

# Business Plan for Wisbech Castle

By Samantha Hoy on behalf of Wisbech Town Council

# Section One

## Executive summary

---

### 1.1 Where we are to date:

Wisbech Town Council (WTC) received a letter from the County Council seeking community interest in acquisition of the building and WTC held a special meeting 5 September 2016, at which it was decided that Wisbech Town Council would express an interest in acquiring Wisbech Castle. This was not to say that the Town Council would definitely be taking on the building but it wanted to ensure that the building was not just sold without the council's knowledge or attempts to make something work, which had happened to the council previously (Wisbech Courthouse).

Wisbech Town Council's expression of interest was considered at 21 October 2016 meeting of the County Council's Assets and Investments Committee; as a result of that consideration, Wisbech Town Council was selected by the committee as the County Council's preferred bidder and, consequently, provided with a period of four months to produce and submit a business case. On 10 October 2016 a number of interested parties – including Wisbech Society, the Ferry Project, Wisbech in Bloom, WisARD and Wisbech Projects – attended a meeting with the members of Wisbech Town Council to brainstorm ideas for the castle and to hear what these parties may have to offer.

Councillor Samantha Hoy, Councillor David Oliver (the then Leader of WTC) and the Town Clerk subsequently examined jointly the outcomes from the brainstorming meeting, to remove the ideas which they did not think could work and then decided to progress any that could have potential; the resultant list of ideas/projects were then subject to consultation with partners.

Also, in the background, meetings have taken place with partners, to achieve their input; also Councillor Miss Hoy met with the MP, Fenland District Council's Cabinet member for Tourism and representatives of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum to see how they could work together. At this meeting the MP said that he supports the on-going work being done by WTC with regard to the Castle and indicated that he may be able to access funding from the Treasury for this project. The representatives of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum were not keen to work with WTC to create any sort of large trust to manage both buildings as they did not feel that they have the capacity.

Councillor Miss Hoy and the Town Clerk also met with Dawn Bainbridge and Kate Brown from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), who listened to some early proposals for activity at Wisbech Castle and they suggested a number of funding "pots" to which applications could be made in relation to this project. Dawn Bainbridge and Kate Brown explained that the HLF is currently concentrating on the Wisbech area, as they understand that there are issues with heritage buildings in the town, with many being left for so long that they get past the point of viability. They said that funding is potentially available in relation to Wisbech Castle but a very robust case would need to be made given the level of competition for HLF monies; in respect of any application for significant funding in relation to Wisbech Castle, the HLF Board would need to see evidence of need/demand, viability and sustainability.

An interim business case was presented to the Assets Committee at CCC on the 24<sup>th</sup> February and the committee agreed that they should continue to look at exploring some sort of transfer to Wisbech Town Council and gave WTC a further 4 months to bring forward a final business case and offered officer support with this. These officers felt they were unable to suggest any new ideas as had they have thought of any, they would have suggested them already.

After the CCC elections, Councillor Hoy met with Chris Malyon and Councillor Roger Hickford (the then Committee Chair) to see where we were to date and if things were still progressing well. Cllr Hoy said that as she had thought for a while and the business case was starting to prove, the Castle would be able to wash its face but no more than that. Because of this she felt it impossible for WTC to give CCC a capital receipt for the building. Cllr Hickford suggested a potential way forward which was the idea of leasing the property at a peppercorn rent to WTC and loaning them the repair costs which they could pay back over 25 years so it would not be prohibitive to the project.

This is obviously subject to the new committee and committee chair and the plan was to present the full case to the new committee but in the meantime ensure WTC were happy with these terms. A meeting of Wisbech Town Council on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017 Cllr Hoy presented the idea of the loan and the lease to gauge support to see if it was worth continuing on those terms. There was unanimous support by the Town Councillors at the meeting.

## **1.2 Vision:**

Wisbech Town Council, the council which is the “closest” to the people of Wisbech, is committed to providing and maintaining Wisbech Castle, a Grade II\* Listed Building in the Wisbech Conservation Area, located in close proximity to other buildings of historic significance to Wisbech (and beyond), as a community and historic asset/resource for the people of Wisbech.

Wisbech Castle should provide a welcoming, enjoyable environment in which the community are able to benefit from both the heritage of the building and as a place of learning and leisure. It should be recognised as an integral part of the town’s proud historic past and the distinctive and diverse present.

## **1.3 Mission Statement:**

The mission of Wisbech Town Council is deliver the operation of Wisbech Castle as an important building for use by the community; to restore this important Grade II\* Listed Building to play its part in the nationally-renowned historic fabric of Wisbech; to be enjoyed operationally and culturally by both the current and future generations of residents of Wisbech, as well as by visitors to the town.

The Town Council sees Wisbech Castle as being able to cater for a variety of community needs: education and learning; culture and heritage; civic and ceremonial (including weddings); space for community meetings; possibly some commercial elements. It is the council’s ambition that operation and development of Wisbech Castle would not place an unnecessary burden upon local taxpayers.

The council will work hard, in collaboration with key stakeholders, to provide a community facility which is both viable and sustainable and plays a part in the Town Council’s ambition to continue to make Wisbech a better place to live, work and visit. To that end, the Town Council will adopt and operate a sustainable and resilient business model which enables Wisbech Castle to become and remain a key part of the network of community buildings in Wisbech and an integral part of the “cultural quarter” of Wisbech.

# Section Two

## Financial summary

---

### 2.1 Financial summary:

In building up the business plan we believe that we will break even each year in a worst case scenario and potentially turn a small profit in future years. As we plan to increase our precept to cover loan repayments, If we were to make a profit we could potentially use that to pay back the loan to enable us to then reduce council tax liability.

WTC realise that the first year will be particularly hard in getting the project off the ground and understand that this is a risk to us but we do have reserves as a last resort that we could use if needed and we may potential look at savings in other areas to help with the project.

Partners, Councillors and the public are on board with the idea of WTC taking on this asset to run it for the benefit of the community.

### 2.2 Financial summary of how it benefits CCC:

By transferring the Castle to Wisbech Town Council this provides an immediate revenue saving to CCC and removes the liability of the building. Of course this would still be the case if CCC were to sell the Castle to a private individual, however, although the building could be sold, it can only be sold really for use as a house due to its listed status. It is unlikely to obtain a large value due to this and the considerable repair works needed. It would also be viewed very dimly by Wisbech residents if CCC were to sell an asset they were gifted for the benefit of Wisbech for a capital receipt to prop up more prosperous areas of the county.

By leasing the building to Wisbech Town Council CCC are being speculative as if Wisbech Town Council doesn't make it work CCC could still sell the asset with justifiable reason to the public and the building would have increased in value as the town council would have done all the works and maintained it at their cost so CCC would achieve a higher capital receipt. If after the end of the lease it was found to be successful CCC may want to renegotiate with WTC for a higher rent.

### 2.3 Breakdown of predicted finances

#### Income

Income from precept rise	10000.00
Grant already provided for Information Centre	5000.00
Profit from Civic Ceremonies	7200.00
Profit from Festivals and Events	2500.00
Donations from Visitors	3000.00
Room Hire	5000.00
Income from Tea Room	5000.00
Income from exhibition space	1000.00

Income from holiday lets	2000.00
Profit from banquets	1500.00
Profit from Photographic Collections	500.00
Money from filming location	500.00
Gift Shop	3000.00
Income from Tours of Dungeons *	TBC
<b>Total</b>	<b>46200.00</b>

\*no income in year 1, see notes in section 7

### Expenditure

Grounds Maintenance *	1000.00
Building Maintenance - Non Structural Maintenance	159.42
Security equipment	350.95
Alarm / CCTV system	155.43
Electricity	406.49
Mains Gas	1,232.90
Water charges	212.52
Refuse collection charge	999.10
Business rates	3,297.00
Fire equipment	41.15
Insurance - buildings and contents	676.84
Cleaning Materials	52.42
Telephone costs	1,448.07
External Telephone - calls	0.00
Other insurances	53.12
Other Hired Contract Services	2,082.72
Cleaning **	2000.00
Staff Cost ***	20000.00
Advertising/Promotion	2000.00
PS&FM add servicing at £957.75 annually	957.75
Repayment of loan	7975.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>45,100.88</b>
<p>*In Bloom have offered to do the garden at cost  ** Cleaning based on current costs for similar building  *** This is including on costs, this could be even cheaper if we used volunteers and worked with existing WTC Staff</p>	

# Section Three

## Terms of Transfer

---

### 3.1 Cost of Building

Whilst the building has a capital value it would not be possible for Wisbech Town Council to pay this. This is because, firstly, Wisbech taxpayers would take a dim view of paying to buy an asset that they believe is already theirs. Furthermore, as you can see from the financial summary, the building will just break even or turn a very small profit so WTC could not afford to get an additional loan (loan required already for repairs) to buy the building as it would not be able to afford the repayments.

### 3.2 Money for Repairs

Originally we were given costs for repair works to the building of £150,000, However CCC had an additional survey report that identified costs of £250,000. We have also spoken with the Conservation Officer at Fenland District Council who estimates the costs at £175,000. We believe the variation in costs is due in part to over estimating labour costs and we believe we can get work done cheaper, particularly as some local partners are offering voluntary labour. We also feel that some works are more urgent than others and require urgent actions whilst others we could do in a few years once we started to get the business established and generate an income.

To finance the repairs we would have to go for grant funding or borrow the money. Grant funding is likely to take a number of months if not years and we cannot guarantee success. We could borrow cheaply from the Public Works Loan Board but CCC gets even more preferential rates and we have been working with the Chief Finance Officer to look at borrowing £150,000 from CCC at the rate of 3% interest. WTC would then ring fence the money for repairs and begin to carry them out and we would pay CCC back over 25 years.

### 3.3 Length of lease

WTC are flexible but would ask for a minimum of 30 years because a lot of funding such as HLF is reliant on a long term lease with 30 years as a minimum term. Ideally, we feel that 99 years is a good length of time to allow stability and show that both parties are serious. Potentially there could be a break clause included so both parties could review how things were progressing.

### 3.4 Summary

Wisbech Town Council are asking CCC to lease Wisbech Castle to them for 99 years at a peppercorn rent. Additionally, we would like CCC to loan WTC £150,000 to cover the cost of repairs, to be repaid over 25 years.

# Section Four

## Activities in the Castle

---

### 1. Educational visits/lessons

#### Description

Use of heritage location for living history, role play, curriculum-based sessions, as well as the history of Wisbech.

#### How it benefits the community

Opportunities to engage with all ages (school and home education) in an inspiring, interesting and informative, safe, learning environment.

Opportunities for adult education, local history (WEA, U3A)

Partnership working with Wisbech & Fenland Museum, Wisbech Library, Peckover House, and Octavia Hill Birthplace House (who already run a school scheme and have used Wisbech Castle).

#### Income

Charges according to facilities needed (hire of tutors, re-enactors, props etc)

Similar school resources:

Victorian School (Farnham) £90/30 children

Southwell Workhouse £4.10/child

Gressenhall Workhouse £8.55/child

Wisbech Castle (CEES) £310/class for CCC or £330 other authority (includes one teacher)

On speaking to Wisbech Museum it appears that the Museum, Castle and Library worked together on this project and got grants from HLF as well as Arts Council. This is something which we can't cost now as we don't know what sums are likely to be achieved but we do know that money is out there and that there is the appetite from other partners to continue this again. We would have a meeting with Head Teachers across Wisbech to get a more detailed idea of what they would like to see so we can tailor the offer as well as finding out what they would be expecting to pay.

### 2. Civic ceremonies

#### Description

The Castle has previously been used for a wedding venue, it has suitable rooms and garden space and the necessary licencing is already in place.

#### How it benefits the community

This provides another location in the town for people to get married. Loss of Registry Office service leaves few civil places for ceremonies, especially with private, outside space for photographs and reception.

#### Income

Variable scale from standard to enhanced facilities such as catering, marquee (approx. £750 - £1000).

Factoring in cost of staffing aim to clear £600 per event with an average of one wedding per month Total: 7,200.00

We have priced at £600 as is a realistic average £500-£750 due to limitations on numbers, current Venue options, facilities available and when we can start taking bookings. Once building has been improved, updated and better facilities available we see prices would increase to reflect the uniqueness of building and the better wedding experience. This could take between 3-5 years to be realised.

### 3. Public access to the Castle and Gardens as a tourist attraction

#### Description

Regency house with attractive garden.

#### How it benefits the community

As an attraction in the architectural core of the town centre. Opportunities for partnership with local groups.

## **Income**

If building in use could offer free access for general visit with donations. Opportunities for income through retail. We estimate we can achieve £3k from donations, this is calculated on visitors donating on average £1. The number of visitors is worked out on what other tourist attractions in Wisbech achieve which varies from 20k per annum to 9. We estimated that we would achieve similar numbers to Wisbech and Fenland Museum due to the proximity and they achieve 12k per year. We estimate that some of these would be return visitors and many may not donate anything at all.

## **4. Information Centre**

### **Description**

Move Information Centre from Post Office Lane to the Castle.

### **How it benefits the community**

Central location near Museum and Library. Opportunity of more space in historic surroundings from current position. Adds to the Cultural Quarter by signposting visitors to tourist attractions, most of which will be nearby.

### **Income**

Wisbech Town Council grant (£5000) supports rent and utilities for current location. Staffed by volunteers. Opportunities for income from retail. By moving this to the Castle it allows for the existing location to be used for a more commercial purpose and brings the Castle a constant income stream. Additional income has identified from using the Information Centre as a booking agent for tours, coaches and accommodation.

## **5. Exhibition space**

### **Description**

Offer to local groups and commercial artists for exhibitions/sales, including craft fairs.

### **How it benefits the community**

Intimate gallery space in heritage building.  
Increase the community's access to craft and cultural activities and products

### **Income**

Commercial charges and/or commission.  
Greyfriars King's Lynn:  
Two weeks: £150  
One Month: £200  
Commission on all sales: 20 per cent

Charge or support non-commercial groups (donations). Seek funding bids for non-sales, community activities.  
Craft fair fees about £30 per table, or hire location to commercial organiser (approx. £150). Approximately £1000 a year could be achieved

## **6. Photographic Collections**

### **Description**

Collection of Wisbech and Fenland photographs

### **How it benefits the community**

Offer permanent storage and display space for collection.  
Permanent housing more appropriate for funding bids.

### **Income**

Opportunities for retail/concessions, specialist exhibitions with entrance fees. Could achieve £500 in entrance fees per year

## **7. General hire of rooms**

### **Description**

Discrete room hire for learning, counselling, advice sessions.

### **How it benefits the community**



Informal, attractive setting.

### **Income**

Hire charges (standard fees within Wisbech approx. £12/hour)  
Seek funding bids for non-sales, community activities.

We estimate from speaking to The Ferry Project that 5k can be achieved from room hire.

## **8. Traditional Tea Room**

### **Description**

Develop kitchen to offer tea room facilities. Garden space.

### **How it benefits the community**

Central location. Opportunities for partnership working with Museum. Enhanced catering facilities on site for other community events.

### **Income**

Commercial let £5000 - £10000

## **9. Themed banquets**

### **Description**

Use of heritage setting for themed events

### **How it benefits the community**

Commercial income and enhanced facilities for other community events.  
Opportunities for local caterers/hotels to work in partnership or on a commercial basis.

### **Income**

Example (Coombe Abbey)

Friday £34.95 per person (excludes whole of December)

Saturday £44.95 per person (excludes whole of December)

Opportunities to enhance banquet dining experience by hiring of mediaeval costume

In the first year we would aim to have one event like this with further in future years. We estimate with ticket sales (aim to sell 100 at £35) and then catering costs and marquee hire taken out we could earn £1,500

## **10. Film location**

### **Description**

Build upon previous contacts for film use.

### **How it benefits the community**

Commercial income, cultural attraction.

### **Income**

2013 Daily Telegraph report: The right kind of property in London can "earn" from £500 a day for a magazine photo shoot to £2,500 a day for a big-budget film. However we have to be mindful of the location. We would aim to get at least 1 day of filming at £500 from the venue

## **10. Heritage Centre**

### **Description**

Continued use, and development, as a Heritage Centre, as well as inclusion within heritage tours/walks of the town. To be developed on a Partnership basis.

### **How it benefits the community**

Increase the public's awareness of the important architectural heritage in Wisbech. Keeps people in the town longer which will bring money into the towns shops and services.

### **Income**

Donations, opportunities for retail sales/commission, charges for special events/exhibitions. The income from this

has been included in other incomes such as Lilian Ream, income from donations etc

## **11. Garden**

### **Description**

Use of garden for events (plays, concerts, fairs, private hire)

### **How it benefits the community**

Increase the community's access to cultural activities such as music and open air theatre. Adds an additional green/open space in the centre of town.

### **Income**

Charge admission fee to cover any costs of event.

Elgood's Jazz £10

Peckover charge £12-£15/ticket for their concerts

Commercial hire of garden could be similar fees to civic ceremonies

We have included the income from the garden in the figures for events and donations

## **12. Gift Shop**

### **Description**

Heritage gift shop

### **How it benefits the community**

Local history and heritage and commercial income. Outlet for local products and crafts

### **Income**

We estimate 3k based on other locations

## **13. Tours of the dungeons**

### **Description**

Set out each area of the dungeon as what it has been used for throughout history such as a wine cellar, place for prisoners of the gunpowder plot, a place of religious pilgrimage etc to create a tourist attraction.

### **How it benefits the community**

History and heritage. Another tourist activity, attraction within Wisbech.

### **Income**

Entrance fee would need to cover costs to staff it.

One of our councillors has been researching and found a number of pots she believes we can tap into to fund the building of this. This is likely to take time to build and develop and so we would not see any income in year 1

## **14. Festivals (e.g. beer festival)**

### **Description**

Themed event.

### **How it benefits the community**

Another tourist activity, attraction within Wisbech.

### **Income**

Approximate we can easily generate £2500 in entrance fees and sponsorship based on evidence from successful festivals that we already run.

## **15. Holiday accommodation**

### **Description**

Unique selling point of Wisbech Castle as a holiday let (such as those properties offered by landmark Trust)

Short-term lets allowing for use by the community during the year for other uses.

Building originally residential

### **How it benefits the community**

Another tourist activity, attraction within Wisbech.

Opportunities to work in partnership with Museum, OHBH, Angles Theatre for themed/activity holidays.

Possibility of working in partnership with established heritage property letting (Landmark Trust).

### **Income**

Landmark Trust fees 4 nights approx. £230 - £300

Peckover Coach House 4 nights approx. £300 - £600

However would take time to get off the ground and advertise as well as needing to buy furniture to kit it out.

Because of this likely to only achieve £2000 in the first year

**This list is not exhaustive but is worked up ideas that we have had from the beginning. The committee in charge of running the castle would need to adapt or vary these to ensure the successful running of the building**

# Section Five

## Management of the Building

---

### **Management options**

WTC looked at a number of Management options in the interim business case and discounted a number for the following reasons:

- A. WTC works with Cambridgeshire Cultural Services (CCS) to see what options CCC has internally, with the potential of CCS taking over the management of the castle and working in partnership with WTC to deliver other activities:**

There seemed no real appetite for this option from CCC and it did not deal with any of the issues regarding repairs

- B. WTC leases the castle from CCC, takes on the repair liability and manages all activities within:**

This seemed the best option as it gives WTC control over an asset that they have taken responsibility of. This option does need to be slightly varied as it is a big ask for WTC to take over liability with no help and this is where the suggestion of a loan from CCC comes in

- C. WTC assists in the formation of a trust to take over the freehold of the castle and the repair liability and manage all activities within:**

This option was discounted as it lacks accountability and transparency and is a big risk for WTC

- D. WTC leases the Castle, take on the repair liability and leases the premises to a consortium of businesses and community groups which run the activities on a for profit basis on the provision that they pay rent to WTC and pay for the employment of a member of staff to manage the building:**

Whilst this represents probably the most risk adverse option for all parties it is far harder to set up and organise.

- E. **WTC takes over the freehold of the castle and the repair liability and tender for a community organisation to take over the management of the building, employment of staff, supervision of repair, fundraising and organisation of activities. If a profit was made WTC could have a share:**

As WTC are taking all the risk and would be expected to step in if the group failed there is no incentive for the group to do well. This represents too great a financial risk to WTC and CCC do not appear to want to give transfer the freehold at nil cost and so this option was discounted

It is best to go with Option B and we would be looking to have a separate committee of the Town Council whose sole job is to manage the Castle. This would be made up of Councillors as well as other interested parties.

# Section Six

## Potential Risks, Issues and back-up plan

---

### Issues/ Risks

**Disability Access** – The castle currently has no disability access. We would have to look at how we can address this and this is likely to incur a large cost

**Business rates** – If we become too commercial the business rates may change and a significant rise could prove problematic

### Back Up Plan

#### Short-term plan:

Do have some reserves to cushion us whilst setting up and can also precept to meet any unexpected costs. WTC also have the ability to put its precept up to meet costs if necessary as Parish/Town councils are currently uncapped

#### Long-term plan:

In long term if there was a break clause CCC could have asset back to sell if didn't work, however we hope that this won't happen and that the project will be a success.