

Ledbury & Area Development Trust

Press Release

30th October 2007

Master's House, Ledbury Business Plan – Key Recommendations

Building an inspirational 21st Century extension to link the Master's House and the 17th Century Barn in Ledbury, and commissioning an architectural competition to find the most creative solution are two of the key recommendations from the Business Plan for the Master's House produced by the Ledbury & Area Development Trust (LADT) today.

"Creating this extension would be the 21st Century's contribution to the fascinating, ongoing story of the Master's House from its mediaeval beginnings in 1487," commented Roger A. Payne, Chief Executive of LADT.

"It would also help to provide sufficient space at the heart of the town to combine a range of services into the Master's House, the 17th Century Barn and the extension for use by people living in and around Ledbury, and by visitors to the Town."

"It is important for people to understand that what we have put forward are ambitious recommendations covering a two-year period," added Mr Payne, "and that they are dependent on being able to attract the right level of funding."

Using a combination from the Four Key Options that came out of the wide-ranging consultation that the Trust undertook locally over the past six months, the Business Plan recommends that:

- a new Library, the Herefordshire Info Shop, and a Tourist Information Centre for residents and visitors should be housed in the new facility – together with meeting rooms for use by CAB, Building Control, Planning, and Pension Advice, and for 'hot-desking' or 'touchdown' for Council employees to use on an ad-hoc basis
- the Council could lease the 17th Century Barn to a community organisation to provide agreed services and facilities – which could be courses and classes for local people, or as a social/drop-in space, or as a gallery/performance space
- the Council could lease the top floor of the Victorian West Wing to a commercial organisation as a self-contained suite of offices with its own outside entrance – generating income which would help towards the ongoing sustainability of the buildings

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- a range of facilities for community use could be provided including offices, social/drop-in space for different ages and interests, a base for a Community Support Officer, shop-mobility office, and translation services
- the mediaeval timbers should be opened up to public viewing
- the new-build extension and work on the Master's House and 17th Century Barn should take into account the latest thinking from the Government's Low Carbon Buildings Programme, and that energy saving measures - such as a biomass boiler system and ground source heat pumps - should also be considered

"Funding was obviously a key issue when we were considering our recommendations in the Business Plan", added Mr Payne. "It would have been relatively easy to justify a Business Plan that called for a multi-million pound portfolio of capital funding for the Master's House and 17th Century Barn - given their architectural and historic significance and provenance, and importance to the town.

However, we took a more pragmatic approach, founded on setting a level of funding that realistically could be achieved for the project within an acceptable timeframe - and we have recommended a funding target of £1.95m."

A further recommendation is that a small 'Action Group' - led by a charismatic and inspirational Chair - is formed of representatives from Herefordshire Council and the local community. It should be tasked with driving the project forward by focusing on a 'can-do attitude' - and a determination to implement the project within an agreed timescale.

Commenting on the Business Plan, Keith Francis, Chairman of the Ledbury and District Civic Society said, "people living and working in Ledbury have been very vocal over the past six months about what should happen to the Master's House and there is currently a high degree of interest and enthusiasm for progress to be made. The recommendations in the Business Plan provide a clear way to move forward and we give them our full support."

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Dr Kay Swinburne, Mayor of Ledbury, commented "this project would not only provide a vibrant, innovative facility at the heart of Ledbury, but would also help to complement the ongoing economic development of the Town."

Though not a formal recommendation in the Business Plan, if the Tourist Information Centre has to move when its lease expires at the end of February 2008 it could be transferred to the Master's House. This would be in line with the overall two-year plan for facilities in the Master's House to include the Library, Herefordshire Info Shop, and the Tourist Information Centre.

Herefordshire Council is currently studying the Business Plan and the recommendations and will decide how it intends to proceed by the end of November 2007, and will then hold a public meeting to announce its decision.

The Business Plan was funded by the Ledbury and District Civic Society, Ledbury Town Council, and the Ledbury & Area Development Trust and is complementary to an "Audience Development Plan" commissioned by Herefordshire Council with funding from Heritage Lottery.

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Notes to Editors:

Ledbury & Area Development Trust (LADT) is an independent and entrepreneurial company working for the benefit of the local community.

Completion of the Business Plan brings to an end LADT's six-month commitment to the Master's House Project.

Its focus over the next twelve months is on bringing the old Cottage Hospital back into use as 6 shared-equity, affordable accommodation units for local people, and around 1,600 sq ft of managed workspace for local, young entrepreneurs.

The Business Plan is based on extensive community consultation including three Open Days attended by 250 people, 500 responses from a Survey together with over 300 individual comments and suggestions that were also submitted, and a feedback session attended by around 150 people.

It is also informed by the 1,200 completed questionnaires which form the basis for the Ledbury Parish Plan, undertaken in 2005.

The Business Plan also takes into account discussions and comments received from a range of individuals and organisations including Herefordshire Council, Ledbury Town Council, Ledbury and District Civic Society, Ledbury Tourist Association, the Rotary Club of Ledbury, and the Development Trusts Association.

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