

SUTTON COLDFIELD TOWN HALL APPLICATION REPORT

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1) The Site

Sutton Coldfield Town Hall was constructed in the second part of the 19th century (originally as a Fire Station) and has been extended at later dates. It directly abuts the Sutton Coldfield Council House that was disposed by the City Council in 2013 and is currently under residential redevelopment. Both buildings are Grade II listed and share many common architectural features including brick and stone.

2) Background

The Town Hall has operated as a functions and entertainment business run by the Council for many years and incremental investment has been undertaken including restoration of the clock tower. Sutton Coldfield District Committee have had responsibility for the asset and its associated budgets since devolution was implemented from May 2004. The District Committee had a number of savings allocated in 2014/15 as part of the overall budget strategy and were unable to continue to manage the growing budget pressure associated with the operation of Sutton Coldfield Town. As a result The District Committee reviewed several options for the site, and asked that a disposal or transfer of the service be pursued.

3) The Application Process

Following the District Committee meeting, users of the Town Hall came together to submit one joint expression of interest (EOI) to take on the operation of the Town Hall under the name of Sutton Coldfield Arts and Recreational Trust (SCART). Under the CAT protocol, existing users can receive a priority interview before advertising the opportunity to the open market. Following the Priority Interview in January 2015, it was agreed that SCART should be given Preferred Partner Status and be asked to work up a business plan to take on the site for further consideration.

In March 2016, the business plan was reviewed by officers, and although it had strengths there were still gaps that needed to be addressed regarding their financial projections and future operating model. SCART accepted these comments and agreed to do further work on the business plan to address the concerns. A revised business plan was submitted by SCART in June 2016 and a further interview was held at Sutton Town Hall on 13 June 2016 to discuss the revised business plan.

4) Evaluation of the Bid

At the interview, SCART went through their income projections and assumptions in great detail, and demonstrated their understanding of the business. They also outlined how they would reduce expenditure by operating a lot more flexibly and by maximising the use of volunteers. They also outline the need for a long term

lease in order to attract external funding from national grants schemes and donations from the local community.

SCART also confirmed that they had successfully registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

Subsequent due diligence has been undertaken which is difficult given that they are a newly formed company but nothing suggests that they cannot achieve a sustainable solution for the operation of the site going forward.

5) The Preferred Applicant's Proposal

SCART's Expression of Interest and business plan stated the following :-

This proposal is presented by Sutton Coldfield Arts and Recreational Trust (SCART), who seek to take over the management and operation of Sutton Coldfield Town Hall (SCTH) from Birmingham City Council (BCC), and to operate it as a not for profit charitable trust. SCART will continue to provide a range of arts and community facilities for the people of Sutton Coldfield and surrounding areas, as defined in its charitable objects. It is anticipated that this will initially be through an agreement to provide services to the current owners (BCC) with a transition to continuing provision to the new owners of the building – Sutton Coldfield Town Hall Trust - a new charity.

SCART will enable a building of great significance to the Town to continue in community use, as a centre for the arts, education, entertainment and a variety of community and civic uses

SCART recognises the fact that SCTH has run at a significant loss for some time and that a new vision for the facility and its use is necessary in order to bring about a commercially viable operating model. This proposal is therefore not 'business as usual' or merely a 'bail out'; but a fundamentally different approach to what SCTH could be and how it is run.

SCART intends to transform SCTH into a state of the art, contemporary arts and community facility for the North Birmingham area – initially stabilising the operating model and returning it to financial health, and then investing in its further development to improve access, increase flexibility and provide new facilities and opportunities for the community as a whole. The invest in developing the building will be made in conjunction with the new Town Hall Trust, as the proposed new owners.

SCART will work in collaboration with the building owner to maintain and improve an important historic building with a prominent physical position in the town and a strong presence in the hearts and minds of the people of Sutton Coldfield and beyond.

This is an ambitious vision but it is one that will regenerate the Town Hall as a 21st century community and arts venue serving not just Sutton Coldfield and all the communities of North Birmingham.

SCART Mission Statement

SCART's mission is for people to have the ability to develop creative ideas and to partake in arts and recreational activities, by providing the facilities and opportunities to enable performance, education, group work and social events and in so doing preserve and protect an importance historic building at the heart of the Town of Sutton Coldfield.

6) Recommendation

SCART are made up of existing users as the preferred partner and have demonstrated their understanding of the business and how they can make the service sustainable for the future. SCART are considered likely to deliver a holistic development for community into the future. This decision was made by a panel of officers with representatives from Birmingham Property Services, Sport, Events and Parks and Finance. The panel felt that SCART could manage the facility as they have a sound knowledge of the centre and the local area and would offer a wide range of services based on local demand. SCART also has the relevant operational structures in place to deliver service s and activities at the point of handover.