

1st February 2005

Report to City Council

Review of the Funding of the Aston Hall and Park Development Project



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Preface

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Chairman, Leisure, Sport and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee



and

Councillor Ian Ward

Lead Review Member, Leisure, Sport and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee



The conservation of the City's magnificent historic Aston Hall and Park is of national importance. However, to the local community, Aston Hall and Park provide much needed local leisure facilities. Since 1996 a great deal of work has gone into drawing up plans to both conserve the Hall and Park and provide facilities for the local area.

By the summer of 2004, the Committee started the Scrutiny Review because of concerns that problems had developed in securing the funding for the improvements planned. The local community understandably had great expectations that all the discussions since 1996 would soon result in action on the ground. Our Review Group of Members visited Aston Hall and heard evidence from local people and received information about funding packages. We saw that during the project there had been changes in leadership: within Aston Pride, of Cabinet Members and Senior Officers.

During the Review our concern was not to



Members, officers and the local community that unless we all work together, and quickly, the opportunity to develop the Hall and Park could be lost. The carrying out of this Review has had the effect of concentrating minds and bringing all stakeholders together to work constructively for the benefit of the Hall and Park.

The recommendations refer to the wider lessons to be learnt by the City Council from this Review. Our recommendations look to the future and relate to: finding resources to preserve and use our heritage at a time when other services are priorities; how to successfully administer complicated heritage projects which cut across corporate structures, and how to engage the emerging District structures in managing local sites in partnership with the community.

We are extremely grateful to all those who took the time to write to us, or come talk to us. We present this f3O8took seook



1: Summary

1. In August 2004, Members of the Leisure, Sports and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee became concerned that there were difficulties in securing the package of funding required to develop Aston Hall and Park. Concerns were expressed since these difficulties, unless overcome, were threatening the whole project. The Committee asked a sub-group of Members from all parties to



2: Summary of Recommendations

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
1	That a Cabinet Member is identified as the Champion for Heritage projects in the City.	The Leader	April 2005
2	That a Heritage Strategy be drawn up to set out the City's priorities for protecting and enhancing our heritage.	Cabinet Member as nominated by the Leader	September 2005
3	That a JNC Officer (within the Portfolio of the Cabinet Champion) should be identified to lead on the production of the Heritage Strategy and to coordinate bids to external funders.	Cabinet Member as nominated by the Leader and Chief Executive	April 2005
4	That the principle is agreed that Heritage projects are allocated a Senior Project Manager with clear lines of reporting to the Heritage Cabinet Champion and JNC Coordinating Officer.	Cabinet Member as nominated by the Leader	April 2005
5	That further work is undertaken to investigate additional ways that the Hall and local residents can be drawn closer.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	September 2005
6	That a review of the Aston Hall and Park Community Forum be undertaken with a view to better engagement and representation from the local community.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture and District Chairperson	September 2005
7	That a Management Plan for Aston Park be drawn up in consultation with the local Community.	District Chairperson and Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	December 2005
8	Progress towards achievement of these recommendations should be reported to the Local Services and Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	July 2005
	Subsequent progress reports will be scheduled by the Committee thereafter, until all recommendations are implemented.		



3:





4: Findings – The Challenges of Heritage Projects

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 Aston Hall is a magnificent Jacobean Grade I Listed Building of national importance. The Park (Grade II Listed on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Interest) is a vital area of public open space in a very densely developed multicultural area of Inner City Birmingham. These two identities do not always rest comfortably together and balancing the different expectations of the Hall and Park is challenging.
- 4.1.2 The Hall is owned by Birmingham City Council and managed by the Museums Service within the Directorate of Learning & Culture. The Park is managed by the Parks Service which is now within the Directorate of Local Services. The Park and Hall are situated within the Aston Hall & Park Conservation Area.
- 4.1.3 The project to develop the Hall and Park, which is the concern of this Scrutiny Review, strives to marry the protection and enhancement of the historic Hall and the improvement of the Park and the area immediately around the Hall (the historic gardens and Stable Range) for community use. During evidence taking the Review Group came to see that the project was complicated by the difficulty of balancing the needs of the Hall and Park.
- 4.1.4 The original project appeared to the Review Group to be primarily about the protection and enhancement of the Hall and its immediate surroundings (the gardens and Stable Range). Whilst the needs of the community for additional facilities were an essential part of the project, we heard evidence that many people perceived the project to be a heritage project. The project was initiated and managed by the Museums Service, in partnership with the Parks Service and the Heritage Lottery Fund were approached Initial ideas to recreate the enclosed character of the historic gardens with walls, railings and gates would have not only respected historical authenticity, but created a secure envelope around the House to protect it from vandalism. The erection of railings and gates in front of the Hall to enclose the East Courtyard would have been historically correct, (as shown in earlier drawings) enhanced the space directly in front of the Hall and enabled the



protection of the entrance and front elevation at night.

- Other parts of the project were more directly intended to meet the 4.1.5 needs of the local community. The Stable Range was to be converted to provide improved community and visitor facilities, (toilets, shop/café) and a park rangers base. A new building, the Aston Regeneration Centre (ARC) was planned to provide a community exhibition/activity gallery and improvements carried out to the Park to enable more intensive use for sport and recreation. The ARC was subsequently dropped from the project and its functions transferred to the Stable Range and the Hall. However, as discussions continued with all those involved, it appeared that this balance within the project was changing. The Review Group heard evidence to suggest that over time, Aston Pride became more insistent that the project should concentrate more on facilities for sports and recreation in the Park rather than enhancing a historic building that many of the community felt no affiliation with. However, these changes in the balance affected the amount and sources of project funding that could be raised to enable the project to succeed.
- 4.1.6 At the point at which the Scrutiny Review was initiated in August 2004, it appeared possible that this instability would destroy the project completely, prevent funding being achieved and lead to widespread disappointment within the community, the City Council and HIF.

4.2 The National Context

- 4.2.1 There are approximately 400,000 Listed Buildings in the UK. Of these, only 8,000 are Grade 1 Listed and a further 16,000 Grade II* Listed. Some are owned by local authorities, as in Aston Hall's case, some by major heritage organisations such as the National Trust and others by Charities, Trusts and private individuals.
- 4.2.2 The Aston Hall & Park project is not unique and lessons can be learnt from other historic building projects not only in Birmingham but through out the UK.
- 4.2.3 The BBC programme 'Restoration' has brought the needs of these buildings, and the complexities of finding ways to improve them and maximise their use to the local community, to the attention of the public. The winner of each of the two series has been promised a Heritage Lottery Grant of about £3m. Like Aston Hall & Park, all the buildings featured were in need of money, not only to prevent historic features from being lost, but to ensure a central place in the local community and an end use that would ensure the long term future of the building. More emphasis was given in the second series on the importance of the involvement of the local community and the support available to raise profiles and raise



money. Several buildings featured needed a package of funding from a wide range of sources for about £10m, of which a Heritage Lottery Grant would provide on average about £3m. Sadly the 2003 Winner announced in August 2003 – Victoria Baths, Manchester – has not yet got a date for work to start on site, as the funding package is still under discussion. This illustrates that such projects are far from straightforward.

- 4.2.4 The Heritage Lottery Fund distributes money raised by the National Lottery to support all aspects of heritage in the UK. For the period 2002 2007 their aims are:
 - To encourage more people to be involved and make decisions about their heritage
 - To conserve and enhance the UK's diverse heritage
 - To ensure that everyone can learn about, have access to and enjoy their heritage
 - To achieve a more equitable distribution of grants across the UK
- 4.2.5 Projects that care for and protect heritage are at the core of their work. The heritage must be preserved in order for other important benefits to flow from it conservation is far more than an end in

ways:

- Projects where the building is owned by the City Council and used for providing a City Council service.
 Examples of completed projects include Blakesley Hall and future projects being considered include Handsworth Library and Moseley Road Baths.
- Projects where the building is not owned by the City Council, but where advice is given to another organisation, including how to make any application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Whilst the organisation makes the application, the City Council plays a coordinating role with HLF.
- Projects of significant interest to the City or a local community where there is a partnership between the Council and another organisation, or where the Council has some part of the ownership. In this case there may be advantages in the bid to HLF being submitted and coordinated by the Council. Examples of completed projects include Cathedral Square. Projects being considered include Perrots Folly.
- Projects where the building is owned by the City Council but where future uses will be managed by a Trust or other partnership for public use.
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments where their value is intrinsic, rather than as place to provide a service – Weoley Castle is currently on the At Risk Register.
- 4.3.4 The portfolio of properties that the City Council owns is The on-going requirement to maintain these considerable. properties places a huge commitment on the Budget. However, where the properties are Listed, significant additional costs are These buildings are inevitably old and fragile and the costs of maintenance are considerably increased by the need to respect the historic character of the building and use traditional techniques and materials. Historically, levels of maintenance of buildings have not always kept up with the deterioration of aging buildings and when urgent intervention has been necessary, there has been a tendency to seek a package of capital funds to restore A number of Heritage Lottery awards have been the building. recently successfully attracted to Birmingham. However, these projects are hugely complicated to administer - successfully bringing together funding from a wide range of sources demands very considerable time and commitment from a wide range of people and projects may take 10-15 years to complete. Where an application is made to the Heritage Lottery Fund, partnership funding is always required – HLF usually only grant fund about 40% of the project costs. However, identifying the money for partnership funds within the City Council Budget is extremely difficult. demands from the statutory services of Housing, Education and



Social Care are so great that prioritising spending on historic buildings can be difficult.

4.4 Aston Hall and Park

4.4.1 At the time of the bid to Heritage Lottery Fund in January 2003, it was expected that the partnership funding would come largely from



over the course of the lengthy discussions between BCC and Aston Pride during the summer of 2004. To make up the shortfall in partnership funding, a bid was made by the Museums Service for £1m to the Birmingham City Council Flourishing Neighbourhoods Fund² in June 2004. The Review Group heard evidence that the Museums Service were unsure of the process for determining their bid. Aston Pride's evidence made it clear that should no resources be available from Birmingham City Council, then Aston Pride would be unlikely to release their resources. In turn, the Heritage Lottery Fund would be unable to confirm any grant from them. The Review Group realised with concern that the funding package was seriously threatened.

The Review Group heard evidence that the demand across the City the d.



House and the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter) but eighteen months ago charges were removed and seasonal opening was introduced. This was in line with national pressures to remove museum entrance charges. Across the City, commercial reviews have sought to develop ways in which services can maximise income generation. A commercial review has recently been commissioned by BMAG in response to recommendations by Birmingham Audit that the service becomes more strategic about its commercial operations objectives. Income generating ideas have been discussed, such as civil wedding ceremonies, letting for business and conference use. However, a balance is necessary between providing a service and running a business. Often

5: Findings – Providing for Leisure and Recreation

5.1 The Local Community

- 5.1.1 Throughout the evidence taking, the Review Group heard different views of what the "Local Community" wanted from the Hall and Park. The local area contains people with different views and the multi-cultural nature of Aston means that quite different cultural needs are articulated. Some of those giving evidence to the Review Group suggested that the voices of some groups in the community were not being heard, as they were drowned out by stronger voices. The Museums Service undertook extensive consultation during the development phases of the project and were sure that their initial plans reflected the outcome of that consultation. A huge consultation exercise was organised between 1998 and 2004 by the Museums Service. The consultation was very wide and there was an undeniable effort to be comprehensive and target all groups within the community. Over 2000 people were included in the survey, through door to door surveys, users surveys and postal surveys. The team have also worked closely with a number of bodies and agencies representing the community, among which are:
 - Aston youth forum
 - Local schools and colleges
 - Black women's network
 - Neighbourhood forums
 - Local youth workers
 - Age concern
- 5.1.2 However, Aston Pride have contested how representative the consultation was. As a result, during the later stages of discussions with Aston Pride, amendments to the project were made. However, it also became clear during evidence gathering that there were different views of what the community wanted, from within Aston Pride. Some evidence suggested that the current scheme no longer reflects all the groups in the community some groups such as the elderly, or Asian women with children, feel that they have been under-represented. It is for example the perception of these groups



that Asian males have been over-represented in choosing which sports facilities should be built (cricket field as opposed to a bowling green or tennis court) or what work would be done for the children's play area.

5.2 International and Regional Visitors

5.2.1 The already diverse needs of the local users of the Hall and Park also need to be balanced with the needs of the regional or international visitors. These different groups of users do not necessarily have the same expectations or needs when spending a



5.4 The Need for Sports Facilities

- 5.4.1 The evidence taken from Aston Pride clearly indicated that at that time (September 2004) their priority was for the project to deliver improvements to the Park, and facilities for sport, in addition to the conversion of the stable block for community use. anecdotal evidence several times that local people thought this project was about improving the historic Hall. There were suggestions that some people thought the Park more important than the Hall. We also heard from several of those giving evidence that local people were concerned that Birmingham City Council seemed to have let the Park deteriorate. In its heyday there were tennis courts, a crown bowling green, well maintained paths and attractive gardens. Basic maintenance had been neglected, it was claimed, and now paths were broken and dangerous, and some people thought that the Park was an unattractive place to visit, made worse by burnt out cars and graffiti. Comparisons were made with other parks in the City, especially Handsworth Park where a major improvement scheme has started on site. It was confirmed by the Parks Service that national resources available for parks maintenance over the last few years had been inadequate.
- 5.4.2 The view given in evidence by Aston Pride is that the City Council is expected to finance that part of the project that will restore the Park to a 'normal' level of maintenance to enable new sports facilities to be provided. Aston Pride are keen to fund the sports facilities in partnership with several outside offers of funding from sports providers. However, if Aston Pride's support for the project is concentrated on sports provision, then their contribution becomes increasingly ineligible as partnership funding for the Heritage Lottery Bid. The result would be a decrease in HLF funding and a reduction of those parts of the project that are intended to protect and enhance the Listed Hall.

5.5 Use of the Hall Itself

- 5.5.1 Evidence from the Museums Service suggests that much has been done to make the Hall accessible to the local community. The following evidence was submitted by the Head of Community Museums:
- 5.5.2 "As a Jacobean mansion house, Aston Hall was meant to intimidate



raising the site's profile within the local community. The house is now visited and used much more by local people, with many more community focused events and exhibitions, often organised in conjunction with youth workers and other partners.

- 5.5.3 Because the Hall is fundamentally a museum of historic interiors which cannot be radically altered, much of our effort has concentrated on a huge range of events, exhibitions and individual projects. These include:
 - Aston Hall Asian Women's Textile Group demonstrations and exhibitions of their work
 - Artists in residence working with school and youth groups
 - Indian dancing demonstrations
 - The Royal Institute of British Architect's Project with local schools
 - Regular and varied programmes of (free) holiday events for kids
 - Sponsoring the Play Centre football team
 - Storytelling sessions
 - Free community evenings for Aston Hall by Candlelight
 - Free bus trips from Aston to the City's other museum sites
 - Participating in Aston Parish Church and Aston Manor Transport Museum's open days
 - Acting as a free venue for any number of community conferences, open days and other community initiated events
 - The newest initiative is the creation of a community exhibition space within the Hall itself which should be opened next year.
- Ouite apart from hosting various events, meetings, festivals etc in association with the 'new' partnership board, we also worked closely with Aston Pride to deliver a variety of major community events, notably the Aston Pride Festival and the Aston Pride Olympics (schools sports days). We have also set up the Aston Hall & Park Community Consultation Forum which is open to all. Finally we have been particularly successful in recruiting local young people from culturally diverse backgrounds. This has meant that the workforce is not only more representative of the local community but has sent out a clear message that Aston Hall and Park is as much for local people as visitors from elsewhere."
- 5.5.5 However, evidence from Aston Pride suggested that local people do



not see it as accessible. One suggestion was that rooms could be opened up in the Hall as meeting rooms and places for elders to sit during the day together with access to toilets.

5.5.6 It is apparent that care and protection of the building must be the chief priority of the Museums Service and the historic fabric is vulnerable. The intention would be that the converted Stable Range is the main focus for community activity rather than the Hall itself. However, the view of some parts of the community that the Hall is inaccessible to them adversely affects the enthusiasm of Aston Pride for the whole project.

5.6 The Future Management of the Hall and Park

- 5.6.1 The debate about who the Hall and Park belongs to is part of a wider issue. This was reflected in evidence gathering by calls for greater management by the community of the sports facilities proposed for the Park and in particular the proposed new pavilion. One of the ways to show the community the desire of the Council to listen to them and take their expectations into account would be to involve them more in the management of the facilities. Moreover, it is also one of the conditions likely to be imposed by Aston Pride to fund the project. This would develop among the local population a sense of ownership which, if it is already quite strong as regards the Park, is almost non existent when it comes to the Hall. An enhanced sense of involvement by sections of the community, who may feel excluded at the moment, might reduce vandalism.
- 5.6.2 There are many0.8(lvg(l)py02 141.7py02 1412-0.0003ctl-6(P)- woul)5(dsal)



that project instead (and subsequently left the Council). At the end of May 2004, the Senior Assistant Director retired from the Council. His post was filled by the Head of Community Museums on an acting-up basis and acting-up was transferred down the line. The effect of this was to reduce the total level of senior officer support within the Museums Service. At the same time, the project to restore the Town Hall was at the stage of being extremely demanding.

6.3 **Project Co-ordination**

6.3.1 Since January 2004, when the new Aston Pride organisation reentered the discussions on the project, the Acting Head of Community Museums has performed both the Officer Champion and Project Co-ordinating roles. The Parks Management Service were actively involved - these services were transferred from the Department of Leisure and Culture in April 2004 to the Directorate of Local Services when 'Going Local' went live. We heard evidence



7: Findings - Aston Pride

7.1 Context

- 7.1.1 Since the inception of the Aston Pride New Deal for Communities in 2000, it has been envisaged as key source of funding for the Aston Hall and Park development project.
- 7.1.2 New Deal for Communities (NDC) is an Area Based Government Initiative launched in 1998. At the beginning of 2000 a community based bid was submitted by a group call the Aston Pride Partnership made up of Community Groups, Statutory Bodies, Residents,



arrangements and its ability to deliver its programme. The next year was a time of intense turmoil and difficulty within Aston Pride. The insurmountable problems resulted in intervention by the Minister and in March 2003, Aston Pride Partnership ceased to be the delivery vehicle for the £54m New Deal for Communities Programme.

- 7.1.6 A Scrutiny Review examining the circumstances leading up to Ministerial Intervention was carried out and was reported to the City Council on 6 April 2004.
- 7.1.7 In September 2003 Aston Pride was relaunched and a new structure was put in place comprising:
 - A Board of 17 members including an independent Chair, 5 Agency Representative, 5 elected. Theme Group Community Representatives, 4 nominated Community Representatives, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and one Ward Member
 - 5 Theme groups
 - An interim Chief Executive and Deputy
 - Officer support for the theme groups and for programme management and community d toWes.4(o Ca9(dl)d 9)inds.o the -



A month later, at the end of March, the reply stated that:

"Aston Hall and Park were discussed at a recent Aston Pride 7.2.3 Delivery Partnership away day where some concerns about the project were raised. A feeling of detachment from the hall, in particular, was felt by many of the community representatives and so there was some disbelief that this asset could become a key part of the community. Clearly more work needs to be done to ensure community ownership of the project. Other questions concerned the extent that this project is a standard package of solutions for such a site and the extent that it does meet the specific needs of the Aston community. Linked to this was a request for further information about the consultation that had been carried out. One proposal made was that a steering group be set up for this project which would consist of key agencies and community representatives. This would be one way to promote community ownership of the scheme. We would like to discuss this proposal with you in some detail. Aston Pride certainly is not in a position to fund all the shortfall from the HLF as this would be around 13% of our total ten year funding and, as your know, we have a wide range of outcomes we need to achieve. We would like to play a key part in getting other funders on board and realise that



7.2.8 There was particular concern that amendments to alter the balance of the project away from the enhancement of the historic and



- Submission for approval to the Government Office of the West Midlands
- Detailed submission to HLF in February (final deadline of 31 March 2005)
- 7.3.2 We heard evidence from the Chair of CRAG (Community Regeneration Advisory Group) that he would recommend a grant of £2 - £2.5m including the condition that there should be more community involvement in the management of the Park, Hall and Sports facilities. In addition he expected a £1m contribution from the City Council, although increases in community involvement were as important. We heard that, in his view, the community are more interested in the sports facilities than improvement to the historic house and gardens. We heard evidence from the Chair of the Housing and Environment Theme Group - one of the several groups who would need to contribute. He reported that the group will propose the total grant of £2.5m to the project. His Theme Group will be meeting with the others in November to discuss their recommendations to the Board. Again, there was the expectation that BCC would put some money into the project themselves. We also heard evidence from the BCC officer acting as Manager to the Housing and Environment Theme Group who reported that £2m -£2.5m is the figure being discussed. However, it was reported that the project is not in the top five priorities of the new Board and only a small number of Board members see it as important. It appeared that Aston Pride are currently more interested in sports facilities than the heritage part of the project. The views of the Board were represented in evidence given by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration (A Board Member). He reported that whilst he had only been a Board Member since August 2004, he thought that relationships amongst Board Members were improving. confident that the Board would support the project to the full amount of the application (£4m) to ensure that HLF resources were secured.
- 7.3.3 However, the Board at its November 2004 meeting did not make a firm decision and negotiations are continuing.

7.4 Development of the New Aston Pride Organisation

- 7.4.1 The Scrutiny Review on Aston Pride, which was presented to Council on 6th April 2004, made several recommendations intended to secure the continued improvement of the organisation. The Review Group endorses the recommendations of that review. In order to ensure that Scrutiny Recommendations are implemented by the Executive, the Cabinet Member is required to report progress back to the Scrutiny Committee on a six monthly basis until all the recommendations are achieved.
- 7.4.2 At the Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on



14th December 2004, the Acting Chief Executive of Aston Pride and the Assistant Director of Regeneration Services reported on the achievement of the Recommendations. Some Recommendations had been achieved fully, in other areas, significant progress had been made. A further report is due to the Regeneration O&S Committee in six months.



8: Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 The Challenges of Heritage Projects

Heritage Champion

8.1.1 Finding resources for the care of our heritage, including buildings, sites and collections, is a national issue. Within Birmingham there are many Listed Buildings, sites and collections owned by the Council in need of resources. In addition, the owners of other Listed Buildings, sites and collections need advice and support from the Council if the City's heritage is to be preserved and used positively. Responsibility for our heritage is split between several Cabinet Portfolios and Directorates. To ensure a strategic corporate approach to priorities for acti(heri) (54aacti(heri)a B2 T572.0088 Toil



Report to City Council - 1st February2005

Burnt Mounds at Moseley Bog Kent's Moat Medieval Deer Park Metchley Camp Gannow Green Moat Burnt Mound in Woodlands Park

Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Interest

Aston Park
Sutton Park (National Nature Reserve and Scheduled Ancient Monument)
Highbury Park
Handsworth Park
Key Hill Cemetary
Warstone Lane Cemetary
Witton Cemetary
Brandwood Cemetary
Cannon Hill Park