

Meeting:	Cabinet	Date:	6 March 2024
Subject:	Guildhall Galvanised		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	A. Guildhall Galvanised – a visual story.		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the works undertaken as part of the capital funding received as part of the Guildhall Galvanised project.
- 1.2 To note the impact of the project and how investment into a cultural venue can be transformational.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that
 - (1) The report is accepted and that the project is celebrated and noted.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 In 2021 Arts Council England announced their Capital Investment Programme, a funding scheme that supports arts organisations to adjust buildings and equipment so that they could operate safely post-pandemic and improve access, seize on technological opportunities, and reduce environmental impact. Arts organisations could apply from £100,000 up to £750,000, noting that the more that was bid for, the more match funding was required.
- 3.2 Previous investment to the Guildhall saw an upgrade to the public toilets in 2013 and the public balcony brought back into use in 2017. Both were positive interventions for the venue but focused on key spaces, rather than a collection of improvements and advancements that could transform the venue.
- 3.3 Gloucester is named as a 'Priority Place' by Arts Council England. *"Priority Place status recognises the need for increased development time from the Arts Council to grow cultural investment in the area and is intended to give more people the opportunity to participate in creative activities and enjoy excellent cultural*

experiences in their communities and neighbourhoods.” – Arts Council England. Being a priority place does improve the chances of success with funding applications.

3.4 Owing to the notable improvements needed within the Guildhall, an expression of interest was submitted to Arts Council England in October 2021 with an invitation to submit a full application by December 2021. The council received notification in April 2022 that its ‘Guildhall Galvanised’ bid for £230,702 was successful.

3.5 To enable the works to take place without interruption and to ensure safety of staff and the visiting public, Gloucester Guildhall closed to the public on Saturday 18th July 2022 and reopened on Saturday 1st October 2022, with much of the works completed during this period.

There were 7 strands of work taking place as part of the improvement works – detailed below.

3.6 **Hall Bar / Kitchen Upgrade**

3.6.1 The bar and kitchen upgrade were the most significant and disruptive parts of the Galvanised project. Previously, visibility and access to the bar in the main hall proved difficult as it was tucked away in the back corner of the hall. When the seating unit is used for events, the bar is concealed even further. The bar is one of the main income generators for the Guildhall and its visual presence was lacking. Allowing the bar to maximise its income potential could significantly impact on the financial sustainability of the venue. A more effective layout of the bar and the cellar area would be transformational.

3.6.2 Structural works were required to relocate the bar further into the main hall area, which would increase its opening, reshape and increase the size of the cellar area whilst ensuring that there was still a functional kitchen. Everything in the kitchen and bar were removed and the space was reconfigured to maximise serving potential and to create several new access points to the kitchen and cellar area.

3.6.3 The wall mounted cellar cooling system was upgraded during the works and the beverage supplier worked closely with the team to increase the number of serving stations for pouring drinks from the taps. Previously, there was only 2 serving stations with 2 sets of pumps. The new set up allows for 4 serving stations with 4 sets of pumps. This enables a quicker service to customers and the opportunity for an increase in income to the bar. This, matched with the improved Wi-Fi (further information below), and a functional cellar space providing cold beverages, allows for a positive experience for visitors attending events within the main hall.

3.6.4 As part of the bar improvements, the kitchen was reconfigured to enable the provision of hot and cold food. A new layout has enabled better productivity and a better set up for staff working in the space. The failing gas cooker was removed and replaced with an electric equivalent which contributes to the council’s ambitions to become carbon neutral by 2030.

3.7 **Installation of Super-Fast Wi-Fi**

- 3.7.1 The Guildhall has suffered with a lack of investment in good Wi-Fi. Previous Wi-Fi was a domestic solution that was unreliable and presented many challenges, including the inability to confidently hire spaces around the building to corporate clients, the inability to live stream any content in or out of the Guildhall and the inability to maximise sales income on the bar as card payment transactions took a long time to process or often failed. Good, reliable Wi-Fi is a basic 21st century expectation especially in public venues that hires out spaces for corporate meetings and events.
- 3.7.2 The capital investment presented an opportunity to make significant improvements. New super-fast Wi-Fi would be transformational for the business. A local broadband provider with a background in providing high speed internet to the events and culture industry was appointed to install a private line directly into the Guildhall with 1000Mbps download speed. The Guildhall now offers reliable, super-fast Wi-Fi – an unmatched level of connection, and is now one of the best Wi-Fi solutions in the county.
- 3.7.3 The new Wi-Fi has enabled the successful live streaming of several events from the main hall including a 3-hour session from the annual Cajun and Zydeco Festival and the Kids Breaking Championships UK Qualifiers that were recently held in October 2023. The super-fast Wi-Fi will enable further development in live streaming from and to Gloucester Guildhall.
- 3.7.4 From a commercial perspective, the new Wi-Fi has transformed the ability to sell the hireable spaces within the Guildhall. All hireable spaces are within reach of a wireless access point, with higher spec wireless access points in higher traffic areas. Transaction speeds have significantly improved within the Guildhall bar. This along with the bigger improvements to the bar set up has made the visitor experience more positive and is already delivering an increase in income.

3.8 Hall Floor Refurbishment

- 3.8.1 The hall within the Guildhall is the main performance space and has hosted numerous dance events in the past. As a multi-use space, the hall floor degraded over time. Visually, it looked worn, with deep scratches and discolouration. As part of the Galvanised works, the hall floor was refurbished, sanded back and three layers of lacquer were applied to stop the penetration of liquid into the wood beneath it. The hall floor is maintained under the advice of the flooring specialists, however due to its multi-purpose use, the floor will not remain in its current state, but regular maintenance and monitoring will allow it to perform well.

3.9 New Dance Studio

- 3.9.1 An existing studio (known as the Fisher Room) had standard office lighting, a small sound system and laminate flooring. This space was set up well as a hireable space for meetings but not as a dance space. To support the ambition in growing our audiences and supporting the work of our partners, there was an opportunity to transform this space.
- 3.9.2 The capital funds allowed for all existing flooring to be removed, and a Harlequin Sprung Dancefloor to be installed. Due to the increased height of the flooring, access ramps were installed at both entry points allowing for the space to be fully accessible to those with mobility issues.

3.9.3 Lighting and audio improvements were made to complete the space that now sees better flexibility and the ability to provide an atmospheric setting if required.

3.10 **Projector Upgrade**

3.10.1 The main projector was near end of life and no longer in circulation, therefore an upgrade of this projector was vital. AVIXA (an industry leader in audio visual technology) advised that the previous model fell below recommended contrast ratios for the size of the screen. The new projector meets AVIXA standards and includes an interchangeable lens to suits different size screens to allow better flexibility. Increased contrast ratio allows for better screen brightness and colour depth. The laser lighting is more uniform, vivid and provides a higher contrast image for longer than any lamp-based projector.

3.11 **Stage Lighting Upgrade**

3.11.1 The Guildhall stage lighting consists of 79 lights. An initial assessment to replace all stage lighting with LED equivalents would cost in the region of £90,000. £25,000 was allocated from the overall project budget to replace 38 of the older, more energy hungry lights with LED equivalents. Some of the historic lighting fixtures were running at 1000watts per lamps. The Venue Technician will continue to replace non-LED lights as they fail or as funding becomes available.

3.12 **Amplifier Upgrade**

3.12.1 Like the projector, the amplifier was old and with advancements in technology, there were better sound systems available that would enable better quality and projection of sound within the main hall. The new amplifier combines massive power and is quoted '*represents an unmatched advancement in amplifier technology*'. Linea Research who provided the new amplifiers are leaders in audio technology for the music and events industry.

3.13 The investment into the Guildhall has been transformational. Each of the 7 aspects detailed above, collectively puts the Guildhall in a strong position in developing its creative offer and to become more financially sustainable. This investment meets the expectations of touring bands, artists, and promoters, making Gloucester Guildhall the venue of choice, capable of delivering high quality activity – thereby meeting audience and artists expectations of experiencing culture.

3.14 The capital investment showed Arts Council England that the Guildhall is serious about making change. The investment provided the Guildhall with the infrastructure to develop its programme and the works that had taken place, opened a range of opportunities as highlighted in 3.7. A significant change within the past 12 months is that the Guildhall applied and was successfully awarded National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status. Joining the national portfolio in April 2023 secured an additional £250,000 per year for 3 years to expand the Guildhall programme and to invest in Gloucester communities. The investment period from 2023-2026 demonstrates the importance of the Guildhall as a cultural venue and capital investment from the Galvanised supported the NPO application.

- 3.15 It is important to not only recognise the financial contribution made by Gloucester City Council and Arts Council England but also to thank departments within the authority, including finance, IT, and asset management as well as the culture team for their efforts during the closure and visitors for waiting patiently whilst the works were taking place.

4.0 Social Value Considerations

- 4.1 Gloucester's residents are made up of people from diverse range of backgrounds, ethnicity, cultures, and communities. Over the next few years, the extensive regeneration in the city means there will be even more city centre living and people looking to access culture after 5pm. Creating experiences for these audiences will be paramount to the prosperity of the city. A programme of co-curated events alongside a more mainstream offering will ensure that the Guildhall appeals to a wide range of audiences from residents to visitors.

5.0 Environmental Implications

- 5.1 Gloucester Guildhall will benefit from reduced operating costs and improvement to the carbon footprint through the installation of LED theatre and stage lighting. Lighting improvements, solar panels on the roof and other operational initiatives will support the Council's net zero targets.
- 5.2 Gloucester Guildhall is also committed to recording and reducing its environmental impact as part of their Arts Council England NPO reporting agreement and is required to submit environmental data through their Julies Bicycle partnership on an annual basis.

6.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 6.1 N/A.

7.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 7.1 Update report.

8.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 8.1 Further capital investment will be required to continue to improve the Guildhall as an accessible space. The Guildhall Business Plan is currently in production and will provide detail around the priorities for the next 5 years.

9.0 Financial Implications

- 9.1 In addition to the £230,702 grant from Arts Council England, the City Council contributed £78,309.98 in match funding from sources including the IT budget, the Contain Outbreak Management Fund and through the Guildhall core budget. Any unplanned overspend during the project was managed through savings from vacancies that were held during the closure period and there being no requirement for casual staff to support the running of the bar whilst closed.

The total project cost £309,011.98.

(Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.)

10.0 Legal Implications

10.1 Onsite works have been completed and One Legal are currently finalising the project by following-up completion of the contract, due to outstanding information. Although low-risk, a completed contract is required to mitigate any risk of uncertain terms should a dispute arise.

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation of this report.)

11.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

11.1 The project was delivered successfully, with all areas of work delivered as expected. A full audit was undertaken by Gloucestershire County Councils Internal Auditors, whose role is to review the City Councils internal controls and procedures. Internal Audit gained '**Substantial Assurance**' that the condition of the grant offer had been met and that the project was managed well.

12.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA) and Safeguarding:

12.1 The PIA Screening Stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact; therefore, a full PIA was not required.

13.0 Community Safety Implications

13.1 None

14.0 Staffing & Trade Union Implications

14.1 None

Background Documents: None.