

Mavisbank House and Grounds: Progress Report

Report by John Blair, Director Corporate Resources

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1** This report provides Cabinet with an update on progress being made towards the restoration of Mavisbank House and Grounds: and outlines the enhanced support implications sought by the Trust from the Council to achieve this restoration.

2 Background

- 2.1** Mavisbank House is a Grade A listed building which is in a very poor state of repair. It is set within extensive grounds which retain much of their original parkland character (location map is attached to this report). The House is owned privately, although the identity and whereabouts of the owners is unclear. The Grounds are owned by Historic Scotland. Whilst there are rights of way through the Grounds there is no general public right of access. There is an extensive, planning history to the House dating from the early 1970s. The House remains capable of restoration either to a wind and watertight shell, or even full restoration and reuse. The Grounds have substantial potential for managed public access and informal recreation.
- 2.2** In a report to Cabinet on 10 January 2012 it was noted that renewed interest from Historic Scotland for some action, together with a restatement by the Mavisbank Trust of its restoration intentions, had initiated further activity. This culminated in May 2012 with the signing of a concordat entitled 'Mavisbank House and Policies – A Vision for the Future', by Historic Scotland, the Mavisbank Trust, Midlothian Council, and the Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust. In this concordat each party agreed to undertake certain actions: for Midlothian Council these are to:-
- “a) Support the work of the Mavisbank Trust to restore the House and Policies, to develop the community value of the Policies and improve access.*
- b) Take forward CPO procedures for the House once a viable funding package is in place and confirmed.”*

- 2.3** This level of commitment in the concordat reflected the decisions of the Cabinet made on 10 January 2012, as per the following minute of the meeting:

- “a) To agree in principle, to engage with Historic Scotland and the Mavisbank Trust in seeking to secure the restoration and long-term maintenance of both the Mavisbank House itself and the Grounds including vehicular access arrangements;*
- b) To agree in principle to consider using compulsory purchase powers which are vested in the Council to purchase Mavisbank House, subject to necessary legal guarantees being in place to ensure that ownership immediately passed to the Mavisbank Trust or other reputable third party and that the Council’s costs are covered by the Trust or other nominated party; and*
- c) That further regular reports be submitted to Cabinet on progress with these matters.”*

- 2.4** Since the signing of the concordat the Mavisbank Trust has taken the lead in working up restoration proposals and, most crucially, in seeking to raise funding. A central part of the latter is a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for £3.5m. This was considered by The Fund in May 2013 and rejected. However The Fund recognised the merits of the scheme and recommended that the Trust resubmit the bid (likely early 2014). In doing so it highlighted a number of matters including greater support and commitment from the Council, and greater certainty over the long term viability/sustainability of the maintenance of the Grounds. This was the subject of discussion between the Trust, the Council Leader and Chief Executive on 21 June 2012.

3 Considerations

- 3.1** In terms of the Council’s contribution, in addition to that set out in the concordat, the Trust has indicated that the Council could strengthen its support and so enhance the resubmitted bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, essentially through
- i) commitment to obtain all the necessary consents, undertake and fund the provision of a new access from the A768 to the east of Loanhead, together with a new car parking area; and possibly continuation of the access road into the Grounds so that it can ultimately link to the House itself; and
 - ii) commit to maintaining the Grounds as part of the Council’s estate.

These commitments would be wholly dependent upon the Trust’s Heritage Lottery Fund bid being successful.

4 Report Implications

4.1 Resource

There had previously been acceptance by the Council that it would subsume the administrative costs of preparing and serving statutory

notices in connection with the compulsory purchase of the House. It was previously considered that costs involving the provision of the new access from the A768 and car park would be covered by the Trust via the external funding secured for the project. The capital costs to the Council if it commits to the access road and parking would be in the order of £93,000. To continue the access road to the boundary of the Grounds could potentially add a further £40,000 to £50,000. If the Council accepts maintenance responsibilities for the Grounds then an estimate of the annual revenue costs is £21,000. Currently, Mavisbank is not part of the Council's capital programme. Accordingly, there is no identified revenue budget to account for maintenance of the Grounds.

The Council's General Reserve, which is the uncommitted element of Reserves, was £6,402 million as reported to Council on 25 June 2013. A prudent level of uncommitted reserves is seen to be 2% of net expenditure which equates to approximately £4 million. The General Reserve shown above is £2,402 million greater than this and provides some flexibility to meet unforeseen costs pressures and overspends.

The projected budget gap for the next three years, as reported to Council on 25 June 2013, is estimated at £16 million.

The recommendation in this report if approved would commit significant capital resources which would otherwise be invested maintaining service delivery and will increase the budget gap in 2014/15 by £21,000.

4.2 Risk

It is clear that the restoration project is now wholly dependent upon the Trust being successful in its bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. This, in turn, would appear to be dependant to a notable extent on the Council and other parties such as Historic Scotland, increasing their level of stated commitment to the project. Without this, there is a greater risk that the Heritage Lottery Fund bid may fail. Conversely, if the Council commits in the terms of paragraph 3.1 above, this reduces the capital and revenue funds available to deliver existing services and support Community Planning Partnership priorities. As the land for the proposed access is in separate private ownership there is a risk that it may not gain the landowner's consent: although, it is understood that the landowner has given in principle assurances to the Mavisbank Trust.

4.3 Single Midlothian Plans and Business Transformation

This report addresses the theme of 'Improving Opportunities in Midlothian' in that it provides public access to a well-maintained area of informal open space; such access also enhancing 'Adult Health'.

4.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

Restoration of House and Grounds will enhance the built and natural heritage stock of Midlothian; and greater public access to the grounds

for informal recreation promotes the agenda of healthy living and wellbeing.

4.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach

No specific issues.

4.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

The current process of promoting restoration of Mavisbank House and Grounds involves a range of organisations. The Trust has held community exhibitions and engagement in March 2013: and this engagement would continue if sufficient funding to commence the project were secured.

4.7 Ensuring Equalities

There are no specific equalities matters arising from this report.

4.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

Realisation of the project will protect and promote conservation of built and natural heritage resources.

4.9. IT Issues

There are no IT issues arising from this report.

5 Summary

- 5.1** The Mavisbank Trust, with commitment of support from Historic Scotland and Midlothian Council, is seeking to secure funding to initiate restoration of Mavisbank House and Grounds. Its bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for £3.5m failed in May 2013, although the Heritage Lottery Fund are encouraging a resubmission. The prospects of success for that resubmission would be increased if there were stronger commitment from, inter alia, the Council. Potential additional supportive measures are noted in paragraph 3.1 of this report, each of which would have potentially significant impacts on the capital and revenues budget of the Authority.

6 Recommendation

- 6.1** It is recommended that Cabinet considers this report and, if minded to provide financial support, this would require to be referred to Council in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders, in the event that the Heritage Lottery Fund bid was successful.

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Background Papers: Mavisbank Concordat of 15 May 2012