the Festival is the only organisation with a management structure, staff, resources, financial control and experience to be able to take on such a large scale complex project.

Undoubtedly, the Festival is not currently fully equipped to do this, but with the correct support from all other sources, including the Council, and with a comprehensive joint business plan, the Festival could be enlarged to play a much bigger and leading role. I know from my discussions with Festival Directors and Staff that this is a difficult challenge and that there are a wide range of views amongst them. I am also acutely aware how far the Festival is dependent on the Council financially and how this may influence the views that their Directors may feel able to express.

We like to think of King's Lynn as a Festival Town, but there is little that joins the various festivals together – except, ironically, the Borough Council, which supports all of them in a non-cohesive way. The Borough Council and the Festival would need to both be fully engaged for a LArCH-like organisation to work.

Specialists, Artists and Performers

This is by no means an exhaustive list of people I have collaborated with. You may be aware of some or all of these and may have your own reasons for wanting to engage with some or all of them, or not:

- Veronica Sekules – Director of Groundwork and former Education Director of the Sainsbury's Gallery at UEA – has extensive knowledge, experience and contacts in Arts administration. In addition to showing great willingness to be involved in LArCH, Veronica has suggested that a first step towards creation of a LArCH-like organisation could be to apply to the Arts Council for a small grant, sufficient to fund a feasibility assessment, business plan development and identify funding sources.
- Nick Balaam – Director of King's Lynn Preservation Trust, Adrian Parker – Retired Planner, Chair of Friends of St Nicholas', Festival Vice Chair – both enthusiasts for the arts with specialist knowledge of heritage planning and conservation and supportive of the aims of an ambitious plan and a LArCH-like organisation.
- Darren Taylor – MD of KLFM and Chair of King's Lynn BID – enthusiastic supporter of what an ambitious solution to the Arts Centre could do for local business.
- Desmond Waite MVO – retired architect with a lifetime's experience of heritage development in King's Lynn – sadly now in very poor failing health, but a huge advocate of an ambitious plan for the Guildhall to be developed into a significant cultural and heritage asset for the town. Despite his failing health, over the past three years Desmond has written several discussion papers with expansive ideas and has written to me repeatedly in support of my endeavours to push for collaboration. Sadly, there has been little discussion of these suggestions. I can supply copies of Desmond's papers if desired.
- Robert Anderson – former Director of the British Museum – has a house in King Street and has offered his considerable expertise to help formulate and/or support an ambitious plan.
- Andrew Jarvis – experienced Shakespearean actor and director, recently moved to Clenchwarton and keen to support the Arts Centre and bring performances including Shakespeare, to Lynn.
- Tim Fitzhigham – actor, eccentric world record breaker and son of Norfolk – has offered to help in any way he can.
- Sir Antony Gormley – leading British sculptor, now a resident of and with a studio in West Norfolk. He expressed an interest in working in Lynn when I first contacted him immediately after the closure of KLACT, but I have had no means to follow up his interest.

Leadership

To pull together the various strands of interested parties that could allow an ambitious and credible solution to emerge will require strong leadership and a clear vision. It also needs the willing participation from all of the wider groups and organisations in the community. However, I know from my own part-time involvement, that there is a real appetite for collaboration. What is now

required is for a strong leader to take the initiative and this can only come from within the Borough Council as the ultimate holder of the Guildhall's lease.

The success of Alive Leisure could serve as a good example of how the Council has provided leadership to the challenge of the provision of sports facilities across the Borough. Perhaps a similar structure could be used for Art, Culture and Heritage? This could be facilitated by an expansion of Alive's remit or, more likely, removing the Corn Exchange from Alive and including it, along with the Guildhall complex into a new formally constituted body.

Being a Critical Friend

Over the past couple of years, as I have tried to establish a dialogue with elected councillors and appointed officers, I have found myself largely vilified, shunned and referred to as a troublemaker. This is not my intention and it is precisely because I **support** the town, the Guildhall and the Borough Council, that I have remained involved and committed so much of my time to identify possibilities. I would like to be considered a critical friend, whose only intention is for the right and best result for the town and the Guildhall. I don't have all the answers and I'm sure many of my ideas don't stand up on their own. However, the best outcome will be found from as many credible inputs as possible. It is completely unreasonable for this to be a problem that the Council must resolve by itself, when there are so many other experienced and available sources.

I am delighted that you are leading the working group to a proposal and pleased that I have been able to address you in that process. I dearly hope that we will have more dialogue and discussion in the coming weeks.

Yours sincerely

Ivor Rowlands

cc: Cllrs Collingham, Manning, Middleton and Tyler.

Ivor Rowlands <ivorrowlands09@gmail.com>

13
Mar

to Cllr, cllr.andy.tyler, cllr.judith.co., cllr.colin.man., cllr.graham.mi.

Dear Councillors

Michael Walsh has confirmed that the Borough Council took over liability for the Guildhall lease as recently as September 1993, by way of assignment from St George's Guildhall Limited. I've been unable to discover the circumstances that led to this undertaking, or how and when the lease was transferred from St George's Art Trust (the original lessee of the 1951 lease).

However, the fact that the assignment took place at all, and the generous funding package agreed by the Council up to 1995, and referred to in the extracted minutes below, reinforces the view expressed to me by Merlin Waterson that the Council took on the liability for the Guildhall at a time when its tenant was in some difficulty and at risk of failure and closure. The Council stepped in, not just to secure the future of the Festival, but also to ensure continuing occupation and use of the National Trust's historic building!

This surely supports the view that the National Trust has a **moral** responsibility to support the Borough Council now that the tables are turned and it is the Council that needs support to secure the future viability of the Guildhall site.

I think I have taken this line of enquiry as far as I am able to, as Michael has made it pretty clear that he can do no more. However, for a tenacious Councillor, it must be possible to uncover the other documents, including the appraisal report referred to in the 19th Feb 1992 meeting and the assignment document from St George's Art Trust to St George's Guildhall Limited. I hope one of you will pick up this line of enquiry and use it to improve the Council's negotiating position with the National Trust.

I remain as determined as ever to do whatever I can to help secure the best outcome for the Guildhall and look forward to hearing back from you.

Regards

Ivor Rowlands

01553 670110

07824 306404

to Ken, Cllr, cllr.judith.co., cllr.andy.tyler, cllr.colin.man., cllr.graham.mi.

Dear Ken

Thank you for copying me on your email.

The connection to the River Ouse is a very significant aspect for consideration and has been a feature of Desmond Waite's proposals.

It is also a factor that has not been overlooked by the National Trust. Their former Regional Director pointed to the fact that the Guildhall is the only building in King's Lynn that links the river with King Street, the main thoroughfare through mediaeval Lynn.

There was also a suggestion that opening up access to the river from the Guildhall could enable (visual) access to a sculpture trail along the riverbank at West Lynn, and that a certain local knighted sculptor may want to be involved with this.

Regards

Ivor Rowlands

01553 670110

07824 306404

On 13 March 2018 at 11:02, Ken Hill <ken_hill@talktalk.net> wrote:

In case you missed my letter in a local paper concerning the Arts Centre, I enclose it below.

What's missing at the Arts Centre

King's Lynn Arts Centre is in the news. But there's one thing nobody seems to be including in possible new uses.

The River Great Ouse.

As a property with river frontage, the Borough Council will have rights over the wall on the riverbank. Neighbouring Ouse Amateur Sailing Club and the Crown & Mitre have both made good use of their proximity to the water. There is a riverside path from Common Staithe Quay past the Crown & Mitre in Ferry Street to the Sailing Club and ferry terminal on Ferry Lane.

Everyone else with property on the river uses the waterfront to enhance the enjoyment, value and usefulness of their location. Why not the Arts Centre?

Yes, the Riverside Restaurant have a lease from the Borough Council to make good business out of its location, but so much more can be done over the wall. The berth behind the bricked up water gate under the restaurant patio might make an attractive feature if it was recommissioned with a watertight door.

Access to the river would need a ramp to be built along the south wall of the Arts Centre garden. That would also provide a stepless access to the restaurant. From there, a walkway on to pontoons similar to those at South Quay would be a natural addition.

The King's Lynn Norfolk Boat Trust could pick up passengers there for their trips in the historic Baden Powell.

The King's Lynn Coastal Rowing Club is already making good use of the river and could do with another place to include in some of their activities.

If the ferry landed there, its passengers would have a much improved footpath route through to King Street, with refreshments and toilets en route, and information and atmosphere to absorb on the way.

There would be scope for a river festival.

A new quay, pier or pontoons over the Arts Centre wall would be a natural step towards what King's Lynn really needs – a riverside walk connecting the South Quay and Purfleet Quay with Common Staithe Square.

Then on to complete the link between the Peter Scott Way and the Norfolk Coast Path.
Let's get serious about improving our marvellous town.

Ken Hill 4B King's Staithe Square, King's Lynn, 07934562909.

to Esther, Cllr

Dear Esther

Many thanks for sending me your notes and the comments of your members.
It is interesting to see how much common ground is shared by interested parties.

I was particularly taken with some of the repeated references to City of Culture.

You may not be surprised to hear that I wrote to the Council, Festival and Bid in January 2017 urging them to work together to put Lynn forward for 2021. A copy of my email is attached. Having read the selection criteria very carefully, I was persuaded that Lynn stood a very strong chance of being shortlisted. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Council Chief Executive, Executive Director and Portfolio Holder for Arts & Culture all came out quickly as opposing the idea, BID were in favour and the Festival remained characteristically silent on the matter. As you will know, the honour for 2021 has been bestowed on Coventry!

I am still of the view that Lynn could come up with a credible bid for 2025, with a revitalised Arts Centre at the heart of the programme. Indeed, if the selection criteria remain the same as they were for 2021, then a tripartite bid, along with Boston and Wisbech, would stand an even better chance and would be groundbreaking for the history of the award (joint bids were encouraged for 2021, but I'm not aware that any were forthcoming.)

A three way bid would be advantageous from a number of perspectives:

- Three lots of sources for business sponsorship
- Three lots of Borough Council support
- Three separate lots of County Council support, in each case in support of a borough at the lower end their county's economic and demographic scale and in need of a regeneration boost.
- There are very strong historical and heritage links between these three towns, that have perhaps been diminished in recent years

I've copied this to Cllr Wright as City of Culture is not something I mentioned in my submission to the IWG, but is nevertheless a significant opportunity for the town and the Guildhall.

Regards

Ivor Rowlands

01553 670110
07824 306404

On 14 March 2018 at 18:24, Esther Boehm <eb@estherboehm.com> wrote:
Hi Ivor,

This is the information I presented (Guildhall-Working-Group_20180307.pdf). The comments were hand written and photocopied.

It will be interesting to see how things proceed.

Best wishes,
Esther

On 09.03.2018 15:33, Ivor Rowlands wrote:
Hi Esther

Thank you for getting in touch with me.
The more people we can get working together, the more chance of something worthy and ambitious emerging at the Guildhall.

I'm not sure what John would have already told you or what correspondence you may have, but I have no problem with anything I have said or written being distributed as widely as possible.

I've attached a letter I sent this week to the IWG as a follow up to my "audience" that took place on 14th February.

Feel free to take from it and use it as you wish.

I'd be interested to hear your own views and those of the Association and get any feedback from your own meeting with the IWG.

Regards

Ivor Rowlands

01553 670110

07824 306404

On 9 March 2018 at 14:54, Esther Boehm <eb@estherboehm.com> wrote:

Dear Ivor,

In November 2017, I took on the chair of the West Norfolk Artists Association. John Walker forwarded me some correspondence from you regarding the Arts Centre which was very useful. I wanted to ask if it would be OK with you for me to share your knowledge especially regarding the National Trust with our committee and members.

I imagine you took the opportunity to speak to the Informal Working Group. On Wednesday, I presented our views.

Your feedback would be most interesting.

Would you also be able to send me LArCH correspondence as well. It would be appreciated.

Best wishes,

Esther

Esther Boehm, Chairperson
West Norfolk Artists Association
55 High Street
Heacham
King's Lynn
PE31 7DW

T 01485 570506

M 07538 986235

Email Correspondence with National Trust AGM

Squires, Teresa <Teresa.Squires@nationaltrust.org.uk>

01/12/2017

to me, AGM, Antony

Dear Ivor,

I was also pleased to meet you recently, as it is so much easier to speak to a real human being rather than a disembodied email. I fully understand the level of commitment you show to the Guildhall, and the frustration you feel with the slow pace of action.

As indicated, we now have a date to meet with the council, in March 2018. We had hoped for earlier, but there were no dates available to co-ordinate the many diaries, and also to work around our financial year end in February.

I would like to reassure you that we will do everything we can to ensure that the building has a solid future and can be a real asset to the people of King's Lynn.

I will look out for you at future events in the town – I had hoped to be at the KL Festival reception at the Guildhall on Wednesday, but unfortunately I was still at a meeting in Suffolk at 5pm.

With best wishes,

Teresa

From: Ivor Rowlands [mailto:ivorrowlands09@gmail.com] Sent: 15 November 2017 15:59

To: AGM; Squires, Teresa Cc: Antony Penrose

Subject: Re: Question for the AGM

Dear Teresa

Thank you for making yourself known to me at the Tourism Forum AGM last week. I was so pleased to get the chance to speak to you face to face and I hope you were better able to understand my concerns and suggestions.

I was delighted to hear that you intend assembling some of your colleagues at the Guildhall to review the situation.

As I explained to you when we met, coming from a business background I do struggle with the slow pace of development in the public sector, so I would be grateful if you could give me some idea of when I will hear back from you.

I have copied Antony Penrose on this email, as I know he is keen to be kept in touch with the National Trust's progress on this matter.

Many thanks

Ivor Rowlands

On 9 November 2017 at 14:29, Ivor Rowlands <ivorrowlands09@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Paul

I do not share your confidence in the Borough Council's ability to come up with a satisfactory solution and do not feel that it was misfortune that led to the failure of the HLF bid.

I am also dismayed with the suggestion that my photographs will be useful in future discussions with the Borough Council. They were intended to be used by the National Trust as a wake up call to the reality of what you are facing if you do not get more closely involved.

On a more positive note, I was delighted to get the chance to meet Teresa Squires yesterday. I think I managed to get across in a more appropriate and constructive way what the National Trust should do to help this situation. Teresa has agreed to get a number of your colleagues together to look at the Guildhall in the near future and I look forward to hearing back from her as to when this may happen.

Regards

Ivor Rowlands

On 8 November 2017 at 10:12, AGM <AGM@nationaltrust.org.uk> wrote:

Dear Mr Rowlands,

Thank you for the follow up to your original AGM question with further background information about St George's Guildhall and for providing images which can be used in future discussions with the local Borough Council. From reading your correspondence I appreciate your very strong desire to ensure the right thing is done for this special place.

I am aware of the 1951 rescue plan which resulted in the long-term leasing arrangements for the Guildhall so that it could be used as an asset for the people of King's Lynn. I believe the Borough Council has a good track record of delivering historic regeneration in King's Lynn in conjunction with the Heritage Lottery Fund. It was unfortunate that the latest application for a national-level HLF grant for regenerating the Guildhall complex was unsuccessful. However, the National Trust is confident that the Council is working on a new scheme to secure the future of the building. We keep an open dialogue with the Council officers and our own regional NT conservation specialists are available to give advice on the new plans when developed.

Thank you again for writing.

Yours sincerely

Paul Boniface

The Secretary

From: Ivor Rowlands [mailto:ivorrowlands09@gmail.com] Sent: 02 November 2017 16:15

To: AGM Subject: Re: Question for the AGM

Thank you, Paul.

You may be aware of a further exchange of emails with your colleague Sophie Grant today.

To help manage my expectations, and to keep my many inquisitors at bay, please can you give me an indication of when I might expect to get a fuller reply.

Regards

Ivor Rowlands

On 2 November 2017 at 15:37, AGM <AGM@nationaltrust.org.uk> wrote:

Dear Mr Rowlands

Thank you for your email dated 29 October to various addressees at the Trust. I am replying on their behalf.

I see that my colleague Sue May has already explained the Trust's position about the Guildhall. However, I recognise you remain unsatisfied. I will look at this issue further and reply in due course.

Yours sincerely

Paul Boniface

The Secretary

From: Ivor Rowlands [mailto:ivorrowlands09@gmail.com] Sent: 29 October 2017 10:01

To: AGM; Ghosh, Helen; John Sell; Pons, Caroline; Squires, Teresa; Parker, Tim (Gardens and Countryside Manager) Cc: Antony Penrose

Subject: Re: Question for the AGM

Dear National Trust

I have hesitated to respond to the email below, because I am dismayed, frustrated and almost lost for words with the National Trust's failure to take this issue on board.

I'd like to remind you of the following claim, from National Trust's own website:

" We're a charity founded in 1895 by three people who saw the importance of our nation's heritage . . . and wanted to preserve them for everyone to enjoy. . . . these values are still at the heart of everything we do. . . for ever, for everyone. . . We restore them, protect them and open them up to everyone. For the Trust, conservation has always gone hand-in-hand with public access. We welcome everyone to explore. . ."

If you are in any doubt as to the historical significance of this building, then I urge you to read the attached notes.

It is shameful that the Trust seeks to revert to an agreement dating back nearly 70 years, holding the Borough Council responsible for a property of such significance. The political and economic environments were very different in 1951, when the Council agreed a 99-year lease on the Guildhall from the Trust. For the Trust to not recognise the changing nature of local government finances in the intervening years is a blatant failure in your principles and a slap in the face to the council-tax payers in the borough.

The secretive, narrow minded and dilatory approach with which both the Trust and Council are pursuing their plans for the building is driving it into the ground. I will send you separately some recent photographs showing just how badly the fabric of the building is deteriorating.

Whatever the legal status of the lease agreement between the National Trust and Borough Council, the Trust has the expertise, experience, resources and people to look after this kind of building. As is abundantly clear from the failure of the Heritage Lottery Fund bid, the Council does not have this expertise.

I urge you to consider the good intentions of those who came to the rescue of the Guildhall all those years ago, and work together with the local community to find a successful outcome for this building that will bring it back into regular and sustainable use.

To put the strength of local feeling towards the Guildhall into context, in a recent online poll run by the Eastern Daily Press, 54% of readers who voted to nominate their choice for Historic England's "100 places", supported St George's Guildhall as Norfolk's preferred candidate for this accolade, beating Norwich Cathedral into second place with just 7%. Quite a remarkable endorsement from a Norwich-based paper.

Whether or not the Trust decides to utilise its resources is in your gift, but please do not hide behind a 70-year-old agreement.

I look forward to your more positive response and would welcome the opportunity to meet you in the Guildhall with some of my associates, where we might discuss a more hopeful outcome.

Yours sincerely

Ivor Rowlands

On 24 October 2017 at 16:52, AGM <AGM@nationaltrust.org.uk> wrote:

Dear Ivor,

Thank you again for submitting a question to this year's AGM. We had far more questions than time available to answer them all. As your question wasn't answered on the day, I am emailing you the response:-

Thank you to Mr Rowland for submitting this question. Firstly, I'd like to reassure you that the Guildhall and its long-term future are a concern for the National Trust.

As many people with an interest in the Guildhall will be aware, the hall and associated buildings that are owned by the Trust are leased on a long-term basis to Kings Lynn Borough Council until 2056 on a full repairing lease, which ensures the building will remain in good condition.

Whilst the lease does not contain any specific requirements around how the building is used and made accessible, both the council and the National Trust have been mindful of the importance of maintaining access, and have sought to find the right balance of how such an important and historic building can be used.

We have been pleased to learn that the Kings Lynn Festival has recently moved their offices into the Guildhall and will be looking at opportunities to offer rental of the galleries and encouraging more use of these spaces.

It is a shame that the council's bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a major grant to rejuvenate the site was unsuccessful earlier this year and we understand that the council is now re-visiting their plans for the site. We are working with the Council to provide support and advice as those plans move forward.

Finally, I'd like to offer my assurances that we will continue to stay in regular contact with the Council until a clearer future for the Guildhall has been defined.

Kind regards

Sue May

Governance Project Support Co-ordinator

Tel. 01793 817637

From: Ivor Rowlands [mailto:ivorrowlands09@gmail.com] Sent: 24 October 2017 13:53

To: AGM Subject: Re: Question for the AGM

Dear Sue

I was disappointed that my question wasn't raised at the AGM - not even on the "Questions and Answers" section of the AGM webpage.

Please can you let me know when I can expect to get the written reply that you referred to in your email of 5th October?

Many thanks

Ivor Rowlands

On 5 October 2017 at 15:54, AGM <AGM@nationaltrust.org.uk> wrote:

Dear Ivor,

Thank you for getting back to me on this. I will keep your question on the AGM register.

Kind regards

Sue May

Governance Project Support Co-ordinator

Tel. 01793 817637

From: ivorrowlands09@gmail.com [mailto:ivorrowlands09@gmail.com] Sent: 05 October 2017 15:50

To: AGM Subject: Re: Question for the AGM

Dear Sue

Many thanks for your reply.

Although this is a very specific question I feel it is important that it is brought to the attention of the AGM audience.

I would be happy for the answer to be emailed as soon as available, but wouldn't want this to be instead of being raised on the day.

Regards

Ivor

Ivor Rowlands 07824 306404

----- Original message-----

From: AGM Date: Thu, 5 Oct 2017 11:51

To: Ivor Rowlands; Cc: AGM;

Subject:RE: Question for the AGM

Dear Mr Rowlands,

Thank you for submitting a question to be asked at this year's AGM. I have added it to the register and will forward it to the appropriate person to investigate and provide a response. If time doesn't allow for your question to be raised on the day, the response will be emailed to you afterwards. However as this is a very specific question I was wondering if you would like the response emailed to you as soon as it is ready rather than waiting until on or after 21st October? Perhaps you could let me know.

I'm sorry you won't be able to join us at the AGM. It sounds like you will be busy in your role as a Town Guide and I hope the weather is good for you that day. You are welcome to catch up with the AGM by watching the live webcast which will also be available after the event at www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/annual-general-meeting

Kind regards

Sue May

Governance Project Support Co-ordinator

Tel. 01793 817637

From: Ivor Rowlands [<mailto:ivorrowlands09@gmail.com>] Sent: 02 October 2017 21:12

To: AGM

Subject: Question for the AGM

Dear NT

I would like to submit a question to the AGM, please. . .

"St George's Guildhall in King's Lynn is the largest and oldest guildhall in England. It is mostly closed to the public and NT members, neglected, under-used and in desperate need of maintenance and repair. In the light of the continued and repeated failure of your tenant, the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, to update and maintain the buildings for regular use, please can the Trustees explain why this unique heritage asset is not a greater priority for the National Trust and what they intend to do about it?"

I am a long standing member of some 30 or so years, membership number 23494986. I am unable to attend the AGM in person as I am on duty as a King's Lynn Town Guide on 21st October and will be showing a group of visitors the outside of St George's Guildhall.

I would be grateful if you could confirm whether or not my question will be raised.

Many thanks.

Ivor Rowlands 01553 670110 07824 306404

LArCH Vision

King's Lynn Art, Culture & Heritage

A Possible Future Vision – for Discussion

Objectives

1. To present an ambitious, vibrant, varied and accessible mix of Art, Culture & Heritage activities that are well supported by a diverse cross-section of the local community as well as being visible to and supported by a wider audience from West Norfolk.
2. To provide a comprehensive marketing, promotion and advertising platform for all Art, Culture & Heritage organisations in town, as a one-stop shop for all activities.
3. To raise awareness of, and participation in, all activities amongst as wide an audience as possible including residents, day visitors, weekenders and holiday-makers from within the UK and further afield.

Key Partners

- BCKLWN
 - Alive leisure
 - Visit West Norfolk
 - TICs
 - Current range of events – from Hanse Weekend to HOD
 - Twin town – Cities and Landscapes
- KL Festivals – Arts, Too, Literature, Poetry, Film etc
- Amateur Performance Groups
- Local interest groups – KLCCC, KLASA, KLDFAS etc
- Museums – including True's Yard
- Independent Galleries – Greyfriars Artspace, Groundworks etc
- Heritage Organisations – Civic Society, KLPT, Town Guides, MWT, Churches Conservation Trust, National Trust, English Heritage etc
- College of West Anglia
- Business Improvement District / Town Centre Partnership
- Schools
- Local Media
- Religious and Cultural – Churches, Islamic Association, Chinese Association, Malayees, East European communities and others.

Secondary Sources

- Public Sector Funding Organisations
- Trusts & Foundations
- Wealthy Philanthropists
- Norfolk County Council
- Local Businesses
- National Businesses with premises in Lynn

- Palm Paper
- Great Northern Railways / Stagecoach

Scope – to include:

- Performing arts
- Visual arts
- Heritage
- Science – e.g Schools Science Festival
- Food and Drink – eg around the world in 80 flavours, celebrating local agriculture/food companies.
- Environment & Landscape – Riverside, The River Ouse, The Wash, The Walks, (West Lynn?)
- Markets and Market Places

Financing a Champion

- £1,000,000 pledged over a period of 5 years may fund an experienced manager on a good salary and some admin support and a small expenditure budget, sufficient for self-generated activity.

Modus Operandi

- With(in) the Borough Council?

Or

- Independent?

Ivor Rowlands

September 2016

Historical Notes

St George's Guildhall, King's Lynn

St. George's Guildhall in King's Lynn is the largest and oldest guildhall in England. For over 600 years it has been adapted and developed to meet the changing needs of life in the town.

For the greater part of its existence, St George's Guildhall has been a theatre and a place for public entertainment. It was used for plays by the medieval Guilds of Lynn. The first known theatrical production was of a Nativity Play performed before a feast in 1442. This nearly 600 year history of use as a theatre makes St George's Guildhall the oldest theatre in England. Other special events, such as a supper held for Lady Bardolf by the Mayor and aldermen in 1445 are recorded in the town archive.

Recent academic research has verified that Shakespeare performed in St. George's Guildhall in 1593 when the Lord Admiral's Men were visiting Norfolk. The Guildhall is the World's only surviving theatre where Shakespeare is known to have performed.

The Guild of St George was founded in Lynn in 1376, when the town was one of the most prosperous in England. Lynn had 70 mediaeval guilds that collectively owned vast wealth and played a powerful and influential role in the town.

In 1406, the Guild of St. George acquired land, reclaimed from the Great Ouse, to build its new hall, 107ft long and 29ft wide. It was built between 1410-1420, on two levels with an undercroft venturing into the Ouse to allow boats to moor inside the building and a great hall above that was used for meetings of the Guilds.

By about 1500 it was necessary for five buttresses to be erected against the north wall due to the magnificent roof of trussed rafters being too heavy for the supporting walls. These buttresses are still to be seen outside the Guildhall. The roof is still the original and the rafters can be seen inside the auditorium.

In mediaeval times, the Guildhall was primarily used for meetings, dinners and dances until in 1547, King Edward VI dissolved the Guilds of England.

Reflecting the growth and prosperity of the merchant class in Lynn, in 1560 a local merchant, John Dynnesdale, bought the out-buildings for use as warehouses and the Guildhall itself became known as the Common Town Hall.

Mediaeval Lynn was a cosmopolitan town with strong trading links with the Hanseatic League in Northern Europe and with Spain and Portugal to the South, and past owners of the Guildhall reflect this. In late 1660s it was purchased by the Rotterdam merchant Hubert Vinckesteyn who rebuilt the rear range. Later, the Guildhall was in the possession of Hubert van Vlierden.

Following the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, various performing troupes from Norwich leased the Guildhall from the Corporation during the February Mart.

During the Civil War of the 1640's, Royalists stored barrels of gunpowder and arms in the Guildhall. And in 1704 there was an unsuccessful attempt by the Corporation to open a button factory. The Guildhall was also home to the County Court until 1767. It had been leased to Joseph Cooper, a

painter, at a peppercorn rent for 21 years in 1727 on the condition that he attended to the painting, woodwork, plastering and even gilding.

By 1766, the Mayor found it worthwhile to commission Thomas Sharpe to build a playhouse inside the Guildhall for £450. A model of this theatre was constructed in 1950 and is still kept in the building today.

The success of the Guildhall as a playhouse led to a modern theatre being built in St. James Street and the Guildhall reverted to use as a warehouse when it was sold to William Lee Warner for £557.10.0d in 1814. When his estate was bought by the Lynn merchant family of Everard in 1826, the Guildhall became a wool warehouse.

The Everards, in turn sold St. George's Guildhall to G. M. Bridges & Son Ltd., scenic artists (for £2,650) who in 1920 were already leasing the premises. Bridges was awarded a Royal Warrant for supplying scenery to the Royal Family at nearby Sandringham, and the crest still hangs in the theatre today. However the impact of Cinema took away much of the firm's work, and by 1945 the Guildhall was not only derelict but in danger of being demolished for the expansion of a nearby garage.

It was saved by Alexander Penrose, who bought the building in 1951 and gave it to the National Trust who, in turn, leased it to the Borough Council for 99 years until 2050. The input of the Pilgrim Trust, Arts Council and a public subscription led to the Guildhall's conversion to an Arts Centre and theatre. Queen Elizabeth (the late Queen Mother) opened the venue in July 1951 and launched the King's Lynn Festival, which has been held every July since then. The Arts Centre Galleries, which were opened in 1963, were converted by the late Lady Fermoy (lady in waiting to the late Queen Mother) as a memorial to her husband, Lord Fermoy, and indeed until recently, the Arts Centre was known as the Fermoy Centre.

In 1997 the Borough Council took responsibility for the programming and operation of the Arts Centre and in 2011 this was taken over by the King's Lynn Arts Centre Trust. Sadly, the Trust closed in December 2015 and the buildings remain under-used, neglected and in need of modernisation and refurbishment. At the time of writing neither the Borough Council (tenant) nor the National Trust (owner) has been able to come up with a viable plan to secure the future of St George's Guildhall.

Sept 2017