**Update on Planning Application**

Agenda Item 3

For Noting

**Dudley Towns Fund Project**

Report of Nick Allen, Consultant Architect (Launchpadd) &

Lowell Williams Consultant to the Towns Fund Board

**1 Purpose of report**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to brief the Board on the progress in the design proposals for the proposed new HE centre on the site of the former Hippodrome, Castle Hill for the Dudley Towns Fund project.

**2 Recommendation**

2.1 The Board is asked to note the progress to date, approve the preferred option of removing the former Hippodrome, and enable action for key risk items.

**3 Brief and accommodation development**

3.1 Due to programming constraints for the production and submission of the TIP, design work, and consequently detailed development of the Brief for the building is proceeding without the benefit of input from the, as yet to be appointed, higher education institute (HEI) partner.

3.2 A preferred building gross floor frea (GFA) of 5,000m2 has been assumed for the proposed building for the purposes of progressing the design (refer to item Cost Review item 7 for further detail on GFA).

**4 Primary design activities July / August 2020**

4.1 Design work commenced on addressing the options for the removal and the retention of the former Hippodrome.

4.2 Based upon a 3d model of the Castle Hill area of Dudley, various scenarios were explored to accommodate a 5,000m2 building over four to five stories on the combined sites of the Hippodrome, the council materials store to the west, and AJ’s and the martial arts club to the east on Castle Hill.

 The purpose of the massing scenarios was to successfully prove that a 5,000m2 building could be successfully developed as well as opening up (currently obscured views) of Dudley Castle and the associated heritage assets.

4.3 The scenarios were successfully demonstrated (by animation sequences) in terms of a new build option.

**5 Consultations and feedback**

5.1 The massing scenarios along with site constraint and opportunity analysis were presented to DMBC Planning & Conservation teams on 24th July. The proposals were well received.

  The planning and consultation teams requested that a scenario be investigated that retained at least some of the former Hippodrome building.

5.2 The massing scenarios along with site constraint and opportunity analysis and the newly produced partial façade retention option were presented to Historic England and DMBC’s planning and conservation teams on 11th August. The proposals were well received; however, the feedback was less favourable on the façade retention option due to the restrictions imposed on potential views to the castle approaches and concerns that the facade to be retained could not work successfully in urban design terms.

 Historic England requested a formal submission by means of pre application. That document is appended to this report.

 The costs of the façade retention option to the project would be in the order of £1.65 million. Since the budget is finite at £25m the cost in terms of the loss of floor area to the project would be in the order of 400 – 500m2 (see project cost planning item 7.0) the proposal compromised the educational and learning deliverables.

5.3 The massing scenarios along with site constraint and opportunity analysis and the newly produced partial façade retention option were presented to Dudley Zoological Society (Derek Grove) on 20th August.

 DZS expressed support for the proposals, mindful of any development or activities that would negatively affect the operation of the zoo.

5.4 The opportunities and constraints and the massing scenarios will be presented at Towns Fund Board meeting.

6.0 **Town planning scenarios and target dates**

6.2 It is considered necessary to secure a planning approval for the new HE Centre so that the project can be presented as ‘shovel ready’ for the submission of the pown investment plan January 2021.

6.1 The matters pertaining to the potential removal of the former Hippodrome building are central to the planning scenarios. The preferred option would be an outline planning application determining floor area, scale and massing for the new proposals.

 Historic England have made it clear that a comprehensive detailed submission will be required addressing the out puts of their formal response to the pre app if support for the removal of the former Hippodrome is to be forthcoming. It would seem likely that a detailed planning application will therefore be required.

6.3 In terms of planning application submission timescales, input from the proposed HE partner would be ideal in finalising proposals. The confirmation of the proposed partner is targeted for 21st September. Design development will most likely continue therefore until the end of November, with a planning application targeted for the first two weeks of December.

7.0 **Project cost planning** (précised from RJK Consulting report)

7.1 The current budget for the project is noted as £25million, which includes VAT, professional fees, specialist fixtures fittings and equipment.

 The budget does not include costs associated with the demolition of the former Hippodrome. We understand this will be funded by DMBC.

7.2 Initial cost Ppanning exercises have been carried out in relation to retaining, restoring and refurbishing the existing Hippodrome building façade (only) and integrating it into the new building, versus demolition of the existing building and a totally new build facility.

A ‘benchmarking’ exercise was carried out using available historic cost data and data published by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors Building Cost Information Service to establish affordability within the available budget, based on costs per square metre analysis (£/m2) of Gross Internal floor area to inform the likely affordable buildable areas for both options.

7.3 The Benchmark exercise, in summary, highlighted the following:

* Based on £25m available budget spend, assuming that the demolition of existing buildings and site clearance are not included in the available budget and funded from elsewhere.
* The affordable building gross floor area achievable will be in the range 3,500 – 4,000m2 assuming good quality accommodation and facilities.
* Funding abnormal façade retention restoration and refurbishment would reduce floor area by 400-500m2 compromising the usable functions and scale of the building.
* Retaining, restoring and refurbishing the façade would be significantly riskier, for example high levels of asbestos and will take longer to build out, which will all impact on costs.
* If a larger building, say circa 5,000m2, were envisaged this would require building at much lower £/m2 which may not deliver the quality levels, functionality requirements or appropriate accommodation for the proposed facility.

7.4 Summary

It is considered by the design team that the loss of significant floor area to pay for façade retention compromises the purpose of the HE Centre and is not considered good value for money.

The available budget does not achieve sufficient floor area for a 5,000m2 building.

Note : If it is possible to set up a VAT registered special purpose vehicle to deliver the project, significant savings in VAT would contribute substantially to the available budget to achieve the ideal building size.

8.0 **Key risk items**

8.1 Key risk items are challenges that will delay progress on the design / delivery of the project and need to be actioned urgently.

8.2 Progress on acquisition of the martial arts centre and JB’s nightclub.

 (Historic England have made it clear that the project must be proved to be deliverable if they are to support the demolition of the former Hippodrome).

8.3 Access to the site of the Hippodrome to complete the necessary surveys.

 A number of requests have been made to DMBC’s Landlord Services to action this item (which involves the removal and re-erection of the palisaded fences either side of the front elevation over 1 day). No progress has been made to date.

 The ecology survey needs to be completed before the end of the bat season which is the end of September.

 The topographic survey needs completing to satisfactorily progress the design of the building.

8.4 Highways and access to the site

 The best access point for the proposals would be via Zoological Way. This would require agreement with DZS and may have implications. We are aware that there are ongoing discussions within DMBC Highways team regarding the potential adoption of Zoological Way.

Discussions need to be formally enabled / progressed.

8.5 Interfaces with other adjacent DMBC townscape improvements.

 It is important for the design team to understand adjacent improvements, potential developments and proposed pedestrian / cycle linkages in the vicinity of Castle Hill, Dudley Castle, Castle Gate roundabout and Trindle Road. We also need to understand the latest thinking on the Autonomous Vehicle Test track.

 As part of a planning application, Historic England need to understand how the project will link in with other town initiatives.