

Dear King's Lynn Arts Centre Supporter

Report of the Informal Working Group

The Borough Council's Regeneration Panel met today to hear the report of the Informal Working Group's (IWG) report on the future of St George's Guildhall.

Despite the fact that the agenda item covering the report was classed as an "exempt item", meaning that the public and press would be excluded, I attended the first part of the meeting anyway. The Panel's Chairman, Cllr Peter Gidney, noted and took exception to the EDP's comment on today's front page that the Council were meeting "in secret", and said that the Council was honouring its obligation "not to discuss confidential matters in public"! It was also noted by Cllr Graham Middleton that the IWG was not secretive because it had "invited all interested parties to attend all of its sessions". I think what Cllr Middleton meant to say was that some interested parties had been invited to speak to one of the meetings. In my own case, this took place without any discussion, reply, questions or feedback of any kind – during or after the meeting I attended on 14th February.

Cultural Prospectus

There was some good news at the meeting. The Council's Executive Director, Chris Bamfield presented the new King's Lynn Cultural Prospectus (copy attached). He explained that this is a framework document that has been put together in response to the Heritage Lottery Fund's rejection of the 2016 bid for funding for the Guildhall. In its rejection letter, the HLF said, [the proposal] ". . . *did not appear to represent a coherent package with a clear identity. The bid provided insufficient evidence of a rethink and fresh approach . . . the case for investment in this scheme was unconvincing.*"

In his presentation to today's meeting, Chris Bamfield stated that the Arts Council England (ACE) would be targeted as a source of funding and the Council would apply for National Portfolio status. This could take up to four years. Apart from c.£20k a year support for the King's Lynn Festival, there has been no significant ACE funding support in West Norfolk since the Corn Exchange project in the late 1990s, whereas about £10m has been provided for recent projects elsewhere in Norfolk – Norwich & Norfolk Festival alone receives £4.8m! By contrast, the Council has just three current projects bidding for ACE funding with a total of just under £200k, in partnership with inCollusion, Norfolk Museums Service and Creative Arts East. Chris said that development of Art and Culture in West Norfolk has been "isolated" and that the Council were enlisting "professional expertise" to help create the Cultural Prospectus.

Cllr Elizabeth Nockolds reported that the Cultural Prospectus has been compiled with comprehensive "consultation with all stakeholders" (hands-up all those who have been consulted!) Elizabeth also said that the Council had formed a local arts partnership with schools, only last week!

It was at this point in the meeting that I and the only other member of the public in attendance – BBC's Jill Bennett – were asked to leave the meeting, so that the Council could discuss the report of the IWG in "not secret".

Press Coverage of today's meeting

The EDP has given prominent coverage on its front page and on its hoardings, which can be accessed from the following link: <http://www.edp24.co.uk/news/meeting-to-discuss-future-of->

[guildhall-st-george-in-kings-lynn-1-5456199](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06171zj#play)

BBC Radio Norfolk broadcast an interview in their drive time show and in the 6pm news. You can listen again on the following link, at 1hr 20 minutes:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06171zj#play>

No doubt the Council will issue its own press release in the coming days and we will be able to read about it in the press.

Regards

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