

Thameside Complex Options Appraisal — Stage One

Regeneration Service
Thurrock Council



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The Thameside complex was planned from 1967 and officially opened by the Chairman of the Arts Council of Great Britain, Lord Goodman, on the 22nd January 1972. The building was specifically designed to contain the new library, the local history museum and the Thameside Theatre in one building.

The future of the building has been a longstanding, recurring topic of discussion which has been thrown into sharp focus in recent years as cuts in public sector spending have given rise to linked debates over the costs of running and maintaining the building, its use, the quality of the services being provided from within it and its ultimate fitness for purpose in a much changed cultural landscape. These debates routinely provoke passionate responses from various parties, driven by concerns that the Council is seeking to unilaterally close the building and cease providing the services currently hosted therein – particularly the Thameside Theatre.

In August 2014 Cabinet received a report entitled 'Thameside Complex – securing theatre provision for Thurrock'. The report set out some of the context surrounding the

Thameside and sought approval, duly given, to undertake an options appraisal with a view to securing the long-term future for a theatre within the Borough.

The complex is important to many local people both for the services it contains and for what it represents; placing Grays at the heart of culture, heritage and the arts in Thurrock and as the administrative and civic centre of the Borough. As was apparent from discussion amongst Cabinet Members during the meeting even the proposal to carry out an options appraisal has raised concern.

Statement of the Task

The options appraisal aims to move the discussion about the Thameside forward to a point where clear decisions on the future of the building and the services delivered from it can be made. The Regeneration Service were appointed to carry out the options appraisal and agreed with the Council's Leadership Group to split the work into two stages.

The first stage takes the debate back to first principles, clearly setting out the current situation and existing plans for the future with the aim of tackling the sometimes confused picture of the building and the services it contains that has clouded debate in the past. The first stage concludes by identifying and reviewing the options open to the Council and making a series of recommendations for those which merit further detailed consideration during stage 2.

This report sets out the findings from stage 1 of the study.

Methodology

The report has been informed by: -

- A review of the building including the land holding, leases, condition and costs to the Council
- A review of the services contained in the building including the suitability of the accommodation to meet service needs and their plans for the future
- Consultation with services and organisations accommodated in the Thameside building
- A small commission from a specialist theatre design company to review options for the existing theatre, in consultation with Thurrock Arts Council



Any options for the Thameside complex and the services it contains need to be developed in context. The Council has a clear vision and priorities for the Borough and an exciting and transformational growth programme which is improving the physical environment, generating new homes, business accommodation and job opportunities. The growth programme has created opportunities to grow and develop the creative and cultural sector in the borough. Investment in High House Production Park has given the borough a much higher profile in the sector which the Council is keen to build on through a new approach to culture, arts and heritage set out in the next section of this report.

However the drive to reduce public sector spending continues, with a strong focus on back-office functions and support costs, including building costs, where cuts can help reduce the impact on front line services.

Council Vision and Priorities

The Council's Community Strategy, adopted in September 2012, sets out the vision and priorities of the Council; the context in which

decisions about the services in the Thameside and the broader culture, arts and heritage offer in the Borough are taken. The strategy recognises that how people feel about themselves and where they live is central to creating a collective sense of identity and direction. Therefore the vision has been written to give a clear direction of travel for the Council that focuses on creating *"..a place of **opportunity, enterprise and excellence, where individuals, communities and businesses flourish.**"*

The vision encapsulates the five priorities. These priorities are interlinked and in many ways depend on each other. The priorities are: -

Create a great place for learning and opportunity:

Ensure that every place of learning is rated "Good" or better

Raise levels of aspirations and attainment so that local residents can take advantage of local job opportunities

Support families to give children the best possible start in life

Encourage and promote job creation and economic prosperity

Promote Thurrock and encourage inward investment to enable and sustain growth

Support business and develop the skilled workforce they require

Work with partners to secure improved infrastructure and built environment

Build pride, responsibility and respect

Create welcoming, safe and resilient communities which value fairness

Work in partnership with communities to help them take responsibility for shaping their quality of life

Empower residents through choice and independence to improve their health and well-being.

Strategic Context

Improve health and well-being

creating a place of learning, building pride and improving health and well-being

Ensure people stay healthy longer, adding years to life and life to years

Reduce inequalities in health and well-being and safeguard the vulnerable with timely intervention and care accessed closer to home.

Enhance quality of life through improved housing, employment and opportunity

Improve health and well-being

Enhance access to Thurrock's river frontage, cultural assets and leisure opportunities

Promote Thurrock's natural environment and biodiversity

Inspire high quality design and standards in our buildings and public space

The services provided in the Thameside play a valuable role in delivering the vision and priorities, with a particular contribution to



Strategic Context

Growth Programme

Thurrock is undergoing transformational change with the delivery of one of the most exciting growth programmes in the country that will ultimately deliver new homes and a large number of new job opportunities. The programme will change the landscape of the Borough as commercial, public and residential development brings new communities, businesses and jobs and the population grows from 157,000 in 2011 to an estimated 191,000 by 2031.

Through the growth programme, opportunities to enhance the cultural offer in the Borough are being created. For example: -

- In Purfleet the creation of High House Production Park (HHPP) and the potential for a new 600,000 sqft Film and Television Studio complex will transform the cultural and employment opportunities in the area

- Lakeside is broadening its historic retail based offer to include leisure, culture and entertainment activities
- The Tilbury area is the focus of a Heritage Lottery Funded project to enhance and open access to Coalhouse Fort



Grays is one of six defined growth hubs within the Borough where regeneration activity is concentrated. A vision for the town was adopted by Cabinet in July 2013 following extensive public consultation including a series of workshops with residents and businesses based in Grays town centre. The vision states;

“Building on its strengths as a Chartered Market Town, Grays will be an exciting, high quality destination for people to live, work, learn, shop and socialise. Reconnected to the River Thames, Grays will support growing resident, student and business communities throughout the day and entertain a diverse and vibrant population through the evening.

Cafés, bars, restaurants, shops and markets will combine with culture, entertainment and events in unique venues to provide a safe and attractive place for communities to meet and businesses to thrive.”

The vision defines a future role for Grays town centre as a centre for culture, entertainment, leisure and socialising. One of the key outputs from the vision is;

“Building a local economy based on:

- *Markets, convenience and specialist retail, cafes, leisure and events during the day;*
- *Entertainment, culture and places to eat and drink during the evening”*

In this context the future of the Thameside building and the delivery of the services it contains is closely linked to the future of Grays. However the overriding priority is to maintain and enhance the cultural offer available to the residents of Thurrock.

Savings and the Transformation Programme

In 2010 the Government introduced its austerity programme to reduce the national budget deficit. Cuts to expenditure have, with certain exceptions, taken place across the public sector and Local Government has been no exception.

Over the past four years the Council’s net expenditure has been subject to severe constraint. Since 2010/11 a total of £61.4m has been taken off of the historic run rate.

This has been achieved through defined initiatives, efficiencies and reductions to services across the Council. The savings programme is expected to continue over the next few years as downward pressure continues to be applied to public expenditure. The Council anticipates having to find a further £37m in savings over the next three years (up to the end of 2017/18); however this figure may increase given recent announcements in the 2014 Autumn Statement.

Part of the Council’s approach to meeting the savings target is through its transformation programme which aims to reduce costs while maintaining and improving service delivery through investment in new ICT, changes to the property portfolio and many other initiatives delivered through each Council service. The transformation programme has already had an impact on the services within the Thameside Complex with, for instance, the ‘Think Digital’ campaign pushing more services online including the Thameside Theatre box office functions with the staffed office within the Thameside Complex now

closed apart from three hours each Saturday morning.

One way of reducing the impact of savings on front line services has been to focus on the efficiencies that can be made in office costs, including the costs of the Council's property portfolio. The Council has been seeking to rationalise its property portfolio and concentrate services at the Civic Offices where possible. While the Civic Offices would not be able to accommodate a new theatre facility without significant investment, the other types of accommodation at the Thameside could be re-provided in the Civic Offices

It is clear that as restrictions continue to be applied to public spending it is becoming increasingly difficult to meet the savings targets through efficiencies alone. Difficult decisions are now being made on the scope and scale of front line services that the Council can afford to provide. This will include those services provided from the Thameside Complex as well as what can be spent on the building itself.

Market for Theatre Provision

The Thameside Theatre is operating in a diverse cultural market place; competing with other live performance venues and alternative leisure pursuits. Immediate competitors include the Cliff's Pavilion (1630 seats) and the Palace Theatre (600 seats) in Southend, the Towngate Theatre in Basildon (542 seats), the Queen's Theatre in Hornchurch (500 seats) and, despite the river between them, the Orchard Theatre in Dartford (956 seats). Each of these theatres has a greater capacity than the Thameside (315 seats) and therefore the scope to attract a broader range of productions and performers.

The Council commissioned some business planning advice to inform decisions about the State Cinema in 2013. The advice, based on provision of a new venue in current market conditions, concluded that:

Commercial viability is possible but difficult to achieve. While there is no 'ideal' size for a theatre a venue of 600-800 seats (double the size of the Thameside Theatre) would be most likely to succeed in the local

market. Fewer seats would reduce the gross potential of the venue while audience demand was not considered to be sufficient to justify a larger capacity. The venue would need to focus on its commercial side and maximise income through hospitality and catering as well as programme while minimising its costs through adoption of a cheaper management model such as a charitable trust. The Queen's Theatre in Hornchurch is an example of a theatre operated by the Charity but in receipt of a subsidy from the Local Authority.

The programme needs variety to attract different audiences. The constraints on the Thameside Theatre space mean that the offer is too narrow. A live music, comedy and variety offer with some children's shows and limited drama and musical production may attract different audiences in sufficient numbers but depends on a number of 'flat floor' events which the Thameside Theatre is not able to deliver.

The programme is only part of the story; promotion and income generation through ancillary services are vital. Catering and hospitality can generate income to support the

whole operation and audience development is vital. The value of producing hard copy programme brochures, regular advertising, using digital and social media effectively, PR / press relations and sponsorship and membership schemes should not be underestimated.

Conclusions

The Council has a clear vision and priorities in which the services delivered from the Thameside Complex have an important part to play.

The growth programme recognises the importance of Grays as the administrative and civic hub of the Borough and also recognises the valuable part services delivered in the Thameside building have to play in delivering the vision. .

The advice the Council received on market conditions for a theatre suggests that an ideal venue for the Borough would be larger than the current Thameside Theatre but that, while it may be possible to move further towards

commercial viability, most theatres including many of the competitors to the Thameside receive subsidy from their Local Authority.

The continued austerity programme means that downward pressure on public sector spending is likely to endure in the short to medium term. While all services need to find savings if the Council is to balance its budget, there is particular pressure on back office functions and on-costs including building costs, where the delivery of greater savings can reduce the pressure on front line services.

Culture, Arts and Heritage in Thurrock

Culture, arts and heritage are increasingly defining Thurrock's image and 'offer'. The Borough has a long-standing arts and heritage scene reflected in the Thameside Theatre, Thurrock Museum and many local organisations, clubs and societies dedicated to history, dance, music, film, theatre and the visual arts.

In recent years, as part of the Council's growth programme, there has been significant capital investment in High House Production Park (HHPP) to create an international centre for the creative industries. Partners in the development include the Royal Opera House, Creative and Cultural Skills, ACME studios, Arts Council England, Central Government and the Council. Together they have invested in creating the Royal Opera House Set Production Workshop, the Backstage Centre which contains world-class production, rehearsal and training space and a dedicated creative workspace for artists. The most recent addition to the park, a new costume store for the Royal Opera House, will open in 2015.

The culture, arts and heritage scene in the

Borough is growing. The creative sector has the potential to grow exponentially in Purfleet through the creation of a 600,000 sq ft film and television studio complex as part of the Purfleet Centre regeneration programme, while at the other end of the Borough a Heritage Lottery Fund supported project is animating Coalhouse Fort, one of the many historic sites along the riverfront that were dedicated to the defence of the City of London.

The creation of HHPP has given Thurrock a much higher profile in the creative sector. The growing reputation of the Borough as a centre for the creative industries has attracted national and international interest. This growing interest is an opportunity for the Council and other stakeholders to work with the sector and create employment, increase social and community cohesion and work with local residents to support a broad cultural programme.

Recognising this opportunity, Cabinet agreed a report in December 2013 that placed arts, culture and heritage at the forefront of the Thurrock 'offer'. The 'Unleashing Creative

Ambition – A Strategic Role for the Arts and Culture in Thurrock' report set out a clear strategic direction and aligned Council engagement in this area closely with the agreed vision and priorities for the Borough.

The report sought to capitalise on the opportunities created through the growth programme by securing the development and delivery of three propositions that together constitute a new arts, culture and heritage brief: -

- A cultural entitlement programme for every young person in Thurrock
- An enterprise and innovation programme to attract, locate and develop businesses in Thurrock
- A creative place-making programme that takes a culture, arts and heritage led approach to engaging communities with the growth programme

Cabinet endorsed the approach and agreed to put in place the necessary steps to deliver a strategic role for the arts, culture and heritage in the Borough.

Culture, Arts and Heritage in Thurrock

Celebrating the River Thames

Alongside and linked with the emerging culture, arts and heritage strategy, the Council has been re-imagining the relationship between the Borough and its 18 miles of riverfront. The Thames Estuary defines Thurrock and the character and personality of the Borough has formed and evolved over centuries as agriculture, industry and the river have shaped the landscape and the people.

The Thames has influenced the development of the Borough from first settlements, through the creation of small port towns and defensive structures to shield and protect London, the industrial revolution and large scale industrialisation to more modern pieces of national infrastructure such as the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge. Parts of the riverside are wild, open space; other areas are crowded with commercial or residential development. Some parts are easily accessible; others are effectively closed to the public.

Through a Cabinet Report in July 2014 the Council sought to redefine the relationship with the river as part of its function as leader

of 'place' in Thurrock. All along the riverfront there are fantastic opportunities to

use heritage sites, landscapes and buildings of interest to tell the story of Thurrock through cultural and arts activity.



In Purfleet the creation of a new Purfleet Centre including more than 2,500 new homes, film and television studios, local services and employment opportunities is a real opportunity to transform the public realm, celebrate the historic landscape and re-open access to the river for local people. The masterplan turns the town around to focus on the Thames, improving access to and along the riverfront, linking venues including the RSPB reserve, the historic gunpowder magazine and proof house to the cultural facilities at HHPP.

In Grays the relocation of South Essex College, the proposal to create an underpass under the railway lines and opportunities to improve the Yacht Club and access to the river at Grays Beach all improve connections between the town centre and its riverfront facilities including those further along the coast such as St Clements Church and the Graffiti Wall in West Thurrock.

In Tilbury the expansion of the Port of Tilbury will create over 1,000 jobs, improving employment opportunities along this working part of the riverfront. Opportunities are being

sought to capitalise on the natural and heritage assets along the estuary including Tilbury Fort, Coalhouse Fort, the Cruise Terminal, the river walk, adjacent marshland and Thurrock Thameside Nature Park.

Through the work re-defining the Borough's relationship with the riverfront and the cultural, arts and heritage brief some key themes emerge: -

- Access. Some parts of the riverfront are inaccessible and it is difficult to move between different locations
- Quality of the public realm. The built and natural environment is in need of improvement along particular stretches of the riverfront.
- Animating the riverfront. Making best use of the river will mean attracting people to visit and use the riverfront. There are sites of historic significance that could be brought to life using the museum collection and appropriate interpretation, along with opportunities to facilitate creative responses to the estuary landscape that can be developed into destinations for visitors and local residents.

In this context the Council has taken a fresh look at what broad cultural and heritage offer it will support across the Borough and a number of opportunities are emerging that together form the new culture, arts and heritage portfolio.

Culture, Arts and Heritage Portfolio

Since the December 2013 Cabinet Report, the Council has worked with a series of stakeholders to develop an emerging portfolio of projects based around the three propositions in the arts, culture and heritage brief.

The first proposition, a cultural entitlement programme, aims to offer every young person in Thurrock regular opportunities to experience excellent arts and culture, both inside and outside of school. The Royal Opera House has been leading a pathfinder programme, developed with a number of schools in the Borough, to develop a sustainable programme of cultural opportunities for young people which will help to deliver this proposition. The Thurrock Trailblazers programme will be broadened to include all schools in the

Culture, Arts and Heritage in Thurrock

Borough in 2015. Other initiatives that support the cultural entitlement programme include an international theatre design project with a partner in Brazil, the transformation of the Thurrock Music Hub offer and an emerging initiative to develop the successful Beat the Streets walking project into a carnival-inspired walking programme to promote health and well-being.

Skills development is critical to supporting the Borough's emerging creative economy. Local people will only be able to compete for jobs in the creative economy if they have the opportunity to develop the skills the sector needs. Skills and business initiatives underway or being developed that support the second proposition, a creative enterprise and innovation programme, include:

- A bespoke creative industries business support programme led by the Royal Opera House and delivered from HHPP to help start-up and job creation in the sector.
- The new Royal Opera House Costume Centre will host a unique costume construction degree course delivered in

partnership with South Essex College and University of the Arts London.

- The National Skills Academy's Backstage Centre is already offering employer led specialist training in the sector which it is seeking to develop further. The centre has recently been designated as one of a select group of sector led National Colleges and will lead the delivery of an employer led curriculum for the Creative and Cultural Sector.
- HHPP and partners are developing a skills programme to support the film industry and supply the film studio complex proposed for Purfleet as part of the growth programme.

Culture, arts and heritage also have a part to play in the delivery of the growth programme; in informing physical change and in engaging local communities with the opportunities created. With major growth initiatives underway the programme is transforming the Borough, creating opportunities in each of the growth hubs. New initiatives being developed include:

- The further development of HHPP by investigating opportunities to bring the Grade 2 listed High House itself back into productive use and developing proposals for the remaining plots on site.
- A Heritage Lottery Funded project to invest in and animate Coalhouse Fort with events and learning opportunities.
- A cultural festival - a celebration of the place of Thurrock, its history and character to be held at Grays Beach in July 2015. Cabinet received a report in December 2014 outlining the proposals for the festival to be delivered in partnership with arts organisation Metal, who currently deliver the very successful 'Village Green' festival in Southend.

Conclusion

The creative sector plays an important part in defining Thurrock as a place. The offer, including the services delivered from the Thameside complex, has been complemented in recent years with new investment at HHPP which has raised the profile of the Borough

Culture, Arts and Heritage in Thurrock

among creative organisations at a national and international level. As a result the Council has adopted a new approach to culture, the arts and heritage in the Borough based on three propositions that align with the Council's vision and priorities and the growth programme.

The three propositions for the sector and their practical application through projects offer a positive context and direction of travel in which new ideas will continue to be explored. Together these initiatives and others driven by local groups, societies and clubs are developing in a strategic context that places the arts, culture and heritage brief at the heart of the growth programme and the delivery of the Council's vision and priorities.

Alongside and linked with the new approach to arts, culture and heritage the Council has been re-imagining the relationship between the Borough and its 18 miles of riverfront. Through this review the Council has recognised the value of re-animating the riverfront through the historic buildings and landscapes along the Thames Estuary. Greater use of the museum collection could

be the opportunity to energise this approach, using objects and information to tell the story of Thurrock at the most appropriate places in the Borough. This could in turn be the

catalyst for efforts to secure funding needed to complete the river walk and improve connectivity.



Coalhouse Fort

Services in the Thameside

The Thameside complex is a symbol of the cultural life of the Borough, however it is the services it contains that are important to so many local residents. These services animate the building, contribute to delivery of the vision for Grays as the administrative and civic hub of the Borough and help generate footfall in the town centre. This section of the report sets out the nature of these services, their accommodation in the building and the suitability of this accommodation to meet service needs. Plans for changes or potential changes to service provision, in the light of the savings programme and other pressures, are also considered. Finally conclusions are drawn to inform the options appraisal.

Services Provided at the Thameside

The Thameside is home to a number of important Council Services and functions: -

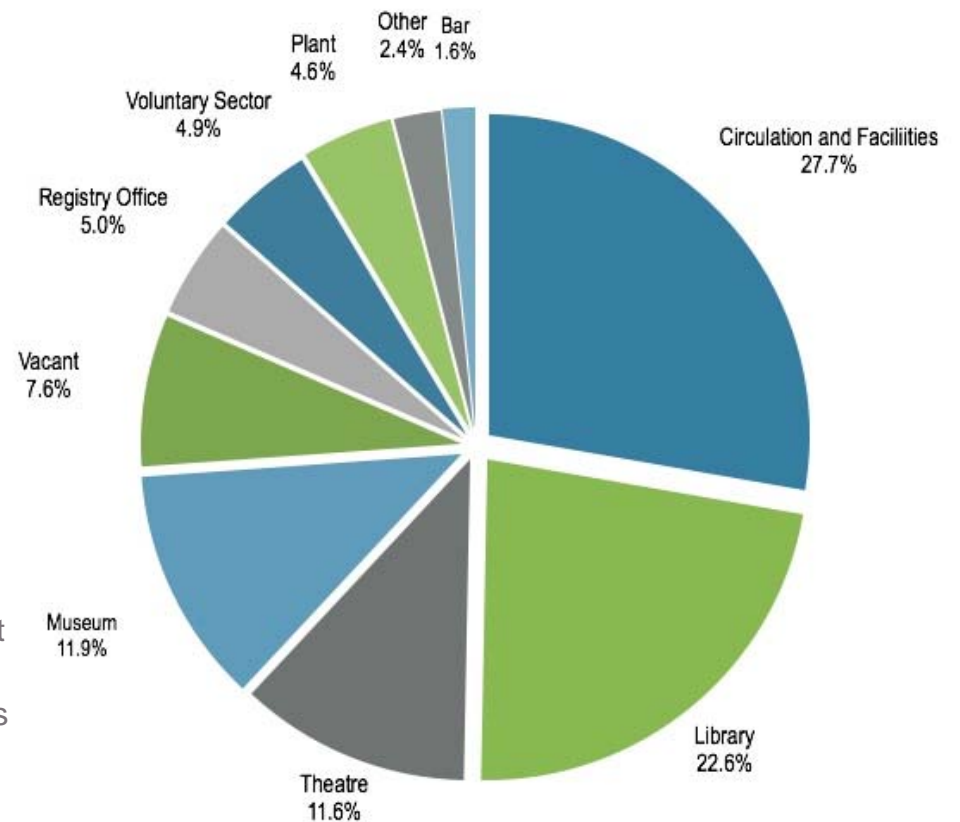
- Thameside Theatre
- Thurrock Museum and archives
- Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages
- Central Library

The building is also home to several voluntary and community organisations including: -

- Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions
- Trans-vol
- CSV
- TRUST
- Talking Newspaper

Occupancy and Floorspace

There is no single comprehensive set of scaled drawings for the Thameside Centre but, based upon the plans that are available, the broad areas occupied by various functions are outlined in the chart to the right. More detail is provided within the table at Appendix 1.



Services in the Thameside

Certain conclusions can be drawn from these estimates:

- A significant amount of the building is allocated to circulation space, public facilities, communal facilities and plant. Together these form approximately one third of the floor area of the building. Whilst venues can typically be expected to have larger circulation spaces the arrangement of the spaces within the Thameside building mean that they are rarely available to conveniently support uses such as the Theatre.
- Aside from the circulation space the Library is comfortably the largest user of the building - occupying some 23% of the floor area.
- Although most people associate the Museum and in particular the Theatre with the Thameside complex in fact these services only occupy about a quarter of the building.
- The Museum display area on the first floor is smaller than the areas dedicated to Museum archive and storage elsewhere in the building.

Plans of the spaces occupied by each service are available as Appendix 2 to this report (available as a separate document).



Council Service Needs

To inform the options review and provide a benchmark against which each proposal can be properly assessed the current occupiers of the Thameside building have been consulted on service delivery, their existing accommodation and its suitability, planned changes to services as a result of the savings programme or other initiatives and their vision for the future including their thoughts about ideal accommodation.

Library Service

Service Delivery

The current library provides a range of services including book, DVD and CD lending, reference library, learning materials, meeting room and staff work room, local history archive, public access PCs and study areas.

The library is open six days a week (Mon–Sat) from 10.00 a.m. to 7.00 pm on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday or to 5.00 pm on

Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. It is well used by the community and is comfortably the largest footfall generator in the Thameside Complex. There are 18 mainly part-time staff based at the Thameside and in 2013/14 there were: -

- 412,631 visits (entrances to the library)
- 152,599 items issued
- 63,962 sessions on public computers totalling 47,384 hours

There are weekly events in the Library including a number of larger events each year which attract large numbers of visitors. The Library Service works in partnership with equivalents in Southend and the rest of Essex to support a broader range of services than would be the case if it operated in isolation.

Existing Accommodation

The public areas of the Library are on the ground and first floors of the building. These areas include the lending library, reference library, work room and public computer areas. In addition the library accommodation includes a book storage area on the 2nd floor and office accommodation on the 5th floor of

the tower. The office accommodation includes desks for staff and storage of equipment used for school visits and other items. In total the library is estimated to use approximately 23% of the Thameside building.

While the existing public accommodation benefits from relatively recent externally funded improvements and is adequate for current use it has its limitations. The lighting is recognised as being deficient and the introduction of flexible shelving would mean that events could be better catered for. There is little space for further IT provision, an area of growing demand, and the mezzanine arrangement in the main library space reduces the available usable area.

While the accommodation has been adapted over the years to suit the needs of the library there is no specialist accommodation required for the library service.

The library does benefit from the communal facilities in the building

including the shared public toilets and the staff room on the third floor and the service yard/ loading bay which provides garaging for the Mobile Library and space for daily deliveries of requested items from partner Libraries in Essex and Southend.

Plans for change

Service specific savings targets may have an impact on the nature of the provision from the Thameside Complex.

The most obvious example of this is the pressure on the libraries budget where the potential to find a saving of up to £569k across the service is currently being considered. Whilst the approach to meeting this target is the subject of a wider review of the library service, there are already suggestions that the existing Thameside offer could be reduced or, through the transformation programme, relocated.

Clearly, the review of libraries needs to run its course and establish the future operating model of the library service and the role of the Grays Central Library. But it is clear that any

possible reduction or removal of library provision from the Thameside will have a significant impact through either the creation of a large vacant space within the building and/or a considerable drop in daily visitor numbers. It will be important to tie the conclusions of the Thameside and libraries reviews together in due course.

Vision for the Future

Whilst the future service model will be determined through the library review, the library service has a clear vision for the future as an innovative modern service at the heart of the community, reflecting the move towards digital technology and a broader community focussed approach. The accommodation required to deliver this service would be:

- Easily accessible by all, with a 'shop window' in an area with high footfall.
- Light, airy and welcoming spaces with plenty of informal and formal seating as well as meeting rooms equipped with whiteboards / conferencing facilities etc.
- Prominent children's and youth areas

attracting and catering for these particular groups

- A broader community offer, possibly linked with the Community Hubs initiative and including an increased role in learning, health and wellbeing services and as a social hub and information point for the community
- Good Wi-Fi connection and selection of IT facilities including Wi-Fi printing services and areas where people can 'plug in' their own device
- Space for events
- Improved ICT software and hardware to better analyse use of the computer system and use of OPEN+ or other software to open parts of a building without a member of staff
- Greater use of self-service terminals to provide other Council services such as 'blue badge' printing and paying parking fines.

This vision aligns strongly with the outcome of the recent Government backed Independent Library Review for England (December 2014,

chaired by William Sieghart) which reflected that the service is at a crossroads, that there are many examples of good practice across the country and that there is still a clear need and demand for spaces where people can access help and knowledge for free. The report makes three broad recommendations:

- The provision of a national digital resource for Libraries
- The setting up of a task force to provide a strategic framework for England
- The task force with local authorities and others to improve, revitalise and change their local library service and encourage increased community involvement

Dependency on the Thameside Building:

None – the service could be delivered from another location.

Thameside Theatre

Service Delivery

The Thameside Theatre has been a centrepiece of the Council's cultural offer since it opened in 1972. The theatre offers a mixture of music, entertainment and drama productions each year. It employs three full time staff, nine technical and front of house staff on a part time basis and four volunteers from Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions when there is a show. In 2013/14:-

- 39,581 people attended 219 performances dominated by amateur/ educational events and the annual Christmas Pantomime.
- Audiences were on average 57% of capacity and are predominantly drawn from the immediate local area

It is generally acknowledged – confirmed through the earlier work on the State Cinema – that, at c.300 seats, the theatre is too small to be attractive to some sub-regional acts and so relies on education and amateur

productions together with the annual pantomime and live tribute acts to make up most of the programme. A larger theatre aiming to deliver a more commercial programme is likely to provide more variety, live music and comedy together with drama and musicals.

Based on 2013/14 figures the Council subsidises the arts and theatre operations to a total of approximately £330,000 per year however it should be noted that non-controllable costs relating to the delivery of central Council services make up £230,000 of this total. If arts development costs are also removed then the operating subsidy for the Thameside Theatre is approximately £86,000. By way of comparison the Towngate Theatre in Basildon received a net operating subsidy of £258,000 in 2013/14 although this is expected to reduce significantly to just over £100,000 in 2015/16. Overall the operating subsidy level for the Thameside Theatre is in line with similar sized sub-regional venues.

Existing Accommodation

The theatre comprises the auditorium, technical suite, backstage areas including the dressing rooms, theatre office and the Thameside 2 meeting space together with shared public communal spaces such as the theatre foyer and bar area.

It is estimated that the total area used exclusively by the theatre is around 12% of the floor area of the Thameside complex.

There are a range of views on the existing theatre and its associated facilities. Given that the theatre accommodation is tailored to meet the demands of a live performance venue a specialist Theatre Consultant, Charcoalblue, were appointed to consider the theatre space and the options for its improvement. The Charcoalblue report is available as Appendix 3 to this report (available as a separate document). The main points in relation to the existing accommodation are: -

- The theatre is situated on the third floor of the building. Public access is via a central stair and two public lifts and the public frontage of the building offers little

in the way of visual identity for the theatre. It is largely hidden from the street.

- The auditorium has been remodelled in the past to provide 315 seats. The auditorium is cramped with limited leg room giving a poor visitor experience.
- The auditorium was built along the lines of a lecture theatre with a single rake of seating. There is no formal orchestra pit however a section of seating can be removed to create an orchestra space if required.
- The stage itself is relatively small and is served by narrow wings at each side and a small hydraulic goods lift on the left wing which, because of its limited capacity restricts the types of show it is possible to bring into the building. There is little flying height and the overhead bars are quite low.
- The 'balcony' area is used as an oversized control room which could be adapted to provide additional seating.
- The backstage areas (i.e. dressing rooms) are reasonably well appointed for a theatre of this size however they

are in need of some updating.

- The shared public spaces which include the foyer and the bar area are somewhat fragmented and in need to refurbishment – typically venues trade heavily on their bar offering which can be used even when the auditorium is not in use. The third floor location and lack of public visibility preclude this in the Thameside.
- Beyond the main auditorium there is demand for a dance venue which could be provided on site and for a staffed box office as there has been a recorded drop in ticket sales since its effective closure.

Plans for Change

The Council's cultural services have been reducing costs in line with savings targets. Recently the service has started to consider options for the delivery and management of cultural services using an Asset Based Community Development approach. Opportunities to reduce costs further include working more closely with other services in the building and management options that could reduce overheads

Vision for the Future

The vision for the future will depend on the outcome of this options appraisal.

Dependency on the Thameside Building:

High unless a viable alternative can be delivered.

Thurrock Museum and Archive

Service Delivery

Like the library and the theatre, the museum was part of the original Thameside 'offer' when the building opened in 1972. The museum and archives chart the history of the Borough from before the earliest human settlements to the present day.

As the museum is accessed from the public areas of the building and there is no front desk the museum service does not record the number of visitors each year.

Some years ago an automatic system that counted the number of entrances and exits from the front door showed approximately 24,000 entrances/exits per annum however

this figure should not be regarded as an indicator of individual visitor numbers. In any case it would need to be treated with caution as anecdotal evidence suggests the figure is now much lower.

Outside of the Thameside offer, the museum service delivers approximately 40 talks a year to groups throughout Thurrock and provides articles for the web and local papers about the history of the Borough.

The museum service employs one full time member of staff and one apprentice. Up to 10 volunteers work with the staff for a few hours each week.

Existing Accommodation

The existing accommodation consists of the museum itself which is housed in the 'theatre wing' of the building, below the dressing rooms and other backstage areas, together with the office and archives stored in the basement of the building and the fourth floor. In total the museum and archives are estimated to occupy approximately 12% of the building.

- The museum itself has not changed for

some time and is generally regarded as tired and dated. There has not been any significant investment in the museum for many years and it has not benefitted from the same externally funded refurbishment that other areas of the Thameside have seen.

- As a result the museum is based around a series of static display cases and lacks the opportunities to interact with the exhibits in the way that a modern museum would encourage. The space allocated is considered large enough but there is no dedicated learning space for school parties or groups of adults.
- There is a significant collection of items in the archives however they are not digitally catalogued.
- The lighting system in the museum is inadequate and in need of repair.
- The archives are nearly full and they are not temperature or humidity controlled to protect items or large enough to meet adequate space requirements. There is a strong room for the protection of valuable items. Without a digital catalogue to interrogate it is difficult to pinpoint the most valuable and

historically interesting items.

- The existing accommodation for the museum is mainly open office-style accommodation which has been adapted. The archives and collection are held on racks in other parts of the building. The only specialist element of the existing accommodation is the strong room.

To bring the museum up to the standards set by the Arts Council the museum accommodation needs to be improved alongside other improvements to the collection, access opportunities, archives and collections policy etc. The current standard of the museum is a recognised blockage in the Council's efforts to secure external funding, notably through the Heritage Lottery Fund, and a clear plan has previously been requested which articulates the Council's vision for providing modern heritage interpretation opportunities.

Plans for Change

There are no specific plans for changing the Museum however the Council's cultural services have been investigating different

management options for the building based on an Asset Based Community Development approach.

Vision for the Future

Building upon the Use of the River work outlined within the previous section there is clearly an opportunity to develop an exciting hub and spoke approach to museum provision across the Borough.

Purpose designed, themed installations in some of Thurrock's numerous sites of historic importance along the Thames (including Tilbury Fort, Coalhouse Fort, Tilbury Cruise Terminal, Grays Beach, Purfleet Gunpowder Magazine etc.) would be the cornerstone of a Museum of the River. Drawing upon relevant parts of the existing collections together with modern interpretation and interactive displays it is entirely possible to tell the story of Thurrock and the surrounding area through a multi-venue museum that would provide renewed impetus to efforts to open up access to the river through a Thameside path. A dedicated schools programme would create

the link with the heritage sites encouraging visits to existing locations.

Beyond this, consideration needs to be given to the role of the archives and stores with the formalisation of a clear collections policy to inform the cataloguing and storage of materials within an appropriate facility. As a starting point cataloguing the existing collection should be prioritised.

Dependency on the Thameside Building

Delivery of the vision cannot be achieved solely from the existing Thameside museum

Registrars Office

Service Delivery

The Registrars Office has been based in the Thameside since moving from the house next to the former Magistrates Court buildings in 2005. The office employs a staff of six and in 2013/14 delivered: -

- Birth registrations-1074
- Death Registrations-513
- Notices of marriage/civil partnership-1133
- Ceremonies-approx. 140
- Approved premises ceremonies-approx. 200
- Nationality checks-46
- Group citizenship ceremonies-14 (up to 30/group)

Existing Accommodation

The existing accommodation includes a reception area, office accommodation, the

formal register room and a ceremony room. Most of the accommodation is essentially office style however the ceremony room has a higher ceiling to provide flexibility to users. There is a room with added security protection for record storage.

Broadly speaking the existing accommodation is suitable for purpose and the Thameside is the best accommodation the service has had in the Borough. However some additional office space and a separate private waiting area for people waiting to registering a death would be beneficial.

For marriages and civil partnerships the ceremony room and garden setting could be improved – the main competitor is Langtons House in Hornchurch; a historic manor house set in its own grounds with some dedicated parking. Many couples choose to marry there or at other locations which results in lost potential income to the Council.

Plans for Change

As part of the transformation programme it has been suggested that the Registry Office function could be relocated to the Civic Offices although no formal decision to do so has yet been made.

Whilst it is acknowledged that elements of the service could be relocated to the Civic Offices, there are not considered to be appropriate facilities for a range of functions including registering deaths and, in particular, wedding ceremonies.

Vision for the Future

For registering births and deaths the service needs a location easily accessible by car and public transport. For deaths in particular a suitably quiet and dignified reception and office area away from other services is required for grieving family and friends. Using the main reception area at the Civic Offices would not be considered appropriate.

For ceremonies Langtons House is a good example of the requirements – an exceptional historic location with ample parking and a large garden ideal for photo opportunities.

Locations such as High House at HHPP and Coalhouse Fort may provide suitably grand and dramatic backdrops to weddings and civil partnerships. However, consideration needs to be given to the appropriate business model for the ceremony offer before any firm view could be formed.

Dependency on the Thameside Building

Mixed. Further consideration would be needed on the offer before concluding on potential relocation.

Voluntary and Community Sector Occupiers

Alongside Council Services there are a number of voluntary and community sector organisations who occupy parts of the building. The Council has reviewed documentation and approached each of these organisations to discuss the Thameside Review. Meetings have been held with most of the organisations in the building and the findings are outlined below.

Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions

Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions is a community

interest company that centres on supporting disabled people taking greater power over their own life choices. Delivering most of Thurrock Council's services for disabled people from 2013, the organisation supports approximately 200 people and activities include:

- employment support
- placements for people looking to live independently
- helping people find personal assistants
- training and advice / support
- transition support for people moving from school into the adult world.

The company has a lease on part of the 7th floor of the Thameside Complex that runs until 2017 as well as an annual license to operate the ground floor café. The accommodation on the 7th floor serves as a head office and consists of four office spaces, a boardroom and associated facilities. The office is one of the buildings that the organisation rents from the Council, the others being used for direct service delivery. In 2017 Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions will be entitled to renew the lease unless they choose to move out or the

Council requires the accommodation for its own reasons (including redevelopment). In the latter case the Council may be liable for some amount of statutory compensation although this is likely to be relatively small.

While not dependent on remaining in the Thameside building itself Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions continue to require accessible office space in Grays and would be interested in exploring options for the building with the Council.

CSV, Trans-vol and TRUST

These organisations occupy the building as tenants at will or, at best, licensees. At the moment they do not pay rent or contribute to the costs of the building itself. Plans to regularise their occupation have been put on hold pending the outcome of this review.

These organisations occupy office space next to each other on the second floor of the building within a dedicated 'community space' created through the provision of external grant funding in 2006.

CSV

Is a charity supporting adults with learning disabilities to volunteer in their own community, learn new skills, meet new people, use public facilities and transport and live more independently. CSV shares an office space with other voluntary groups in the Thameside building. The area used by CSV includes three desk spaces together with some minimal space for filing cabinets and other storage. Kitchen and other facilities are shared.

CSV are not contracted to work with clients in Thurrock at the moment. They are funded to work across several districts in Essex and the three staff spend a considerable amount of time away from the office. As a result the office space is used throughout the week but often there is only one staff member in the building at a time. CSV has expressed a desire to remain in the Thameside building.

Trans-Vol

Trans-vol is Thurrock's community transport service providing wheelchair accessible transport for elderly and disabled people in

the Borough. The charity has operated in the Thameside for 14 years and employs one full-time and one part-time member of office staff together with 4 full time and 8 volunteer drivers. The Trans-vol office includes a number of desks, a separate private office and filing space. Kitchen and toilet facilities are shared.

The office receives approximately 15 visitors a day during the summer and around 4 visitors a day at other times. The variation is partly explained by the summer excursions arranged alongside day-to-day work. The service needs to be delivered from an accessible central location and ideally they would like secure parking space nearby for the four mini-buses the service uses. The Thameside is considered an ideal location for the service which would prefer not to move. Trans-Vol do not consider that their current funding arrangements would enable them to pay towards the cost of the accommodation they occupy.

TRUST

TRUST aims to empower minority communities to have a greater voice in

Thurrock and surrounding areas, offering support and advocacy services including employment support, health projects, housing support, volunteering and a refugee project.

TRUST uses two linked offices on the second floor of the Thameside building and shares kitchen and bathroom facilities with other users. They deliver projects funded by the Council and by other organisations and employ a total of 11 staff. It is rare for all staff to be in the office at any one time. Typically the group receives 10-15 visitors a day.

The Thameside Complex is appropriate to service needs and TRUST would like to remain in the building. To pay towards the costs of the accommodation in the future TRUST would need time to build accommodation costs into contracts and bids for funding to deliver services.

Talking Newspaper

The Talking Newspaper uses accommodation at the Thameside Complex on Tuesday evenings to record the news and Wednesday mornings to copy and mail out the newspaper to residents in the borough. On Tuesday

evenings there are up to 6 volunteers in the building. The Talking Newspaper use three desks and storage space alongside CSV and Trans-vol on the second floor of the building. The building meets their needs in that it is quiet, accessible and in a central location. There are no plans to move.

Conclusions

While the museum and particularly the theatre are the services most often associated with the Thameside building they in fact occupy only a quarter of the floor area. In fact the three services which the Thameside Centre Complex was specifically built to accommodate forty years ago occupy only around half the building area.

A significant proportion of the building is circulation space, communal facilities and plant. While a limited amount of space is required for these facilities the quantity provided in the Thameside building higher than would be the case with a modern facility.

In most cases the services and occupiers within the building are not dependent upon the Thameside for their continued delivery

and in the case of the museum the vision for the future of the service mainly lies outside of the existing building. The community and voluntary sector agencies would like to remain in the building. At least in part this reflects their current occupation terms rather than a reliance on this specific building itself. The Theatre is the exception. It occupies particularly specialised accommodation in the building which would be difficult to accommodate elsewhere without significant re-design and investment

While the focus of this report is the services contained in the Thameside and the context in which they operate, it is important to understand the specific issues and opportunities associated with the building itself. This section of the report considers the Thameside building and its environment, the condition of the building and the capital and revenue costs associated with its operation together with the impact of the savings programme.

History of the Thameside Building

The Thameside Complex was planned from 1967 and officially opened by the Chairman of the Arts Council of Great Britain, Lord Goodman, on the 22nd January 1972. It is situated in the north-east corner of Grays town centre, bounded by Orsett Road (where the main entrance is located) and Cromwell Road.

The building is of its time. The main front entrance is set back from Orsett Road and the adjacent shopping parade. There is a stepped front entrance and a long ramp for wheelchair access. The building can appear austere as there are very few windows in the front façade

of the building apart from at ground floor level. There are also side and back entrances from Cromwell Road and the public car-park at the back of the building. A plan of the layout of the building is included in Appendix 2 (available as a separate document).

The building was specifically designed to contain the new library, the local history museum and the Thameside Theatre in one building. It consists of two 'wings': -

- The 'theatre' wing containing the main public circulation spaces, café, museum, theatre, some of the library and office space currently used by voluntary sector organisations.
- The 'tower' wing consists of nine floors including a basement and contains most of the library, the register office and ceremony room, museum archives and office space for Council services. About a third of the top floor is rented by Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions and a telecommunications mast is located on the roof, providing mobile phone coverage for the local area. Parts of this wing are currently unused or are temporary accommodation for Council services while the refurbishment of the

Civic Offices is underway.

As is noted in the previous section; the physical configuration of the building means that there are large areas devoted to underused circulation space and to plant and machinery, as well as public toilets, lifts and stairwells.

The design of the theatre means the type of shows that can be accommodated is limited and its location on the third floor means there is a lack of presence at street level. The museum and archives are in need of improved accommodation while the ceremony room does not meet the needs of many couples looking for a wedding or civil partnership venue in the Borough

Although there has been some investment in the building in the forty years since it was built, most recently in the mid-2000s when some cosmetic changes to certain areas were carried out, the building has suffered from underinvestment in non-essential repairs and maintenance.

The extent of the Council's land ownership is outlined in blue on the plan shown on the Plan.

The Thameside Complex Now



As well as the building itself the Council owns the adjacent pay and display car park in Cromwell Road. Titan Road is owned by the Council, it is also public highway and rights are reserved across it for access to Grays Chalk Pit. A popular misconception has been that the Council also owns the parade of shops next to the front entrance to the Thameside building. This is not the case.

Parts of the Thameside building are leased to other occupiers:

- Cornerstone Telecommunications Infrastructure Limited lease the roof of the Thameside building as a telephone mast location. The lease expires in February 2028.
- Thurrock Lifestyle solutions have a 3 year lease on part of the 7th

Floor expiring in July 2017 and also hold an annual license for the ground floor café.

- Other voluntary sector organisations housed in the building including CSV, Transvol, Trust and the Talking Newspaper have offices on the second floor as tenants at will or at most, licensees

The rest of the accommodation is used by Council services, is vacant or forms shared circulation space, plant and facilities.

Town and Country Planning

The complex was built as a cultural hub containing the theatre, museum and library. Planning permissions were granted in 1991 and 2005 for refurbishment of the building and changes to the external landscaping and access. The mix of uses has changed over time as the library has required less space the Council has introduced office accommodation, parts of which have been occupied by the voluntary sector over the last 15 years. Planning regulations would enable the building to be used for a similar range/mix of uses provided the broad character of the use does not change significantly.

The core strategy proposals map adopted by the Council in December 2011 does not identify a specific role for the site. It is included with the town centre and the Orsett Road frontage is within the designated shopping centre. Policies in the adopted core strategy would support the principle of development for a range of uses including residential, culture, leisure, sports, offices, community uses, retail, education, and health.

The site is at the entrance to the large potential redevelopment site at Titan Works.

Value of the Asset

The Council Lands Department has inspected and valued the Thameside building. The valuation report concludes that the Thameside building site is 0.7 acres with an adjacent Council owned car park of a further 1.04 acres. The valuation report concluded that on an existing use basis the value of the whole site is £1.645m while, if redeveloped as residential accommodation, the value could be £1.86 - £2.6m depending on the density of development. These figures should be treated with some caution as the modelling underpinning the values is sensitive to relatively small changes in some, critical variables. However, what is clear is that the site has a value both in its current guise and as a redevelopment site although its value may not be as great as some assume.

Building Condition and Maintenance Costs

The Thameside building is now forty years old and, while some repairs and general maintenance have been carried out, there has not been a wholesale refurbishment of the building and its services since it was constructed. As part of the options appraisal the Council has commissioned a general condition survey of the Thameside which is expected to report in early 2015. The results will be fed into the detailed assessment of options during stage 2 of the appraisal.

The Council has received a report from E & C Design Services Ltd who were instructed to carry out surveys and prepare a condition report along with '5 Year Life Cycle Costings' for the Mechanical and Electrical services at the complex. The report considered the condition and the need for maintenance, repair or replacement of mechanical and electrical installations in the building and reached the following conclusions: -

- While much of the mechanical central plant has been replaced in the last 20 years the central infrastructure and

distribution systems for services are original to the building.

- Works in the past have been on an ad hoc basis and replacing like with like rather than considering the changing needs of the building as a whole. As a result some of the original installation is now in poor condition.
- The building has poor environmental control and a high carbon footprint. The ventilation systems are unlikely to be correctly balanced which is resulting in poor air flow to some areas.
- There are concerns about the general upkeep of the Mechanical and Electrical systems with issues reported on the toilets, filter panels on air handling units, lighting circuits and the electrical installation generally.

A range of Mechanical and Electrical services were considered to be in poor condition and 'life expired'. The report recommends a series of actions ranging from provisions in case of breakdown for facilities judged to be in good or fair condition, through to repair or replacement where judged to be needed. A five year cost plan was produced for the

Council to indicate the estimated cost of the repair and replacement of these services. The headline figures from this cost plan are outlined below:

Year	Cost
Year 2015	£94,500.00
Year 2016	£120,500.00
Year 2017	£14,000.00
Year 2018	£4,500.00
Year 2019	£178,500.00
Total	£412,000

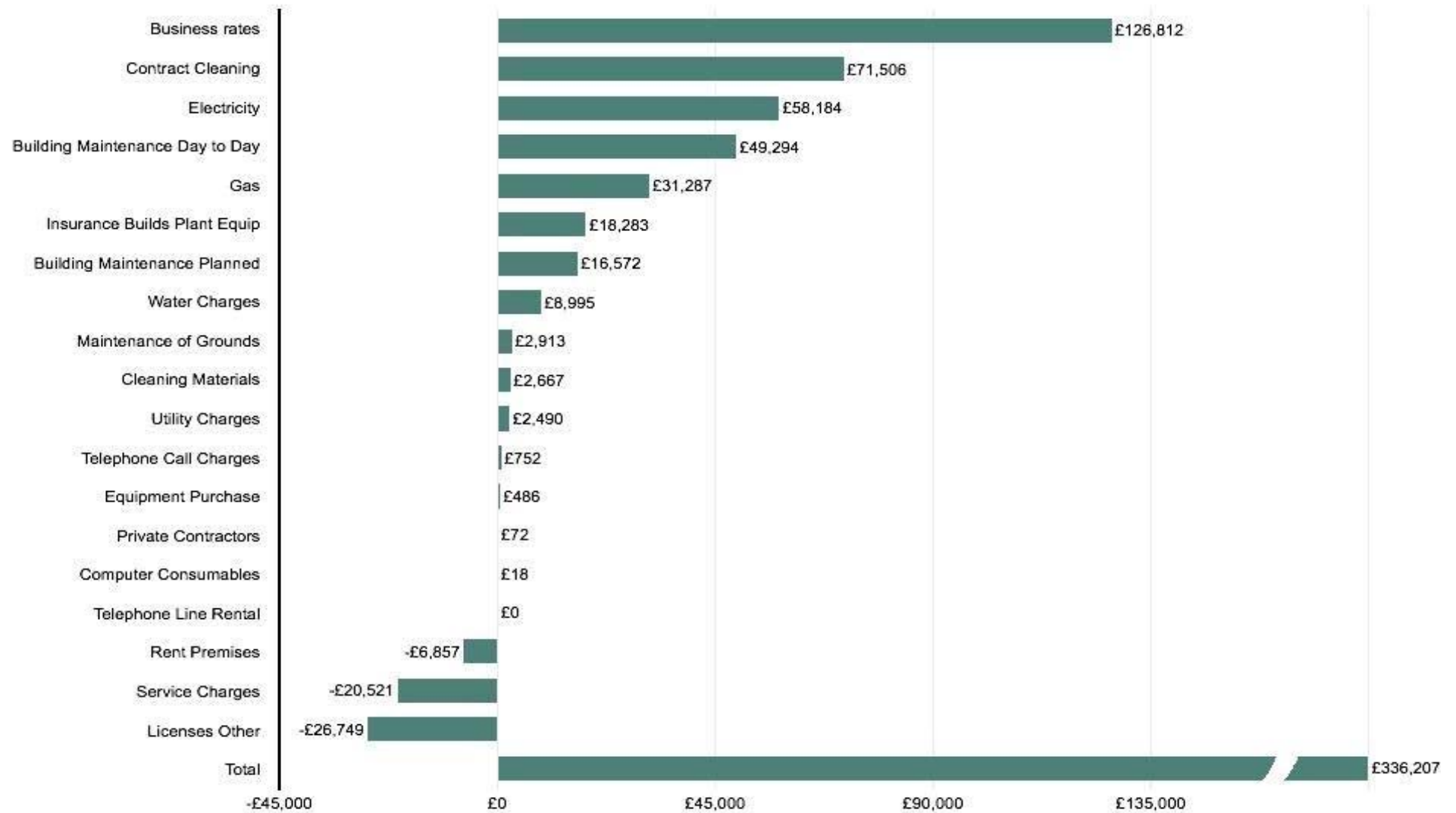
Running Costs

While managing capital spend is important, the Council's savings programme is based on reductions in revenue expenditure levels. Like all buildings the Thameside Complex incurs revenue costs associated with day-to-day maintenance, utility bills, business rates and cleaning costs etc.

The average spending for the three years from 2011/12 to 2013/14 is shown in the chart on the next page and the budget against forecast running costs for 2014/15 is on the following page.

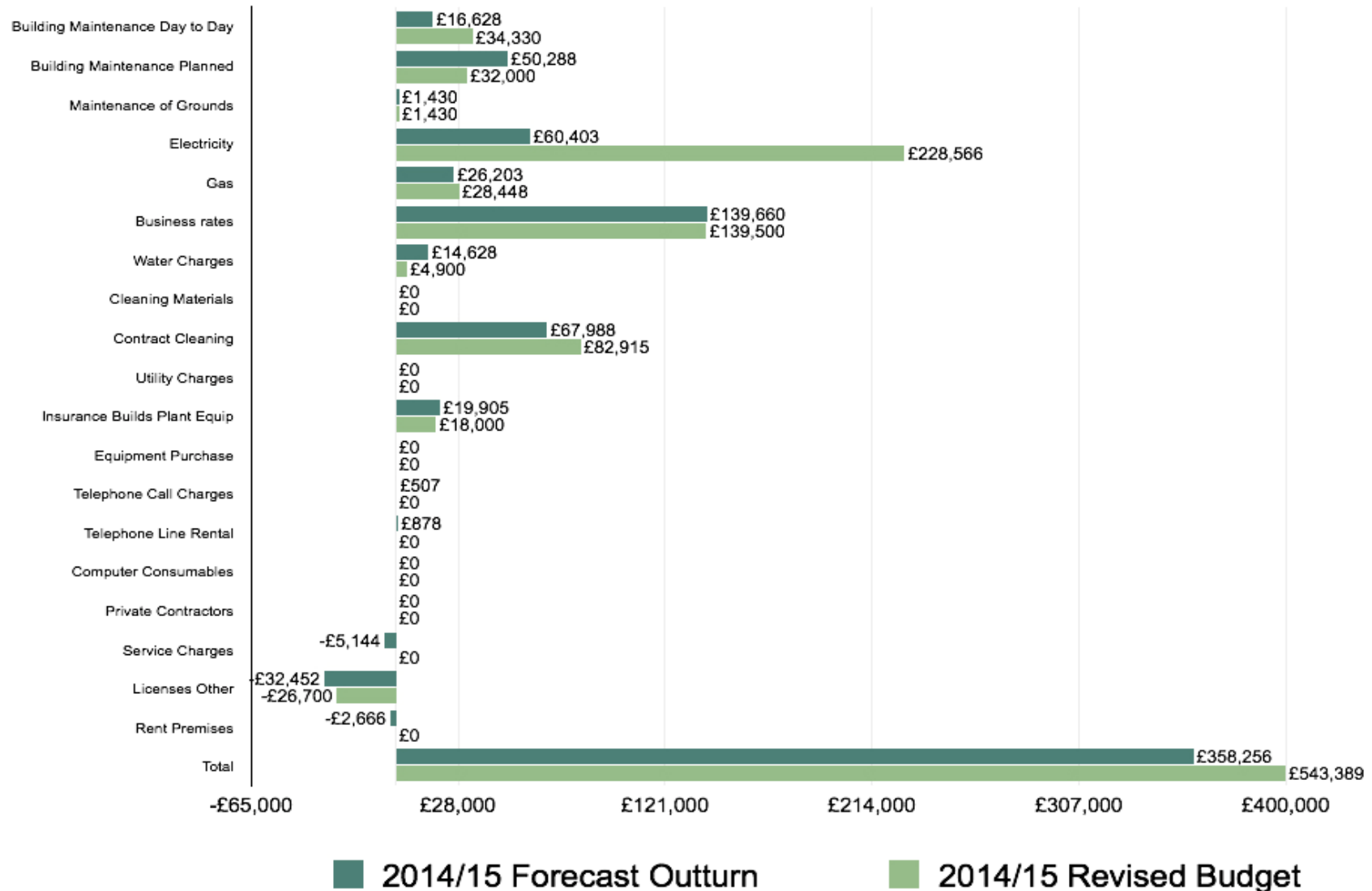
The Thameside Complex Now

Average Spend 2011/12 – 2013/14



Services in the Thameside

2014/15 Budget and Forecast Outturn



The Thameside Complex Now

The conclusions that can be drawn from these figures include:

- The average outturn for 2011/2014 amounted to £336,207. The forecast outturn for 2014/15 will be higher at £358,246 against a budget for 2014/15 of £543,389
- The total cost of the Thameside complex to the Council is considerably lower than the budget allocated to the building in this financial year. The main reason for this is the large budget allocated for electricity costs which is approximately £170,000 higher than the forecast outturn for the year. This budget is intended to guard against increased electricity prices, but has not been drawn upon since it was first set.
- The largest single cost to the Council associated with running the building is the payment of Business Rates.
- The income recorded as service charges, licenses and rent relate to the payments received from Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions for occupation of part of the 7th floor and the café, the telephone aerial masts on the roof of the building and occasional rental income from room hire.

- The other voluntary and community services in the building do not currently contribute towards the costs of the building.
- The remaining direct and indirect costs are off-set by re-charges to the Council services occupying the building. These 'below the line' charges are non-controllable costs to the services and do not impact on their operational budget.

Based on the forecast outturn for 2014/15 of £358,246 and the estimated floor area of approximately 6750 sq m, the Thameside

costs the Council approximately £53 per sq m.

In addition the Council incurs an indirect cost for depreciation on the building each year. For 2013/14 the depreciation 'cost' is expected to be £176,968. This is added to the direct costs for the building and shared out between the Council services as a non-controllable cost associated with the building

Based on the forecast and budget for 2013/14 the re-charge for each service (i.e. the cost to the Council of accommodating the service at the Thameside) will be:

Service	Charge based on 2014/15 budget	Charge based on forecast spend for 2014/15 (rounded)
Insurance	£10,480	£8,925
Registrars	£41,920	£35,685
Adolescent Team	£104,779	£89,190
Museum	£157,199	£133,810
Library	£199,118	£169,490
Theatre	£115,279	£98,125
Total	£628,794	£535,225

These costs will only be significantly reduced if part or all of the building were to close. In addition to this each service incurs a charge for central Council services such as HR and Finance which would continue if the Thameside building closed and the services were relocated.

Impact of the Savings Programme

The savings programme has already had an impact on the running costs of the Thameside. The Council has had to reduce costs by, for example, closing the box office on weekdays as part of the 'think digital' campaign.

The savings programme includes a savings target for the Thameside building of £200,000 in 2016/17 and further savings may be required in future years depending on the outcome of the options appraisal. This £200,000 saving can largely be delivered by reducing the budget for the building to a figure much closer to the expected outturn in 2014/15 which will have a minimal impact on the front line services in the building. However it will be difficult to reduce costs

further unless the building is closed. Even then there will always be some cost while the Council retains ownership.

Conclusions

The Thameside Complex is starting to show its age. While day-to-day maintenance continues and there has been investment in schemes to bring the building's appearance up to standard (such as the cosmetic changes made in the mid 2000's) these efforts have been somewhat piecemeal and, if it is to be retained, the building will need a coordinated and concerted programme to bring it up to a modern standard. The mechanical and electrical survey has given the Council a five year capital spend programme to bring these services up to standard and the general condition survey commissioned by the Council and due to report in early 2015 will identify the further investment required in the built fabric.

The costs associated with running the building are significantly lower than the budget set for the financial year suggests however these costs still amount to a significant sum of money at a time when the

Council has to assess those functions it can continue to sustain and afford as the austerity programme continues. While some of these costs are offset by rental and other income derived from Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions and from the telephone aerial on the roof the other voluntary and community services in the building do not contribute.

As a result, the vast majority of the running costs are incurred by the Council and these are predicted to amount to over £358,000 (excluding depreciation) in the current year. While the budget can be adjusted to better reflect the actual costs of the building the only significant further savings that can be derived while the building remains in Council ownership depend on closing part or all of the building.

This section outlines the different options open to the Council and, in broad terms, what the consequences of these options will be for the Thameside building and the services therein.

The report has sought to put these options in context – in terms of the Council’s vision and priorities, its commitment to the growth programme, the changes to and growing importance of the arts, culture and heritage agenda within the Borough- together with the savings programme and the impact it has on the Council’s budget and ability to deliver services.

Alongside the strategic context in which the Council is making decisions the report also recognises the current condition of the building itself and the costs involved in bringing it up to standard. The services that use the building, including their plans for the future and their accommodation needs and wants are also reviewed with a view to informing the choices open to the Council.

Conclusions from the Review

A number of conclusions can be drawn from

this review to inform the options appraisal:

- The context in which the building operates and services are delivered is changing. The Borough is growing and this is creating opportunities as well as challenges for service provision. Culture is an increasingly important part of Thurrock’s ‘offer’ to local residents and businesses and is recognised as key to improving education and attainment, as a job creator and as a mechanism to improve the place of Thurrock and to animate some of the cultural and historical assets of the Borough, particularly those along the riverfront.
- The savings programme means that cuts to Council budgets and in particular to back office and support functions such as the provision of accommodation will continue. These cuts will have an impact on the Thameside building itself as well as the services it contains. Already there are parts of the building that are vacant or underused and these areas could grow as further cuts are made.
- The Thameside building itself is over 40 years old and since it was built tastes

and fashions and new technology have changed the demands made on the building by Council services and local residents. While there have been some improvements to the building these have tended to be piecemeal and, to bring the building up to modern standards the Council will need to invest a significant sum of money in its physical fabric.

- Even if there is a significant capital investment in the building, operating costs are unlikely to reduce significantly and the building will continue to require Council funding that could otherwise be used to support front-line services

In summary: the Council needs to find a way of improving its service offer while reducing costs associated with the building and the services it contains.

The Options for Services

The library is the largest Council service in the Thameside building and is responsible for generating much of the footfall. The service is preparing to consult on plans to meet a savings target of up to £569,000 and while the outcome of the consultation cannot be

assumed there is a possibility that the Grays Library offer may have to change to reflect the budget available. This could be through various options such as a reduction in the size of the library or in its opening hours.

Clearly, the review of libraries needs to run its course and conclude the future operating model. But it is clear that any changes to Library provision could have an impact on the Complex. There have also been suggestions that, through the transformation programme, the Library could be relocated. It will be important to tie the Thameside and the Libraries review together with the transformation programme in due course as there could be an impact on the functionality of the Thameside building and the other services it contains.

The museum is acknowledged to be in need of investment. Through the new approach to culture, arts and heritage in the Borough and the re-imagining of the relationship between Thurrock and its 18 miles of riverfront the opportunity to create a Museum of the River, using the collection to tell the story of the

Borough in exciting and interactive ways at a number of historic locations and joining these up with a Thameside pathway is a chance not to be missed. Initial discussions with the Arts Council and Heritage Lottery Fund have been positive and this should be considered the future of the museum provision in the Borough. The rest of the collection needs to be catalogued and managed effectively but could be stored anywhere.

The future of the register office is not as straightforward as the museum and the library service. However, it would clearly not warrant retention within the Thameside building if the other services were on the move. The service can be divided into two main functions: the register of births and deaths and the provision of ceremonies for weddings and civil partnerships. The register office staff have identified shortcomings with the accommodation provided for the latter function and identified that more appropriate alternative accommodation could be found at other venues in the Borough. The opportunity to join this piece of work to the culture and

heritage brief and to the changing relationship with the riverfront is important; it has the potential to generate much needed income for the service and for some of our most important heritage sites while providing a unique service to couples in the Borough.

The other function of the register office, the registration of births and deaths, needs to be accommodated in an easily accessible central location and in appropriately sombre surroundings. However this function is delivered in office style accommodation and arrangements could be made to create an appropriate entrance and office space by re-configuring part of the Civic Offices, these services could be accommodated elsewhere to meet their needs.

The voluntary sector services accommodated in the building are all housed in office style accommodation that could be re-provided elsewhere should the Council decide to close the Thameside building although the outcome of the review of lease and licence arrangements for these services and their accommodation requirements are important

factors.

It is considered that the first stage of this options appraisal has highlighted opportunities for the future of each of the Council services (excluding the theatre) that could be at least comparable to, if not better than, their existing offer if provided outside of the Thameside Centre. It is proposed that the conclusion of this stage of the options appraisal be that these opportunities should be explored in more detail through the second stage with a view to providing outline business cases for each one within the final report.

This then leaves the future of the Theatre as the main focus for further analysis.

The Thameside Theatre

As the Cabinet Report in August 2014 recognised, the Thameside Theatre was always going to be the most difficult and contentious part of the building to resolve. The future of the theatre needs to be considered in more detail but the opportunity to consider it in isolation and with greater clarity around the future of the other services (should the

recommendations on those services be accepted) is a significant move forward and makes the task more manageable and transparent.

Through the work which has been completed to date, both through the options appraisal and earlier studies into the State Cinema in 2013, it has been possible to identify six basic options which should be considered to a greater or lesser extent:

- Closure (i.e. removal of Council sponsored theatre provision)
- Continue with existing arrangements
- Improve the existing theatre space
- Create a multi-venue theatre
- Create a new purpose built theatre on the same site
- Create a new purpose built theatre on a different site

The rest of this section will focus on exploring each of these options further based on the

information presented elsewhere in this report and a high level assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, before concluding which of these options are considered worthy of further assessment in stage 2 of this options appraisal.

Closure

With all other services relocated it is conceivable that the Thameside Complex could simply be closed down and the Theatre space no longer provided.

The site would be available for alternative development and savings could be taken in the form of the building running costs and the theatre budget.

While it is important to consider all the options at this stage, Members and the public at large have expressed very clear opposition to this option and the Council has made a commitment to continuing theatre provision.

This option would also have a detrimental impact on other agendas which the Council is trying to foster such as the growth programme and the regeneration of Grays. However this option is the only one likely to generate further significant savings. The other options are all likely to involve an on-going subsidy in support of theatre provision in the Borough.

Nevertheless, given the very clear views expressed by Members and local residents this option is not considered worthy of further consideration.

Strengths

- Only way in which further substantial savings (i.e. beyond the £200k) are likely to be generated from the building itself (c.£350k pa)
- Potential to save £100k pa from the Theatre budget
- Removal of any ongoing financial liability

Weaknesses

- Public opinion (and the opinion of Members) would be against this option
- Impact upon ability to deliver the wider vision for Grays
- Costs incurred through relocation of other services
- Removal of all provision is likely to weaken broader cultural offer
- Detrimental impact on the Council's arts and culture agenda and events such as the river festival
- Loss of community provision not otherwise provided for (amateur, school and dance school performance space)

Opportunities

- Potential to invest some of the savings into alternative provision models
- Potential capital receipt generated through disposal of the site for alternative use
- Redevelopment opportunity for other uses in an important site at the top of the High Street
- Get to manage the withdrawal of support thereby minimising further capital expenditure

Threats

- Reputational damage among partners, stakeholders and the public
- Significant opposition to the proposal including the potential for challenge of the Council's decision
- Cost of vacant building if no alternative uses are immediately available
- Impact of vacant building on image of Grays Town Centre
- Reduced visits to Grays Town Centre undermining other businesses

Continue with existing arrangements

Any options appraisal should contain a 'do nothing' option. This option would see a continuation of current service offers and approach to the building management and maintenance with the various savings and transformation measures being implemented over time with their associated, anticipated consequences.

While this may be an attractive option in the short term it doesn't address the underlying limitations on the theatre and the programme it is able to support or the longer term pressures on the budgets for all Council services from the savings programme. This option will simply delay a decision about the ultimate future of the Thameside Complex and is likely to result in the slow decline and ultimate closure of the building and theatre provision in the Borough. It is not considered an option that should be explored further in the second stage of this options appraisal.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We know what we currently provide and, with appropriate focus, can identify the measures through which it could be enhanced 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued cost of maintaining the building and for capital works to address current building issues Continued funding cuts will ultimately reduce the service offer to the point at which it is no longer sustainable Transformation programme and savings pressures will ultimately force consolidation within the Civic Centre leaving large void spaces within Thameside Failure to realise more exciting and deliverable options Diminishing offer impacts on quality of other services No/limited market interest from alternative occupiers that could cover the costs of the building
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relocation of other services provides additional space for theatre studios and museum expansion Vacant floorspace could be leased to others 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limitations on the theatre programme imposed by the design of the theatre and auditorium would continue Competition from other Theatres and venues Vacancy of other parts of the building further undermines the theatre and other remaining services Vacancy undermines the image of Grays Town Centre Consequential reputational damage to the Council

Improve the existing Theatre

A variant of the 'do nothing' option would be to retain the Thameside building and theatre but to improve the auditorium and stage, consider management and ownership options and the opportunity to use some or all of the rest of the building for alternative uses including other art, creative and cultural activities. Essentially this option would consider ways of reducing the costs of the building and/or generating more income to offset those costs, thereby improving the service and reducing the call on subsidy from the Council.

The Theatre is the most specialised part of the Thameside building and the Council commissioned a small study from Theatre Consultant CharcoalBlue to inform debate on options for the theatre (Appendix 3 – available as a separate document).

The report outlines the main limitations on the existing accommodation including:

- The position of the theatre on the third floor with little in the way of visual identity at ground floor level

- The capacity of the auditorium and the cramped seating arrangement
- The lack of a formal orchestra pit, limitations on the wing space and lack of flying height above the stage, together with the limitations imposed by the goods lift used to access the theatre from the ground floor.
- The need to update the backstage areas and the front of house offer including the bar which could be used to generate more income.

The report proposes some alterations to the building and the theatre space to address some of these issues. Options considered include:

- Remodelling the auditorium to increase capacity to 400 seats and therefore improve attractiveness to sub-regional theatre productions
- Providing additional creative spaces
- New build

While these changes could improve the

theatre offer in the Borough and generate some additional income to support cultural activity the initial financial analysis carried out by Charcoalblue does not suggest that any of the changes, in themselves, will eliminate the need for a Council subsidy towards theatre provision.

However there may be an opportunity to reduce the subsidy by changing the management and ownership of the building and the theatre. Staff in the Council's cultural services have already started to review options for service provision based on an Asset Based Community Development approach and this work could continue, together with a review of ownership models, in the second stage of the options appraisal.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains the Thameside Theatre continuing to build upon its existing profile • Requires a lower level of capital expenditure than a new build. • Retention of theatre in Grays supports the Council's Vision for Grays 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any works likely to take the Thameside out of use –interim provision needed • Reputation of existing theatre space remains in place • Continuing subsidy for theatre provision • Structural alterations required and need more detailed assessment • Scope and scale of theatre offer requires further assessment • Costs of works, addressing historic issues and ongoing maintenance costs • Adaptation could represent poor value for money in comparison to new build options
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to draw upon the skills and experiences of alternative operators (private and third sector) • Creation of a new cultural venue with range of spaces accommodating various uses • Potential to put unused spaces to alternative use and generate a revenue stream or redevelop to generate capital receipt. • Alternative management arrangements could reduce costs for the Council • Alternative management arrangements such as a charity would have access to alternative sources of funding • Potential to enhance the theatre offer for the Borough supporting the Council's Arts and Culture Agenda 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended auditorium still not sufficient to attract larger acts and offer remains largely as now – does nothing to build the cultural critical mass in the Borough • Failure of alternative operating models • Failure to identify a suitable alternative operator • Audience development activity insufficient to justify expansion of theatre. • Loss of audience to competing theatres while refurbishment works take place

The initial work carried out suggests that there could be some advantage to both the theatre offer and the costs of operation through adapting the building and moving its operation into a commercial and/or charitable model. As such this option (or series of options) is worth exploring further in the second stage of this options appraisal.

Multi-venue Theatre

During recent discussions on the future of the Thameside Theatre there have been suggestions that it could be replaced through the use of other facilities which have now been developed in the Borough such as the lecture theatre in South Essex College's Thurrock Campus in Grays and the Backstage Centre's Sound Stage in Purfleet. Recognising that each of these facilities has an existing 'main' use the likelihood is that none could become a permanent home for theatre provision in the Borough. However there may be an opportunity to move to a multi-venue theatre offer where the Council curates a theatre / live event programme provided through a range of venues.

This option would entail a significant change in the Council's approach to theatre provision; moving from a venue provider for amateur and professional shows to a broker for venues belonging to other organisations or even a provider of a touring theatre company buying

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides an opportunity to showcase unique venues across the Borough • Links to the Council's arts and culture and celebrating the river agendas • Removes the financial liability associated with owning a bespoke theatre venue • Takes provision out to the different communities across the borough rather than focussing on one specific venue 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results in there being no dedicated venue available for general use, likely to have an impact on the existing community/education uses • The Council would need to change its role – becoming a broker between performers and venues if not producing itself. • Cost of set up and break up on every production likely to make a number of events unaffordable
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting financial sustainability of venues across the Borough • Potential to tailor offer depending on scale and capability of venue within a rich cultural programme • Could provide an opportunity for local groups to lead development of the cultural agenda within local areas • Takes delivery out to different communities across the borough rather than focussing in one central location 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If unsuccessful there would be no venue and no theatre offer • Competition from established Theatres and other venues • Audience development across multiple venues is likely to be highly challenging

space in locations throughout the Borough. This is not a role that the Council has adopted in the past and the potential for delivering savings through this approach would need to be carefully considered.

This option has several strengths and is an opportunity to make use of other venues and spaces across the borough rather than focussing provision in one central location. However it would mean the Council changing its role from one of venue provider to being a broker of theatre space and potentially managing its own theatre company. This option is considered worthy of further consideration during stage 2.

New build on the same site

A more radical option for theatre provision in the Borough is the demolition of the existing Thameside Building, including the theatre, and construction of a new modern purpose built theatre space on the same site, either as a standalone project or as part of a wider scheme which provides the opportunity to cross subsidise the construction cost. A new building could be constructed to overcome the limitations of the existing venue and the running costs are likely to be significantly lower because of the more efficient use of space, plant and equipment and reduction in maintenance costs.

Coupled with a thorough assessment of management and ownership models this option is considered worthy of further assessment during stage two of the options appraisal.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secures continuous provision of a theatre space as part of a purpose built modern venue • Can include spaces for a range of cultural activities that meet present day expectations and support the Council’s arts and culture agenda • A larger venue would support the Council’s aspirations for Grays and cultural offer • New build more cost effective than refurbishment options 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of theatre offer during demolition and construction • Lengthy process for re-provision • Cost of build and limited number of external funding bodies • Retention of a facility results in continued running costs although not necessarily to the Council if alternative management models are considered • Theatre provision alone unlikely to be financially viable, subsidy likely to continue to be required
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to address the challenges of the existing venue and create spaces that can accommodate a range of performance forms • Beneficial development of land not required for the theatre building which could generate a capital receipt or cross subsidise the development cost • Potential to consider alternative management options that reduce the cost for the Council and provide access to alternative sources of funding 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition from other theatres could make it difficult to re-establish a theatre offer • Current and potential users become used to alternative venues • Availability of funding • Audience development activity insufficient to generate sufficient demand for a new facility

New build on a different site

If the Council is to explore re-building the Thameside Theatre then consideration should be given to the location of the facility. Any site chosen would need to be easily accessible and with adequate parking nearby and, ideally, should add value to other Council agendas.

Given the commitment of the Council to theatre provision in the Borough and the opportunity to add value by linking an improved theatre offer to other agendas and priorities for the Council this option is considered worthy of further investigation. As with a new development on the existing site, this should be coupled with a thorough assessment of management and ownership models.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secures continuous provision of a theatre space as part of a purpose built modern venue • Can include spaces for a range of cultural activities that meet present day expectations and support the Council's arts and culture agenda • New build more cost effective than refurbishment options • Can retain current offer while construction is underway • Can redevelop existing site for other beneficial purposes 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of suitable sites • Costs of land acquisition where the Council does not already own a suitable site • Lengthy process for re-provision • Cost of build and limited number of external funding bodies • Retention of a facility results in continued running costs although not necessarily to the Council if alternative management models are considered • Theatre provision alone unlikely to be financially viable, subsidy likely to continue to be required
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to address the challenges of the existing venue and create spaces that can accommodate a range of performance forms • Potential to consider alternative management options that reduce the cost for the Council and provide access to alternative sources of funding • Potential for cross subsidy from redevelopment of current site 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition from other theatres could make it difficult to re-establish a theatre offer • Current and potential users become used to alternative venues • Availability of funding • Audience development activity insufficient to generate sufficient demand for a new facility

Conclusion - the way forward

This report has set out the changing context in which the Thameside and the services it contains operate. The pressure on Council budgets as well as the opportunities generated through growth and the new approach to arts, culture and heritage in the Borough are considered. The services accommodated in the Thameside building are reviewed and their accommodation needs and wants have been incorporated into the options review.

Given the savings target and the impact this will have on all the services in the Thameside building as well as the building itself the 'do nothing' option has been rejected as, in effect, it would increase financial pressure on other parts of the Council and is likely to simply lead to the slow decline and eventual closure of the building without suitable alternative provision having been considered.

Given that 'do nothing' is not considered an option for the future, the alternatives open to the Council have been explored. The options

appraisal has concluded that there are alternative options for the provision of the library, museum and register office that could be at least equal to if not better than the existing offer. Similarly alternative office accommodation for the voluntary and community organisations in the building could be re-provided should it be required once the review of their terms and conditions of occupancy has concluded.

As expected at the beginning of this process the most difficult issue to resolve should the Thameside building close is theatre provision in the Borough. Given the public and Member support for theatre provision and the limitations and opportunities presented by the existing building four options have been identified that should be explored in conjunction with plans for the other services in the building. These are:

- Improving the existing theatre space and considering management and ownership options to determine the most viable mix for the Theatre and the Thameside building.

- Moving to a multi-venue theatre offer where the Council curates a live event programme provided through a range of venues across the borough
- A new purpose built Thameside Theatre on the same site as the existing building but with a modern footprint and facilities together with the opportunity to cross subsidise development through provision of commercial or residential development. To be considered alongside options for the ownership and management of the theatre.
- A new purpose built Thameside Theatre in an alternative location that would better meet the needs of the Borough and delivery of other Council priorities. To be considered alongside options for the ownership and management of the theatre.

Stage 2 of the options appraisal will consider each of these options in more detail. This will involve commissioning support for business planning and design work and the costing of each option, together with further consultation

with stakeholders and local residents. While the length of time taken for this report will depend on the decisions about the options made by Cabinet it is hoped that a stage 2 report could be prepared by late summer 2015.

In the meantime, a number of interim measures have been identified which could be taken to reduce the costs of the Thameside building while further work on options is carried out. These measures include:

- Reducing the budget to better reflect the actual costs of the building resulting in an immediate 'saving' to the Council with absolutely no impact on the operation of the building;
- Moving the tenants who currently benefit from free accommodation onto a charging arrangement with the minimum requirement to recover their costs of occupation;
- Considering the potential for short term or interim uses for the vacant space available in the building in line with the Council's corporate assets policies; and
- Minimising capital expenditure on

improvement and maintenance of the building pending a decision on its future.

This first stage of the options appraisal has sought to set out clearly the existing situation and to address some of the issues that have sometimes clouded debate in the past. Clear options for the future for each service have been identified and a detailed assessment during stage 2 of the appraisal will help to inform decisions by Members that secure the delivery of the arts, culture and heritage agenda, including theatre provision, for the foreseeable future.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Occupancy and Floorspace

Appendix 2 – Layout of the Building (available as a separate document)

Appendix 3 – Charcoalblue Report - Thameside Theatre (available as a separate document)

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Thameside: Estimated Floor Area (Square Metres)

	Circulation Space	Library	Theatre	Museum	Vacant	Registry Office	Voluntary Sector	Plant	Other	Bar Area	Total
Basement				165							165
Ground Floor	466	625						91	61		1243
1st Floor	287	666		376					17		1346
2nd Floor	394	137	235			337	231	7			1341
3rd Floor	372		408					184	48	110	1122
4th Floor	78		143	263				28			512
5th Floor	78	95			168						341
6th Floor	78				263						341
7th Floor	120				84		101		34		339
Totals	1873	1523	786	804	515	337	332	310	160	110	6750