

# Communities Committee

<b>Report title:</b>	<b>Future vision for the Wensum Lodge site, Norwich</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>16 January 2019</b>
<b>Responsible Chief Officer:</b>	<b>Tom McCabe – Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services</b>
<b>Strategic impact</b> The proposal to sympathetically redevelop Wensum Lodge in Norwich will support skills development and economic growth within the County, as well as seeing the transformation of an underutilised site into a thriving cultural asset, benefitting both creative businesses and individuals alike.  The proposal also aims to bring in additional funding to the County, both in terms of the short-term capital investment and support for the growing cultural sector.	

## Executive summary

<p>Wensum Lodge has been the home for Norfolk Community Learning Services (NCLS) for over 40 years and is held in great affection by its users and local residents. During that time, it has built a strong reputation for creative crafts and is well established as an important community asset.</p> <p>In more recent years, the overall utilisation of the site has reduced, and remedial repair works, required by the historical buildings that comprise the site, are placing a disproportionate financial burden on the service.</p> <p>With the agreement of the Leader of the Council, an outline brief was created to redevelop Wensum Lodge into a creative hub for the region, building on the existing Adult Education offer and strong reputation for creative crafts.</p> <p>Hudson Architects were commissioned to complete a short piece of work to develop a vision for the site to ensure its longevity and realise its potential as an important asset for Norwich and Norfolk.</p> <p><b>Recommendations:</b></p> <p>Members are recommended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Approve the proposed vision for the redevelopment of Wensum Lodge site as a creative hub.</b></li><li>• <b>Agree the next steps to carry out surveys and feasibility studies.</b></li></ul>
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## 1. Proposal

- 1.1. This report, and accompanying presentation, set out a vision for the redevelopment of Wensum Lodge into a creative hub for Norwich and Norfolk. The proposal sees the development of a multi-use site which aims to fulfil the following objectives:
  - A platform for skills development
  - A creative and community hub
  - A visitor destination
- 1.2. **A platform for skills development** - building on the existing Adult Education ethos of helping people into education and employment, the site would offer

opportunities, not only for Adult Education courses, but also for shared working spaces and short-term rental space for start-up creative/ arts organisations.

- 1.3. **A creative and community hub** – the strong reputation for arts and creative crafts at Wensum Lodge, would be extended to incorporate maker spaces and exhibition and retail opportunities. In addition to improved utilisation of the buildings themselves, there is also scope to create better use of the external spaces with craft markets and potentially outdoor performances.
- 1.4. **A visitor destination** – the site comprises of several buildings of significant historical importance. Most notably, the Music House, which fronts onto King Street, is thought to be the oldest residential property in Norwich dating back to Norman times. Additionally, there are also a number of remaining brewery buildings (The Tuns, The Maltings and The Stables) dating back to the site's use by Youngs Brewery (throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century). The preservation and proper presentation of these buildings will not only protect them for future generations but will also add to the ongoing development of the King Street area and extend the overall cultural offer of the city.
- 1.5. In order to test the feasibility of the project, we engaged Hudson Architects to develop a coherent, achievable vision for the site. This was supported by CIL, Culture and Heritage and the Corporate Property department.  
The NCLS Steering Group, including the Committee Chair Cllr Margaret Dewsbury and Cllr Chris Jones (Elected Member for the ward in which Wensum is located), have been kept informed of the developing plans, and Members have been invited to visit the site for a tour of the existing facilities.  
Early stakeholder engagement has also included Norwich City Council, Arts Council England, Norwich University of the Arts (NUA). High level ideas were also shared at the recent Norfolk Arts Forum to get feedback from a cross section of potential future users. Support for the sympathetic redevelopment of the site has been positive and is seen as complementary to wider developments of a similar nature within the City.  
No consultation has yet taken place with NCLS learners or the general public.
- 1.6. The next steps for the programme include:
  - Completion of site surveys to “de-risk” the programme and ensure a realistic picture of potential costs
  - Appointment of a programme manager to lead the development
  - Consultation with a wider stakeholder group
  - Development of a detailed business case

## 2. Evidence

- 2.1. Wensum Lodge is currently underutilised, both in terms of its occupancy, its river front location, and its proximity to Norwich city centre and complementary cultural offers including the National Centre for Writing, located close by in Dragon Hall.  
Wensum Lodge is a unique regional economic asset and proposition which we believe will be highly attractive to a number of external funders and investors. The site already benefits from an ongoing programme of Adult Learning courses which can be enhanced and grown by the additional of other creative and arts organisations. The proposals for the site facilitate an improved approach to the existing offer, as well as bringing in a number of new elements.
- 2.2. Wensum Lodge is well placed to deliver against many of the goals within the six key priorities set out in *Culture Drives Growth: The East's Cultural Strategy 2016-22* endorsed by the New Anglia LEP and launched by Mark Pendlington when he was chairman. The Wensum Lodge development will deliver strongly

against the Government's Industrial Strategy, particularly around the skills agenda, workforce development and the opportunities set out for the future growth of the Creative Industries in the UK.

- 2.3. Investment in Norfolk's cultural sector via the Start East project and developments elsewhere in the city, mean that many creative start-up businesses and arts organisations could soon be looking for new spaces to be able to develop their businesses, create work and offer skills development more widely. The redevelopment at Wensum could meet some of this immediate demand, whilst the site undergoes longer-term development and further builds its reputation.

### **3. Financial Implications**

- 3.1. The current cost to run and operate Wensum Lodge are approximately £350K, all of which is borne by Norfolk Community Learning Services. By reducing the cost burden of the premises and bringing in additional income, NCLS will be able to allocate more resource to teaching hours, as well as considering more county wide provision in line with local needs.

In addition, many of the buildings require significant remedial work which cannot be funded from existing revenue budgets, and therefore a planned programme of redevelopment will address a number of structural issues and create new income generation opportunities.

- 3.2. There is evidence to suggest there will be opportunity to attract external investment to the site in future. Potential funders who may be approached include, but are not limited to:

- Arts Council England
- Crafts Council
- Heritage Lottery Fund
- New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
- NCC (where there is a robust business case to ensure ROI)

### **4. Issues, risks and innovation**

- 4.1. The completion of the recommended site surveys will identify any potential risks and issues at an early stage and allow for contingencies to be built into the programme.

The phased approach will ensure that a considered and financially viable programme will be delivered.

### **5. Background**

- 5.1. Wensum Lodge has been the home of Norfolk County Council's Adult Learning offer for over 40 years, but the buildings that comprise the site are currently underutilised and in need of some significant repair.

Over recent years the requirements for active teaching space on the site have reduced, due to more provision being planned out in communities where most needed; this has left the site underutilised during some parts of the week, and out of term time.

- 5.2 The current use of the site (see Appendix 1) is as follows:

- Delivery of Adult learning courses, comprising of Community Learning, Skills and Training, Leisure and Pleasure, and Apprenticeships
- Some Adult Learning Staff Accommodation
- Wensum Café (currently unoccupied)
- Jurnet's Bar (subsidised community run social club)

- Other subsidiary community uses

5.3 The site is hugely important to local residents and Adult Learning customers, and there is a great deal of affection for the site, both in terms of its role as a community asset, and due to the historical significance of the site. The proposals developed by Hudson Architects have taken both of these factors into account and propose a vision that is sympathetic to existing use, as well as being innovative and ambitious in its aspirations for the future.

Surrounding developments, such as Dragon Hall, and numerous residential buildings, mean that now is the ideal time to undertake the redevelopment of the site, and in so doing, bring King Street further into the cultural offer of the city, as well as the wider county.

### **Recommendations:**

Members are recommended to:

- **Approve the proposed vision for the redevelopment of Wensum Lodge site as a creative hub.**
- **Agree the next steps to carry out surveys and feasibility studies.**

### **Officer Contact**

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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