



Lynn Art Culture Heritage

Meeting 4 of LArCH Group (Lynn Arts, Culture and Heritage)

Tuesday 30th July 2018 7.00 at Thoresby College

Present: *Ivor Rowlands (IR Chair) Sally Turff (ST, St Margaret's with St Nicholas Ward Forum) Chris Fox, (CF, Kings Lynn Players) Esther Boehm (EB, Chair, WNAA) Anne Roberts (AR, WNAA, Greyfriars Art Space, Minutes) Adrian Parker (AP, Friends of St. Nicholas Chapel) Amanda Arterton (AA, Kings Lynn G&S Society) Michael Hankinson, (MH, King's Lynn G+S Society) Lesley Bambridge, (LB) ward councillor*

Apologies received from : Martin Little, Nick Balaam, Alison Croose

1) Ivor outlined developments since the committee last met in May.

Recent press releases from the Council have publicised the fact that an anonymous donor has now come forward, who wishes to purchase the whole Guildhall site and to create an art gallery of "international significance" in the present Guildhall.

The anonymous donor has not been to a Festival event. He is a property manager and owns several properties in the town. He owns a large art collection and is thinking very much in terms of an ambitious visual arts venue. It is not known at this stage what his collection contains, although it is said to include a work from St. Peters in Rome. The donor has spoken of collaboration with major organisations such as the Tate. Under these proposals the theatre would become an art gallery, while the mezzanine floor of the Corn Exchange would be developed as two small cinema spaces. Ivor has been in contact with the donor and promised to protect his anonymity. The National Trust has not been involved at this stage.

These proposals would mean a transfer of the lease of the whole property from the Council. A dialogue is opening between the donor, the Borough Council and the National Trust. Alison Croose is waiting for a meeting on behalf of the Festival. Cllr Liz Nockolds (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Culture, Heritage and Health) has pointed out that the Guildhall has many community uses and the donor is open to hearing about these. Alison also wants to make clear to him the full range of Festival activities.

This development represents a huge opportunity but the donor needs to work with LArCH. The arrival of a new benefactor would mean a new start for LArCH, as the group would not then have to deal with the Council. He has offered Ivor a meeting.

2) Concerns raised in discussion:

- The Guildhall was thought to be dark and unsuitable as a gallery space – especially when there is now a purpose-built gallery with access for large works next door in the Shakespeare Barn.



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- It was felt that the donor has a one-dimensional view, and needs guidance, “selling” him the concept of a multi-functional space.
- There was concern about continued unnecessary secrecy and the fact that the Council’s “Cultural Board” will not talk to Ivor.
- The possibility of moving the King’s Lynn Players’ props store to a unit on an industrial estate would create major practical problems for the Players.
- The Guildhall’s restaurant and catering offering needs to work much more closely in tandem with programmed events to provide an all-round experience for visitors. The new Maltings in Wells is thriving with a 130 seat theatre, a bar, restaurant and art gallery .
- The proposed cinema area at the Corn Exchange was felt to be unsuitable and not large enough
- There is currently no regular programming at the Guildhall, whereas there used to be about eight events per month. An enthusiastic director is needed to initiate and develop this. The Council is committed, through grants from Creative Arts East, to three cultural events during the coming year.
- The donor’s proposed sum of five million might still need additional funding. Michael Hankinson has researched sources of funding on behalf of the G&S

3) The Future of the Larch committee

Ivor explained his concern that he is seen as the only spokesperson for the group. For example, why was LArCH not invited to the Council’s press release presentation as a group?

Chris said that, on reflection, we had allowed the Council to do “a good job in dividing the group” and diluting our influence.

Are we nothing more than a forum? – and how difficult would it be to set up LArCH as a formally constituted organisation?

As the Council has already done its own press release in response to the plans, it was suggested that Alison Croose could come and report on this to the group.

4) Action:

Michael will draft a proposal to be sent to everyone involved in LArCH. This will legitimise our activities and will be sent with a covering note requesting everyone’s commitment and signature to



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the letter. The possibility of inviting the press to a “signing meeting” was briefly discussed. Once agreed the proposal will be sent to the donor.

In response to Adrian's comment that the Festival would not endorse our letter, Ivor said that LArCH - our forum, a letter to the would-be benefactor, or any other things we might want to do - only has legs if it is supported by ALL of the relevant groups, including the Festival. Without collective support and a united front, we are doing no better than the Borough Council did in their failed HLF bid, in that we are merely decrying our own predicament and asking for help with our own problems. One of the Festival directors told Ivor that they would be "fighting their own patch". Ivor strongly disagrees with this approach. Even the sum of the parts of all of the user-groups, including the Festival's 8-10 uses per year, is insufficient to be a credible reason for investment into the theatre. We should be big enough to recognise this and the failure for the last 68 years of not creating a sustainable programme of activity for the Guildhall complex, and we should be ambitious enough to want to find a sustainable solution that will win support from a benevolent supporter.

Ivor urged that everyone concerned should give their full backing to this next step.

Chris thanked Ivor on behalf of the committee for all his hard work in co-ordination our efforts.

The meeting closed at 8.25pm