

Project Director's report to Oldway Working Party

Project: Building a resilient future for Oldway

Client: Torbay Council

Prepared by: Katherine Findlay, project director

Date of meeting: 14.08.23

Location: Teams

Overview

Since the last working party meeting, the 'Developing a resilient future for Oldway' project team has completed three key pieces of work that will inform the final masterplan. These are:

1. Business viability report

This report looks at the potential uses of the mansion and their commercial viability. It concludes that a mixed use model is preferable, comprising a commercially-run catering offer on the ground floor, enhanced Registry Service and events hire on the first floor, and private residences on the second and third floors.

2. Buildings Conservation Management Plan

This is a substantial piece of work that provides a comprehensive guide to the conservation of the Mansion and covers the other buildings on site. The CMP:

- sets out the Mansion's history and main phases of construction and alteration
- provides a costed condition survey
- articulates the building's heritage values and the levels of significance which are attributable to its fabric and interiors
- identifies the key conservation challenges that need to be considered as part of the building's on-going management, repair and reuse
- sets out a clear action plan of prioritized works and recommended policies
- provides a full gazetteer that describes the building on a room-by-room basis as a reference tool

3. Stakeholder engagement and public consultation report

The report gives a full account of the project's stakeholder engagement and public consultation phases which were completed in June 2023 and sets out the findings. The consultation reached a large audience, with over 1,800 people responding to the final survey. This was the largest public consultation survey response in recent years for Torbay Council.

Through the survey, and face-to-face engagement with the local community at a range of events, the public have shown strong support generally for the emerging vision and proposals presented for Oldway's future. The report concludes that there is overwhelming support for restoring Oldway Mansion and gardens and preserving its history and heritage.

These three pieces of work will all be appended to the main masterplan. They are currently awaiting sign off from Torbay Council. Once it is received, they can be circulated to Oldway working party attendees.

Oldway gardens nature trail

We were pleased to support the Oldway Gardens Group by providing specialist input from heritage and nature education specialist Catherine Farnell. Together they have produced a new nature trail (attached) that will be printed and made available to the public shortly. It will provide some sustainable income for the OGG and will be an attractive new activity to encourage families on to the site while the buildings are inaccessible.

Progress against Approved Purposes

Key

Complete or on track to complete with no issues
Some issues - needs adjustment to complete
Stuck or major issues

Approved purpose	Notes
Business development and income generation	
Analyse the potential future financial business model	Business viability report for the mansion complete and submitted to Torbay Council for sign off. Conclusions support a mixed use model with catering, weddings/events and residential.
Develop a masterplan for future use.	In progress, on track
Develop 10-year business/sustainability plan.	It has become apparent there are too many variables to complete a detailed 10 year business plan. 10 year schedule in masterplan will consider high level phasing of works and schedule of commercial activities coming on stream.
Analyse potential structures for post-restoration operational management including the roles of Torbay Council, voluntary organisations and commercial operators	Recommendations will be included in masterplan, drawing on stakeholder/client engagement and business viability report.
Governance, organisation review and development	
Support volunteers to review current governance and purposes of the existing groups.	The governance review is complete and contains practical recommendations. However, progress is now stalled due to lack for formal agreements/leases with the Oldway Gardens Group and Oldway Tearooms CIC. This issue has been raised with TC on numerous occasions.
Support volunteers to explore how the existing groups can move forwards together to maximise the benefit to Oldway, volunteers and the community.	As above.

Facilitate the establishment of an appropriate structure that will enable volunteers and the community to fully participate in and help shape future operations at Oldway.	As above.
Regularise the operation of voluntary groups on site through appropriate agreements with the landowner, Torbay Council.	As above.
Master planning, options appraisal and conservation management	
Review historical context and development of the site.	Complete for buildings and in progress for gardens.
Establish the wider constraints on site including consents, funding constraints, ownership/covenants, current leases and agreements.	As above.
Indicate ways in which Oldway might best suit all existing and potential users, increase footfall and attract visitors from beyond local area.	As above.
Define and evaluate options for both buildings and gardens along with their comparative capital and other development costs.	As above.
Develop operational model and historic fabric impact assessment.	As above.
Consider phasing options with outline cost plan.	As above.
Produce Conservation Management Plans for both the buildings and the gardens	The buildings CMP is complete and the gardens CMP will be completed in September.
Communication and engagement	
Carry out appropriate and meaningful public and stakeholder engagement with emerging master plan and business plans	Stakeholder engagement and public consultation complete and successful. Over 1800 responses and overwhelming support for the emerging vision. Consultation and engagement report complete and submitted to Torbay Council for sign off.
Support volunteers to test pilot activities with wider audiences	This has happened to an extent through events and the new nature trail but cannot be fully pursued until structure of voluntary activity on site is resolved on the basis of firm agreements with TC.
Create a unified identity for Oldway that will give shape to the restoration programme and provide a brand for future voluntary, public, civic and commercial activity on the site.	Development of branding not possible within timeframe due to delays in main contracts starting as a result of procurement process. We recommend that it is scheduled in the next phase, when Torbay Council is committed to a defined course of action.
Establish regular, consistent channels of communication about Oldway in partnership with the Torbay Council communications department and volunteers.	Project team working closely with comms team

Next steps

Masterplan

In the coming weeks, the team will concentrate on absorbing the findings of the stakeholder engagement and public consultation report, the business viability report and the buildings CMP into the main masterplan and refining the proposals accordingly. The gardens CMP is in progress and will feed into the masterplan as it develops. We have been instructed to work to the following timetable:

- Draft report deadline 12 October
- SLT draft report clearance 24 October
- Final report deadline 26 October
- Informal Cabinet final report clearance 31 October
- Cabinet 14 November

Rotunda Heritage Enterprise proposal

The team is currently developing an application for a Heritage Enterprise grant from NLHF which we propose Torbay Council submits to fund the restoration of the Rotunda. The masterplan will propose that the Rotunda is brought back into commercial use in the first phase of the site's restoration, while the mansion is drying out and more invasive condition investigations are carried out. KF and MT met with NLHF at a regional level to discuss the idea, as Heritage Enterprise grants are not widely available, and received an encouraging response. Through the 'Developing a resilient future for Oldway' project, we have identified that to bring the Rotunda back into use in phase one, its end use should meet the following criteria:

- Income generating – it must support the viability of the site
- Sensitive to the historic character of the building
- Third party operated – TC is not in a position to be the operator
- Good fit with the active and healthy vision for Oldway
- Not sensitive to continued works on the rest of the site
- Contributor to wider economic development in Paignton and the Bay
- Not in conflict with established venues in Paignton or other users of Oldway

The end use that we propose is a family activity centre. We have begun talks with the UK's leading supplier of this type of facility, who are enthusiastic about the potential of the site. This use can be operational relatively quickly, makes a virtue of the unusual volumes within the space and fits well with the building's heritage of entertainment and welcoming children and young people. The equipment can be installed without interacting structurally with the historic fabric.

Should another operator open a climbing centre in the Bay in the meantime (which would come with an exclusivity zone) we would have the option of a different but similar product from the company such as a layered adventure course with high ropes etc.

On 15th August, KF, AD, DT and CL will meet with an interested supplier to discuss the proposal. Torbay Council will then decide whether to go ahead with the application. We recommend that this decision is taken as soon as possible so that the project can continue from the currently NLHF project without a hiatus if the application is successful.

Levelling Up case studies

The scale of the conservation deficit at Oldway means that very substantial funding will be required to restore the mansion and gardens and ensure a sustainable future for the site. Torbay is a tier 1 Levelling Up area and there are a number of projects based around historic buildings in similar areas that have received significant LUF grants. KF has prepared case studies of four that are most relevant to Oldway (attached).