

Progress Report – June 2020

Over the last year we have made major progress towards restoring The George as Wickham Market's Community Pub.

After the Heritage Lottery Fund's decision in September 2018 not to award a Round 1/Development Phase Grant, and the implementation of their restructuring that month which would not be complete until the end of March 2019, the Committee considered the best way forward. This resulted, in February 2019, in a consultation of the Society's Members by ballot as to whether the Society should proceed with a second application to the Fund or maximise the value of the site and sell it, potentially, thereby, ensuring that shareholders' investments could be returned.

Members voted overwhelmingly to proceed with a second application, and, after a successful Expression of Interest to - what is now - The National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Management Committee and its professional advisors prepared a second application for submission in May. We considered the Heritage Fund's comments on the previous application regarding the ratio of new-build to reconstruction/conservation, management of the Project and match-funding. During the process, East Suffolk Council Conservation and Planning Officers were consulted to ensure that a revised design would be acceptable and vital documents such as the Business Plan were reviewed in detail. A major new element was the preparation of a detailed Project Execution Plan, covering the design and construction process from start to finish. The resulting application for £82,100 Round 1 (Development Phase) funding and estimated costs for Round 2 (Delivery Phase) funding of £989,200 was submitted on the 25th of May. Please note that the award of the Round 2 grant is dependant of us successfully completing Round 1 which we are confident we shall achieve. These two grants will go a long way towards meeting the cost of the full rebuild project which will cost in total approximately £1.7M.

While waiting for the Heritage Fund's decision due in September, the Society held its second Members Annual Meeting in June; a report on which accompanies this Progress Report. After the end of 'formal business', members and committee stayed on for a 'pop-up pub, where several members made pledges for further share investment. At the meeting, co-opted committee member, Mark Macdonald was formally elected. A welcome addition to the team, Mark organised a much-needed tidy-up of the site frontage in September. Throughout the year, the committee has continued to take measures to ensure the safety and security of the site.

At the end of September we learnt that our Heritage Fund application had been successful, the Committee informed members and publicised the award and the contribution of the Heritage Fund and National Lottery players through the press, including East Anglian Daily Times full-page coverage and a BBC Radio Suffolk interview and news coverage, and via our website – which has been updated and improved over the year - and peer networks.

By way of thanks to all our supporters, at the end of October many of our members attended and enjoyed a highly successful Celebratory Event held in the Village Hall with music from the 'Biscuit Brothers' a band member of which is our Chairman, Bill Wolff-Evans, and speeches by our MP, Dr Dan Poulter, and County Councillor, Alexander Nicoll. The whole event was a great success with our Pop-up Pub supplying beers and ciders which had been provided free, or at cost price, by local producers who had been contacted by our events team.

In November, the Committee was further strengthened by the co-option of Steve Elliot, principally to deal with compliance issues in what will become an increasingly complex project process.

Getting Work Started

We have already mentioned the Project Execution Plan, or PEP as it is known.

This plan describes how we will be going about designing the restored George in preparation for the actual building work to be commissioned and carried out and then how we are going about completing the rebuilding task.

The Heritage Fund will be closely following our progress and how we go about the many activities that are required in order for us satisfy their requirements to enable them to award us the Round 2 (£989,200) toward the funding we need to carry out the building work.

So, how are we doing?

We received the formal agreement from the Heritage Fund to start on 13th December; this was a major milestone and our Project Plan was in place and ready to go. Our Project Plan lists all the tasks which need to be undertaken together with start and finish dates.

In 2020 our first task has been to assemble the Project Team of profession advisors and consultants and the following appointments of the key members of this team has been made through a formal tendering process:

- **Project Manager** – A professional person who ensures that the Project team stays on track. We selected Greenwood Projects Ltd. to deliver this service. Greenwood are a well established and experienced project management company based in the Midlands with an excellent track record of managing Heritage Fund projects.
- **Cost Manager** – It is vital that cost estimates are realistic, and that expenditure is kept under tight control. The Cost Manager works closely with the Project Manager to ensure that this happens. The company selected to provide these services is Castons, an Ipswich base company with a long track record as quantity surveyors.
- **Design Team Lead** – The design team is to be made up of several specialist professionals working to a Lead Designer/Architect. The practice selected to provide these services is Purcell, who have an international reputation and extensive expertise in restoration project, working from their offices in Colchester, Cambridge, and Norwich.
- **Heritage Consultant** – Advising the Management Committee on interpretation planning, activity planning and evaluation, the consultant selected to assist us is Alix Slater Consultancy & Training Ltd in association with Studio Eger, the latter focussing on interpretation. Alix worked with us in preparing our successful Heritage Fund grant application.

Following these appointments, a Project Start-up meeting was held on 2nd June, bringing together this team to establish the means for delivery of our Project Plan and ‘setting them to work’.

Finance

The only substantial income received in 2019 was the Heritage Fund project development grant, 50% (£41,500) of which we received in December. This was nearly all carried forward in the accounts to this year - to be used as we incur expenditure throughout the development period. The grant represents 71% of our expected spend, so is taken to income at this rate. Other than grants we received just £678 in events, donations, and interest on deposits.

Expenditure in 2019 totalled £13,669, with £8,625 for various fees to help resubmit our grant application and £5,044 for running costs. Going forward we will spend about £7,000 a year in running costs of which half will be for property insurance and regular scaffold checks and half general running and administration costs. During 2020 we will also begin spending far more substantial amounts on the professional appointments detailed above.

The Society's balance sheet on 31st December 2019 remained sound with net assets of £112,130 and total Bank and Building Society funds of £109,581.

While most of the grant funding we are looking for will hopefully come from the Heritage Fund we will also be applying for grants from other providers. One such supporter has been Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) who have awarded us a grant in the past towards the cost of our Feasibility Study. Now, again in May, the AHF have awarded us a second grant of £8,000 to be used towards the cost of the professional services of a Project Manager.

We have also recently received grants from East Suffolk Council and the Suffolk County Council, which together with the AHF grant shows that there continues to be a belief that Saving the George is a worthwhile cause.

Covid-19

The impact on the project has been minimal with all project meetings being conducted using the video-conferencing service, Zoom, allowing much of our day to day business to continue without delay.

However, our programme of events planned for the year, including our MAM have had to be postponed until it is sensible to restart the programme once Government's restrictions on public and private gatherings have been lifted.

The next 12 Months

By the end of June 2020, we will have assembled the full Project Team whose task is to produce a final and fully costed design for The George by February 2021 with Planning Consent in place in June 2021. That design will then form a major part of our application to the Heritage Fund for the Round 2 (Delivery Phase) funding.

If our application is successful, then, following detailed technical design and selection of the Main Building Contractor, works on site could start in October 2022 and completed by September 2023 with the George opening for business by the end of November.

For more information and the latest news, don't forget to visit the Society's website:

<http://www.wmgeorge.co.uk/>

Saving the George

Management Committee - June 2020