

POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

21 FEBRUARY 2022

NEWARK CASTLE – CONDITION SURVEY

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To advise members of the results of the Condition Survey at Newark Castle and request that the schedule of work is added to the Capital Programme for 2022/23.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 Newark Castle is designated an Ancient Monument by Historic England. It was built by Bishop Alexander of Lincoln, and is a rare example of an episcopal residence. It holds architectural and archaeological significance, and has the most complete example of a Romanesque gatehouse in England. It has historic significance as the death place of King John. It has been in the stewardship of Newark and Sherwood District Council for many years, enabling free public access to the Victorian Gardens but offering only limited access to the Castle itself.
- 2.2 The ruinous nature of the Castle remains bring significant challenges. The two main walls which run between the towers are exposed to the elements – the inner facing of these would originally have been internal walls and so are particularly susceptible to damage caused by vegetation growth, water ingress and cold, freezing conditions in the winter. There is limited access at high level and roosting pigeons cause further damage. The Castle will always require a commitment to repair and preserve, and the Gatehouse Project is the next step in protecting some of these exposed walls, developing long term plans for supervision and repair management with a dedicated staff presence, a conservation management plan, and delivering greater, more regular footfall.
- 2.3 A condition survey was last undertaken for Newark Castle in 2010/11. Following this survey, a number of repairs were actioned, however it is believed that some outstanding items remained. The Business Manager – Heritage and Culture, in conjunction with Corporate Property, commissioned a new survey in 2021 to ensure that NSDC would be fully apprised of all works required moving forward, enabling a robust forward plan and schedule of repairs to take place over a ten year period.
- 2.4 Due to the availability of suitably qualified heritage specialists, the work eventually commenced in September 2021, with the final report being received in January 2022. Immediately following the physical inspection of the site, we received advice to fence off the inner and outer walls due to the risk of loose stone fall. Heras fencing has been erected accordingly and will remain in place until repairs can be undertaken. This is impacting on the Castle's operation, with weddings being particularly affected. The wooden walkways are also currently inaccessible due to this risk. The lower footpath which runs along the riverside has already been closed for a significant period due to loose stonework.
- 2.5 The resulting report offers both an overview of the current condition of the Castle, a matrix of repairs which have been RAG rated, and a current cost estimate for each aspect of the repairs. Red items require immediate repair, Amber should be placed on a 5 year schedule for completion by 2026, and green items are for review post 2026.
- 2.6 The executive summary states that:

'Overall the castle is in fair to good condition. Notwithstanding this there are several defects that require urgent attention to prevent the further decay of the highly significant historic fabric and ensure the safety of the public who regularly visit the Castle and grounds.'

Within the body of the report, the majority of the Red rated items relate to the exterior, and to the exposed castle walls. Additionally there is water ingress from the inner courtyard area down into the Undercroft and one internal area of concern. The report determines that regular defrassing to remove loose stone is likely to be required due to the fragile nature of the walls; in the future this can be combined with a schedule of vegetation removal as part of the conservation management plan that is being developed.

3.0 Proposals

- 3.1 The Red rated items equate to approximately £311,652, with preliminaries and access to those areas being estimated at a further £240,000; a total of £550,000. The total cost of all items across the 10 year schedule is in the region of £955,000.
- 3.2 Additionally, quotes have been received for an architect to prepare a schedule of work and tender documents, oversee the tender process for specialist contractor, and to oversee the work on-site, including acting as CDM Principal Designer if required. These quotes are in the region of £30,000, of which £10,000 is required immediately to facilitate the schedule of works and tender. Corporate Property have advised that, due to the specialist nature and high cost of construction in the current climate, the cost of the works at tender may vary.
- 3.3 Earlier this year, £80,000 was agreed to develop the plans for the Castle Gatehouse Project. This included the fee for the condition survey, to mitigate the risk of unidentified repairs being unearthed during that project. It also included provision for a number of professional services, including archaeological surveys, which have not been required. The preparation of the schedule of work and tender documents (£10,000) can be funded from this remaining budget.
- 3.4 It is proposed to add £570,000 to the capital programme to complete the urgent repairs, to protect the legacy of the Castle, to ensure the safety of the public visiting the site and to enable the grounds and green space to remain accessible to the public. It is also proposed that the Business Manager reviews the past ten years' repairs in conjunction with Corporate Property to assess the level of investment that has been made previously and better understand the future impact to NSDC.
- 3.5 It is likely that some of the conservation work included within the Gatehouse Project is a repetition of some of these repairs – the conservation package was developed from the old condition survey. This information is now ten years old and it is recommended that this new survey supersedes this schedule. It is also recommended to continue with this work as a priority as the Gatehouse project, if approved to proceed, will not begin on site until 2024. This may result in some savings to NSDC's contribution to the Gatehouse Project, however this cannot be guaranteed at this stage.
- 3.6 The condition survey includes for the replacement of the wooden walkways, at this stage it is recommended to exclude this item and remove access to this area, as this will be abortive work if the Gatehouse Project proceeds.

- 3.7 Newark Castle is a 900 year old monument which will continue to require a schedule of repair and maintenance to preserve its legacy for the future, as an iconic emblem of Newark. In order to successfully manage this, it is proposed to review the annual contribution to Repairs and Renewals and develop a 10 year programme of repairs with the Corporate Property team and specialist consultants as required – this will include regular vegetation removal and defrassing, and will incorporate regular updates to the condition survey and conservation management plan. The Gatehouse Project itself provides an opportunity to ensure that the Castle delivers on its potential for tourism as a destination attraction, and as a much loved historic building and green space for residents, delivering improved educational and well-being benefits for the local community and economic impacts to the town and district.
- 3.8 Possible alternatives are to ‘do nothing’, or to wait until the Gatehouse Project is being delivered. Both of these options have a huge impact on NSDC’s responsibility as the custodians of a significant heritage asset as it would continue to deteriorate, and would continue to limit access to the Castle and grounds. The longer term strategy for weddings and events could not be realised, and the risk of unknown and higher conservation costs for the Gatehouse Project would increase, as Red rated issues would continue to worsen over the next two years. Should the Gatehouse Project not go ahead, NSDC would still have a responsibility to deliver these repairs at a higher cost due to the deterioration and inflation.

4.0 Equalities Implications

- 4.1 The proposals will support the Council’s Equalities Strategy objectives by providing access to the Castle, its Gardens and the Gatehouse. The wider proposals will increase access for people with mobility issues and wheelchair users, and include a Heritage Lottery Funded project which, if successful, will target disadvantaged groups to improve wellbeing and break down socio-economic barriers.

5.0 Digital Implications

- 5.1 None.

6.0 Financial Implications - FIN21-22/8115

6.1 Capital

The total costs of the required works are estimated at £580,000. Of which a contribution of £10,000 can be made from the capital budget already in place for the Castle Gatehouse project towards the £30,000 required for architect and design fees. Hence the total additional capital budget required is £570,000.

- 6.2 If the works are to be funded from Borrowing then this would attract both MRP and Interest payments, the length of the loan is aligned with the life of the asset/work which we have estimated at 50 years.

6.3 Revenue

Charges to revenue directly relating to the financing of the project are:

Charge Type	Life/Int Rate	Amount	Annual Charge
MRP	50 Years	570,000	11,400
Interest	1.90%	570,000	10,830
Total Cost of Financing Loan			22,230

Capital works are to be completed in 2022/23 so these charges would be incurred through revenue from 2023/24 onwards for a period of 50 years.

- 6.4 The proposal for a review of future repair and renewal costs will be conducted and any revenue implications will be picked up as part of 23/24 revenue budget setting.

7.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

- 7.1 This work will contribute to the delivery of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, and to the improvement of the health and wellbeing of residents, ensuring the Castle remains integral to the town’s future economic growth and the Gardens remain accessible to the public.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that:

- (a) the inclusion of this work in the 2022/23 Capital Programme for £570,000 be approved, to be funded from borrowing; and**
- (b) the Business Manager - Heritage and Culture works with the Corporate Property Team to develop a management and maintenance plan to include all amber and green items from the condition survey, with any revenue implications to be picked up as part of 2023/24 revenue budget setting.**

Reason for Recommendations

To ensure the preservation of Newark Castle, ensuring that the Castle and Gardens remain safe and accessible for residents and to mitigate the risk of unforeseen emergency work as the Gatehouse Project progresses.

Background Papers

Nil.

For further information please contact Carys Coulton-Jones on Ext 5773.

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