



Subject:	City Hall Update - Creation of new Exhibition/Memorabilia area – implications for City Hall East entrance and Bobbin operations
Date:	21 st October 2016
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Property & Projects
Contact Officer:	George Wright, Head of Facilities Management

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	Members will be aware that work on the creation of the new Exhibition/Memorabilia Area in the East side of the City Hall building has commenced and is on schedule, with the facility due to open to the public in May 2017.
1.2	Members will also be aware from previous reports that the placement of the facility presents problems of access and control for those seeking to manage it, because of the number of points of entry and egress (front door, courtyard/back door, East entrance, Bobbin corridor and East staircase).
1.3	This report therefore seeks the Committee's approval to close the East entrance (while still permitting exit) on the basis that, on balance, it improves the operating environment for the exhibition facility and minimises the associated control difficulties.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agree to close the East entrance of the City Hall once the Exhibition Area is fully operational, and to review the out-workings of this approach at a later date (not later than 31st October 2017) before any final decision is taken on the matter.• Agree to make an offer to LOAF Ltd to provide the franchised catering service in the refurbished Bobbin area for a period not to exceed 6 months on the rates prevailing at

the termination of the previous contract, and not to require the invitation of quotations for this work on the basis of the very temporary nature of the service, the goodwill created by LOAF and their previous experience in operating the facility.

3.0 Main report

3.1 It is clear that, as a dedicated Tours & Exhibitions Reception area will be provided at the front of the building and as the full route commences from that point, it is preferable to have most/all visitors arrive at that point if possible. Here they can be greeted by dedicated exhibition staff, pay for headset hire, merchandising and printed souvenir building guides etc and commence the full exhibition from the intended start point. This approach is strongly advocated by Redhead, the council’s consultants on the project.

3.2 If the East entrance were to remain open, it raises the possibility that either individuals or groups of visitors – or indeed the larger organized groups – may enter via the East despite whatever signage and marketing messages are used. Where this happens it would create obvious difficulties as these individuals would then start to move the ‘wrong’ way around the tour route to find Reception and hire headsets etc, thus causing un-necessary bottlenecks and over-crowding. It would also make it more difficult to accurately assess the numbers of visitors in the facility if we have flows of visitors going in both directions. Some of the other principal advantages and disadvantages are set out below for the Committee’s consideration:-

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Offers best customer experience if most/all customers arrive through the front doors rather than in East area - also aids sales of headsets, souvenir material & merchandising thus maximising potential income to BCC	Inconvenient, in that it would require many Bobbin customers to enter via the front doors and then work their way through the exhibition customers/area to reach the Bobbin
Would allow better control of organised (charged) groups rather than have them enter by the East in the middle of the exhibition and potentially begin moving to Reception against the flow of other visitors	Makes the overall building less accessible to the general public and adds to any perceived ‘chill factor’
Would better enable BCC to design bespoke commercial packages for	May encourage more people to enter Bobbin via the back gate which is

commercial bookings to maximise ability to cater to this growing market (possibly separate tours point at front doors)	undesirable and not wheelchair-accessible etc
May make it easier to ensure adherence to overall facility capacity numbers imposed by Building Control/Fire Regulations etc (350)	Wouldn't solve all of the access & control problems as the other entrance/exit points are still open
Can better control the potential loss of technology (headsets) from customers forgetting to return these after their visit	May adversely impact the throughput and turnover of the new Bobbin franchise operator
Area currently used as a car park for contractors and overspill from court yard and disability access not up to standard. Would avoid significant upgrading costs if East is an exit only	Special arrangements may be needed for a small number of external events traditionally taking place in East area e.g. Stromberg, Titanic
	May cause bottle-necks at the main Reception area at the front door

3.3

In the light of the fact that Building Control and Health & Safety have agreed an overall maximum usage figure of **350** visitors at any point in time, it is clear that opportunities exist to market paid tours of the facility to large commercial groups (e.g. cruise ship tour operators etc) while still offering plenty of capacity for walk-in visitors. This may well involve a separate group-bookings area at the front of the building opposite the new Reception, which again would benefit from the closure of the East entrance in order to provide a single focal point for group bookings.

3.4

From a purely practical, financial point of view we do also need to ensure so far as possible that visitors paying for the hire of the multi-lingual headsets do return these to Reception after use (as the cost of each headset is many times greater than its rental value or any deposit paid) rather than simply leaving without returning their headset, and having the East entrance completely open would probably not assist in this.

3.5

In terms of the modalities of closure it would be the intention that the relevant doors would be fitted with the appropriate 'panic-bar' & closer fittings to allow visitors to leave easily and also allow effective evacuation in an emergency. The area immediately outside the East entrance is used as a car-park and the temporary disabled ramp is not fully fit for purpose in circumstances where numbers are large, so that consequently an upgrade of the area would probably be necessary if it were to remain open as a main entrance once the

	<p>Exhibition Area is operational.</p> <p>3.6 It is hopefully clear from all of the above that the decision as to whether or not to close the East entrance is neither an obvious nor easy one; there are advantages and disadvantages to doing so as set out herein. On balance however, it is the view of the Civic HQ Unit - which will be responsible for managing the Exhibitions & Tours operations - that there are somewhat greater benefits to closure of the East than to the retention of the <i>status quo</i>.</p> <p>3.7 The Committee may wish to agree to the East entrance closure on a trial basis, to be reviewed after 6 months of full operation of the Exhibition Area.</p> <p><u>Bobbin issues</u></p> <p>3.8 The exhibition infrastructure works will also impact on the Bobbin Coffee Shop. The current franchisee contract was due to expire on the 4th September 2016 but was extended to 2nd October 2016 on the basis of a reduced franchise fee to reflect the disruption caused. Part of the overall Exhibition project includes the installation of a new air-handling system into the Bobbin area and also to form an opening in the wall of the area currently used by the telephonist staff in order to provide enhanced Bobbin facilities to cater for large parties. This work is, of course, both disruptive and dirty, and thus necessitated the closure of the complete facility with effect from Sunday 2nd October 2016 to permit the necessary works to take place.</p> <p>3.9 Members will be aware that the current franchisee is a social enterprise organization and that the facility has proven very popular with staff, users and visitors. The franchisee did generate a significant and mutually beneficial increase in throughput in the Bobbin facility and added significantly to the existing goodwill.</p> <p>3.10 Members may also be aware that the broad area of catering within the council's principal civic buildings is currently the subject of an external consultancy review being carried out by APSE Consultancy Services. This review will address the operation of the Atrium staff restaurant and the Bobbin franchise, together with the potential opportunities arising from function catering in the 3 prestige rooms on foot of nearly 500 functions per year, with a view to making recommendations around an optimal business model going forward.</p> <p>3.11 While this consultancy review process is due to be completed by late November 2016, the out-workings and implementation of any recommended changes may take some additional time. There is therefore the likelihood that there will be a period starting approx. late February 2017 (when the work in the Bobbin is complete) during which there could be</p>
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3.12	<p>several months in which there will be no contracted supplier for the Bobbin.</p> <p>In recognition of the work of the franchisees in terms of generating goodwill for the Bobbin facility the Committee may therefore wish to offer the outgoing franchisee the opportunity to provide the specified services until formal contracts can be put in place, on foot of the recommendations of the catering review. Any such offer would be made on a purely temporary basis only, and on the basis of the same schedule of charges previously applied under the contract. This would require the Committee to dispense with the requirement to invite quotations for this work for the interim period and make the offer direct to LOAF Ltd.</p> <p><u>Finance and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The costs associated with the physical alterations to the East doors and new signage etc can be borne from the existing City Hall administration of buildings revenue budget. Additional staffing will be required in order to operate and manage the Exhibition facility, and these will be set out in more detail in a separate report. Making an offer to the outgoing franchisee in respect of the temporary operation of the Bobbin from February/March 2017 for a period not to exceed 6 months would generate income to the council of up to £12,500 while the broader approach to council catering is being finalised.</p> <p><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>There are no direct equality implications arising from this report.</p>
3.14	
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
4.1	None