



DORSET

Local Enterprise Partnership

Shire Hall

End of Project Report

October 2018

Project Summary

Shire Hall is a Grade I listed Georgian Assize court and cells in the heart of Dorchester, Dorset. It is one of the best-preserved buildings of its kind, and remains almost unchanged since it first opened in 1796–7. The surviving records relating to the building and its use are also of unusual and extremely high quality.

It was formerly part of West Dorset District Council's office complex. When WDDC moved offices in 2013 there was an opportunity to transform the building into a visitor attraction. Shire hall has been the centre of administration and justice since it was built in 1797 and was the location of the trial of the Tolpuddle Martyrs in 1834; a significant moment in the history of the trade union movement. The trial, and subsequent events, changed the course of history and helped to shape the society in which we live today. In the early 20th century the writer Thomas Hardy served as a magistrate at this court, an experience that inspired some of his writing. Hardy's close association with Shire Hall makes it of interest to readers of his work across the globe.

The prime purpose of the project was to bring a disused listed building back into sustainable and productive economic use. For Shire Hall to be the centrepiece of a new "Cultural Quarter" for Dorchester incorporating visitor attraction, education, lifelong learning and training. The Shire Hall project improves the accessibility to all of the whole building through physical changes, interpretation, education and training facilities, and it will also provide the resources for a wide range of new activities to take place.

The capital works include internal building remodelling to create:

- A visitor attraction which takes visitors on an immersive and engaging journey that ensures they are aware of the context of life and circumstance in 19th century Dorchester. This will be done through introductory exhibitions based on real stories before arriving in the cells. The route will then lead the visitor to their first view and experience of the court room. From our research of other similar buildings, this will be the first court and cells where context is set through knowledge and personal experience before visitors enter the courtroom.
- A Grand Jury room which visitors can go to after the cells and court experience which will provide the space for finding out what happened next in the particular cases they have found out about during the experience.
- Access to the ex-WDDC Council Chamber to provide a learning and training venue.
- A café / gallery space adapted to provide for temporary exhibitions and enabling it to be joined with the Learning space to make a larger room. This exhibition area will be used for a programme of temporary exhibitions related to Shire Hall and its themes and the development of contemporary justice issues.
- On the top floor of the western end of the building two, two bedroom apartments will be created for letting. These will have a separate access from the Shire Hall attraction and provide important income for the Shire Hall operation.
- Other spaces are allocated for toilets, storerooms, volunteer space, supporting office space. Through a combination of main lift and other access improvements it is intended to provide wheelchair access to all floors of Shire Hall.

The project also includes an extensive and varied programme of activities for formal learners and new target audiences. The works proposed will create a year round visitor attraction, community venue and centre for learning, engagement and training.

Project start date	January 2017
Project construction start date	May 2018
Growth Deal Funding awarded	February 2017
Project completion date	March 2018

Review of Business Case

An outline business case was submitted in the call for projects for Growth Deal 3. As part of the due diligence assessment before projects were put forward to Government the project was assessed and received a BCR of 26. This project was included in a collection of four projects made to Government for Productivity in Tourism and Government agreed to fund each of the four projects, who each received £56,250 gap funding.

This contribution from Dorset LEP gave the final funding towards a £3.1m scheme. West Dorset District Council put in £1.2m and WDDC along with Shire Hall Trust submitted a bid to Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and were successful in gaining £1.5m funds. Due to the rigorous HLF procedures, Growth Deal 3 initial process and the amount of funding awarded from Dorset LEP this was exempt from an independent business case review.

Governance

This project reported straight to Dorset LEP Board through the programme management team.

Change Request

There were no change requests for this projects.

Planned Outputs and Outcomes

It is set out in the business case the outputs of the whole project would be:

- New high profile heritage & cultural tourism attraction
- 2 town centre apartments
- Franchised Café operation

As a result of this work it will provide the following outcomes:

- £2M added spend in the local construction supply chain
- 5 FTE new jobs at admin, customer service, managerial, and expert levels, as well as a variable number of assistants and tour guides on a casual basis.
- 50 volunteers
- 1 trained and skilled apprentice per year.
- 32,000 p.a. visitors to Dorset

Additional benefits:

- 1 disused building brought back into productive use
- Increased visitor spend in Dorset especially important in shoulder season
- Enhanced economic attractor to Dorchester
- Improved public realm space

Achievement of Outputs

Construction completed in May 2018, a couple of months behind schedule and therefore an informal opening took place in May 2018, which meant that some facilities were open to the public. A formal opening of Shire Hall took place in October 2018 which was attended by the funding partners, including Dorset LEP Board members.

The two flats were completed ahead of the wider tourist attraction and were rented out ahead of the May 2018 opening.

The Café was opened at the same time as the tourist attraction is being run by Kingston Maurward College, with their catering students and apprentices.

Outcomes

Outcomes that have been achieved to date:

- 5 FTE are currently in place
- 100+ volunteers were trained

Outcomes continued to be monitored on a quarterly basis.

Benefits Realised to date

Shire Hall Trust has written a corporate plan for the next 5 years to outline the Trust's priorities and activities for 2012–22 and covers the ways in which Shire Hall will be launched as a new historic courthouse museum in Dorchester. Their 5-year strategic aims are to:

- Engage a wide range of audiences, from children to specialists, with the stories of the Tolpuddle Martyrs and three centuries of justice and injustice. Show people they can make a difference to society, politics, and justice for all people. This is our core aim.
- Create a strong community spirit so that Shire Hall becomes a place where local people come together for enjoyment and to meet together.
- Build a local, national and international reputation for lively public debate and academic excellence in the field of judicial and human rights past and present.
- Foster a positive, respectful, safe and secure working environment that promotes professional development for both staff and volunteers.
- Stimulate pride in Dorchester and conserve the fabric of the Shire Hall building so that it continues to enhance local history and heritage.
- Be welcoming and convivial with a strong visitor focus. Combined with creating a sound business culture this will help us be a resilient and sustainable heritage organisation.

Review of Project Objectives

RAG Review of Objectives	Status	Comments
Time		The project started on time but completed 2 months late due to additional works that had to be carried out to remove asbestos, this was not picked up within initial surveys that were completed.
Cost		The project came in on budget.
Quality		Shire Hall was completed to a high specification which was sympathetic to its routes, including paint colours in the courts which were used previously.
Scope		The scope of the project did not change.
Benefits		
Risk		Additional asbestos that was found in the building created a delay, all other risks were mitigated through the life of the project.

Dorset LEP

Katherine May

kmay@bournemouth.ac.uk

01202 962720

<http://dorsetlep.co.uk/delivery/local-delivery-the-growth-deal/shire-hall,-dorchester/>

Shire Hall Trust

Anna Bright