

**16 December 2014**

**Business and Town Centres Committee**

**Developing Artists Studios and Networks**

*Report of:* Lucy Gill, Culture, Community and Youth Development Officer.

*Wards Affected:* All

*This report is:* Public

**1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 In partnership with Brentwood Borough Council, Essex County Council is keen to develop affordable studio exhibition space in central Brentwood, utilising a retail unit in the Baytree Centre, which has been empty for 5 years.
- 1.2 It is proposed to commission arts organisation and registered charity, ACAVA (the Association for Cultural Advancement through Visual Art) to undertake a feasibility study to ascertain local demand for the project, the suitability of the identified unit for a temporary lease for a minimum of 2 years and devise a financial and membership model for the studios.

**2. Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 To note the presentation and agree to commission ACAVA to undertake the feasibility study, which will ascertain local demand for the project, the suitability of the identified unit for a temporary lease for a minimum of 2 years and devise a financial and membership model for the studios, allocating £1,000 from the Economic Development Fund to do so as matched funding.**
- 2.2 For a further report to come back to Business and Town Centres Committee with the results and recommendations of the feasibility study.**

**3. Introduction and Background**

- 3.1 Essex County Council has successfully worked with ACAVA to set up sustainable affordable artist studios, exhibition and community spaces

with supporting artists' networks in Hadleigh Old Fire Station and Gatehouse Arts in Harlow.

- 3.2 The presentation to Members by representatives of Essex County Council and ACAVA will outline the history and detail of the 2 existing models and how the project could work in Brentwood.
- 3.3 Essex County Council has agreed to provide £1000 of funding towards the feasibility study (50% of costs). If Members agree to commission the feasibility study, the remaining £1000 (50% of costs) will be funded by Brentwood Borough Council.
- 3.4 The Baytree Centre has shown initial interest in using the empty unit in the Centre previously occupied by Roseby's, which has been empty for 5 years. Agreement for a 2 year minimum temporary lease is to be confirmed by the Baytree Centre owners.
- 3.5 ACAVA has visited the unit and made a superficial assessment on suitability, and has considered that it could be utilised as 8 individual studios with a flexible exhibition, community and workshop space. The estimated costs of unit conversion and project set up are in the region of £15,000. Funding for this could be sought from a variety of funding streams. Essex County Council can contribute £5000 towards these conversion costs.
- 3.6 Full financial details of the project will be identified by the feasibility study. As a registered charity, ACAVA, as the unit occupier, will qualify for 80% mandatory rate relief. The Baytree Centre is currently paying 100% business rates on the empty unit.

#### **4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 4.1 In other districts (Harlow and Rochford), the project has helped with regeneration, increasing footfall, developing new audiences for art and emerging artist employment, as well as attracting new retailers to the area.
- 4.2 Priority will be offered to local artists to occupy the affordable space in which to practice and exhibit. There are criteria set by ACAVA to select local artists for the scheme to ensure that affordable studio space is not abused.
- 4.3 The unit could also host a central, flexible space that can be used by the local creative community for a variety of means that will be staffed by

volunteers. This space could also be utilised by the Council for public-facing consultations or health and wellbeing initiatives, and link to Council projects such as the Brentwood Art Trail.

## **5. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 5.1 The project could deliver a number of benefits for Brentwood including meeting the Council's priorities for economic and community development.
- 5.2 A feasibility study will determine whether such a project could work in the available unit and the details of the model, including management and finances.

## **6. Consultation**

- 6.1 The feasibility study will look at whether there is local demand for such a project by liaising with local artists, community organisations and local businesses.

## **7. References to Corporate Plan**

- 7.1 Through maximising an economic opportunity, the project supports the Council's priority, a Prosperous Borough.
- 7.2 By supporting local communities to do more for themselves and increasing volunteering, the project meets the Council's priorities for localism.

## **8. Implications**

### **Financial Implications**

**Name & Title: Francesca Scagliosi, Senior Accountant**

**Tel & Email: 01277 212839 / francesca.scagliosi@brentwood.gov.uk**

- 8.1 At this point, to commission the feasibility study, the cost implication for the project is match funding at £1,000. This will be allocated from the existing Economic Development budget, for which there is a provision for this funding
- 8.2 There will be a minimal amount of officer support at this stage of the project, which will be met by existing resources in the Community Services team. Additional staff support required for the project will be identified through the feasibility study.

- 8.3 Following the feasibility study, should the project be delivered, ACAVA, as a registered charity, will be entitled to an 80% mandatory rate relief. The consequence in terms of the reduction in annual business rate income to the Council would currently be £7,635 a year until March 2016.
- 8.4 ACAVA will be entitled to apply for retail relief and re-occupation relief, both discretionary reliefs where the government reimburse the Council. If successful this would be at no loss to the council.
- 8.5 Dependant upon future Central Government decisions on business rate reliefs and changes to the Council's discretionary relief policy, after March 2016 there is a possibility the loss of income for the Council could rise to £9,544 a year. This would be as a result of the ceasing of Government funding for re-occupation and retail reliefs which are reducing the amount of discretionary relief required.

#### **Legal Implications**

**Name & Title: Chris Potter, Monitoring Officer**

**Tel & Email: 01277 312860 / christopher.potter@brentwood.gov.uk**

- 8.6 This report is about conditional and non-refundable part funding ACAVA to undertake a feasibility study to take place so as to assess (1) demand (2) whether or not the identified unit is suitable and (3) to create a financial and membership model. It is to help those interested in affordable studios and, if feasible, as a consequence would assist the Baytree Centre in finding tenants for their commercial property. There is no financial contribution from the Baytree Centre to the feasibility study funding and no obligation on the Baytree Centre to reimburse any of these costs of facilitating the unit to be occupied (thereby saving business rate payments and generating income for the Baytree Centre). Members need to exercise their discretion reasonably, and this includes being aware of the finite funds available for economic regeneration.
- 8.7 If approved, and providing there is agreement from the owners of the Baytree Centre, Brentwood Borough Council will commission, by way of contract with ACAVA, the feasibility study to be undertaken to assess the proposal in detail.

**Other Implications** (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

At this stage of the project there are no additional implications.

- 9. Background Papers** (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

There are no background papers to this report.

- 10. Appendices to this report**

**None**

**Report Author Contact Details:**

**Name:** Lucy Gill - Culture, Community and Youth Development Officer  
**Telephone:** 01277 312645  
**E-mail:** [lucy.gill@brentwood.gov.uk](mailto:lucy.gill@brentwood.gov.uk)