

The Beecroft Art Trust

Consultation on the future of the former Beecroft Art Gallery
Building, Station Road, Westcliff-on-Sea

29th June 2015 – 20th September 2015





The Beecroft Art Trust is carrying out this consultation with the help of its trustees, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council.

Background

The Foundation for the Beecroft Art Gallery and collection was set up in 1949 by Walter Beecroft for the advancement of Art, Music and Literature in the County Borough of Southend-on-Sea. The gallery building was purchased in 1951 and the Beecroft Art Gallery first opened in Station Road, Westcliff, on 9th October 1953.

At that time the building contained a small collection of paintings belonging to the founder of the Gallery, Walter G Beecroft, a solicitor from Leigh on Sea, Essex. Over time the collection has grown through donations from the Friends of the Beecroft Art Gallery, the Thorpe Smith bequest of local paintings and funds from Southend-on-Sea Borough Council.

The Station Road building was always intended as a temporary home for the collection, which has now been transferred to the New Beecroft along Victoria Avenue. In time the gallery looks forward to transferring the collection to a purpose built museum.

By virtue of a Charity Commission Scheme dated the 18th February 1980 the Council is now sole trustee of the endowment consisting of the Gallery building, the Beecroft collection itself and additional funds held for the benefit of the Charity.

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council has operated both the trust and gallery as part of its Museum Service since this date.

The need to move the Gallery

The Gallery building in Station Road, Westcliff has been suffering from major structural issues for some time; consequently the decision to relocate the Beecroft Art Gallery to the former Library building in Victoria Avenue was taken by the Council in May 2013, following which further temporary measures have been undertaken to support the building.

Further deterioration of the building and concerns for the on-going safety of both staff and members of the public saw the Gallery close while plans were made to re-house the collection in the former Library Building along Victoria Avenue.

The relocated gallery in the former Library Building, Victoria Avenue re-opened to the public during August 2014. The new premises allow more of the existing collection to be displayed and are much more accessible to a wider range of people.

The trust does not have any revenue and neither does it hold any financial reserves. Any deficit which arises in the operation of the trust is funded by Southend-on-Sea Borough Council; Southend –on-Sea Borough Council are meeting all of the costs of providing and operating the Gallery in its new location.

Requirements of the Trust

It is now time for the Trustees to consider and consult on the future of the original gallery building in Station Road, Westcliff which remains empty.

Whilst considering the different options it is worth noting that the trustees (Southend-on-Sea Borough Council) are legally bound by the requirements of the Charity Act 2011.

As sole Trustee, the Council is duty bound to ensure that value received from the use or disposal of the land / building at Station Road, Westcliff-on-Sea is the “best that can be reasonably obtained”.

The Trust was set up for the “promotion of the study of art, music and literature and in particular the provision and maintenance of the Beecroft Art Gallery at Southend-on-Sea as a public art gallery and library.”

Any proceeds of sale will be a permanent endowment for the Trust and the income received from the proceeds of sale (e.g. through investment) must be used to further the objects of the Trust.

The Options:

Option 1: Retain the former gallery building, Station Road Westcliff, and use it for either additional gallery space or as storage.

Points for consideration:

- With the relocation of the Gallery to new, larger premises, it is unlikely that the Trust will have any further use for an additional Art Gallery.
- The gallery's new premises in Victoria Avenue already have ample storage for the collection; with room to expand in the future. The gallery can also make use of the Museums Service storage facilities at an off-site location at no additional cost.
- Due to the present condition of the premises a considerable amount of money would need to be spent on the building before it can be used again safely in any form.
- Accessibility problems within the building itself would still remain a problem – the building comprises 3 floors and does not have a lift. The toilets are located on the first floor of the building. Those with mobility problems and those with prams / pushchairs will continue to have restricted access to the building.
- An additional gallery would require increased staffing levels, placing financial pressure on the trust.
- On-going repair and maintenance on the building would be required; the cost of which is likely to be quite high.

- The Trust would become responsible for the long-term management liability of the building.
- The Trust does not have the reserves to fund the cost of remedial works or further staffing.

Option 2: Sell the site

a. Sell the premises as it is without additional outlay or cost.

Points for consideration:

- Any proceeds of sale will be a permanent endowment for the Trust and the income received from the proceeds of sale (e.g. through investment) must be used to further the objects of the Trust.
- Offering the site for sale without planning permission involves the least amount of input from the Trust and minimal capital outlay (costs associated with selling the building could be covered from the proceeds of a sale).
- A sale (without planning permission) will realise a significant amount for the Trust; but not quite as much as if the site were to be sold with the benefit of planning permission.
- Property agents have advised this would not be the preferred option for developers due to existing challenges with the site and premises.

b. Sell the premises with planning consent for residential conversion

Points for consideration:

- As with option 2(a); any proceeds of sale will be a permanent endowment for the Trust and the income received from the proceeds of sale (e.g. through investment) must be used to further the objects of the Trust.
- The property is located in a conservation area and subject to Planning Policy C4 – The Council has a statutory duty to preserve and enhance the character of its conservation area. The building is deemed to make a positive contribution to the area. Making a case to replace it with a new build property may therefore be difficult and time consuming.
- Property agents have advised that selling the site with planning permission would be the most attractive option for developers due to challenges with re-developing the existing premises and its location within the site itself.
- The Trust would incur costs to get plans drawn up and obtaining planning permission – the Trust would need to raise funds to finance this as they do not have sufficient reserves.
- This option has the potential of realising a substantial sum for the Trust but would involve the Trust having to borrow money in the first instance to obtain planning permission and carries a far greater level of risk

Option 3: Alternative Proposal

There may be other options which you feel the Trust should consider.

When telling us your ideas please do bear in mind that the Trust can only undertake activities in accordance with its “Charitable Objects” - these are the goal, aims or ends for which the charity exists and are the limits within which the charity can lawfully act. Another important factor is that the trust does not have any revenue and neither does it hold any financial reserves.

What do you think the Trust should do?

The Trust would like to find out your thoughts on the range of options presented within this consultation document.

Please take the time to consider the options along with the various considerations, implications and the Trust's financial position as set out above.

Once you have done this, please tell us which of the following options you feel would be in the best interest of the trust:-

- Option 1: Retain the premises**
- Option 2a: Sell the site as it is without additional outlay or cost**
- Option 2b: Sell the site with Planning Consent for residential conversion**
- Option 3: Alternative Proposal (please provide as much detail as possible)**

My alternative suggestion is:

About you

The following section is optional but getting this information will enable the Beecroft Art Trust to get a picture of who has been involved in this consultation and help us make sure that all interested parties are fully represented.

If you are completing this on behalf of an organisation, please provide the Organisation's name and contact details:-

If you are completing this as an individual, please answer the questions below by ticking the boxes that you feel best describe you. If you do not want to answer a specific question, please leave it blank.

Some questions may feel personal; the information we collect will be kept strictly confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act. If you would like to know how we will use this information, please contact us.

What is your home postcode?

Age

- 16-24
- 25-44
- 45-64
- 65+
- Prefer not to say

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

Disability - Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Ethnicity - What is your ethnic origin?

- White:
- Asian/Asian British:
- Black/Black British:
- Mixed:
- Other Ethnic Groups: Please state:
- Prefer not to say

Religion/belief - What is your religion?

- Buddhist
- Christian (all denominations)
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh
- No religion
- Any other religion
- Prefer not to say

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form and give us your views.

Please return this completed form by Sunday 20th September 2015 to:-

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