

Cross House Improvement Programme

Report from Property and Business Teams – December 2018

Introduction

1 This paper returns to Kirk Session's aspirations to provide accommodation in the Cross House / Kirk Hall complex that is safe, accessible, efficient to run and maintain, and that offers inviting and comfortable accommodation to meet our needs and those of other users. All of this is entirely in keeping with the Welcoming element of our 2020 vision. The paper builds on a previous paper considered by Kirk Session in April 2018. It is the product of great deal of time and work by the Property Team, notably by Jim Rae and also by Brian Lightbody.

2 The Cross House / Kirk Hall complex comprises a 300-year old Grade A-listed building, conjoined to a modern hall and rooms on the Kirkgate side of the site. Although it has served us well over the years and remains well-used, there are some evident deficiencies in the current accommodation. The kitchen facilities are very limited. The toilets (which themselves fall below current standards) and the upper floors are not accessible to wheelchair users. The office accommodation is cramped. There is a need for thorough decorative refurbishment.

3 On-going assessment of Cross House has also revealed several other matters that must be addressed to keep the building wind and watertight, safe and cost-effective, namely:

- The electrical wiring requires to be modernised. While the Kirk Hall is satisfactory, we have not done much to the electrics in Cross House since we acquired it in the 1960s and they need to be renewed.
- The current heating system is highly inefficient. Many radiators give out too little heat and we have 2 boilers (plus one in each flat which would remain). Cleaning and flushing out the system will improve the heat output from the existing radiators. We will replace the main Cross House and Kirk Hall boilers.
- Significant woodworm and rot has been found in the roof structure. We have a price (£44k + VAT) to fix that.
- Some upper floors are not properly tied into the walls. We are obtaining an estimate to fix that, but it seems likely to be at least the same again as the roof.

- The condition of the windows is poor, with a number requiring replacement rather than repair. The most serious defects are on the south and west faces, and these could be a first phase.

4 The report considered in April 2018 explored 3 options, namely: do nothing; retain Cross House and improve facilities; or dispose of Cross House and rebuild on the newer part of the current complex. Session agreed that 'do nothing' was not an option, and requested that both the other options be explored further. Since then, a third option has been suggested, focused on the Low Port Centre. Each of these options is explored further below.

5 It is hoped that this report, and associated visual information to be presented at the meeting in January, will enable Session to determine which of these options should now be pursued as our preferred option. Once Session has reached that decision, Presbytery would require to approve any significant expenditure and/or property sale. The title to Cross House is held by the General Trustees whose consent and involvement would be needed for any sale. In addition the planning authority would need to give permission for the new build option, and for the new kitchen and lift in the upgrade option.

The 3 options are set out below.

Option 1: New Build

6 Since the last main report we have met with our quantity surveyor to see whether the cost of the **new build option** could fairly be reduced. It could not, because though he had allowed a significant sum for the particular difficulties of developing the constrained site, as he explained it that seemed entirely justified. The costing of that option is therefore unchanged from that given previously, except that the likely sale price of Cross House should probably be lowered to reflect the further defects we have uncovered (see below). The figures were

Gross cost	£2,180k
Sale of Cross House	£ 525k
Net cost	£1,655k

Option 2 – Retain and improve

7 The structural engineer has examined the **roof** and advised that, because of woodworm and rot, remedial works are needed, and that we

should allow some **£50k** for that. In addition he identified issues with the tying of some upper **floors** into the walls. The possible remedial cost is not yet known, but likely to be at least **£50k**.

8 The costing for the **windows** will increase from about £40k to perhaps **£60k** (a firm price is awaited) to allow for some work to some cills and lintels.

9 We have looked afresh at the **heating** solution, as it seems disproportionate to spend the previously estimated £200k or so on a system that costs less than £5k a year to run. The new proposal would re-use much of the existing pipework while eliminating one boiler, improving controls and levels of heating, and making provision for renewable sources of energy, including initially air source heat pumps. The cost is estimated at **£118k** and will provide a reduction in energy use (and therefore carbon footprint and running costs) and a reduction in plant maintenance costs. Because the existing heating pipework is to remain to keep installation costs down, there is a concern that water leaks may present themselves. This can be monitored during the installation process.

10 We have had design work done for the new **electrical system** so that we could get a reasonable costing for that. The estimate is **£162k** including the new build element.

11 The new build kitchen, plus toilets, plant room and office alterations etc will cost some **£304k**. Minor external works plus preliminaries, together with a contingency allowance of 10%, amount to **£170k**. In addition there will be a cost for temporarily relocating the Church Office. If the Manse or Kirkgate flat was vacant, the office could move there with only costs for IT communication, telephone and print facilities required. All other facilities are available on site. We would also lose letting income, and have to pay for alternative accommodation for the BB, GB etc. This could amount to some **£25k**.

12 On top of the costs of the various components are costs for ancillary works, fees etc. There will also need to be an asbestos survey and depending on the results there may be removal of asbestos. There is no price for that at this stage. Then there is VAT. Allowing for some estimating gaps, at present **the total cost comes to some £1.3m**.

Option 3: Use Low Port Centre

12 A suggestion was received from Councillor Tom Conn that we might be interested in the Low Port Centre. The Centre is already leased to West Lothian Leisure, so an option would be to approach them to see if block bookings could be arranged and aligned with current activities/timetables within Cross House at a discounted charge. The distance seems to rule this out, even without the issues of timetabling. A more radical option, as the Council have a programme of property disposals, could be to consider the practicality of an Asset Transfer from the Council under the Community Empowerment legislation, on the basis that the building could be community managed to provide a better facility for the community. Some of the other buildings in the town providing for youth activity are in many respects not fit for purpose and Tom wonders whether there is common cause to be made eg among the air cadets, scouts, LYPP, army cadets and ourselves. Tom is mindful of the ecumenical Lanthorn Centre in Livingston. This is imaginative but would involve uncertain negotiations, and complicated joint working if they were successful; and in any case this option would not overcome the issue of distance.

Other factors

13 We have received no further information about the council's plans for redevelopment of the Vennel, though the councillors told us that officers are working on it.

14 Annex A notes the other major expenditures in view.

Consideration

15 If we prefer the new build option then it will be a single contract. In addition to being more expensive, this option compromises access to the manse (and its privacy); it is close to scheduled land; loses us car parking, the Cross House flat, and our presence on (and door onto) the Cross; and it involves a significant element of risk to do with planning permissions and the sale of Cross House. In particular, it is extremely difficult to anticipate with any confidence what price Cross House might achieve. We would either have to resolve the major structural issues before sale, or expect a much reduced sale price. Even then selling would require a lot of work to get the best price eg developing a plan for division into 3 flats, and getting at least outline planning permission for that. Also, a major new-build project on a difficult site carries a high risk of cost overspend.

16 If we prefer one of the Low Port options then we lose our dedicated premises, or we keep the Kirk Hall, cellar and Kirkgate flat, and lose the rest. We then gain a receipt from the sale of Cross House.

17 The recent discovery of defects in the roof and floor timbers suggests that the first priority is to deal with these defects, and also with the most deficient windows, to prevent further serious deterioration. It would be better to rectify these defects first whichever option is chosen, either as a precursor to refurbishment or preparation for sale. Thereafter, if the refurbishment option is chosen, it makes sense to tackle the other refurbishment works as a single project.

18 While we have not seriously engaged with the fundraising challenge, it has been suggested that we are more likely to gain financial support for refurbishing Cross House than we would for a new build. This support could come from local organisations as well as more distant trusts etc. Indeed retaining the attraction of the old Linlithgow High Street may be thought more and more important as further encroachments happen (Victoria Hall).

19 We had a visit from a representative of the General Trustees who expressed some enthusiasm for Cross House and the Kirk Hall and indicated support for our refurbishment plans (recognising that they had to progress through Presbytery first). Presbytery will not approve major expenditure until they have a plan, but may agree to the work on the roof and floor timbers, and the worst windows, as these are urgent.

20 Session are invited **to discuss these options and to agree a preferred way forward.**

Other Possible Major Capital Projects

Annex A

Project	Why needed	Cost £k	Comments
Church drains	Inadequate drainage is causing rising damp and degradation of stonework and foundations. Also toilet drain has collapsed and needs renewal.	60?	New drains will be needed at our expense. We are confident that WL Council and HES will facilitate our works. Design work progressing well.
Church roof	In some areas water is seeping into the upper stonework, leading to long-term degradation. Sorting it now is relatively feasible, before serious damage to the stonework occurs.	51	Some parts of the roof have a lead covering to the stone channel that leads to the down pipes, but others do not. Session has agreed in principle that lead-lining the untreated areas is the best approach and that we seek funding for that.
Solar panels on church triforium roof.	Could save £3k a year.	25?	Consultation with community on hold. Some opposition likely.
Solar panels on manse roof for Cross House	Energy efficiency and carbon reduction measure.	12	Needs to be committed by end-March to qualify for Feed in Tariff.
Manse windows and carpets etc	To secure presbytery agreement for calling a minister.	30	9 windows plus French doors to be replaced. Includes decoration and various minor elements.

Probably all of these would require consent from presbytery, and some possibly from 121. Options for obtaining grants would be explored once a decision in principle to proceed had been taken.