

# EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE – 25<sup>th</sup> MAY 2005

## ARTS AND MUSEUMS SECTION CAPITAL DEVELOPMENTS

### Report by Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform and update Committee of the recent capital developments in arts and museum buildings and highlight some of the developments planned for the coming months.

#### 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As part of the modernisation of the Arts and Museums Section it was identified that investment needed to be made in the buildings if a higher quality service was to be provided to the residents of East Ayrshire and visitors to the area.
- 2.2 The Arts and Museums Section operates six buildings: The Palace and Grand Hall Complex; The Dick Institute; The Baird Institute; Doon Valley Museum; Dean Castle; and Burns House Museum.
- 2.3 In early 2003 an internal capital development plan was introduced that scheduled the proposed developments at each of these buildings and charted a way forward to enable increased access through a mix of external and internal funding. This was supported by a range of consultation strategies that highlighted the need to change how facilities operated if increase of visitor numbers and participation levels were to be achieved.

#### 3. PROJECT PROGRESS

##### 3.1 Burns House Museum

Burns House was purchased in 2003 by East Ayrshire Council with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It was identified that the museum needed to be modernised in order to better engage audiences. During 2003/4 a development plan was designed to raise funds to support the redesign/display of its interior. The redesign was supported by the following partners: Social Inclusion Partnership, Enterprise Ayrshire, Scottish Arts Council and Heritage Lottery Fund. The project budget was £120,000, which was met through external funding. The redesign has met with universal approval and the museum has recently been awarded a four star visitor attraction status. The museum has also seen attendances rise by 48% from last year.

### 3.2 Doon Valley Museum

Doon Valley Museum was formerly called Cathcartston Visitor Centre and was in need of a redesign as the display had remained static for many years and only 900 people visited the facility in 2003/4. A proposal was submitted to Heritage Lottery Fund in 2003/4 and the Council was awarded a grant that helped us meet the project cost of £60,000. The redesign helped create a more contemporary museum space that encourages the local community to see changing arts and museums exhibitions alongside the Doon Valley story exhibition. It is also supported by a community resource (Research Lab), which is designed to let local people/groups design new exhibitions. Since relaunching in 2004 visitor numbers have increased by 93% and achieved a three star visitor attraction rating.

### 3.3 The Dick Institute

3.3.1 The Dick Institute is one of the most significant cultural venues in the west of Scotland and houses a fine museum, a leading contemporary art gallery and the central lending library. A phased approach to redesigning the interior and carrying out external improvement works was taken reflecting the needs of the different funders involved and the type of work to be undertaken. During 2003/4 an application was made to the Scottish Arts Council to redesign the gallery. The gallery is one of the major visual arts venues in Scotland and has a high profile. A project was developed that would improve disabled access and create a new young people's gallery, whilst upgrading the main gallery. The total project cost was £140,000 and was completed in May 2004. The gallery programme is now able to develop a wide range of exhibitions and has seen major new shows during the last year, which has helped to increase visitors by 17% since the May relaunch.

3.3.2 Phase 2 of the development is now underway and will see the upper (North) museum redesigned to be able to show the important fine art collection in rotation. This will complement the work completed in 2003 to redisplay collections in the South Museum. Natural science collections are also being redisplayed creating a dynamic new exhibition space. As part of this development we are also upgrading the toilets and redesigning the foyer entrance. The cost of the project is £120,000. The museum will be relaunched in June with a major exhibition from the fine art collection.

3.3.3 Phase 3 of the development concerns the exterior of the building. This development will cost £450,000 and will be supported by Historic Scotland and is subject to a bid to HLF. If successful, work will start during January 2006. The work will help secure the building and gardens and will result in an enhanced visitor experience, which will place The Dick Institute as a premier Scottish cultural attraction.

### 3.4 The Palace and Grand Hall Complex

- 3.4.1 The Palace and Grand Hall is East Ayrshire's busiest entertainment facility. It was however in need of modernisation in 2003. During 2003/4 a successful bid was made to the Scottish Arts Council to support the redesign of the front-of-house areas as part of a three phase development. The first phase, which cost £400,000, enabled the creation of a new bar facility and more accessible venue that supports the broader aims of developing new audiences through the programme. The Palace relaunched in September and has seen a steady increase in audience through a more diverse programme. Since relaunch we have seen an 8% increase in audience/footfall through the venue.
- 3.4.2 Phase 2 will result in the refurbishment of the Grand Hall and we are currently involved in developing proposals, which will be submitted for European and Scottish Arts Council funding for October. If successful work will start during 2006/7
- 3.4.3 Phase 3 will result in external works to the building. The Palace is a Grade A listed building and proposals will be developed alongside Historic Scotland in 2006/7 with a bid to Heritage Lottery Fund in due course.

### 3.5 Dean Castle

The Dean Castle is a major tourist attraction but has witnessed a decline in visitors over the years. During 2004 proposals to upgrade the castle infrastructure for insurance purposes was seen as providing an important catalyst to develop plans for a redesign of the castle and the visitor experience on offer. The project developed has a cost of between £150,000-170,000. Most of this has been met through East Ayrshire Council with the remainder (£50,000) subject to Heritage Lottery Fund support. The interior will also be redesigned to create a more dynamic visitor experience. Importantly this will also allow free access without a guide to aspects of the castle and increased interpretation. The castle will relaunch in June.

### 3.6 The Baird Institute

The Baird Institute was identified as needing a radical realignment if it was to engage new audiences/visitors. It is an important facility that has the capacity to play a more central role in the local community than it presently does. Plans are currently being developed for the building, this includes opening up the basement to become a performing arts venue. The plans for the Baird will be to create an important cultural facility for the area, which mixes the arts with historical collections. The budget for the project is likely to be £400,000 and bids will be made to European funding sources in October to support the development. A full consultation process will be undertaken prior to any bids being submitted.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no financial implications to this report.

#### **5. LEGAL AUTHORITY/IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 As a result of the recent and ongoing developments, the Arts and Museum buildings meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and the value of the buildings will be protected and enhanced.

#### **6. POLICY/COMMUNITY PLAN IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 The developments have been planned as part of a strategic overview aimed at delivering the very best service to the people of East Ayrshire in line with the Community Plan.

#### **7. CONCLUSIONS**

7.1 The developments highlighted above emphasise East Ayrshire's growing reputation as a cultural provider. The Council now provides an efficient and respected Arts and Museums Service. All of the developments have helped to strengthen services and this success is shown by increased audience figures.

#### **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the progress made in upgrading Museum and Arts facilities across East Ayrshire

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WS/JAG/KH  
3<sup>RD</sup> May 2005

#### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Nil

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