

REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

MARKET HALL REFURBISHMENT PROJECT



Report Reference	C-23-24
Meeting Date	13 th November 2023
Agenda Item	5
Prepared by	Town Clerk

1.0 BACKGROUND

The Town Council acquired Knutsford Market Hall in 2014 as part of a community asset transfer from Cheshire East Council. The business case for transfer recognised that the asset would require significant investment in the medium term to address the poor presentation of the building. Over the past nine years the council (through the Assets and Operations Committee) has explored a range of options. The position taken had been that it had to be self-funding i.e. that the expected borrowing costs would be covered by the income from the market hall: with the increase in interest rates this made the business case challenging.

Two major funding opportunities became available in mid-2023. The Community Ownership Fund is awarded by central government to projects which save local assets, it provides grants of up to £1m. The Shared Prosperity Fund is administered by Cheshire East Council and provides funding through a variety of interventions. Applications under both schemes were submitted for the Market Hall and both have been successful with an award of £560,000 from the Community Ownership Fund and £160,000 from the Shared Prosperity Fund. This enables the refurbishment programme that had been developed by the Assets and Operations Committee to proceed with no borrowing/council tax funds.

Both schemes have timescales with which they must be spent. The COF requires expenditure within 12 months of the award (October 2024), SPF requires expenditure by 31st March 2025. This presents a time pressure to ensure the project can go ahead through these schemes. Both grant awards are specifically for the delivery of a refurbishment market hall as set out in the business case and could not be redeployed to alternative projects/uses.

2.0 MARKET RELOCATION

It is intended that a temporary trading space will be created in 60 King Street during the works. This will enable market traders to continue in business whilst works take place (approx. 3-6 months, tbc). All traders have been invited to meetings to go through the draft plans for both the market hall work and temporary relocation. The Planning and Facilities Officer is seeking engagement from the Cheshire East Council Conservation Officer regarding the removal of the existing bar from the building, but no other structural works are envisaged at this stage. This is subject to the ongoing engagement with Bruntwood concerning their occupation of the building.

3.0 PROJECT PROGRESSION

The council's architect (Hive Architects) is currently preparing the planning application for submission (RIBA stage 3). It is noted there are delays with Cheshire East Council in determining planning applications and the importance of this application will be stressed. After submission, work

will commence on the RIBA stage 4 (detailed plans) and then onto tendering for the construction contractors.

The project will involve sourcing a number of contractors and professional input and both funding schemes have tendering requirements to secure best value which are similar/identical to the council's financial regulations. Financial Regulations will be followed except where a funding scheme places a specific requirement in excess of this.

The table below outlines the proposed decision making authority to facilitate expeditious decision making with appropriate oversight. In most instances this provides for the Town Mayor and Assets and Operations Committee Chairman to be involved in major decisions and they would be able to convene an extra-ordinary council/committee meeting in the event of disagreement.

Decision Type	Decision by
Award of small contracts (<£5k)	Town Clerk
Award of minor contracts (£5k-£30k)	Town Clerk - in consultation with Town Mayor and Assets and Operations Committee Chairman.
Award of major contracts (>£30k)	Assets and Operations Committee
Cost engineering at award of tender	Assets and Operations Committee
Variations to awarded tender	Town Clerk - in consultation with Town Mayor and Asset and Operations Committee Chairman
Use of contingency / ongoing cost engineering	Town Clerk - in consultation with Town Mayor and Assets and Operations Committee Chairman.
Specification, legal and operational	Town Clerk (in consultation with Town Mayor and Assets and Operations Committee Chairman as appropriate)
Use of council reserves ¹	Full Council

4.0 LEGAL CHARGE

Under the Community Ownership Fund, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities reserves the right to require legal charge to be registered against the asset which would enable it to recover its funding award in the event the asset is disposed of within a certain period. This is similar to the existing legal charge applied when the asset was transferred to the Town Council (the overage period) and is designed to safeguard public funds.

The Town Clerk has a meeting with DLUHC in advance of the council meeting and will report on this further as necessary once it is known if this will be required.

5.0 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

- a) Council notes the award of grant funding from the Community Ownership Fund and Shared Prosperity Fund towards the refurbishment of the Market Hall
- b) Council approves the refurbishment of the Market Hall as set out in the business case

¹ This is not expected, but will be determined at tendering or in the event of unforeseen costs exceeding contingency.

- c) Delegates authority to the Town Clerk to make the necessary decisions to deliver the project in line with the business case, funding allocation and table set out above.