



Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	19 th February 2025
Subject:	Update on Guildhall Action Plan
Purpose:	To provide Cabinet with an update on the work programme of activity designed to support service delivery at the Guildhall, Boston
Key Decision:	No
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Sarah Sharpe, Portfolio Holder for Culture
Report Of:	Phil Perry, Assistant Director Leisure & Culture
Report Author:	Luke Skerritt, Principal Museum, Arts & Heritage Officer
Ward(s) Affected:	All
Exempt Report:	No

Summary

The Guildhall is owned and maintained by Boston Borough Council. It has international, national and local significance. The building itself dates back to the 1390's and is a testament to the wealth and influence of the Guild of St Mary at a time when Boston's power as a centre of trade was second only to London.

The Leisure and Culture Division within the Communities Directorate is responsible for developing and delivering the museum service that is offered through the Guildhall.

Noting the importance of the building to the borough of Boston and the need to deliver an efficient service, an action plan was developed around four themes that was approved by Cabinet in February 2024:

- a) Sustainability and Improving Financial Resilience
- b) Historic Site and Collection
- c) Exhibition and Event Programming
- d) Promotion and Marketing

The thematic areas within the plan are supported by key strategic objectives which are linked to 21 actions.

Year one of the plan has been successful and has had many highlights. The exhibition and event programme has been reinvigorated with the support of the NPO which has led to increased engagement, participation and use of the Guildhall.

Of all 21 identified actions: 14 are on target, 2 have been completed or are no longer required, 5 require mitigations to stay on plan and 0 are off target.

Cabinet are asked to note the progress of the action plan to comment on work that has taken place to date to deliver the action plan.

Recommendations

1. To consider the report and its appendix and note the progress made in realising the ambitions of the approved Guildhall Action Plan
2. To confirm the continuation of the work of the Action Plan and confirm any new actions

Reasons for Recommendations

The Guildhall is an important Council asset which is managed within the Leisure and Culture Division of the Communities Directorate. The approved action plan for the Guildhall has been developed to support economic, efficient and effective service delivery, and this report outlines and updates the progress made in these areas.

Other Options Considered

To not review progress against the Guildhall Action Plan.

1. Background

- 1.1 Built in the 1390's The Guildhall is a testament to the wealth and influence of the Guild of St Mary at a time when Boston's power as a centre of trade was second only to London. This wonderfully preserved building, with a wealth of original features, has survived the centuries and is to be enjoyed as one of Boston's finest visitor attractions.
- 1.2 A wealth of stories, secrets and experiences are told and shared throughout the building including the history of the Guild of St Mary, international trade with the Hanseatic League, the foundation of the Corporation of Boston and the very famous trial and imprisonment of the Pilgrims.
- 1.3 Boston Guildhall Museum is free to visit and is open Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 10:30am to 3:30pm.
- 1.4 The Guildhall is owned and maintained by Boston Borough Council.

- 1.5 Noting the importance of the building to the borough of Boston and the need to deliver an efficient service an action plan was presented and agreed in 2024 and is presented in appendix 1 of this report and discussed in section 2.
- 1.6 The Action Plan Report was presented to Environment & Performance Committee on Tuesday 11th February 2025.

Report

2. Progress to date

- 2.1 The Ron Diggins exhibition 'Dance again to Diggins' has captured the imagination of local audiences and communities as well as visitors and online engagement and resulted in a 60% increase in visits to the site in comparison to the same period the previous year. This exhibition has also enabled us to develop touring opportunities for the exhibition and the potential to lever further external investment to support this ambition. The forward programme of planned exhibitions in 2025 further champions Boston's past and includes exhibitions on the 900th Anniversary of Boston Mayfair and an exhibition that focuses on Historic Imagery of the town with a special focus on Boston's great Herbert Ingram, MP and Founder of the London Illustrated News. The ability to exhibit material, build our programme, share our collections, and support programmes of engagement has been significantly enhanced by the support of the NPO in having a new suite of exhibition cases procured for the site. The Guildhall successfully levered circa £100,000 from the NPO, supported by Arts Council England, to secure this provision of cases.
- 2.2 Overall visitors to the site, which is open 20 hours per week, between April and December were up circa 10% overall with 6844 users in this period, up from 6238. With figures in April and July slightly down on the previous year the biggest impact of investment and implementation of the action plan can be seen in November, with the launch of our first major exhibition for a number of years, 'Dance again to Diggins' which saw a 61% increase in footfall in the same period growing from 382 to 616. This is the first of our planned NPO supported exhibitions and the forward programme will form a baseline on visitor and user numbers and the consequent impacts on income.
- 2.3 Proposals to the NPO programme also secured 2 days a week of full staffing costs to deliver the programme including 1 day a week directly employing a member of staff at the Guildhall.
- 2.4 Our social media channels have also been relaunched and are growing in traction and activity, which continues to build our audiences and reach, in addition to sharing hire and retail opportunities. Retail opportunities have been realigned with a focus on locally branded material and memorabilia alongside local heritage literature and our ability to engage with sales opportunities increased through the installation of a card payment machine.
- 2.5 The card machine was secured in July and our new branded promotional stock received during December. Our social media and our venue and wedding hire promotional strategy was initiated during November. It is too early to see the impacts of this implementation financially but with these and the evidence of significantly increased footfall related to the beginning of the NPO funded exhibition programme.
- 2.6 The service has also worked to explore further external investment to support the specialist repairs and maintenance programme of our 600 year old Grade 1 Listed

site and we are awaiting the outcome of a grant funding bid, constructed with the support of our assets team, that can fund these works. Approximately £170,000 has been applied for.

- 2.7** With the successful leveraging of external investment to support museum and engagement programmes, exhibitions and events and bespoke museum fixtures, and with the active work in investigating and applying for monies to support capital works our service strives to explore creative ways to sustainably expand our remit, influence and impact

3. Objectives

Appendix 1 of this report provides a monitoring report on each of the strategic objectives of the action plan which sit around four themes: -

3.1 Sustainability and Improving Financial Resilience

Strategic objectives within this theme:-

- Seek to improve resilience in the service
- Seek the most efficient service delivery model for the Guildhall
- Seek to maximize income.

Successful actions delivered within this include the successful recruitment of the Museum, Events & Venue Officer which has increased the capacity of the team, enabling the successful delivery of activities and exhibitions, such as the successful “Dance with Diggins” exhibition and events.

The installation of a card machine has improved the customer experience enabling more choice when making payments and donations. Alongside this the retail offer is being developed and improved.

3.2 Historic Site and Collection

Strategic objectives within this theme

- Retain museum accreditation
- Repair and maintain the Guildhall
- Curate and contribute to historical research

Activity delivered within this include an invitation to submit a full application to Arts Council MEND (Museum Estate funding programme) to enable essential repairs to the building, as well as ongoing care and curation of the Collections.

3.3 Exhibition and Event Programming

Strategic objectives within this theme:-

- Increase income and support for a wider cultural/tourism offer
- Seek external funding opportunities for events and exhibitions
- Maximise the opportunity of National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status
- Delivery of an annual exhibition programme
- Increase accessibility to collections through exhibitions
- Increase joint and partnership event and exhibition programming

Successful actions delivered within this include the procurement of new bespoke made exhibition cabinets which will arrive in April 2025, enabling more collections to be displayed as well as the potential for displaying loans from other museums in the future.

The Dance with Diggins exhibition featuring the display of the first mobile disco has been extremely popular, inspiring memories and reminiscences from residents resulting in coverage on the local news. It has also 61% more people in November 2024 compared to the same period in 2023.

3.4 Promotion and Marketing

Strategic objectives within this theme:-

- Maximise promotion of the Guildhall offer to a range of audiences
- Seek to increase reach through marketing
- Increase engagement with Schools

Activity delivered within this include the relaunch of social media pages on Facebook and Instagram. This has been enabled through working with an apprentice from the Communications team and has provided a new voice for the venue reaching a new generation of potential visitors.

4. Conclusion

The Guildhall Action Plan has been developed as a “live document” to be continually developed in order to support accountability within the service to strategically and operationally deliver what is required from this important borough asset.

This report and accompanying monitoring report demonstrate the progress has been made in the delivery of the Action Plan and that this is resulting in a revitalised programme of activity in the Guildhall that is resulting in a month on month increase in visitors.

Implications

South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership

No key implications to be reported within this report. There is the opportunity to enhance the synergy between the Guildhall and other heritage/cultural assets within the Partnership area which is to be further explored through the action plan.

Corporate Priorities

The Guildhall Action Plan aligns to the following Sub-Regional South and East Lincolnshire Council Partnership priorities:-

- Priority 1: Growth and Prosperity
- Priority 2: Healthy Lives
- Priority 3: Safe and Resilient Communities
- Priority 4: Environment
- Corporate Priority: Efficiency and Effectiveness

Staffing

The action plan includes an action to seek to improve resilience in the service through a remodelling of staffing arrangements, including the use of volunteers.

Workforce Capacity Implications

The remodelling of staffing arrangements referenced in point 6.1 includes consideration of the capacity for the workforce to deliver the required service.

Constitutional and Legal Implications

None

Data Protection

None

Financial

None

Risk Management

None

Stakeholder / Consultation / Timescales

The action plan was developed following engagement work with the Portfolio Holder, Lead Officers and Partners. Progress on the action plan has been regularly reported in Portfolio Holder updates throughout 2024.

Reputation

Progress of the action plan supports work to uphold the reputation of the Council by promoting an efficient and effective service that safeguards the appropriate use of the Guildhall for present and future generations

Contracts

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Equality and Diversity / Human Rights / Safeguarding

None

Health and Wellbeing

The positive use of the Guildhall by the public helps support matters relating to community cohesion and healthy activity.

Climate Change and Environmental Implications

None

Acronyms

BBC – Boston Borough Council

ICT – Information and Communications Technology

NPO – National Portfolio Organisation

SMG&BM – St Mary's Guildhall & Boston Museum

MEND – Museum Estate and Development Fund

Appendices

Appendices are listed below and attached to the back of the report:

Appendix 1	St Mary's Guildhall & Boston Museum Action Plan Monitoring Report / Annual Review
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Background Papers

No background papers as defined in Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the production of this report.

Chronological History of this Report

This is the first publication of this report as an annual review document since the St Mary's Guildhall & Boston Museum Action Plan was agreed on 21st February 2024

Report Approval

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Signed off by:	Phil Perry, Assistant Director Leisure & Culture Phil.perry@boston.gov.uk
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Approved for publication:	Cllr Sarah Sharpe, Portfolio Holder for Culture
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