

For general release

REPORT TO:	SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE 1 November 2016
AGENDA ITEM:	7
SUBJECT:	Fairfield Halls Update
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CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Alison Butler, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Homes, Regeneration and Planning Councillor Timothy Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport
PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:	Cllr Timothy Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport

ORIGIN OF ITEM:	A request for an update from the Chair of Scrutiny
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	This report updates Scrutiny on progress with the refurbishment of Fairfield Halls and the procurement of a new operator for the building. This includes updated information with reference to particular issues relating to the closure and future operating model raised at the Scrutiny meeting in November 2015.

1.EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Fairfield Halls closed in July 2015 for works to begin on the £30m major refurbishment scheme as part of the wider College Green Development. The design of the building will transform the building in both functionality and customer experience, it is both practical and heritage led and integrates with the surrounding new public realm.

The work to Fairfield Halls is part of phase 1 and taking place under the structure of Brick by Brick. The hoardings are up and initial scoping works underway, to be followed by soft and hard strip out and full refurbishment.

The formal procurement process to secure an operator for Fairfield Halls has been started and will conclude in May of 2017. A website has been established to provide information on the refurbishment as it progresses and there will be further local and public engagement following the appointment of an operator.

2 Fairfield Halls Update

2.1 Introduction

The Fairfield Halls refurbishment is part of the wider College Green development. This comprises a £30m investment into Fairfield Halls, a circa 200,000 sqft new college/university building and approximately 2,000 new residential units alongside new public realm, retail and leisure space.

2.2 Initial stages

Fairfield Halls closed in July 2016, following the decision by Cabinet in October 2015 to close the building for the duration of the development. The building was handed back to the Council by Fairfield (Croydon) Limited.

As part of the arrangements around the closure, the Council allocated £750,000 to the Trust; £300,000 towards the cultural programme from April to July 2016 and £450,000 towards the costs of closure. Both parties signed an agreement to this plan which included an agreement to an asset sale undertaken by the Trust.

Croydon council officers liaised with the lead for Human Resources at Fairfield Croydon Ltd to offer access to the Croydon Works jobs brokerage scheme and vacancies in the council. An offer of a support package was also made from the Job Centre Plus locally. Croydon Council also took back the pensions liability relating to staff from the Trust who had previously been council employees.

The council formally took back possession of the building on July 15th with a handover of keys and briefings for security staff employed to be on site prior to the site being handed to General Demolition for the works to begin. The technical team on the project, Mott MacDonalds, retained the General Manager of Fairfield Halls, as someone with a current working knowledge of the building, in a technical capacity to oversee aspects of managing the building during the period of refurbishment.

Immediately following the closure, a project led by the National Trust called Edge City was run in Croydon; a programme of tours including iconic 1960s buildings in Croydon and culminating in a tour of Fairfield Halls whilst it was empty. This was particularly successful with tours latterly selling out and the Fairfield Halls part of the tour attracting especially positive customer feedback.

Earlier this year before the closure, Croydon council invited the Theatres' Trust, which is a national statutory body charged with the protection of theatre buildings, to

undertake a peer review on the refurbishment scheme for Fairfield Halls. This was an extremely useful and timely exercise, the results of which have already been fed into the design work and effected a number of changes. The panel was made up of experts in their field who were pleased to come and give freely of their time.

2.3 The design of the scheme

In terms of the designs for Fairfield Halls: The building will be fully integrated with the surrounding area (above and below ground), and feature a new outward facing offer to the north (i.e. onto College Green from the Ashcroft Theatre façade) which will encourage additional visitors and customers. A new gallery space will be created in the basement car park to complement and enhance the cultural offer.

The design approach for the Fairfield Halls is practical and heritage led. It proposes improving the appearance of the building by:

- Restoring facades
- Replacing windows
- Rationalising and improving the soft landscaping outside the building
- New pavilion structure and lighting at the side of the Ashcroft Theatre to improve the relationship with College Green.
- Extending the forecourt and refurbishing and refining the canopies
- Creating a transparent and uncluttered façade at the front of the building

The design also focuses on improving the way the building functions, and internal improvements will include:

- Architectural lighting and signage, enhancing the quality heritage architecture
- New box office and “welcome” experience to improve the entrance and open up the foyer
- Improving the circulation of the building
- Improved disability access
- Creating more flexible spaces which can be used more intensively throughout the day and evening
- Replacing the seats in the concert hall and theatre
- Increased the stage size in the Concert Hall
- Improving the mechanical and electrical make-up of the building, creating the ability for different parts of the building to operate independently
- Improving the food and beverage, conferencing and theatre facilities

There were several key changes made to the scope of the £30m scheme as a result specifically of the participation in the Theatres’ Trust Peer Review referred to above, and the soft market testing period which is referred to below. The importance of the front of house aspects of the scheme were emphasized in the review and the elements that would have a real impact on the customer experience such as the air cooling systems and the catering changes were also highlighted. More specifically, the changes to the Ashcroft Theatre will now include new seating and a new layout that will enable an increase in capacity to over 800 from its current 750. The original plans for a radical alteration to the get in at the back of the venue by knocking through a large entrance and installing two lorry lifts has now been taken out of the £30m

scope. Instead the team have a simpler solution whilst retaining enough space at the rear of the building to ensure any future changes can be accommodated.

To complement the new Fairfield Halls and enhance the area as a cultural destination, a new high quality public square is proposed in College Green and in the forecourt of the Halls. This will include new trees and green spaces as well new seating, areas of informal play, and a new outdoor performance space to complement the activity in Fairfield Halls.

New active frontages are proposed around the square with a range of uses including the new interface to the side of the Ashcroft Theatre to integrate the Fairfield Halls and College Green area. Improved lighting and public realm will have a positive impact in terms of people feeling safer in the area.

The scheme has been positively received and the design team, Rick Mather Architects won New London Architecture (NLA) award for Fairfield Halls design in the Conservation and Retrofit category in September of this year.

2.4 Capital works

It was agreed at Cabinet in June 2016 to use the Brick by Brick structure to bring forward those elements of the College Green scheme where the council holds land interests and/or options. This will at least include Phase 1 (the refurbishment of Fairfield Halls, the initial residential development, the enabling works for the college facility and some public realm works) and Phase 2 (the delivery of the new college building, the redevelopment of the existing college land and the remainder of the public realm works).

The process involves the transfer of land interests of the relevant parts of the site to Brick by Brick under terms as set out in Part B of the June 2016 report. Brick by Brick will complete the £30m package of improvement works to Fairfield Halls under licence.

Fairfield Halls closed in July 2016 in order to allow the commencement of essential first phase enabling works in the vacated building. This package of works includes:

- Securing site, hoardings and signage – completed August 2016
- Detailed asbestos R&D survey – completed September 2016
- Dimensional surveys – completed October 2016
- Structural, M&E and condition surveys and investigations – September 2016 to February 2017
- Soft strip out and removal of loose fittings – October 2016
- Phased asbestos Strip out – November 2016 to March 2017
- Strip out of engineering systems – December to March 2017

An asset management plan has been developed to ensure that key assets within the building are protected through the refurbishment scheme. This includes a package of works to protect and maintain the organ in the Concert Hall by Harrison & Harrison, a specialist organ firm, for the duration of the scheme.

Procurement of the refurbishment contractor for the next phase of works is running in parallel to the enabling works packages and will commence in January through to April 2017 for immediate implementation.

2.5 Operator Procurement

Following a period of soft market testing which involved a number of potential operators visiting the venue formal procurement for an operator for Fairfield Halls commenced in October. The process is one of competitive dialogue and will be concluded by May 2017, giving an appointed operator over a year for the mobilisation in the lead up to the venue re-opening.

The service specification for Fairfield Halls is looking for a suitably qualified operator for the venue. There is a requirement in the tender for the provision of a balanced programme that includes high quality product across art forms and space for community and locally driven events. In addition to all the necessary technical and legal requirements, the specification also describes the need for the venue to provide a welcoming environment with excellent customer service.

There are also requirements around audience development and public engagement both to take place in the period of mobilization prior to the opening and on an ongoing basis. These would be for the operator and the council to work jointly on. There is also a specific objective for the council to host at least one session for the operator to bring them together with local promoters and users for dialogue on what their future needs would be.

2.6 Further communications and engagement

Croydon Museum is working with the Fairfield Arts Board to conserve and consolidate the archive material from Fairfield Halls. The project is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and has a significant oral history element, gathering, preserving and presenting the histories of Fairfield Halls as it looks towards the next stage of its future.

A dedicated website has been developed to offer continual updated information on the progress of the refurbishment programme. This can be found at:
<https://fairfieldcroydon.wordpress.com/>

Following the example of the success of the mid-refurbishment tours at the South Bank, there will also be a programme of tours for key individuals, including Members, at a safe point in the capital refurbishment programme next year when the asbestos work is completed.

Appendices
None included

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None referred