

To: **Economy and Regeneration Policy Board**

On: **23 January 2024**

Report by: **Chief Executive**

Heading: **Steeple Buildings Kilbarchan - Update**

1. Summary

1.1 This report provides an update on the amendment to Council Motion 9 of 4 May 2023 which restated Renfrewshire Council's *"commitment to the refurbishment of the Steeple Hall with the allocation of the £700,000, as agreed at the 2021/22 Council Budget and instructs officers to bring forward an investment proposal with timescales for consideration at the next appropriate board."* In support of that process, Council agreed to:

- Consult with OneRen, the National Trust for Scotland, Kilbarchan Community Council, Kilbarchan General Society and the wider community in Kilbarchan on the future use of the Steeple Buildings (specifically an outreach museum linked to Paisley Museum which would complement Kilbarchan Weaver's Cottage);
- As part of that consultation, examine the viability of a "Kilbarchan Cultural Quarter";
- Work towards a prospective bid to Historic Environment Scotland's Historic Environment Grants Programme at the end of the consultation period;
- Develop a concept for the Steeple Buildings that reinforces Renfrewshire Council's Tourism Action Plan.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Board:

- (i) Approve an initial repair programme for the Steeple Buildings at an estimated cost of **£310,000+VAT**.

This will deal with all immediate and urgent external repairs, plus some additional high-level repairs, and reinstate the electricity and water supplies internally.

- (ii) Authorise the Head of Economy and Development to continue stakeholder engagement and commission an options appraisal for the Steeple Buildings with the aim of bringing forward a viable, preferred long-term use for consideration at the next appropriate board.

3. Background

- 3.1 Prominently situated within Kilbarchan's Conservation Area, the Category A-listed Steeple Buildings date from the 18th Century and are jointly owned by Renfrewshire Council and local charity the Kilbarchan General Society (who own a room on the first floor of the main halls building).
- 3.2 Though joint owners, Kilbarchan General Society are not a key holder for the building, nor are they responsible for any share of repair costs.
- 3.3 The property has additional symbolic significance to the village as a focus for its annual Liliias Day celebrations during which the statue of Habbie Simpson "comes to life" to lead a parade through Kilbarchan with his bagpipes.
- 3.4 The property is currently managed by OneRen as a community hall on behalf of Renfrewshire Council. Pre-pandemic the property was being used by the community for around 7 hours per week. Post-pandemic, the property has not reopened. Several other community spaces are available for hire in Kilbarchan, including: the Old Library Centre; Kilbarchan Parish Church Hall; Kilbarchan Guide Hall; Kilbarchan Scout Hall; Kilbarchan Bowling Club; and Kilbarchan Performing Arts Centre.
- 3.5 Repairs have typically been undertaken as issues have arisen. In December 2022, a flood caused significant water damage internally.

4. Stakeholder Engagement

- 4.1 Throughout 2023, officers from the Regeneration & Place and Facilities & Property Services teams - as well as OneRen - have met regularly with Kilbarchan Community Council to understand their concerns and ambitions for the Steeple Buildings, and to keep them updated on actions resulting from the amendment to the May 2023 Council motion.
- 4.2 Meetings have also taken place, and dialogue is ongoing, with Kilbarchan General Society and the National Trust for Scotland.
- 4.3 An online questionnaire inviting local groups and individuals to share their previous experiences of the Steeple Buildings, and their hopes for its future, was distributed in October 2023 (please see **Appendix A**). From this, a wider database of stakeholders has been generated, which has been further augmented with the help of Kilbarchan Community Council.

4.4 Kilbarchan Community Council has asked officers to help facilitate the creation of a “Friends of the Steeple” working group. This would be a separate entity from the community council, likely with an ability to fundraise, and potentially taking an active interest in Kilbarchan’s wider heritage. Engage Renfrewshire has agreed to offer input on possible models and governance options for this group.

5. Condition Survey

5.1 In September 2023, conservation specialists John Gilbert Architects (JGA) were appointed to carry out a non-intrusive external and internal condition survey of the Steeple Buildings, using a drone and cherry picker. Collaborating with a mechanical engineer, stone specialist, and quantity surveyor, JGA returned an illustrated report which itemised repairs as “immediate”, “urgent”, “necessary” and “desirable”. Estimates for the cost of each repair were also provided, as well as a summary of indicative project costs. JGA’s costings assumed the building’s return to its pre-pandemic use.

5.2 Using JGA’s report as a reference, and allocating additional estimated costs for surveys, site investigations, fees and inflation, costs for 7 alternative, initial repair programmes were generated: from Option A “immediate repairs only”, at an estimated cost of £238,000, to Option F “all repairs, including more expensive refurbishment options”, at an estimated cost of £1,088,000.

5.3 This Board are being asked to approve Option C2, at an estimated cost of £308,000, as the initial repair programme. This focuses on roof repairs and deals with all immediate and urgent repairs which JGA advised should be undertaken within 18 months of their survey being carried out. With scaffolding erected for roof repairs, this programme also includes less urgent repairs to windows above first floor level, and repairs to the steeple’s weathervane and clockfaces. It reinstates the electricity supply, which will enable both the clock and the heating to be switched back on, which in turn enables the water supply to be turned back on.

6. Options Appraisal

6.1 Following on from the condition survey and online community consultation, Renfrewshire Council is seeking to appoint an external consultant to carry out a detailed Options Appraisal for the Steeple Buildings in early 2024. This involves further stakeholder engagement and will:

- (i) Consider appropriate uses for the building in the context of the proposed “Kilbarchan Cultural Quarter”;
- (ii) Consider a range of options for future use of the building, including community museum;
- (iii) Assess the viability of options and explore the business case, and associated costs, for the most viable options;
- (iv) Recommend a preferred option to take forward for approval by Renfrewshire Council.

6.2 Initial conversations about potential future funding applications to help refurbish the Steeple Buildings have taken place with National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and Historic Environment Scotland (HES):

- (i) Given its location, NLHF have expressed doubts that any proposed use for the building would engage sufficiently with their target communities;
- (ii) HES are open to an application to their Historic Environment Grants programme; however, any application would be subject to Renfrewshire Council being able to demonstrate that a sustainable, long-term use for the building has been identified.

7. Next Steps

7.1 Subject to receiving approval from the Board, officers will instruct the initial repair programme.

7.2 Subject to the outcome of the Options Appraisal, the ambition is to return to Council on 28 May 2024 with a recommendation for a preferred use for the Steeple Buildings.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – £700,000 has been allocated by Renfrewshire Council for the refurbishment of the Steeple Buildings. It's likely that additional funds would need to be sourced to fully refurbish the building, with further funds required to refit the building if a change of use was identified as the most viable option.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None.
3. **Community/Council Planning** –
 - *Our Renfrewshire is thriving* – The project supports development which will protect and enhance the built heritage of Renfrewshire's village centres, contributing to the creation of thriving places which support individuals, communities, and businesses.
 - *Reshaping our place, our economy and our future* – The project will help support the restoration and productive re-use of a landmark building in the centre of a Renfrewshire village, improving the built environment, helping to create job opportunities and contribute to economic growth.
 - *Building strong, safe, and resilient communities*: The project works in partnership with local groups and organisations to achieve positive outcomes.
4. **Legal** – The Steeple Buildings are jointly owned with local charity, Kilbarchan General Society.
5. **Property/Assets** – The intention is for Property Services to project manage the initial repair programme.

6. **Information Technology** – None.
7. **Equality & Human Rights** – The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report.
8. **Health & Safety** – None.
9. **Procurement** – A main contractor will need to be appointed to deliver the initial repair programme.
10. **Risks** – The initial repair programme is just the first step on a longer process which aims to bring the Steeple Buildings back into use.
11. **Privacy Impact** – None.
12. **COSLA Policy Position** – None.
13. **Climate Risk** – With cognisance of Historic Environment Scotland's 'A Guide to Climate Change Impacts: On Scotland's Historic Environment, Our Place in Time, 2019', the repair and maintenance of Steeple Buildings will contribute to the restoration and repair of Renfrewshire's historic fabric and will improve the performance of this property over time.

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Appendix A – Summary of Responses to October 2023 Online Questionnaire

- The questionnaire received 54 responses – 8 on behalf of local groups, and 46 from individuals
- 65% of respondents had been previous users of the Steeple Buildings – the most common uses had been for: meetings; events; parties; classes; and groups
- 85% of respondents shared their suggestions about potential future uses. Continued community use was the most common theme. Uses which highlighted Kilbarchan's history and heritage – particularly weaving - were also popular.
- In terms of specific functions, the following were mentioned:
 - wedding venue
 - village museum/outreach museum
 - heritage centre
 - community hub with halls and meeting rooms for hire
 - gallery/exhibition space
 - indoor bowling
 - youth club
 - men's shed
 - music venue
 - cafe
 - wine bar
 - craft venue/market
 - farmers' market
 - business hub
 - social enterprise hub
 - residential
- Other comments:
 - highlighted the architectural and symbolic importance of the building to the village
 - highlighted the need for external repair, internal upgrade, and more sustainable heating
 - questioned whether spending money to modernise the building might be better spent elsewhere
 - flagged the poor disabled access
 - highlighted the potential use of the square for associated events
 - suggested the building needed to have a distinctly different function from the other public access halls in the village
 - questioned whether the council was the best custodian of the building
- 80% of respondents asked to be kept informed about how plans for the buildings progress.