

Local Members Interest

Cllr Charlotte Atkins - Leek South Cllr Gill Health - Leek Rural

Charities and Trusts Committee - Tuesday 14 June 2022

Nicholson Institute - Leek, Staffordshire Moorlands

Recommendations

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. Consider and comment on the proposed investment in the Nicholson Institute via the Government's Levelling Up Fund.
- b. Approve an application to the Charity Commission requesting an amendment to the Trust Deed.

Report of Director for Corporate Services.

Summary

1. The Nicholson Institute is held in Trust by Staffordshire County Council (SCC), and its use is shared between the County Council's Library and Arts Service, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (SMDC), and Leek and Buxton College, which is part of the University of Derby.
2. The Nicholson Institute will be included in a bid, by SMDC, to the Government's Levelling Up Fund, to be submitted by the 6th of July 2022. This is a significant opportunity to access capital investment to address maintenance issues, as well as enhance the provision.
3. It is timely, alongside this proposed capital investment, to look at developing sustainable income streams, which will also help to secure the viability of this iconic building, allowing for future reinvestment.
4. To develop new income streams, an application to the Charity Commission to amend the Trust Deeds needs to be made. This amendment would not fundamentally change the Trust's objectives, but would permit income generating events, potentially including SCC's Registrar's office holding wedding ceremonies. It is anticipated that any events would be held at weekends and in the evenings, so as not to affect normal day to day operations.

Report

5. SCC is the Trustee of The Nicholson Institute, which is a Grade II* listed building in Leek.
6. The Trust deed states that the Nicholson Institute be used:
 - a. "As a public library, public museum, school of science, art gallery and school of art for the use and benefit of the inhabitants of the town of Leek."
7. The Nicholson Institute is home to SCC's Leek Town Library, which occupies the ground floor of the building. An art gallery and museum are run by SMDC on the upper floor, and Leek and Buxton College have art school rooms on the lower ground floor. The art school rooms require extensive refurbishment before they can be used again, during the week by the College.
8. Due to its age, the building has had significant maintenance over the last fifteen years, with approximately £800,000 spent on roof repairs and to comply with fire regulations, amongst other more cosmetic work. Further investment of at least £1.3m will be needed over the next 20 years, just to address on-going maintenance requirements.

Capital Investment - Levelling Up Fund

9. SMDC is the lead authority for the Levelling Up Fund, and the District Council will be submitting its bid, for projects in Leek, on the 6th of July, which will include the Nicholson Institute. SMDC is a Priority 1 authority for this fund, so there is a degree of confidence that their bid will be successful.
10. The inclusion of the Nicholson Institute in SMDC's Levelling Up Fund bid, will potentially provide the monies to address longer-term maintenance issues, and importantly provide for significant refurbishment of the internal space, which will benefit all users of the facility.
11. The Levelling Up Fund bid will also align with revenue funding of £1.1m, which has already been secure by SMDC and Support Staffordshire through the Creative People and Places programme. This will ensure that a range of dynamic arts and cultural offers are connected across the Town, which will also include the Nicholson Institute.
12. This is an exciting opportunity to maximise the use of the Nicholson Institute, and make sure that it remains a key point of interest in the Town, for local people and visitors, now and into the future.

Revenue Income for reinvestment

13. The Levelling Up Fund, is independent of the following proposal in relation to income generation. However, it is helpful to start developing sustainable revenue income streams, which will benefit from the promotional opportunities that a revamped Nicholson Institute will offer.
14. As part of the Levelling Up Fund bid, SMDC intend to include a full-time arts curator to actively attract and promote exhibitions etc., and to develop income generating events. In addition, there is an opportunity for SCC's Registrar's Service to offer weddings at the Nicholson Institute.
15. Currently the registry office wedding provision in Staffordshire Moorlands is limited. On average there is one wedding per month, lower than in the other Districts. Weddings are currently offered in an extremely functional meeting room in SMDC's offices.
16. The Nicholson Institute offers the potential to become a destination wedding ceremony venue, and this would offer a sustainable income stream. A conservative estimate, based on just 2 weddings every weekend, 100 per year, would provide approximately £35k of revenue income based on current fees. This is a particularly attractive option, as weddings mainly take place on a Saturday, when the areas of Nicholson Institute allocated to Leek and Buxton College, which could be used for this purpose would be available.
17. To develop these revenue streams, there will need to be an application to the Charity Commission, for an amendment to the Trust Deeds, to allow these types of events to take place. However, fundamentally the core Trust objectives will still be delivered through the Nicholson Institute.

Background

18. The Nicholson Institute is a Grade II* listed building in the market town of Leek. The building was left in Trust for the benefit of the Town's inhabitants by the Nicholson family. Following the 1974 Local Government reorganisation, SCC became the Trustee.
19. It is an iconic, and valued local resource, which requires considerable upgrading to bring it back into full use.
20. All the current partners, SCC, SMDC and Leek and Buxton College are committed to enhancing the Nicholson Institute offer and ensuring that it complements other local community-based arts provision.

Conclusion

21. Members are asked to consider the report, and to agree to an approach to the Charity Commission to explore amending the Trust Deeds.

Link to Strategic Plan

22. Live in thriving and sustainable communities.

Community Impact

23. Not applicable for this report.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

N/A

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