

# Culture and Communities Committee

Item 8.5

10.00am, Tuesday, 18 June 2019

## Update on Custom House

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### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 It is recommended that committee:
  - 1.1.1 Notes the development to date and the planned work for the future of Custom House, Leith; and
  - 1.1.2 Discharges the motion by Councillor Munro.

#### Paul Lawrence

Executive Director of Place

Contact: Frank Little, Museums and Galleries Manager

E-mail: [frank.little@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:frank.little@edinburgh.gov.uk) | Tel: 0131 529 3994

## Update on Custom House

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 A motion by Councillor Munro at the Culture and Communities Committee on [29 January 2019](#) called for a report:
- ‘providing an update on work done to date and planned work for the future on Custom House. The report should also include a progress report on work towards a Museum of Leith’.*
- 2.2 This report provides Members with an update on developments at Custom House since it was purchased by the Council in August 2014.

### 3. Background

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- 3.1 At its meeting on [21 August 2014](#), Council approved a motion for the acquisition of Custom House Leith with the intention of securing an appropriate use of the building for museum/heritage purposes for the benefit of Leith and the wider city. A Short Life Working Group was formed, which identified the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust (SHBT) as a suitable partner and custodian for the building.
- 3.2 At the meeting of the Finance and Resources Committee on [13 May 2015](#), approval was given to granting a five and 99-year lease to SHBT. They took over occupation of Custom House on 6 May 2015 on a month to month missive until the five-year lease was signed in August 2018.
- 3.3 Funding of £110,000 was identified under the Scheme of Delegation by the re-prioritisation of the then Culture and Sport division’s re-allocation of its Capital Asset Management Funds. Internal and external repairs were carried out to allow the occupation and operation of the building.
- 3.4 It was agreed that the building would be sub-let under the five-year lease arrangement to ensure its short-term sustainability, cover revenue costs and allow the development of the longer term project.

## 4. Main report

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- 4.1 SHBT currently manages the building complex with a dedicated Building Manager based on site, with additional project staff to develop the capital project.
- 4.2 Since occupation, the building has been divided into office and public use, with the office spaces currently 100% occupied. The spaces set aside for public use have been used by a wide range of community groups and organisations for exhibitions, meetings and events.
- 4.3 The Cruiser Store, located behind the main building, has been separately let to a variety of tenants including a café, a gentlemen's outfitter, a gallery and community space, and the Edinburgh Tool Library. The upper floor is occupied by artisans and artists.
- 4.4 SHBT has also taken a lease from Forth Ports on the car park adjacent to the building. This is occupied by the Leith Market every Saturday, selling a range of produce, gifts and crafts, and also food stalls.
- 4.5 Since 2015, the local community have been welcomed and encouraged to visit and make use of the building. This has resulted in nearly 10,000 visitors in addition to the specific open public events. Several Open Days have been delivered and are planned for 2019 to work alongside the Leith Market and local festivals. These include:
  - 4.5.1 Saturday 16 February 2019 to coincide with Chinese New Year (hosting a troop of Chinese dancers);
  - 4.5.2 Saturday 27 April 2019 to coincide with the Market's celebration of 'All things Leith';
  - 4.5.3 Saturday 15 June 2019 to coincide with the Leith Festival celebrations;
  - 4.5.4 Saturday 28 September 2019 to coincide with Edinburgh's Doors Open Day; and
  - 4.5.5 a Saturday in December (to be confirmed) to celebrate Christmas in Leith.
- 4.6 SHBT has installed some interpretation within the building and are currently looking at some additional external interpretation to share the history of the building with the wider community.
- 4.7 Informal consultation has taken place with members of the community at a number of open days to canvas opinions on both the existing use of the building and the longer-term vision. For example, an oral history project was established to gather information and memories from people who have had experience of the building when it was used as an actual Custom House. This has provided a greater understanding of the building and it is hoped that this will continue as part of the capital project. Interpretation panels have also been produced to share information with visitors and these will be on display at Open Days.

- 4.8 Regular meetings of community groups in Leith are hosted by SHBT as a forum for sharing information on what individual groups are working on, as well as offering them space within the building on Open Days to promote their own interests.
- 4.9 A Custom House Friends Scheme has been established to share information and enable interested parties to be kept informed of any events happening within the building.
- 4.10 Council officers are working with SHBT to agree the next stages of the project. In the meantime and for the duration of the lease, Custom House will continue to be used as a community hub/events space with offices and artist studios while the capital project is developed.
- 4.11 A feasibility study is required to develop a master plan. Key to this will be consultation with the community in Leith to shape and determine the long-term future of the building. £50,000 funding was allocated for the feasibility study from the balance of available resources as part of the Council's approved budget motion in 2015.
- 4.12 External funding will be required from bodies such as the National Heritage Lottery Fund to realise the estimated £7m required to repurpose the building. The feasibility study is now being progressed by SHBT in partnership with the Council.
- 4.13 It includes a number of separate packages which will be individually procured, and these can be summarised as follows:
- 4.13.1 Architectural Options – a full design team will be appointed to look at the architectural options for the building as well as undertaking a condition survey of the building fabric. This package is currently being procured in the anticipation that the successful Design Team will take the project through to completion. From over 100 individual notes of interest, 35 have submitted the first stage of the tender and these will be shortlisted to around 10 to submit a detailed tender return for consideration and interviewing. It is anticipated that the Design Team will be appointed by the end June 2019;
- 4.13.2 Conservation Plan – tenders were invited via Public Scotland Contracts to undertake the Conservation Plan on the building which will set out the significance and importance of the Custom House to Leith and the gateway to Edinburgh and beyond. It is anticipated that the Conservation Plan will be commissioned in time to have this essential document available for the design team when they are appointed;
- 4.13.3 Community Consultation – a wide reaching community consultation will be undertaken which will be used to brief the Design Team on the options for consideration in addition to those set out in the brief. There will also be more formal consultations with key stakeholder groups which will continue throughout the feasibility study process. This is scheduled to start in June;

- 4.13.4 Other packages of work will be released for tendering which will include market research, and an outline business plan and interpretation proposals;
  - 4.13.5 The Museums and Galleries Service is currently carrying out a full inventory and condition survey of its collections, which will include an initial survey of the Leith collection to confirm a number of key objects which can be considered for display within Custom House; and
  - 4.13.6 It is anticipated that the feasibility study will be completed by the autumn of 2019 and the outcome of the study brought to this Committee by the end of the calendar year.
- 4.14 It should be noted that as well as a proposal for a Museum of Leith, the feasibility study will explore a number of options which came out of the community consultation. The preferred option brought forward in the final proposals to Committee will have to be financially sustainable in the long term, and it is anticipated that a range of additional income streams will be necessary to achieve this.
- 4.15 The initial work which has been undertaken by SHBT to bring the building to life and draw people into the site has been very successful. Custom House is already a lively and vibrant artistic hub which has brought new life to the Shore and to Commercial Street. This will continue to grow as the capital project is developed, and there will be an increasing number of opportunities for the community of Leith to engage with the building in many different ways.

## **5. Next Steps**

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- 5.1 The feasibility study will be progressed and a final report will be presented to Committee by the end of this calendar year.

## **6. Financial impact**

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- 6.1 The costs of running the building are mitigated by the short term lets of property with tenants responsible for all utilities and running costs of the building including some repair works.
- 6.2 The costs of the feasibility study have been secured as set out in the Council's approved budget motion, 2015/16.
- 6.3 The outcome of the feasibility study will give an indication of the required capital monies and business case for the redevelopment of the building including its long-term financial sustainability.

## **7. Stakeholder/Community Impact**

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- 7.1 Informal consultation has taken place with members of the community at a number of open days to canvas opinions on both the existing use of the building and the longer-term vision.
- 7.2 A wide reaching community consultation will be undertaken which will be used to brief the Design Team on the options for consideration in addition to those set out in the brief. There will also be more formal consultations with key stakeholder groups which will continue throughout the feasibility study process.
- 7.3 The need to build resilience to climate change impacts will be considered by the design team in due course.
- 7.4 The proposals in this report will help achieve a sustainable Edinburgh as both the short and longer term uses for the building will secure an appropriate use for the building including a museum/heritage purpose for the benefit of Leith and the wider city

## **8. Background reading/external references**

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- 8.1 None.

## **9. Appendices**

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- 9.1 None.