

Results of Workshop on a Proposed 'Cultural' Centre in Morpeth

Held on Wednesday 2nd April 2014 at Morpeth Town Hall

Background to the workshop

The Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan has been looking at the provision of **Sports Arts and Leisure** in Morpeth and surrounding parishes and the 'Issues and Options' consultation held last year asked the question ***'Should there be some form of theatre/arts centre for Morpeth and surrounding areas?'*** to which 78% of respondents said 'Yes'. In addition there was a question in the Heritage section about whether there ***'should there be a Social Heritage Museum and/or other means of preserving and promoting our local history?'*** to which there was a 65.4% positive response.

In light of these responses the 'Plan Preparation Group' asked for some further work to be done to:

- ***consider the need for and provision of a new arts and cultural venue in the town,***
- ***it's mix of uses,***
- ***it's size,***
- ***possible location or criteria for the location of such a facility (adopting a town centre first approach),***
- ***the possibility of this including a heritage centre either as a stand alone facility or incorporated within a wider arts/cultural centre.***

A workshop was therefore arranged to address these issues to which all interested groups and individuals were invited to attend. There were 27 attendees at the workshop representing a number of organisations and they have been listed below.

Format and feedback from the Workshop

The attendees divided into groups of 4/5 to discuss the various issues and were asked to give their opinions/feedback which was recorded and the results are set out below. These will now be used to inform the Neighbourhood Plan making process which will in turn be consulted upon later this year.

By way of clarification in order to progress this project further work (research and business planning) will be required, potentially to be carried out by Greater Morpeth Development Trust, for which a new project has been instigated called 'The HEART of Morpeth'.

Name of attendee	Organisation
Alison Byard	MTC
Sue Dibbon	GMDT
Nicky Wall	Collingwood School
John Bibby	Morpeth Gathering
Kim Bibby-Wilson	MAS
Alistair McCubbin	KEVI
Simon Cox	MNP
Henry Warne	GMDT and Civic Society
Douglas Hoblinn	FOMM
Angus Kirk	KEVI
Ian Campbell	MNP
Nancy Smith	St Georges Players
Barry Mead	GMDT
David Lodge	GMDT
Eileen Clark	St Georges Players
Frank Rescigno	GMDT
Dom James	KEVI
Lewis James	KEVI
Calvin Willis	KEVI
Freddie Bowles	KEVI
Victoria Najafi	KEVI
Sue Elliott	St Georges Players
Joan Foster	St Georges Players
Richard Firth	Morpeth Art Group
David Cowans	MNP Heritage Topic Group
Dorothy Cowans	MNP Heritage Topic Group
Graeme Trotter	MNP

Need/Reasons for a Cultural Centre
There is no such a facility and a town the size and location of Morpeth would support one (similar to Berwick/Hexham/Alnwick/Blyth)
To provided facilities for local user groups (drama/music/dance/arts and crafts)
To attract professional 'touring' performance groups
To enhance the provision of a community cinema
To enable more people to access the arts/entertainment/social activity without having to travel by car
To provide educational opportunities and research facilities
To have a Morpeth based centre for heritage interest groups to store and display exhibits
To attract visitors to the town and help promote Morpeth as a visitor/tourist destination which in turn would contribute to the local economy
Provide a community 'hub' with social benefits
Provide employment opportunities and work experience
Provide 'collaborative' regional, national and international opportunities
Provide opportunity for the live viewing of major events/performances from around the

world through digital streaming

Add to the vibrancy and wellbeing of the town

Mix of Uses	Size/Capacity
Theatre/Drama/Stage Performance	Flexibility very important! The auditorium to be able to accommodate between 200 to 250. The preference was for as much flexibility as possible say with the use of retractable seating and/or a mix of fixed and retractable seating. With use of partitioning the space could be reduced for smaller audiences. In addition there would need to be 'back stage' provision such as changing facilities and props/staging/equipment storage.
Music	As above
Dance	As above
Cinema	As above
Heritage museum/Exhibition space	Approximately half the size of the Corn Exchange at Town Hall
Storage of 'Heritage' collection	This would need to be about 70 square metres to house the current collection
Workspace facility	100-150 square metres to accommodate up to 25 persons involved in practical activities eg painting, crafts of various sorts, preparation of exhibits etc...
Research/archive/ facility	A good sized room
Technical/multimedia facility/ Recording studio	Sufficient to house equipment/computers etc...
Retail	A shop/display area for the sale of appropriate merchandise to provide revenue for the centre.
Conference/Lecture/Meeting rooms	To accommodate 20 to 50 people (which could be the same space as for Exhibitions)
Café/Bar/Restaurant/	Say between 30 to 50 'covers' to provide refreshments to visitors/audiences but also to provide a revenue stream for the centre.
Ancillary requirements – box office/toilets/office etc...	As appropriate

Location Criteria for the Centre

Town Centre (or as close as possible) and if possible a riverside location
Adequate car parking available either/or on site or nearby
Close to public transport links
In a 'attractive' existing building or new build which is visually appealing and welcoming
Flood resistant
Easily accessible on foot
Good disability access (DDA compliant)
Easily accessible by cycle (with provision for securing cycles)
Accessible for transport lorries with stage/sound equipment
Possible potential to 'overspill' outside e.g. for al fresco dining/drinking