

Dear Gerry,

Thank you for your email. Your proposal looks an interesting one and I would very pleased to talk to you and your group about whether it is something that might be eligible for MSDC financial support. Of particular interest will be your Business Plan including your aims and objectives, market analysis, financial projections, results of public consultations, etc, etc. Without these, it will be difficult to comment in detail. However, from the limited information available, the project would appear to have some merit as a local facility.

In your attachment, you ask Councillor Kathie Guthrie a number of questions about the Wingfield Barns Project (WB). Comparing your proposal to other schemes in the area will be an important element of your Business Planning. The WB Business Model sets out what WB aims to offer the public - a broad-based cultural and community centre, which appears to be different to your proposal. In essence, your proposal appears to be satisfying a local need; the WB scheme, which opens in April this year, aims to satisfy a much wider market. As such, there is probably every reason to explore the demand for your proposal without fear that WB will compete with it. In fact, the two projects are probably quite compatible.

To answer your questions (to help clarify the situation):

1. The WB Project is based on a recovery package agreed with Arts Council England and the liquidators of the old Wingfield Arts and Music. The freehold of the property is being transferred to MSDC essentially free of charge, at no cost to the Council Tax Payer. The business aim, as expressed by the MSDC Executive Committee, is to run the venue at neutral cost, in other words, at no cost to the Council Tax Payer. Our financial projections based on known expenditure and our projected business, private and educational income streams predict that this aim will be achieved.
2. We all know that public transport links in the rural area are poor so the WB Project is looking at ways to establish partnerships with schools, the Border Hopper and the like but even with these types of services in place, some people will still find it difficult to access services from nearby villages and towns and, as you say, they will have to rely on family and friends. I think this will always be a feature of living in a rural area and is a sound reason for developing services close to peoples homes. The people living within striking distance of Wingfield Barns feel the same way.
3. The WB project is already benefiting businesses and people around it. We have electricians, plumbers, caterers, lighting specialists, artists, musicians, photographers, building contractors, and even piano tuners from the surrounding area. We would welcome the involvement of Debenham people, if they wish to become involved in any way. I am pleased that Kathie is promoting the WB in Debenham as it will give local people the opportunity not only to attend events there but also get involved in its running/delivery if they wish. Other District Councillors are doing the same in their Wards across the district.

4. I do know anything about a proposal to move your Resource Centre and Library (or the Parish Clerk!) to Wingfield. I would think these are best placed in Debenham but would leave this to people who know more about the subject.

5. WB was designed as an Art Gallery and will continue to offer gallery facilities but is being adapted to accommodate more uses such as education, workshops, conferences, seminars and weddings. Theatre and other performing arts can be accommodated but seating will be restricted to approximately 120; a fairly modest number. We know other venues, such as the Cut and Fisher, will attract larger audiences. If the Debenham proposal is able to accommodate 220, it will be in a good position to take advantage of this market.

In conclusion, it is too early for me to make any judgements about the costs and benefits of your proposal so, if you would like to take the project forward, I suggest we meet to discuss it.

I hope that helps to clarify the situation. If you would like to visit WB at any time just let me know and I would be pleased to give you a personal guided tour!

All the best

Richard

Richard Thurlow

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-----Original Message-----

From: Richard Thurlow [mailto:thurlowandprobert@hotmail.com]

Sent: 03 February 2009 08:04

To: Richard Thurlow

Subject: FW: Debenham Theatre, Conference, Youth & Art Centre

Richard