

Minutes of the Meeting of the Thameside Complex Review Panel held on 12 March 2015 at 1.00 pm

Present: Councillors John Purkiss and Graham Snell

Apologies: Councillors Charles Curtis (Chair)

In attendance: Stephen Taylor, Programmes and Projects Manager
Matthew Boulter, Principal Democratic Services Officer

9. Notes on Thameside Complex Site Visit

Ground Floor Area

- The box office seems to take up a large area of the reception.
- The reception area needs to be opened up and the entrance made more inviting.
- The Cafe is not busy considering it is lunchtime and the group wonders whether a Costa or similar shop would encourage more people to visit and have a knock-on effect on the usage of the library.
- Is Grays busy enough to make the cafe better used? Members feel if there was a Costa there would be a destination for people to go.
- Members did consider whether the Thameside complex is close enough to the town centre to attract people to a café.

Library

- Members noted that the book shelves are static and cannot be moved.
- Members felt that although the Library was nice, was it a library fit for the future? Member discussed using apps to spread the use of the library but also only make certain online content available at the library. For example, comics downloadable accessible online but only at the library could encourage children to visit the library more.
- Members noted that the library could be used as an information hub.

Museum and Archives

- Suggestion made for a mobile museum
- Members reiterated the need to put objects out into the localities so that storage was reduced and objects were placed in their relevant settings. It was suggested, for example, that every library could have a display cabinet for historical objects which were rotated on a regular basis.
- Members felt the current museum displays were stale and sterile and needed to be modernised.
- Some of the paintings in the museum, Members felt, would be better placed in localities.
- Speaking to the heritage officer, members learnt there were many local heritage groups that could be supported to make better use of objects in the storage. This officer also added that to move objects, the conditions in other localities needed to be right to protect the object from deterioration.

Theatre

- Members noted the limited storage, wing and backstage space.
- The theatre was used regularly although the number of bookings had decreased by half since 2005 due to the recession. Attendance averaged at approximately 60% across all productions although there was a greater need for weekend bookings than mid-week.
- Members noted the difference between a rep theatre where a production would run for a number of weeks to one night productions. The Thameside theatre was more of a local theatre that catered for the local community and local productions. Lots of local dance schools and amateur dramatic groups used it for productions
- Members wondered whether the theatre could be turned into more of a cinema for specialist events or movie marathons and a theatre relocated.
- The Group debated the future of the theatre and were divided between investing in a new theatre at another location in Grays and the associated night time economy within the town to moving the theatre somewhere else, namely Lakeside where there are existing leisure surroundings.
- The Group recognised that the council needed to decide what the theatre wanted to be in future. What productions and audiences it wanted to attract and base a service on this.

Other Office Space

- Member visited a number of office spaces that were vacant.
- Members felt there was potential to turn these areas into restaurants or pubs that could support a better theatre if needed.

Registry Office

- The Group thought the registry office could be improved but noted that in the summer there could be three ceremonies on a Saturday. It was quieter at other times of the year. Citizen ceremonies were held once a month and catered for thirty people and their families.
- Members were told that the Registrars had identified that many couples were looking for a more iconic wedding venue such as Coalhouse Fort. The Group agreed that the office was suitably professional and easy to access for registering deaths.

The key thoughts of the group were that:

- Improving certain services in the complex would have a positive knock-on effect on the other services. Similarly the improvement of Grays as a night time economy or place to visit during the day would also increase the usage of the complex.
- The group could see an argument for the re-provision of services in the Thameside, including the theatre, at another location / other locations.
- The future of the theatre is really based upon what the theatre provision will actually be in terms of the size of acts to be hosted and the audiences they will attract.

The meeting finished at 3.00 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**