



Ward: Not applicable

Ropetackle Trust

Report by the Chief Executive

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 At its meeting on 23 September 2008 the Cabinet decided to underwrite some of the immediate and forthcoming costs of the Ropetackle Centre for a limited period, to provide the Ropetackle Trust with the opportunity to re-evaluate its position whilst it sought a business partner.
- 1.2 This report outlines the latest position following initial work between the Trust and its business partner and in the light of the emerging financial situation following part of the Trust's autumn programme.

2.0 The Ropetackle Trust (RT)

- 2.1 Cabinet will recall that the Trust took on the arrangement of running the Ropetackle Centre (RTC) in early 2007. The Trust had been working closely with Officers from Adur District Council in their development prior to taking over a lease for the Centre at a peppercorn rent.
- 2.2 Since February 2007, the Trust have been operating the Centre independently as a separate charitable organisation. However, as explained previously the income and grants did come up to the expectations of the original business plan.
- 2.3 In anticipation of these issues the Trust have been working with the support of the Council and advertised nationally for a partner to work with them in securing the running and viability of the Centre, through the programming of events and in generating a sustainable stream of income to keep the centre profit making and active.
- 2.4 Following the successful artistic programme held in the RTC over the summer, particularly during the Adur Festival, the Trust organised an autumn programme. This has been set up on a non-risk basis with the underwriting provided by the Council of certain costs of the Centre, which would fall to the Council in any event. It has proved a successful venture which demonstrates that with the right operating formula the Ropetackle Centre can be a success.

2.5 It must also be acknowledged that together with the Ropetackle development as a whole, the provision of the Centre has proved to be a contributor to the regeneration of Shoreham town centre. Through the busy festival period and during the autumn programme local restaurants and pubs experienced a boost in their trade and in the evening economy of the town. Therefore, keeping the Ropetackle Centre active is an important factor in ensuring that Shoreham retains its attractiveness as a place to be both now and in the future.

3.0 Progress Report

3.1 The Trust has been working with their appointed partner, Serendipity Enterprising Solutions, over recent months. They have prepared a short report of findings, proposals and progress. This is attached as Appendix 1.

3.2 The report outlines an encouraging picture with a particular strength identified in the number of “friends” and volunteer effort available to the work of the Trust. It also identifies potential areas of new funding.

3.3 Appendix 2 is a report from the Ropetackle Trust which summarises the overall financial position following some of the Autumn programme and the work and the suggestions of their business partner, referred to in Appendix 1. For the purposes of holding this discussion in the public part of the agenda, a few financial details have been excluded. However, a copy of the report, including these figures, is available as part of the confidential section of the agenda.

3.4 Members will see that the progress made by the Trust since the Cabinet meeting in September just two months ago, is substantial. It vindicates support given by the Council to help the Trust to redefine its way of working. The signs that it can find a sustainable working arrangement are good.

3.5 On the income side the hirings income, event income (via the in-house bar operation) and support from ‘friends’ is an improving picture as the venue becomes known and established. Serendipity also seem to have opened up new opportunity for grants etc. in a highly professional and experienced manner.

3.6 The events and programming matters covered in the reports demonstrate that their variety and context is shaping up to make the Ropetackle Centre a venue where exciting and innovative events run alongside more conventional programming and hire arrangements/community events. Members will recall that this mix was at the heart of the Council’s original objectives in negotiating for this venue to be part of the Ropetackle development.

3.7 This highly positive picture is marred by continuing issues concerning the floor, doors and mechanical and electrical equipment. In any event, the majority of these issues fall to Adur District Council as owner (head lessee) of the building. Members are asked to note and endorse the need for Adur District Council offers to work with the Trust, to resolve them with SEEDA, and the developer, and relevant contractors as appropriate.

4.0 The Way Forward?

- 4.1 In the light of these encouraging reports the Cabinet can be positive about its underwriting of the Trust for this short period. However, the report from the Trust does not say that it is fully solvent yet though it is not requesting further support at present beyond that already committed.
- 4.2 The underwriting promised by the Council in September expires early in the New Year. In view of the more positive financial position and prospect that has resulted from the Council's short-term support the Trust can proceed to devise programmes for the spring and the Adur Festival.
- 4.3 It is important to recognise the substantial mobilisation of local voluntary effort and the fact that the Ropetackle Centre is becoming a place for people to be out and about within the District, engaging in the local economy and enjoying their "sense of place". The forthcoming programmes also represent a positive contribution to the cultural offer within the district – a fact that may well assist the success of Ropetackle at a time when people might be more reluctant to travel further afield where costs and inconvenience may be more of a deterrent?
- 4.4 In terms of the future, the risk of failure has diminished very significantly. On an event by event basis there is clear evidence that the combination of its programming, the nature of how the Trust is sharing risk with performers, income from hiring, and use of local voluntary effort, that the Centre can cover its costs. Nevertheless, some of the remaining building issues and their maintenance charges could distort this position and will require further consideration in due course.

5.0 Recommendations

- 5.1 The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED:-
- (i) to welcome the progress made by the Ropetackle Trust following the short term support from the Council.
 - (ii) To request a more detailed financial update at the conclusion of the period.
 - (iii) To endorse and welcome the progressing of the spring and Adur Festival programmes on a minimum risk basis.
 - (iv) To ask council officers to work in partnership with the Trust to help resolve outstanding building issues.

**Local Government Act 1972
Background Papers:**

None

Contact Officer:

Ian Lowrie
Chief Executive
01903 221001,
ian.lowrie@worthing.gov.uk

IL WBC 151

Schedule of Other Matters

1.0 Council Priority

1.1 Protecting financial interests and delivery of objectives for Ropetackle.

2.0 Specific Action Plans

2.1 (A) None.

(B) None.

3.0 Sustainability Issues

3.1 Report focuses on financial and operational sustainability of Ropetackle Trust.

4.0 Equality Issues

4.1 None.

5.0 Community Safety issues (Section 17)

5.1 None.

6.0 Human Rights Issues

6.1 None.

7.0 Reputation

7.1 Finding a viable and sustainable solution for use of the Ropetackle Centre is highly relevant to the reputation of the Council.

8.0 Consultations

8.1 (A) Internal – relevant officers and leading members, Ropetackle Trust.

8.2 (B) As basis for report.

9.0 Risk assessment

9.1 No statutory risks. Financial and reputation risks in failing to find sustainable future for Ropetackle Centre.

10.0 Health & Safety Issues

10.1 None.

11.0 Procurement Strategy

11.1 Not applicable.

12.0 Partnership working

12.1 Aims to maintain partnership with Ropetackle Trust.

Serendipity Enterprising Solutions – Ropetackle Update

This is a brief summary of the work carried out to-date which started on the 1st of October. In our original proposal we summarised our input into the partnership as providing a professional support to the Ropetackle Trust to manage, develop, and sustain its vision of a community arts venue for Shoreham. Having identified the six primary areas of activity of the Ropetackle Centre as Performance, Workshops, Bar/Foyer, Education/Outreach, and Friends of Ropetackle we identified the priorities for our input.

- For the Performance space the proposed SES input was the Identification of funding/support and investigation into greater use of available space.
- For Workshops the proposed SES input was assisting with the advertising and interviewing of individuals/organisations wishing to stage weekend and school holiday activities for children with a view to producing a regular programme for the New Year
- For the Bar/Foyer the proposed SES input was to be a short/medium and long term plan for the area, this would lead to a fully operating Café that would have the potential to open 7 days a week and generate a healthy turnover. The time line for this would depend on funding.
- For Educational/Outreach work the SES proposed input was consideration of a strategy for promoting greater activity in educational activities, both Centre based and outreach.
- For the Friends of Ropetackle the SES proposed input was revising, reviewing, and implementing a system for running, increasing and servicing this group.
- In relation to fundraising the proposed SES input was the researching and completing of at least two major funding applications in addition to the submission of an Awards for All application. The identification of a number of Charitable Trusts for future applications. The production of a medium term funding strategy covering all forms of potential funding.

For the first three months of our proposal SES is providing its services free of charge, in the second three months SES would be looking to recover 50% of the costs of its input subject to funding being available. After six months a detailed discussion would take place as to the second half of this initially twelve month arrangement.

Below is a summary of the input and achievements of our involvement¹ in the first month and a half:

Bar/Foyer area: We have arranged for a catering equipment supplier to visit to give recommendations as to the equipment that will be necessary to operate a catering service. He has been asked to make recommendations as to the relevant priority of equipment purchases to enable the facility to be developed incrementally as funding is secured. To this end two funding applications have been prepared for a total of £15,000 for capital equipment. One of these has been submitted the other is awaiting supporting documents from the Trust (Bank Statements etc) both have short turn-around times. The concept is to re-arrange the area to maximise ease of service this will include moving the beer cooling equipment and positioning a coffee machine at the front counter. Maxine (who is a qualified licensee) is meeting with the voluntary staff to look at current profit margins etc, and is investigating the issue with current equipment.

There is the potential for a major income generating activity based around these facilities especially when linked to other events in the Centre. This will include the ability to cater in-house for conferences and meetings, the provision of refreshments for people attending the

¹ Supported as always by the ongoing input of the Trustees of Ropetackle and a small band of volunteers

Serendipity Enterprising Solutions – Ropetackle Update

Centre outside of performance times – for example parents accompanying children to activities (see further in the report) or those attending exhibitions of art or photography. In addition there is no café facility at this end of the High Street by offering a generalist service will allow more people to enter the building and potentially become customers for other activities.

Friends Group: A newsletter has been produced and mailed to the 240+ on the current address list, a PDF copy is now on the Website. The newsletter gave details of the changes being made, the involvement of SES in the work, and had on its reverse a membership form, an authorisation for Gift Aid claims, and a Bank Mandate to encourage ongoing income. A reply paid envelope (Freepost) over 10% have responded from this number. Of these twenty seven replies ten contained cheques for rejoining and eleven provided bank mandates for introducing a standing order payment system. Only two or three responses have not agreed to their fees being registered for Gift Aid.

A bank mandate form is now downloadable from the website and is available at the Box Office. Membership can be paid for online via PayPal. We are now in receipt of the previous records of the Friends and will be working through these to ensure contact with all those listed, this will include a specialist stand at the forthcoming AGM. At this event we will also be promoting volunteering opportunities and launching our small scale sponsorship scheme where individual chairs in the building can be sponsored for £25. Chairs funded in this way will carry a small plaque with their benefactor's details engraved on it.

Both the sponsored chairs and the Friends membership will be available as gifts to be purchased for others, and a range of Gift Vouchers will soon be available to purchase (at the box office or on line).

Workshops: We are in the process of completing an Education and Community Engagement Policy for agreement with the Trustees at their next meeting. This will form the basis of our activities for children and outreach work and will link to our proposed Arts Council bid. In addition the policy and its implementation will allow greater partnership work with schools to access further funding through education budgets.

In the short-term we are arranging for interviews for Artists to run a series of pilot children's' (under 12's) workshops for the weekends and school holidays to test audience numbers and preferred activities in advance of introducing this policy. This work will be carried out while contact is made with schools and other education providers to link further aspects of the proposed outreach work.

In order to promote the children's activities we have linked to the Town's Christmas extravaganza (see item below) and are running a "Letter to Santa" competition, with a prize of free admittance to the children's activity programme, that will produce a database of local families for future promotional work. Through a stand at the last Farmers Market over 100 entries were distributed despite the inclement weather.

Major Funding Bids: Currently we are looking at Local Food to support the development of the catering provision (and through that the co-ordination of all voluntary input) and the Arts Council for the Education/Outreach work. In addition we will be producing an application "format" for applying to smaller trusts which are currently being identified through research of our on-line database.

Christmas Extravaganza

Late night shopping in Shoreham, arranged by the Shoreham Town Association Tuesday 9th December. Ropetackle is the venue for Father Christmas and his grotto. We have assisted in the organising of this event and ensuring the evening will be not only successful but will generate additional revenue for Ropetackle. To see Father Christmas is free of charge,

Serendipity Enterprising Solutions – Ropetackle Update

however we will be serving a range of hot beverages and cakes. Kings Manor School have taken on the challenge to run the evening with their older children, along with the choir from Swiss Cottage School. We will be promoting the Children's programme for the New Year and making parents more aware of the facilities Ropetackle offers the community.

Local Business Forum

We have been attending the local Shoreham Town Association, not only to plan the Christmas Extravaganza but also to build a relationship with the other businesses in the area to help promote Ropetackle and its facilities.

Adur Festival

Being part of the planning committee for Ropetackles part in the Adur Festival, to help where possible, currently looking at a Schools/community project to run along side the festival and looking at potential funding for this piece of work.

Serendipity Input to Date:

Consultancy Days;

Andy Silsby 8 days

Maxine Silsby 10 days

Additional Resources - £210.00 (Business Review For EDEAL) to fund Printing and Postage of Friends Newsletter etc

Andy and Maxine Silsby
Serendipity Enterprising Solutions CIC

APPENDIX 2

ROPETACKLE CENTRE TRUST

Financial Situation

Since the September meeting of the ADC Cabinet, there has been a significant improvement in the financial situation of the Trust and all of the old debts have been paid, (with the exception of the amounts due to SALE that we do not expect to pay). This improvement is due to a number of factors:

- the grant of £11K received from ADC
- an autumn programme that has covered its direct costs.
- no expenditure on staff apart from £ a month to the technician though as from November a similar amount will be paid to a part time worker
- a successful bar operation, run wholly by volunteers, which has produced a profit of over £ in the last 6 weeks
- an increase in the 'hire' income
- the 'Tom Crean' performance which raised over £ for us

We had hoped to provide a comprehensive financial report including the draft accounts for the 13 months to 30 June 2008 and management accounts since then. But there have been both some unavoidable delays with the accounts and continuing uncertainties about some of our liabilities – mainly with the M and E system, service charges and water rates and we are reluctant to issue a financial report that is not absolutely accurate. By the end of January we will provide draft statutory accounts and management accounts for the 6 months to 31 December 2008 and the basis for a longer term business plan. We expect these to show that the Trust is solvent – but subject to clarification of whether we are liable for the costs of the M and E system.

Progress made by 'Serendipity'

We are pleased and heartened by the progress that 'Serendipity' have made in the first few weeks of the initial consultancy period. The report on the activities to date is attached.

They have been concentrating on applying for grants to establish the catering function and we wait to hear whether the applications for £10K to 'Awards for All' and £5K to 'Sussex Community Grants' have been successful. If the £10K is received, then it is planned to apply to the Lottery for a 'Healthy Eating' programme.

The next stage of the work is to investigate possible sources of Arts Council funding. These will be concentrated on educational programmes which will help to justify the Council's investment in the Centre.

Prospects for the first 6 months of 2009

Programmes are now being planned for the period up to the Festival. The 'financial' basis for these is that they will cover the direct costs and attract audiences that will enable us to maintain our current bar profit. The great majority of events are on a split basis so we cannot expect to produce any significant income after all our costs have been met.

We intend to continue to operate the bar on a voluntary basis in this period so that we can maximise our income.

We are also hopeful that the hire income from both conferences and other events will continue to grow. In the last 2 months conference income has been over £ and bookings have been received from a number of public and voluntary sector organisations for £ . Income from other events, including West Sussex Youth Theatre and the Adur Band, amounts to £ . Not only does this 'hire' income provide an important source of income but it also shows that the Centre is meeting a demand for a good quality venue in Shoreham.

Finally we hope that our funding applications are successful and that by the early summer, a catering function will have been established which can then allow us to put in more profitable commercial events.

2009 Festival

For the 2009 Adur Festival, Ropetackle is planning a programme of events under the working title of "The Art of Science".

We have developed the concept with Sussex University, which has agreed to sponsor the programme, and to field a team of eminent science professors to provide a series of talks, around which we will build various forms of complementary artistic performance.

We are also working with the former West Sussex LEA Science Advisory Officer to involve schools in the programme, and we are in discussion with well known TV science personality, Johnny Ball, who is enthusiastically supporting the plan.

It is envisaged that in addition to a series of music, performance, film comedy and other events, built around the science theme, we will run a number of workshops for the local community and for schools and young people.

In conjunction with Serendipity, we are exploring possible funding which this theme may attract.

Conclusion

We are pleased with the progress that has been made in the last few weeks and are more confident that the Centre can become viable. But there is still a major concern as to whether sufficient income can be generated to pay for the high overheads, especially as we still do not know the future cost of the M and E system.

It is too early to calculate what continuing subsidy might be required over the coming months as we try and establish additional and further sources of income. But we believe that it will be significantly less than both the current subsidy and the costs of maintaining the Centre if the Trust ceased operating. We will be in a better position to advise on this when we have produced an accurate statement of our financial position in the New Year.

Neville Pressley
on behalf of
Ropetackle Centre Trust
17.11.08