

ASHTON COURT MANSION

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

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NIALL PHILLIPS

OLD POLICE STATION, 6 ST PETER'S COURT, BRISTOL, BS3 4AQ
niall.phillips@purcelluk.com
www.purcelluk.com

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I INTRODUCTION

1.1 This summary looks at the options for the future use of Ashton Court Mansion that were considered during the course of the original study work undertaken between 2012-14. The summary updates the work and sets out some preliminary conclusions about which options should be explored further and a suggested strategy the City of Bristol might adopt which has the potential to result in an acceptable solution for the future of the building in the current and foreseeable economic climate.

1.2 In addition to possible use options, this summary also reviews a 'do nothing' option and the option of complete closure of the Mansion and its mothballing until some date in the future when the range of use options available might increase and/or their viability and access to grant funding improve.

1.3 For 60 years Ashton Court Mansion has been largely unused and of little benefit to Bristolians, despite the City's original objectives in acquiring the Mansion and estate to secure their future in 1959. The Mansion itself has to some extent been secondary to the development and management of the estate which has been a major asset for the City, its community and visitors. It is now however becoming an increasing and more urgent problem for the City to resolve as its costs continue without benefit and its condition is increasingly threatened. This study summary seeks to map out the route forward to turn Ashton Court Mansion from a burdensome liability to a jewel in the City's heritage crown.



2 A BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT SITUATION

2.1 Ashton Court Mansion has been owned by the City of Bristol since the late 1950's following its acquisition from the previous owners, the Smyth family. The Mansion is listed Grade I by Historic England which designates it as a building considered as being of national and international importance – only 2% of listed buildings are Grade I. It stands in a designed parkland estate of approximately 850 acres which incorporates an ancient deer park and is included in Historic England's Register of Historic Parks & Gardens with a Grade 2* listing, also setting it out as being of considerable historic importance. The estate immediately abuts the Avon Gorge and has become perhaps the City's most valued public green asset used by hundreds of thousands of Bristol residents every year, although administratively it lies outside the City boundaries and is in the North Somerset Council district.

2.2 When the City acquired the Mansion and estate in 1959 it was in poor condition having suffered long-term decline since the First World War, during which the Mansion was used as a military hospital, and the during the Second World War when the Mansion and estate used as a military transit camp. Following acquisition, the City maintained and enhanced public access and use of the estate parkland for a wide range of activities including major outdoor events such as the International Balloon Festival, golf and pitch and putt courses, orienteering, riding and a very wide range of outdoor activities as well as informal use for walking, exercising dogs and picnics. Considerable improvements were made to the parkland when the City obtained a substantial grant of £4.5m from the Heritage Lottery Fund in 1999 at which time the East or Stable Wing was also converted to provide a small café for estate users and meeting and office facilities on the first floor.

2.3 The Mansion itself posed significant problems for the City and its derelict condition prevented its immediate use following its acquisition in 1959. However, in the early 1970's the City resourced a major programme of repairs which secured the Mansion's

external fabric in good condition, but funds ran out before significant progress could be made on completing the conservation and upgrading of its interior. Although several of the larger state rooms were completed and new catering facilities had been constructed on the site of the old Winter Garden to allow their use for weddings, functions and conferences, the remainder of the house, over 70% of its available floor area, was left derelict, its fine fittings and panelling removed and stored to allow the treatment of extensive dry rot but never reinstated. Apart from the works to the East or Stable Wing no further work has been undertaken over the passing 45 years.

2.4 As a consequence our surveys undertaken during the original study period highlighted that the major part of the Mansion was in very poor derelict condition and that although the 1970's external fabric repairs were well done, only basic maintenance had been carried out subsequently and that the need for cyclical maintenance works were starting to increase in their frequency and scope. The situation worsened when an arson attack in 2013 left the fine interior of the West Wing badly damaged. As a result of its poor condition and lack of use, Ashton Court Mansion is now included on Historic England's 'Heritage at Risk Register', despite its Grade I listing – only 3.7% of all the Grade I & 2* listed buildings in England are on the register indicating the level of concern over Ashton Court Mansion's condition and its future.

2.5 Over the period since the works completed in the early 1970's the City has made several attempts to resolve the future of the Mansion and its use through commissioning a number of feasibility studies and options appraisals. In common the outcome of these studies was shaped by;

- the City's desire to maintain a level of public use of and access to the building
- the constraints on the City's ability to invest in the Mansion

and its perceived lower priority compared with other investment needs across the City

- the limited availability of external grant funding even with the establishment of the HLF in 1995
- the City's reluctance to separate the Mansion from the estate parkland and its desire to constraint any development of the Mansion within the existing boundary walls
- a reluctance to market the building for sale as a freehold or to consider leases long enough to justify the levels of commercial investment necessary
- frequent political, member and officer changes in the City leading to a lack of consistent decision making and any long-term commitment and the development of a coherent vision for the future of the Mansion

The studies also broadly in common identified a conferencing, functions and events venue as a primary use for the building with a mix of other supporting uses as the preferable approach. Hospitality/hotel use was also highlighted as being a potential primary use but the requirements of potential hotel developers could not be reconciled with the City's concerns about the public use of and access to the Mansion and physical separation of the Mansion and gardens from the wider parkland. However, underlying all the study conclusions was a concern about the poor financial viability of the uses being considered given the scale and size of the building and the cost, complexity and scope of the repairs necessary. None of the studies offered the City an easy, palatable way forward to resolve the future of the Mansion.

2.6 Ashton Court Mansion has now therefore remained undeveloped and little used despite its significance and prominence as a public heritage asset for well over half a century and has been a substantial burden on the City's finances with little resulting benefit for Bristolians. The use of the principal ground floor rooms

for functions and meetings largely managed by the City through contractors produced insufficient income to cover the Mansion's costs and indeed was loss-making in its own right; so conference and functions use was ended by the City in 2017. The Stable Wing café remains, the principal ground floor rooms are partly tenanted on a short-term lease by Artspace – Lifespace and UWE continues its use of the ground floor rooms for teaching purposes, although this has reduced as the development of its Bower Ashton campus has been completed. Even with the City's effective moth-balling of the building it remains a substantial cost, the deterioration in its condition is gradually accelerating, the costs of re-use are increasing and as its condition declines it becomes more vulnerable to vandalism and damage.

The purpose of this study is to try to find a way forward for this much-loved building.

2.7 The Condition of the Building

2.7.1 Our earlier work included a detailed condition survey of the Mansion. The external fabric of the mansion was the subject of major works in the 1970's and is in reasonable condition although with the passage of time is beginning to require cyclical repairs. However, to most visitors the exterior of the Mansion looks in good condition. The same is broadly true of the internal spaces that remain in use and open to the public, although the principal staterooms including the Music Room have had no significant works, re-servicing or refreshing since the 1970's and now need general improvement and upgrading. The Stables and Hayloft were converted during the 1990's NLHF funded works and are in good condition although again are beginning to need re-decoration. Taking into account the upper floors of the Mansion these spaces account for approximately 30% of its gross floor area.

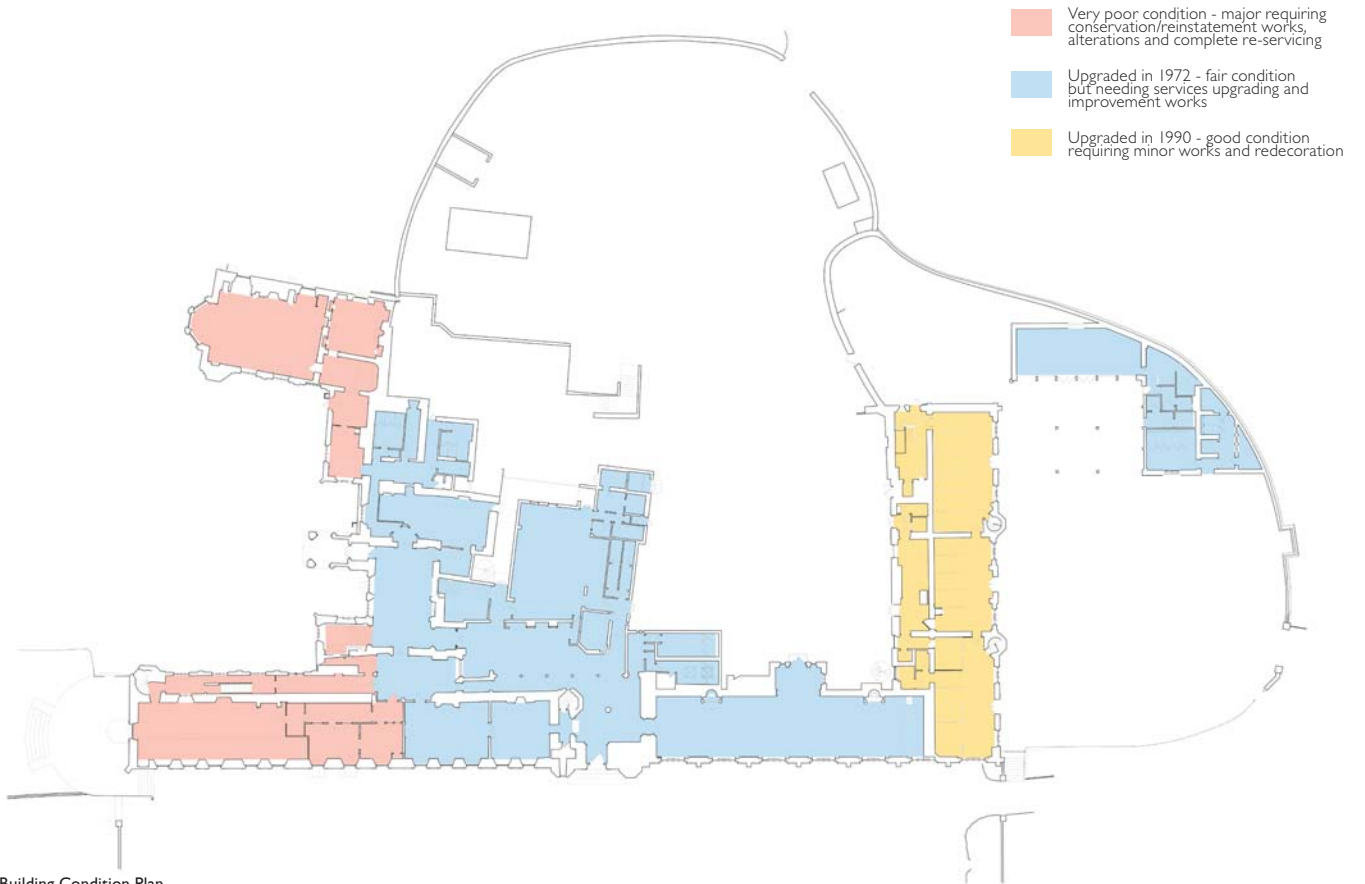
2.7.2 The condition surveys identified therefore that a very

considerable proportion of the Mansion (about 60%) was in very poor condition having been stripped out to treat dry rot in the 1970's fabric repair works and left empty, un-serviced and largely derelict. The original panelling, joinery and fittings that were removed during the 1970's survive in part and have been mostly catalogued. This work has shown that the surviving salvaged joinery and other fabric can be reinstated or used as patterns and the principal rooms from which they were removed can be reconstructed and mostly restored to their original appearance.

The poor condition of the Mansion has been further exacerbated by the arson attack in 2013 which left the Library and upper floor of the West Range very badly damaged.

2.7.3 The floor plans on the following pages indicate the condition of the main areas of the Mansion and the extent of works necessary to bring them back into good repair and full productive use.



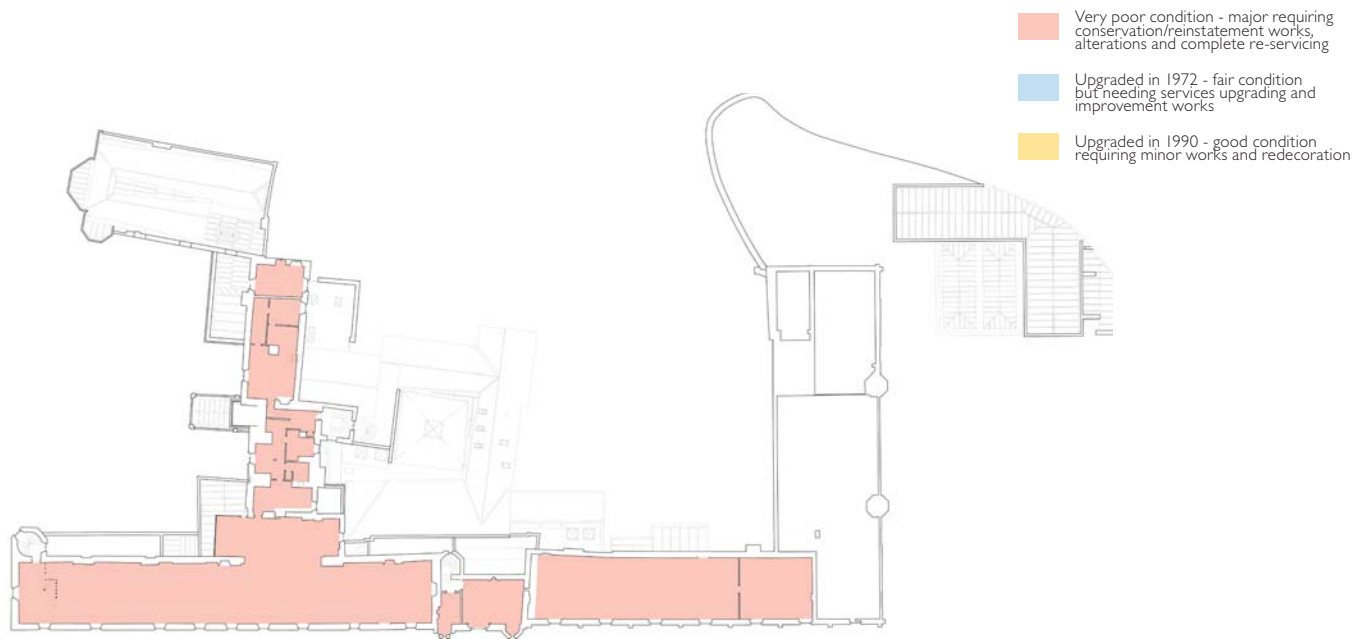


Ground Floor Building Condition Plan

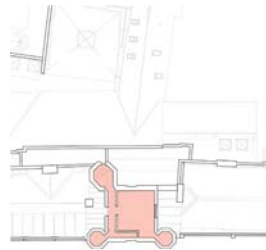
- Very poor condition - major requiring conservation/reinstatement works, alterations and complete re-servicing
- Upgraded in 1972 - fair condition but heating services upgrading and improvement works
- Upgraded in 1990 - good condition requiring minor works and redecoration



First Floor Building Condition Plan



Second Floor Building Condition Plan



Third Floor Building Condition Plan

3 CONSIDERING THE OPTIONS & CRITERIA FOR THEIR ASSESSMENT

3.1 Deciding on the future of Ashton Court will depend on the use or uses to which the Mansion is put, their compatibility with the Mansion's historic fabric, viability, fundability and future sustainability. A first step is therefore to explore and assess what the use options for the Mansion are.

3.1.1 The main criteria we developed for the assessment of the potential uses of Ashton Court Mansion are discussed below and were as follows;

- Impact on Historic Fabric
- Public Accessibility
- Impact on the Estate
- Use Compatibility
- Financial Viability
- External Grant Funding
- Identifiable Users & Developing Agencies

3.2 Impact on Historic Fabric

3.2.1 Ashton Court's Grade I listing will impose a significant constraint on the extent to which it can be altered and adapted for any new use. The CMP prepared by Purcell highlights the sensitivity of each area of the building which consequently defines the extent to which each space can be altered, adapted or even removed. The key issues will be;

- The extent to which the use requires spatial sub-division – the more subdivision the greater the impact
- The extent to which the use requires major services installations such as air- conditioning , sanitary installations, kitchen facilities and specialist plant – the heavier the servicing requirements and loads the greater the impact
- The extent to which the use requires alterations to the exterior of the building such as new openings, rooflights,

additions – the more external change the greater the impact

- The extent to which the use requires complex fire escape and protection – the greater level of requirement the greater the impact.
- The extent to which the use requires the provision of Disability Act compliance
- The extent to which the use requires invasive construction which might cause fabric loss or destruction of below ground archaeology
- The extent to which any use might prejudice the reinstatement of panelled and historic rooms
- The extent to which the use might lead to excessive wear and tear or abuse of the fabric
- The need for any additional new build accommodation for the use – the more new build the greater the impact.

3.2.2 Whilst there will be a planning presumption for the reuse of the vacant spaces at Ashton Court Mansion, the Grade I listing of the building will also require a listed building consent which will require the assessment of any application by Historic England. Where the proposed use results in 'substantial harm' to Ashton Court it is likely that the application would be rejected as set out in Para 133 of the National Planning Policy Framework. Where the proposed use results in 'less than substantial harm' the tests outlined in Para 134 will apply and will require the applicant to show how the benefits of the use outweigh any disbenefits in terms of the impact of the use on the historic fabric.

3.2.3 For each of the use options considered we assessed the impact of the use on the historic fabric on a scale of 1-5 with a greater impact giving a lower score and vice versa.

3.2.4 The sensitivity and significance of Ashton Court's historic fabric as illustrated on the following drawings.



Ashton Court - Entrance Vaulting



Ashton Court - Derelict First Floor

- Very little change acceptable
- Limited change acceptable
- Change Acceptable
- Significant change acceptable
- Removal and reinstatement



Ground Floor Significance Plan

- Very little change acceptable
- Limited change acceptable
- Change Acceptable
- Significant change acceptable
- Removal and reinstatement



First Floor Significance Plan

- Very little change acceptable
- Limited change acceptable
- Change Acceptable
- Significant change acceptable
- Removal and reinstatement



Second and Third Floor Significance Plan

3.3 Public Accessibility

3.3.1 Although only very limited public access is available to the interior of Ashton Court at present the public consultations held during the original study period showed emphatically that the public consider Ashton Court to be a building in the 'public realm'. It also indicated that public access to the interior is considered a high priority for any future use

3.3.2 In assessing how the potential uses might provide for public accessibility we have assumed that does not mean 'free access' but any access or use for which on payment of a user charge, entrance fee or similar charge allows a member of the public to enter and enjoy the interior of the building. The key issues relating to the provision of public access will be:

- The extent to which the use allows public access throughout the building – the greater access to more of the building the better
- The extent to which the use allows public access throughout the year, during the working week and at weekends and holiday periods
- The extent to which the use allows and provides public intellectual access to the history of the Mansion and its heritage
- The extent to which the use can provide for Disability Act compliant access

3.3.3 For each of the use options considered we assessed the level of public accessibility on a scale of 1-5 with a greater accessibility giving a higher score and vice versa.

3.3.4 The potential accessibility of Ashton Court is illustrated on the following drawings.

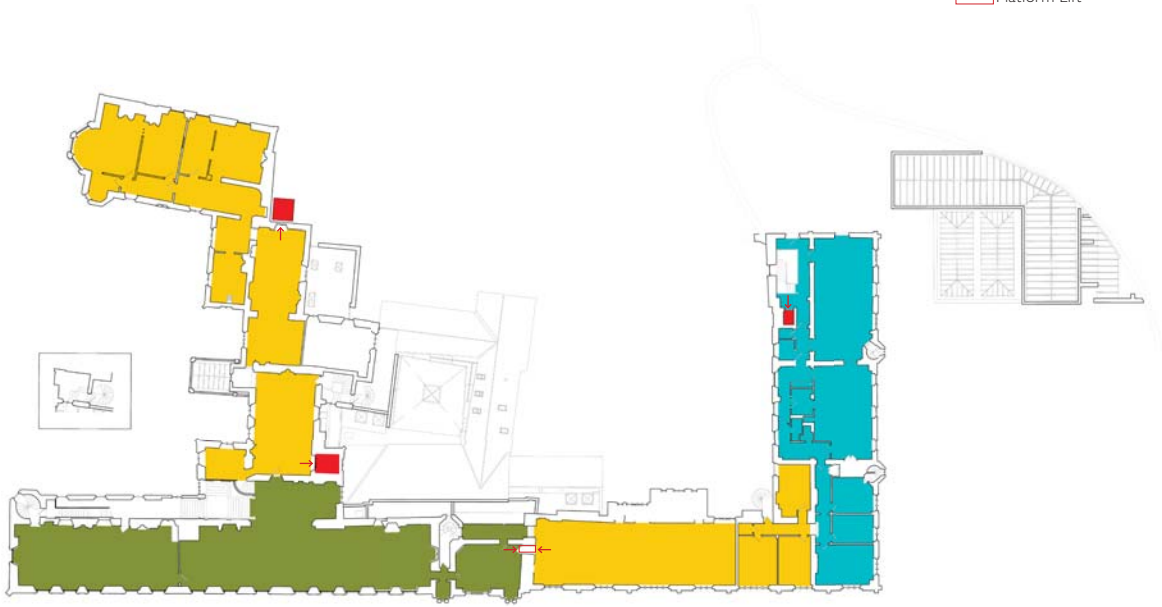


Ashton Court - the fine C.17 Great Stair

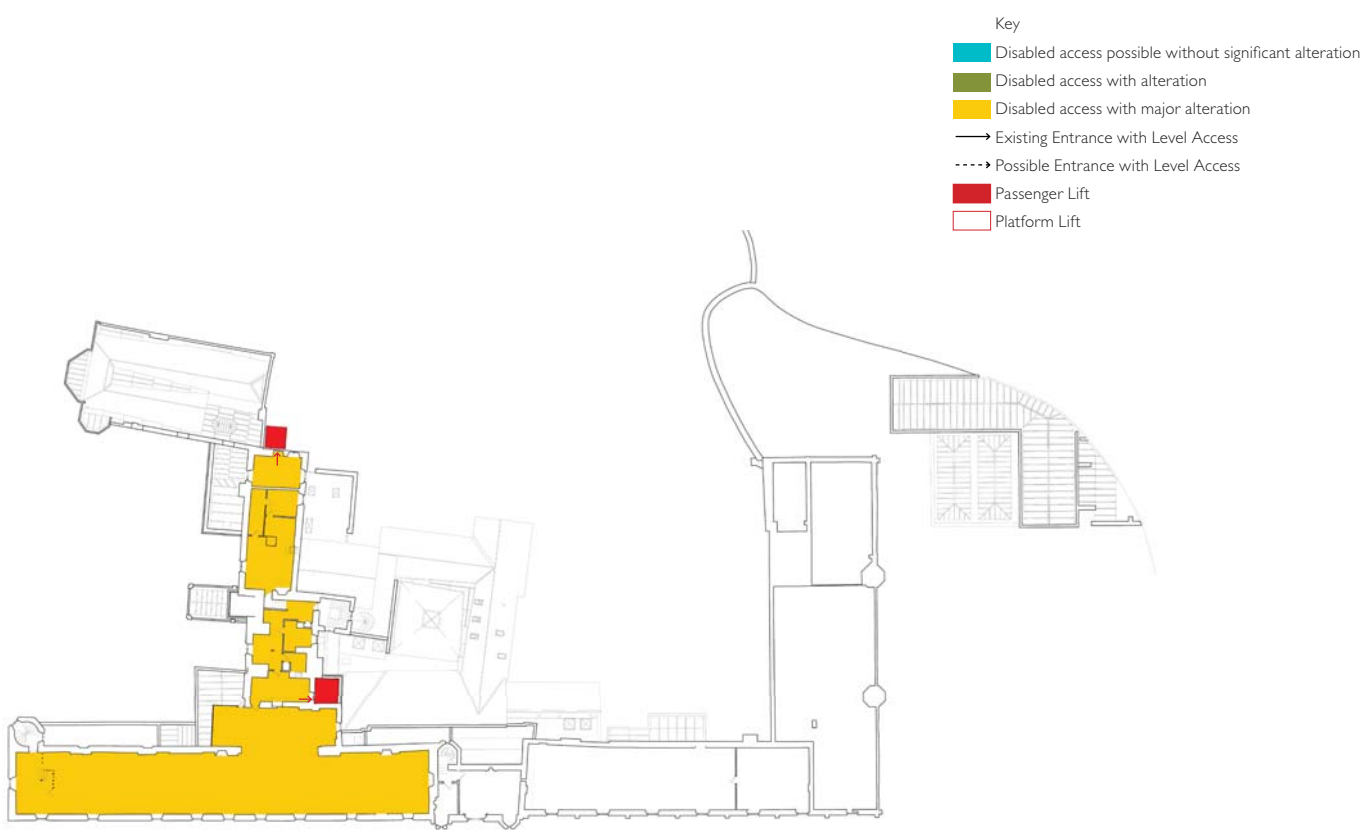


Ground Floor Access Plan

- Key
- Disabled access possible without significant alteration
 - Disabled access with alteration
 - Disabled access with major alteration
 - Existing Entrance with Level Access
 - - - Possible Entrance with Level Access
 - Passenger Lift
 - Platform Lift



First Floor Access Plan



Second and Third Floor Access Plan

3.4 Impact on the Estate

3.4.1 Any use or increased use of the Mansion will have an impact on the wider estate and its use which may be to the detriment of the estate and public enjoyment of what it offers. This impact may take many forms each of which needs to be considered in assessing the future use of the Mansion. Key issues to consider in assessing the potential uses are;

- To what extent does the use require exclusive use of the adjacent external spaces
- What car parking provision does the use require on site and does it need to be dedicated
- Does the use involve regular access by heavy and/or large vehicles
- Are private external areas required
- Does the use have any direct physical impact on the estate
- To what extent might the use curtail current events and activities on the estate
- Does the use depend on access to other facilities on the estate such as the golf course
- Is 24 hour access required

3.4.2 For each of the use options considered we assessed the level of its impact on the estate on a scale of 1-5 with a greater impact having a lower score and vice versa.

3.5 Use Compatibility

3.5.1 The Mansion is a substantial building and it is quite possible that a single use or users to take responsibility for the whole of the building will not be identified and that a mix of uses will be necessary to achieve a viable solution to its future. Bringing some potential uses together on site may make them more sustainable

through being able to share costs and resources as well as space. The City may also determine that it wants to retain its current meeting facilities at the Mansion. It is therefore likely to be important that potential uses are compatible with each other and the assessment of the potential use options needs to take this into account. Key issues to consider will include;

- Is the use compatible with other uses or does it require exclusive use
- Is the use flexible in its accommodation needs or does it require the exclusive use of key spaces
- Does the use involve activities which might be noisy or disruptive to other possible uses
- Does the use have a weekly, seasonal or other bias which might create opportunities for alternative or shared programmed use of spaces
- Which uses are compatible with each other and which not
- Is the primary use compatible with public access
- Does the use have security issues relative to other uses

3.5.2 For each of the use options considered we assessed its compatibility with other uses on a scale of 1-5 with a greater compatibility having a higher score and vice versa.

3.6 Financial Viability

3.6.1 Whatever use is determined for Ashton Court Mansion it will have to be viable in both capital and revenue terms if a sustainable future is to be achieved for the building. Assessing the likely financial viability for each option is therefore an essential part of the process of confirming a preferred option(s). The key issues considered include;

- Is there an identifiable market and demand for the proposed

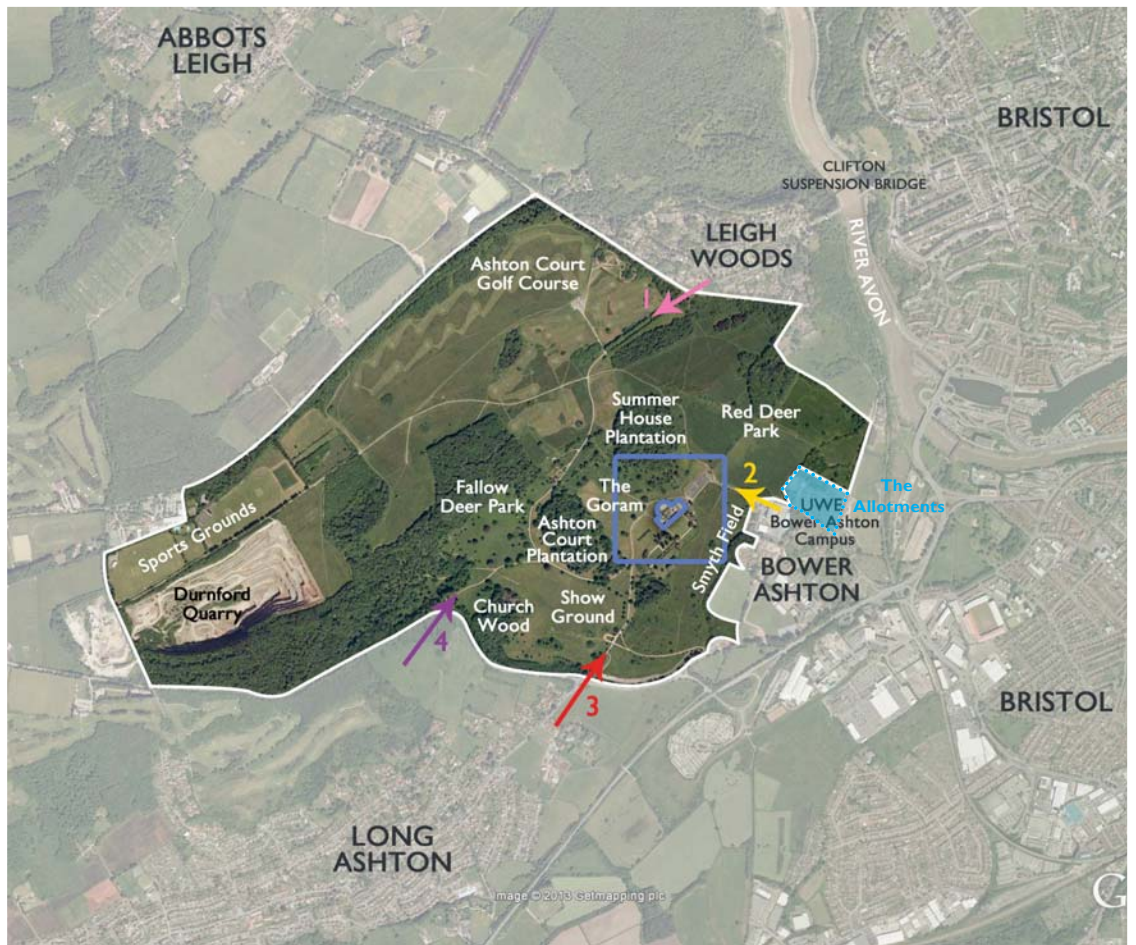
use

- What is the local and regional competition for the proposed use
- Does the use give a positive end value to the Mansion – after allowing for all development costs
- If the use is not viable in capital terms what is the capital or conservation deficit and/or the residual value of the Mansion
- What sources of grant funding are available towards any capital deficit
- Does the use cover all its operational and the long term cyclical maintenance costs of the building
- If the use does not cover its operational and the long term cyclical maintenance costs is funding sufficient to cover the revenue deficit available from other sources
- What precedent is available to confirm the viability of the potential use
- Where deficits have been identified in either the capital or revenue costs have sources of funding being identified

3.6.2 For each of the use options considered we assessed its financial viability on a scale of 1-5 with a greater financial viability having a higher score and vice versa. We have undertaken separate assessments for capital and operational viability.

3.7 External Grant Funding

3.7.1 The initial assessment of the project capital costs (see below) shows that the Mansion has a substantial conservation deficit and that for most uses achieving viability is likely to involve the need for external grant aid towards meeting the deficit. The potential sources of grant aid have been assessed in looking at each option and the likelihood of the use being able to attract sufficient grant aid to achieve viability assessed the key issues considered have been;



Ashton Court Wider Estate

- For each use what funding sources are available for which the use meets the funders criteria
- What level of funding is available towards each use option from each funding source
- Does the likely level of funding available meet the conservation deficit
- What constraints does each funding source impose on the use – for example does it require public access to be available
- What are the minimum acquisition or tenancy terms required by each funding agency
- How is potential grant claw back secured on the Mansion
- What is the timescale involved in applying to each funding stream
- For any potential use option how does a potential capital grant funding sources test the long term sustainability of the use in its assessment

3.7.2 For each of the use options considered we assessed its ability to attract external grant funding on a scale of 1-5 with a greater access to grant funding having a higher score and vice versa.

3.8 Identifiable Potential Users and Developing Agencies

3.8.1 During the course of the study we sought to identify potential users and developing agencies for the Mansion and during this further commission we have both sought to confirm the interest expressed previously and identify potential new interest. Clearly the existence of any potential users or developing organisations interested in the Mansion could have a significant impact on the selection of a preferred option or mix of options. For each use option we have therefore reviewed the potential

developing agencies who have expressed an initial interest to establish;

- The nature of their interest
- The substance of their organisation, its track record and its ability to invest
- The criteria by which they will judge their investment
- Their spatial requirements and 'fit' with the Mansion
- Their interest in working with other potential users/ developing agencies
- The compatibility of their use with other potential users
- Their compatibility with the City's requirements and aspirations

3.8.2 For each of the use options considered we assessed the identifiable users or developing agencies and assessed them on their capacity, suitability, compatibility and ability to meet above criteria on a scale of 1-5 with a greater capability and compatibility having a higher score and vice versa.

4 USE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

We undertook an assessment of each of the possible options for Ashton Court Mansion against the above criteria. For some options considerable supporting work has been undertaken including meetings with potential users. For others where early indications are that the use is not appropriate the assessment has not been in depth – for example, the supermarket use included in the Tessa Coombes 1997 report.

4.2 The resulting assessment is summarised on the attached Options Assessment Table (Table 1) for all use options considered. Options scoring above 30 (out of a maximum of 40) are highlighted in red and options scoring 25-29 are bold.

4.3 The range of options considered are listed below.

4.3.1 Hospitality

- Hotel
- Holiday Accommodation
- Aparthotel
- Budget Hotel
- Youth Hostel
- Restaurant
- Cafe
- Function/Events/Conference

4.3.2 Entertainment

- Casino
- Night Club
- Cinema

4.3.3 Learning

- UWE – University facilities
- Leisure Learning
- Music Conservatoire
- Business School
- Training
- Council Training
- Activity centre

4.3.4 Conference

- Existing conference/functions business
- Conferences
- Meeting venue
- Room Hires
- Functions
- Events

4.3.5 Heritage Visitor Asset

- Museum/Gallery
- Public Visitor Attraction
- Specialist Museum
- Archive Centre
- National Museum Outpost

4.3.6 Office/Workspace

- Commercial major let
- Commercial minor lets
- Studio/workspace
- Incubator/Start-Up Centre

4.3.7 Residential

- Apartments
- Retirement Home
- Student Letting
- Holiday Apartments
- Single Residence

4.3.8 Retail

- Supermarket
- Speciality Retail
- Food retail

4.3.9 Health

- Hospice
- GM Practice
- Specialist Practice
- Private hospital
- Convalescent Home

4.3.10 Others

- Remand Centre
- Storage
- Warehousing
- Archival Facility

Table 1: Options Assessment Overview

	Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Criteria 3	Criteria 4	Criteria 5a	Criteria 5b	Criteria 6	Criteria 7	Total Score
	Impact on Historic Fabric	Public Accessibility	Impact on the Estate	Use Compatibility	Financial Viability Capital	Financial Viability Revenue	External Grant Funding	Identifiable User or Developing Agency	
Hospitality									
Hotel	2	3	3	2	3	4	2	2	21
Holiday Accommodation	4	3	5	4	4	5	4	4	33
Holiday Property Bond	4	3	4	4	4	4	2	4	29
Aparthotel	3	3	3	3	3	4	2	2	23
Budget Hotel	1	4	3	3	2	3	3	2	21
Youth Hostel	1	4	3	3	3	3	4	3	24
Restaurant	3	5	4	4	5	5	2	4	32
Café	4	5	5	5	5	5	2	4	35
Conference Centre (Residential)	4	4	4	5	4	4	3	4	32
Entertainment									
Cinema	1	4	1	2	1	2	1	1	13
Night Club	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Casino	2	2	3	2	1	3	1	1	15
Learning									
University Teaching Space	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	31
Leisure Learning	5	5	5	5	3	4	4	2	33
Music Conservatoire	4	4	5	4	2	4	4	4	31
Business School	5	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	30
Training	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	33
Council Training	5	4	4	4	4	5	3	5	34
Counselling Centre	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	34
Activity Centre	4	5	5	4	2	2	5	3	30
Outdoor Activity Centre	3	4	3	3	2	2	5	3	25
Conference									

	Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Criteria 3	Criteria 4	Criteria 5a	Criteria 5b	Criteria 6	Criteria 7	Total Score
	Impact on Historic Fabric	Public Accessibility	Impact on the Estate	Use Compatibility	Financial Viability Capital	Financial Viability Revenue	External Grant Funding	Identifiable User or Developing Agency	
Existing Conference/Function Businesses	4	4	4	5	4	4	3	5	33
Conferences (non-residential)	5	4	4	5	4	4	3	5	34
Meeting Venue	5	5	5	5	4	4	3	5	36
Room Hires	5	5	5	5	4	4	3	5	36
Functions & Events	4	5	3	4	4	5	4	5	34
Heritage Visitor Asset									
Museum/Gallery	4	5	5	4	1	2	5	1	27
Private Gallery	4	5	4	3	3	4	1	1	25
Public Visitor Attraction	4	5	5	4	1	2	5	3	29
Specialist Museum	4	5	5	4	2	2	5	2	29
Archival Facility & Centre	2	4	5	5	1	1	4	1	23
National Museum Outpost	3	5	4	4	3	3	5	1	28
Office/Workspace									
Commercial Major Letting	5	2	4	4	4	5	2	3	29
Commercial Small Lettings	4	2	4	4	4	4	2	3	27
Council Office Accommodation	5	3	5	4	4	5	2	4	32
Studio/Workspace	4	2	4	3	3	4	3	3	26
Incubator/Start-Up Centre	3	2	4	3	3	3	3	3	24
Residential									
Apartments	4	1	4	3	3	2	1	2	20
Retirement Home	3	2	3	2	3	2	1	2	18
Student Letting	3	2	4	3	2	1	2	3	20
Single Residence	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	12
Retail									
Supermarket	1	4	1	1	4	5	1	1	18

	Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Criteria 3	Criteria 4	Criteria 5a	Criteria 5b	Criteria 6	Criteria 7	Total Score
	Impact on Historic Fabric	Public Accessibility	Impact on the Estate	Use Compatibility	Financial Viability Capital	Financial Viability Revenue	External Grant Funding	Identifiable User or Developing Agency	
Speciality Retail	2	5	2	2	3	3	1	1	19
Food Retail	2	5	2	3	3	3	1	1	20
Health									
Hospice	2	1	2	2	3	4	1	1	16
Convalescent Home	2	1	3	2	3	4	1	1	17
GM Practice	2	3	2	1	3	4	1	1	17
Specialist Practice	2	2	2	1	4	4	1	1	17
Private Hospital	1	1	1	1	2	4	1	1	12
Spa/Fitness Centre/Gym	2	4	3	3	2	3	2	1	20
Others									
Remand Centre	1	1	1	1	2	4	1	1	12
Storage	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	9
Warehousing	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	9



5 THE 'DO NOTHING' OPTION

5.1 It is an option for the Council to 'do nothing' and allow the current uses, occupants and facilities at Ashton Court Mansion to remain as they are with little significant change. In many respects and in ignorance, this is the easiest option to follow and has been the case at Ashton Court for over 45 years since the last major works were commenced in the 1970's, although they were not completed.

5.2 It would appear that allowing the status quo to continue at Ashton Court and to adopt the 'do nothing' option has been assumed to be an option with little cost, especially given the lack of transparency in the Council's figures which do not allow an easy identification of the Mansion's property, maintenance and operational costs. In reality however, the figures drawn together by the Council during the course of this study show that the Mansion has a very substantial annual deficit indeed; for the 2012/13 financial year alone the deficit amounted to over £730,000, excluding the costs of this study. For the Council this represents a spend of nearly three quarters of a million pounds for which very little, if any, public benefit is achieved as the Mansion was largely closed to the public and, except for the café, the three function and events rooms on the ground floor and the Hayloft, is mostly unused and internally derelict.

5.3 The 'do nothing' option with annual deficits at this level could not be sustained or justified when such little public benefit results.

5.4 Conscious of the scale of the revenue deficit of keeping Ashton Court Mansion open the City closed the conference, functions and events facilities in 2017. The only activities in the Mansion at present are the Stable Wing Café and the meeting spaces above, the short term letting of the ground floor principal spaces to Artspace – Lifespace and the UWE teaching activities. The City itself has recently occupied space in the Hayloft for use as offices. These provide some modest income but offer the

important function of security and activity as well as providing refreshments to estate users.

5.5 Despite closure of the conferencing and functions activities at the Mansion, in 2018/19 the City Council's non-occupancy costs alone for the Mansion buildings are likely to total over £175,000. This excludes any utilities costs, any capital works or major repairs, the running costs and any business rates for the

space let to Artspace-Lifespace and UWE (it is assumed these are covered from income), the running and staffing costs of the café (it is assumed these are covered from income generated) and any gardens and landscape maintenance costs. Hence even with significant reduction in the activity at Ashton Court Mansion it remains a significant financial commitment delivering little benefit, with no significant further savings possible and indeed with the increasing risk that urgent fabric repairs could begin to add very significantly to the non-occupancy costs in the near future.



Ashton Court - West Entrance Hall

6 A CLOSURE & MOTHBALLING OPTION

6.1 The scale of deficit involved in the 'do nothing' option raises the question as to whether or not the Council should continue to keep Ashton Court open and operating in its reduced current uses and with its current minimal operational and management structures. An alternative would be to close the mansion entirely including the stable café and to 'mothball' the building until such time as a longer term sustainable solution can be implemented. This would involve potential problems with some existing users having to find alternative locations for their activities at short notice, particularly UWE which is the most substantial user providing the greatest revenue at present and for the City itself, which would have to find alternative accommodation for the meetings, training and other activities held in the Hayloft and for its offices.

6.2 This option will however involve substantial continued annual costs for the Council as some of the costs will be fixed costs, such as maintenance of alarms etc and other costs we understand will be incurred whether or not the mansion is in use. In addition the Council has statutory responsibilities to keep the building fabric in good repair and to protect the public. Given the 2013 arson attack on the Mansion the Council would also need to consider replacing any staff currently based on site during working hours with a full time 24 hour site based security provision.

6.3 Table 2 sets out the Mansion's closure and mothballing costs. These amount to in excess of £175,000 per annum. If the Stable Cafe remains in use and open business rates have to be allowed for at approximately £37-40,000 per annum, increasing the annual mothballing cost to approximately £210-215,000 per annum.

6.4 In addition to the continued annual costs the 'closure and mothballing' option would also be likely to involve some one off costs which might include staff redundancy costs, one off costs involved in securing the building such as window shutters,

extension and improvement of alarm systems, installation of additional CCTV and other items. Including the provision of dedicated security would therefore probably increase the Council's overall annual costs to approximately £200-250,000 per annum.

6.5 Closure and mothballing unless part of a clear development programme might also require the Council to discuss the possibility of any grant claw back from the previous project at the Mansion with the Heritage Lottery Fund, who we understand in part financed the works to convert the Stables and Hayloft to provide the current café and meeting facilities and the public sanitary facilities.

6.6 Lastly, this option is also likely to involve adverse public reaction and comment unless it is carefully presented as part of a clear long term development programme.

Table 2 : Mothballing and Closure - Annual Costs

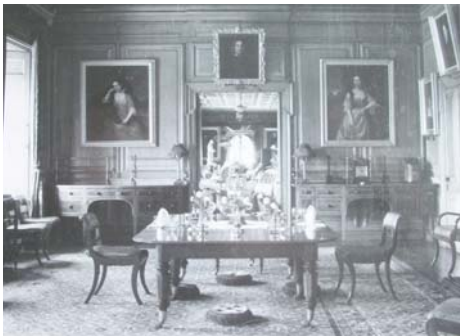
Cost Heading	Closure & Mothballing Cost
Staff/Employees	
Staffing	£0
Officer Management Time	£5,000
24 Hours Security	£120,000
Sub-Total	£125,000
Premises Costs	
Building Repair Upgrades	£0
Other Building Costs	say £10,000 (Essential repairs & maintenance only)
Statutory Maintenance	£10,266
Non-Occupancy Cost	£18,000
Gas	say £5,000 (Fabric & Frost Protection)
Electricity	say £5,000 (Alarms, Access Provisions and Emergency Systems)
Water	say £3,000 (Maintenance of public sanitary facilities and systems)
Business Rates	£0
Sub-Total	£51,266
Supplies & Services Costs	
Conferences & Weddings	£0
Café	£0
Sub-Total	£0
Total	£0
Income	£0
Deficit	£176,266

7 HOSPITALITY OPTIONS

7.1 There are a wide range of hospitality options as listed in Section 3 above and substantial precedent for the use of substantial country houses for boutique and up-market hotels and for holiday apartments and accommodation. The market demand for accommodation is robust at present but the high capital requirements and risks involved in development of new hotels along with the difficulties in obtaining funding mean that the market for new hotel development outside London is limited, especially at the high end of the market and involving existing historic buildings. The only exception is low cost branded budget hotels.

7.2 Impact on Historic Fabric

7.2.1 Hotel and hospitality conversions of existing historic buildings usually require significant change to their fabric particularly in sub-dividing spaces to create rooms of a suitable size, in creating fire escape routes and upgrading fire performance



Historic Dining Room

30 | Ashton Court Mansion - towards a sustainable future

and in the alterations necessary to provide en-suite sanitary accommodation which the market demands even at the bottom end of the market. The economics of operating hotels mean that operational viability drives the need for minimum room numbers which range from 100-120 rooms for budget level hotels down to 30-40 for specialist boutique hotels and meeting the required numbers will involve high levels of sub-division where an existing building is concerned. In addition budget hotels have strong branding requirements and a need for uniformity in room sizes and planning to achieve the necessary economies in operation. These factors add to their detrimental impact on historic buildings.

7.2.2 Some hospitality uses such as up-market holiday accommodation can be achieved with a minimum of impact on a historic building as the spatial requirements are more flexible and indeed the use is often very close to the original use of the spaces.

7.2.3 There is usually a good fit between the restaurant and public spaces required by up-market hotels and the spaces available in the principal rooms of a large country house such as Ashton Court Mansion.

7.3 Public Accessibility

7.3.1 Hotels provide good levels of public access although it is generally on a paid basis through using the hotel services either staying overnight, for functions or using restaurants, spa and other paying facilities. Lower budget hotels clearly provide higher levels of public access and use as their market is greater.

7.4 Impact on the Estate

7.4.1 At a location such as Ashton Court a hotel would have to provide adequate on site car parking and access would need clear signage across the estate. However, an up-market hotel use



Astley Castle

and uses such as holiday accommodation would also require a clear separation of external spaces between publicly accessible and private areas, which in turn would be very likely to mean that unless using paying services public access directly around the mansion and through its gardens would have to be constrained.

7.4.2 For up-market hotels exclusivity is important and at Ashton Court Mansion would be difficult to achieve in the context of a public estate which attracts over a million visitors a year and is the venue for major events which, although they could have some marketing benefits, would involve significant disruption of hotel operations both before and after.

7.4.3 Although a significant estate the opportunity to provide supporting exclusive activities for a hotel at Ashton Court such as a golf course, riding facilities, shooting or similar would be constrained by the fact that such facilities could not be dedicated to the private use of hotel guests only without imposing major restrictions on public access to the estate and areas where such



Golf on the Estate

activities might take place.

7.5 Use Compatibility

7.5.1 Hospitality uses at Ashton Court could be compatible with some of the other activities and uses discussed in this summary, particularly facilities such as a restaurant and conference and meeting rooms, which could support learning, education and conferencing uses.

7.5.2 Where hospitality uses include provision for functions and events these could conflict with uses such as residential use where these might require quiet enjoyment of the building and immediate gardens.

7.5.3 Our initial research and studies of Ashton Court Mansion suggest that hotel use is likely to require the entire building and possibly some extension to be operationally viable and hence compatibility of a hospitality use with other uses is less relevant as a

constraint.

7.6 Financial Viability - Capital

7.6.1 Using current hotel market values (allowed at £245,000 per room for Ashton Court) and the construction costs advised by Bare Leaning and Bare Synergy we have undertaken a simple residual value calculation for hotel use of Ashton Court assuming that 60 rooms could be provided within the mansion without any additional new build. This would mean room sizes including sanitary facilities averaging about 450-500sqft each, leaving 21-24,000 sq.ft for public spaces and circulation – about 45-50% of the gross floor area.

7.6.2 The updated residual value calculation is shown on Table 3 appended and illustrates that even with a nominal acquisition cost development for hotel use falls far short of viability with a deficit in excess of £8m. The simple sensitivity analysis set out on Table 4 shows that to reduce the deficit to zero, still assuming a nominal acquisition value, construction costs or room values would have to fall or rise respectively by 36.7% and 58% to achieve viability. Similarly to achieve viability room numbers would have to rise to 88 at the same values without involving any new build reducing room sizes to about 350-360 sq.ft and in reality significantly reducing the assumed room value.

7.6.3 Our analysis shows that hotel development which produces a positive site value at Ashton Court is unlikely in the current climate and that the scale of the capital deficit will make any commercial funding unobtainable.

7.7 Financial Viability - Revenue

7.7.1 Assuming charging structures reflecting an up-market boutique hotel and related operating costs a hotel option should be operationally viable at Ashton Court Mansion provided the

financing of the capital costs does not include the need to fund of any deficit between capital costs and value. If this could be achieved, which seems unlikely, on-going revenue support by the Council would be unnecessary.

7.8 External Grant Funding

7.8.1 Current economic development funding programmes in the region are not targeted at hospitality development and hence the major sources of funding for hospitality use would be likely to be heritage related. However, the key potential funding agency, the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), can only fund commercial organisations with grants of up to a maximum of £100,000 and even if the development is taken forward by the Council or a charitable organisation the NLHF have indicated any grant would not be greater than £5 million against a deficit likely to be in the region of £8m. The NLHF introduced a funding scheme in 2015 called Heritage Enterprise in order to help fund the conservation of heritage projects which have a commercial and economic use if the conservation deficit can be met. This scheme also requires the application to be in a partnership with another possibly commercial but experienced partner organisation and hence has significant potential for Ashton Court Mansion. A good example of a similar Heritage Grant project is the £28m Titanic Hotel in Belfast which secured a grant of just under £5m from the HLF and was led by a specially formed charity, the Titanic Foundation, working in partnership with a private sector commercial developer, Harcourt Developments. The changes to NLHF funding strategy introduced in February 2019 do not make a significant difference to the potential for a substantial grant as far as Ashton Court Mansion is concerned but increased competition and reduced funding will make securing NLHF grants more challenging.

7.8.2 Other funding agencies such as Historic England can offer funding to commercial as well as charitable and non-profit sector organisations but the ceiling on their grants is unlikely to mean any grant would make a significant impact on the deficit.

7.9 Potential Users & Developing Agencies

7.9.1 During the course of the original study we made numerous enquiries across the hospitality sector to try to identify any potential hotel developers but unfortunately we were unable to identify any interest in the market. Our enquiries included budget operators and organisations such as the YHA who have access to grant funding. The lack of interest confirms the lack of viability of a new development at Ashton Court and reflects existing hotels in the same up-market boutique sector being available at much lower room values.

7.9.2 Two possible areas of interest were identified however, both involving the conversion of all or part of Ashton Court to holiday accommodation; the Vivat Trust and the Holiday Property Bond.

7.9.3 The Vivat Trust is a charitable organisation established in 1981 to bring vacant and disused historic buildings back into a new use as up-market holiday lettings and has achieved considerable success. Being a charity the Trust has the capacity to raise grant aid towards any conservation deficit and has been able to access significant grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage and others for its projects in the past, including most recently at Hadlow Tower in Kent where the entire development costs of £4m were raised as grant without any long term borrowings. Initial discussions with Vivat led to them confirming an interest in developing the West Wing. However, the Vivat Trust have subsequently ceased to trade and their assets transferred to the Landmark Trust or sold.

7.9.4 The Holiday Property Bond is an organisation which acquires substantial properties for conversion to and use as holiday accommodation for its shareholders. It owns approximately 30 properties of which about half are in the United Kingdom and the majority of the others are elsewhere in Europe. In return for their investment shareholders have rights of use but unlike with timeshares their investment is directly through the company in the freehold of the property. Decisions about what properties to acquire and invest in are taken directly by the shareholders through an annual ballot. Initial discussions with the Holiday Property Bond have indicated that they would be prepared to seek the initial interest of shareholders with a view to going forward to the ballot stage but also advised that over recent years all investments have been abroad with none in the United Kingdom and that they do not see a change in the foreseeable future.

7.10 There have been a number of more recent expressions of interest from hospitality sector developers with one, Signature Living, being of particular potential interest. Signature Living is a small relatively new hotel developer working on an innovative funding and operational model which could be of relevance to Ashton Court Mansion. They have recently successfully developed the Coal Exchange in Cardiff, a Grade 2* historic building long derelict that has been a major conservation problem for the City of Cardiff and own and operate the Titanic and Shankley Hotels in Liverpool. They have recently commenced the development of another long-standing major conservation problem, the former Denbigh Hospital in North Wales. The key elements of its approach are;

- A focus on threatened historic buildings of social interest (and with nominal initial acquisition costs)
- Private investor funding (rather than conventional bank or major investment/equity fund resourcing), on a room

- ownership basis with a four year buy back agreement
- Themed hotels with emphasising and using the stories of the building and the people who owned, built and worked in it to create a unique character and ambience and to allow focused marketing
- An in-house marketing team using social media to build an active community of contacts and encourage bookings and limiting use of on-line booking agencies
- Non-branded conversions to allow unique individual rooms, working closely within the existing fabric of the building, minimising change and hence reducing construction costs
- Its own direct labour workforce undertaking the works removing contractor's profit element and reducing construction claims risks
- Incremental development in line with investor funding generated and earned income
- Open doors approach to the public to generate high levels of earned income through restaurant and bar trading – they indicated that unlike conventional hotels they would not want additional exclusively held land around Ashton Court but would like the highest possible 'permeability' for the public into the building
- It acts as both developer and operator

Signature Living's unusual model could bring a proposal for the development at Ashton Court close to viability but would entail significant risks for the City which would need to be carefully evaluated and mitigated. Key to these risks is the process of incremental development which gives no certainty of delivery at the outset and a design and construction process which might not deliver the quality necessary for a building of the Grade I listed status of Ashton Court Mansion. These issues could be mitigated as follows;

- Any viability gap could be resolved by establishing a project specific trust for Ashton Court mansion or engaging with an existing charitable organisation with the ability to develop buildings working in partnership with Signature Living to draw in NLHF funding through the Heritage Enterprise grant scheme
- Using a development partnership with a project specific trust who can use its influence and access to conservation deficit funding to ensure adequate conservation quality is achieved
- The City undertaking the key conservation works to the principal rooms at Ashton Court Mansion prior to passing the Mansion on to Signature Living for completion of the development and covering all or part of its costs through any agreed sale price.

Signature Living have indicated their willingness to bid for Ashton Court should it be marketed or to work with the City direct to formulate an acceptable development agreement.



Signature Living at the Coal Exchange Cardiff

Table 3 : Preliminary Development Costs & Appraisal

Construction Costs		Educational	Commercial Office	Conference & Functions	Hospitality	Residential
Fabric Repairs		3301000	3301000	3301000	3301000	3301000
Pannelled Room Restorations		850000	850000	850000	850000	850000
Mechanical & Electrical		1905000	1905000	1995000	210000	1980000
General Alterations		900000	800000	900000	1885000	1581000
Finsihes		495000	495000	518000	760000	585000
Specialist Items		156000	121000	266000	0	0
Sub-Total		7607000	7472000	7830000	8896000	8297000
Preliminaries	18%	1369260	1344960	1409400	1601280	1493460
Sub-Total		8976260	8816960	9239400	10497280	9790460
Design Risk	20%	1795252	1763392	1847880	2099456	1958092
Construction Rosk	10%	1077151	1058035	1108728	1259673.6	1174855.2
Total Construction		11848663	11638387	12196008	13856410	12923407
Professional Fees	15%	1777299	1745758	1829401.2	2078461	1938511.08
Overall Construction Total		13625963	13384145	14025409	15934871	14861918
Development Costs						
Statutory Fees			31000		28000	22300
Funding Valuation & Other Bank Fees			535366		637395	594477
Legal Cost (Acquisition and Loan Costs)			70000		70000	70000

Interest Costs (Construction)			652477		776825	724519
Interest Costs (Sales Period)			711896		847133	789907
Agents Fees			90000		30000	120000
Legal Costs on Sales/ Lettings			50000		20000	36000
Overall Development Total			2140739		2409353	2357202
Combined Construction & Development Costs			15524884		18344224	17219120
Developers Profit @ 15%			2328733		2751633.6	2582868
Total Development Costs			17853616		21095858	19801988
Cost Inflation Jan 2014 - Sept 2018	8.90%	1212710	1588972	1248261	1877531	1762377
Updated Development Costs (Sept 2018)		14838673	19442588	15273670	22973389	21564365
Sales Values/ Capital Values (Updated Sept 2018)		n/a	14473846	n/a	14520000	17491500
Surplus (Shortfall) Conservation Deficit			-4968742		-8453389	-4072865
Previous Shortfalls (2013/14)			-4553616		-7895858	-6001988
Change in Shortfall			-415126		-557531	1929123

Table 4 : Ashton Court Hotel Development
Variables & Sensitivity

		Cost	Room Numbers	Gross Room Areas (sqft)	Room Value	Total Value	Surplus (shortfall)
Main Calculation		22973389	60	520	242000	14520000	-8453389
Variable Costs							
-10%		20676050	60	520	242000	14520000	-6156050
-20%		18378711	60	520	242000	14520000	-3858711
10%		25270728	60	520	242000	14520000	-10750728
20%		27568067	60	520	242000	14520000	-13048067
Breakeven	-36.80%	14519181	60	520	242000	14520000	819
Room Numbers							
50		22973389	50	624	242000	12100000	-10873389
70		22973389	70	446	242000	16940000	-6033389
80		22973389	80	390	242000	19360000	-3613389
Breakeven	95	22973389	95	328.42105	242000	22990000	16611
Room Values							
-20%		22973389	60	520	193600	11616000	-11357389
-10%		22973389	60	520	217800	13068000	-9905389
10%		22973389	60	520	266200	15972000	-7001389
20%		22973389	60	520	290400	17424000	-5549389
Breakeven	58.2%	22973389	60	520	382900	22974000	611

8 ENTERTAINMENT OPTIONS

8.1 Entertainment options at Ashton Court Mansion were included in Tessa Coombes appraisal but are likely to be very limited due to the constraints of the building, funding and other issues. There is a fundamental lack of fit between these uses and a major historic mansion except where these are small in scale and might be part of a hospitality use such as an upmarket hotel.

8.2 Impact on Historic Fabric

8.2.1 Cinema and nightclub uses require relatively large spaces with no external daylighting. As these do not exist at Ashton Court they would have to be created and it is inconceivable that this could be achieved within the historic spaces of the mansion without a level of change and alteration which would be unacceptable to Historic England, the planning authority and statutory consultees. The only option would be to accommodate such uses in a new building on the site but again this would be almost certain to be unacceptable to Historic England

8.2.2 Casino uses require a range of smaller spaces and do not necessarily need to exclude daylight. Theoretically a casino could probably be designed within the existing spaces at Ashton Court in a way which could satisfy Historic England but the use is likely to be one outside the acceptable use options both in planning policy terms and to the general public.

8.3 Public Access

8.3.1 Public access would be provided by these use options but on a paying basis. Major problems could arise with access and egress to a night club at Ashton Court in the evenings with the attendant problems of security and vandalism.

8.4 Impact on the Estate

8.4.1 The major impact on the estate would arise from late night use and the associated security and vandalism problems. The uses would require parking but as usage would be heaviest in the evening this would not necessarily conflict with public parking to access the estate during the daytime.

8.4.2 The location of Ashton Court relative to the city centre and transport and the isolation of the estate make it unlikely that it would be of interest to a developer for these uses.

8.5 Use Compatibility

8.5.1 The problems attendant with these uses mean they would have little compatibility with other uses such as residential or conferences and learning. The only other use option with which they might be compatible is the hospitality options where they could be part of a hotel complex but this use would be secondary to the hotel and not a primary use.

8.6 Financial Viability - Capital

8.6.1 No detailed appraisal has been undertaken for this option as other criteria effectively rule it out of consideration. However, the market for cinemas is in large new build edge of town leisure



Outdoor Cinema located in the grounds of various statement buildings across the country

complexes and not for locations such as Ashton Court. There are small boutique cinema operators but their sites are always in the centre of urban areas. Similarly the market for both nightclubs and casinos is for sites central in urban areas. This means any values at Ashton Court would be low compared to other sites whilst the costs of construction and development relative to new build and other options would be so high as to leave exceptional levels of deficit likely to be greater than those for uses such as hospitality

8.7 Financial Viability – Revenue

8.7.1 No detailed appraisal of the revenue aspects of these use options at Ashton Court have been undertaken but the constraints of operating them within a historic building are significant and would increase operational costs compared with purpose built new facilities to levels likely to be unviable. For example multi-screen cinemas are planned to operate with a minimum of staffing based on a single central reception area where all ticketing, food and drinks sales take place and with very direct visual routes from the reception space to the screen rooms – this simplicity of planning would be unachievable at Ashton Court where much higher staffing levels and hence operational costs would be a consequence

8.8 External Grant Funding

8.8.1 No external grant funding is likely to be available for these options at Ashton Court and hence all development costs would have to be funded by any developer.

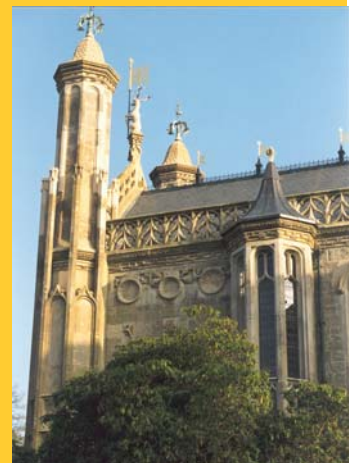
8.9 Potential Users & Developing Agencies

8.9.1 No potential users or developing agencies for entertainment uses with any interest in considering Ashton Court Mansion were identified during the course of this study.

CASE STUDY: HIGHCLIFFE CASTLE

Highcliffe Castle is a Grade 1 listed C18 countryhouse set in 14 acres of gardens on the cliffs above Christchurch Bay. It was ravaged by fire in the 1960's and then spent several decades falling into complete dereliction before being acquired by the Borough Council in the mid-1980's. With limited resources the Council brought the main external fabric of the Castle back into good repair through a programme of restoration works over a fifteen year period but the interior of the Castle remained derelict. Despite this some limited uses began, including the establishment of a seasonal temporary exhibition venue and a function venue which became popular for weddings. When the

Council was able to consider starting on the interior its brief required the architects to retain its 'derelict' character which feedback from users had indicated was a strong part of its interest and attraction. So the interior spaces completed to date still have the fire damaged panelling, exposed brickwork and masonry, no restored plasterwork ceilings just fragments and are undecorated but now have discreet heating and services and sanitary and catering facilities. The Castle has become the most popular wedding venue in Dorset doing over 400 weddings in 2012 with nearly 50 receptions and functions!



9 LEARNING USE OPTIONS

9.1 A wide range of learning related and education options have been considered for Ashton Court during the course of the study and a number of potentially interested parties and options have been identified. However, the value of Ashton Court for learning options cannot be evaluated in the same way as for commercial office, residential, hospitality or other options as such uses arise from specific need and user demand rather than from identifiable property development markets and demand.

9.2 The learning uses we have explored vary widely from leisure learning centres to high level academic facilities, to specialist facilities such as a music conservatoire and to training facilities. Most share a need for core teaching spaces with range of associated seminar and individual teaching spaces. They also require supporting administrative space, welfare and refreshment facilities, library and similar spaces. Some of the potential uses require a single large assembly space suitable for major gatherings, performance and ceremonial activities. Ashton Court provides a wide range of spaces that would provide for most of these activities. However, its largest space, the Music Room, can only provide for an audience of approximately 200 and so any learning use requiring a space accommodating larger numbers would have to consider the provision of a new build space. Our initial studies indicate options for a new building providing a large assembly or performance space on the north side of the mansion are feasible and with sensitive design could obtain the necessary planning and listed building consents.

9.2 Impact on Historic Fabric

9.2.1 Ashton Court provides a range of spaces of different sizes many of which have good daylighting, natural ventilation and good views and there is a good level of fit between the spaces in the Mansion and those likely to be required by general learning uses. As a consequence learning uses can be accommodated in the

Mansion with a level of alterations and upgrading likely to have a relatively low impact on the fabric of the Mansion.

9.2.2 Specialist facilities such as laboratories, drama studios and performance spaces or similar which have very high levels of servicing and require significant alterations could have a greater and unacceptable level of impact but could be provided in a new building if an essential part of any proposal involving a learning use.

9.2.3 Some learning uses especially those involving more formal education would require close management of activities and users to prevent excessive wear and tear and mild abuse, for example indiscriminate and extensive use of wall space in sensitive principal rooms for notices and posters, hanging student work etc.

9.2.4 Achieving DDA compliant access would be essential to learning uses but would be little more onerous than for any other use and involve no greater impact.

9.3 Public Accessibility

9.3.1 Learning uses would in many respects provide high levels of public access or could be managed to allow the provision of high levels of public access during periods when the core use is minimal or much reduced, such as in vacation periods and at weekends. For example a typical National Trust property is only open to the public from the end of March/April until late September/October and is closed to the public during the late autumn and winter period whilst by contrast a university academic year commences in late September/early October and ends by late May/early June. Similarly the highest visitor numbers to a National Trust property will be at weekends whilst university activity at weekends is very low.

9.3.2 Many learning use options would involve activities in which

the public in one guise or another are direct participants and hence as users would have access to the Mansion.

9.4 Impact on the Estate

9.4.1 Learning uses would have little direct impact on the estate other than the need to provide access and car parking and some could involve direct associated and beneficial use of parts of the wider estate for activities; for example field study centres or outdoor activity centres.

9.4.2 Learning uses which extensive evening programmes would require arrangements for managed evening access but this would not have the potential detrimental impact of entertainment use options for example.

9.5 Use Compatibility

9.5.1 Learning uses could have very good levels of compatibility with other use options especially conferencing and functions, heritage visitor asset use and hospitality uses. As noted above for example heritage asset use focused on vacation periods and weekends could fit well with academic use patterns. Likewise leisure learning demand is at weekends and during summer months whilst commercial conferencing demand is during the working weekend and is heaviest between Septembers and March. Similarly a strong segment of the leisure learning market is for residential course which could fit well with hospitality options through use of hotel rooms and catering and other facilities. Training uses would fit very well with conferencing uses requiring the same basic accommodation and supporting facilities such as catering.

9.5.2 There is also a potentially good fit between different learning activities. For example, a music conservatoire where use would be focused in the evenings, at weekends and during vacations would

fit well in physical terms with university academic uses of the same spaces but also have synergies in learning and intellectual terms as well possibly creating the opportunity for co-operating on courses and the provision of new joint courses. Similarly university extra-mural courses could have high levels of compatibility with leisure learning courses.

9.6 Financial Viability - Capital

9.6.1 There is no property market in learning accommodation which allows learning uses to be valued in speculative property terms however academic institutions have a range of funding programmes available for capital development. Furthermore, their investment decisions are primarily based on much wider factors such as local and regional need, adjacent facilities, location within communities, partnership arrangements, land availability and other factors.

9.6.2 There are however clear guidelines for learning institutions on the capital costs proposed for any development according to the type of use. The conservation deficit at Ashton Court will mean that development costs at Ashton Court would be likely to be significantly above those guidelines and hence some external funding would be needed to make Ashton Court viable in capital terms and in comparison to other comparative development options which may be available for any learning institution.

9.7 Financial Viability – Revenue

9.7.1 As with any business learning use options have to cover the costs of their accommodation provision from the revenue and support grants generated by their activities in teaching, training and supporting their students and participants. Meeting these property based operating costs depend much more on levels of utilisation than the actual costs themselves. For example an auditorium or

performance space might be a key space necessary to provide for specific learning courses run by an academic institution or users but might only be needed for a very small proportion of the time it is available, even as low as 5-10%, and will have the broadly the same operating and property costs irrespective of the level of use. Increasing the level of use is therefore an important factor in achieving viability and creates opportunities for sharing expensive facilities and accommodation with other users and use options to increase utilisation.

9.7.2 As many learning institutions have clear divisions between term time activities and vacations this can also have a significant impact on utilisation of accommodation and its viability with accommodation not being used and vacant outside the academic terms. Many universities seek to improve utilisation by running conferences, summer schools, leisure learning and similar activities in vacation periods. This also assists with better year round staff utilisation with a similar beneficial impact on overall operating costs and revenue.

9.7.3 At Ashton Court the complexity of the building, its high levels of circulation space and difficulties of improving its environmental efficiency to the levels offered by a new building will mean that its operating and property costs will be higher than a comparable new building. However viability of any learning uses at Ashton Court will be far more dependent on achieving high levels of space utilisation throughout the year than on property related operating costs. In addition higher property costs at Ashton Court may be offset for some learning uses by the quality of environment the building and its setting can provide and the related ability to make higher charges to uses.

9.8 External Grant Funding

9.8.1 Learning uses could attract significant external grant funding

particularly if provision for and emphasis of public use and access can be incorporated in any proposal. Grant funding from charitable foundations, government agencies and other sources is available towards training and education provision and related capital costs. Any fundraising programme and strategy would have to be targeted towards specific funders according to their specific remit and interests.

9.8.2 In addition heritage related funding is also available with potentially very substantial grant aid being available from the Heritage Lottery Fund with whom discussions were held during the course of the study. These discussions have indicated that a grant of up to £5m could be available through the NLHF's Heritage Enterprise scheme. Achieving a grant of this size would require careful structuring of the project and its presentation as the NLHF cannot fund educational projects where there is any danger of their funding being used to replace statutory educational funding streams towards state or private university, secondary or other education provision. Any NLHF funded project would have to provide good levels of public access in addition to any primary use and to provide training, volunteering and community engagement opportunities. Substantial NLHF capital funding can only be provided to non-profit, third sector, local authority or central government agencies and not to commercial or private owners or developers. However, the NLHF are happy for commercial or private sector users to be tenants and pay rents for the use of space in projects it funds where these rents are market rents and are used to reinforce the viability of the project. In this context the NLHF could support Ashton Court with the University of the West of England as a key tenant paying rent, an arrangement supported in principle for the Creative Youth Network project at Bridewell Island in Bristol.

9.8.3 The NLHF have very recently suffered a significant fall in their funding levels due to changes in the Lottery pricing structures

made by Camelot and their ability to give major grants will be constrained for the next four/five years until income levels have been brought back to previous levels. This reduced funding will be relevant to all options.

9.8.4 Smaller but important grant funding could be available from Historic England towards the building fabric repair costs and these grants are available to any owner of a building at risk subject to the works they propose being to high conservation standards and not having a detrimental impact on the historic fabric of the building.

9.8.5 A new funding stream for community asset transfer projects is currently being developed by the Big Lottery in partnership with the Social Investment Business combining a combination of central government and lottery funding. Other Big Lottery programmes such as 'Power to Change' may be applicable. Big Lottery funding schemes change constantly and monitoring the schemes will be important to any organisation undertaking Ashton Court.

9.8.6 For learning uses a coordinated and well-presented strategy which meets the constraints within which funders have to operate could make a very substantial contribution to securing the future of Ashton Court.

9.9 Potential Users & Developing Agencies

9.9.1 A number of interested users and potential uses have emerged from our investigations into this potential use option foremost of which is the University of the West of England whose Bower Ashton campus is immediately adjacent to the Ashton Court estate. Other potential users are the proposed new Bristol Music Conservatoire and the City Council for provision of accommodation for staff training.

9.9.2 UWE

9.9.2.1 The future of UWE's campus at Bower Ashton has been resolved after a period of uncertainty and the major development of their facilities at Bower Ashton is now well-underway. The Bower Ashton facilities are being expanded to cope with the re-location of St Matthias College and growth of courses and students. UWE's commitment to Bower Ashton means they will continue to be a potential user of any accommodation available in the Mansion at least at the present levels which provide a current income of approximately £40,000 pa

9.9.2.2 UWE are unlikely to ever require all the available space at Ashton Court and at this stage cannot give unequivocal commitment to longer term levels of use and hence could not make any commitment to taking a long-term lease on all or part of the space at Ashton Court. However UWE sees clear advantages in a partnership with other organisations including the Council which could introduce other compatible uses thereby significantly increasing levels of space utilisation hence reducing costs and which could assist the university in widening its academic and learning activities; for example through working with the Bristol Conservatoire to provide specialist courses or working with conference users to host academic conferences. UWE have indicated that they would be interested in discussing the partnership options and some investment in Ashton Court as a development partner with a separate flexible agreement through any partnership arrangement on their actual space use in order to meet the levels of demand that emerge in the future. They have entered into similar partnership agreements elsewhere in the City such as at Spike Island and are discussing their possible engagement in the Bridewell Island project with CYN.



UWE Bower Ashton Campus

9.9.2.3 Further discussions with UWE are suggested before a development strategy for the Mansion is taken further.

9.9.3 Bristol Music Pre-Conservatoire

9.9.3.1 The organisers of the Bristol Pre-Conservatoire already run successful programmes of music education and master classes for younger children and teenagers across the Bristol area and have the long term goal of building the project into a full Music Conservatoire for which they believe there is considerable demand. Currently they lease premises for practice and related teaching activities and have links with St George's where their students hold regular public performances.

9.9.3.2 The Conservatoire currently have no capital funds and would not envisage an activity of a scale which might require their sole use of Ashton Court but they would be a willing and interested partner in a wider scheme and their use could provide a steady and growing stream of income as a tenant.

The Conservatoire has already had discussions with UWE over potential course development and linkage and their use would be predominantly outside the normal academic terms and at weekends helping increase space utilisation.

9.9.4 Bristol City Council Training

9.9.4.1 Bristol City Council has over 10,000 staff and hence has a continuing and long term need to provide for staff training, development and CPD. At present these training needs have to be accommodated in City premises and through internal and external training providers at external venues. The City has undertaken a major overview of its office accommodation making significant economies; one of which has been to provide all training through external providers with the assumption that the providers also provide the accommodation necessary reducing the need for training space within City owned premises. (Check this is still current policy)

9.9.4.2 However, given the likely issues the City will face if it seeks to pursue a use for Ashton Court which involves the disposal of the building it could be a significant benefit if the City in outsourcing training to external providers tied any training contracts to the use of space available at Ashton Court for the delivery of the training activities. This could reduce the outsourcing contract costs by removing the cost of providing premises from the training provider and assist in increasing space utilisation at Ashton Court as part of any partnership agreement with other potential users such as UWE. Somerset County Council's experience at Dillington, a Grade I listed mansion, near Ilminster about 12 miles from Taunton has shown clearly that staff respond well to courses held in an interesting location and where facilities and services such as catering are of a high standard with better levels of participation and better training results as well as the benefit of networking opportunities with other users.

9.9.5 Other Interest

9.9.5.1 During the course of the study we had discussions with a number of other organisations with a need for space for similar activities to the main learning options discussed above. For example; Network Counselling, a charity currently based at the Methodist College in Henbury, were looking for new premises for both their training and counselling activities due to the forthcoming closure of the College. Unfortunately although they considered Ashton Court could provide accommodation well suited to their needs their current premises have to be vacated by the end of 2013 and Ashton Court was not an option that could be delivered in their timescale.

9.9.5.2 The likely long development timescale of the Ashton Court project is one which has a significant impact on all the potential users identified including UWE and is a real constraint on any potential users being able to make any firm commitment. In particular the need to find external funding to meet the conservation deficit has a significant impact on the overall development timescale; for example, application and negotiation of a major grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund will take at least two years before which no progress on the main capital works could be made as grants cannot be paid retrospectively for any works undertaken before a grant commitment is made. The implication of this is that Ashton Court Mansion needs a development body if not the City Council that can champion and implement a development strategy over the longer term. Such an organisation could be structured as a project specific development trust and further consideration of this is given below.

CASE STUDY: DILLINGTON HOUSE

Dillington House near Ilminster about 12 miles from Taunton is run as a residential leisure learning and conference centre by Somerset County Council. Its gardens are open to the public and the main house is available to visitors when not in use or by arrangement. The leisure learning uses are predominantly at weekends and in the summer months whilst the conferencing and training uses are predominantly during the week and in the autumn and winter periods, meaning Dillington achieves high levels of occupancy and hence is sustainable and supported by a diverse market. The standards of provision including catering are maintained at a high level with quality of offer being part of its appeal. The County Council has achieved a high quality result without the taint of 'municipality' that can limit the success of local authority run venues and activities.



10 CONFERENCE EVENT & FUNCTIONS OPTIONS

10.1 Ashton Court's most recent though now defunct main use was as a conference, events and functions venue run by the Council itself after being run by a commercial contractor for a number of years up until 2011. The three main rooms on the ground floor of the south range provided the principal function rooms supported by the bar and main kitchens which replaced the Winter Garden in the 1970's and sanitary facilities in the east side of the north west range. The Music Room is the largest of the function rooms available and can seat up to approximately 200 guests according to the seating arrangements. Entrance to the conference and functions area of the Mansion is via the main Entrance Hall on the west side of the Mansion. In addition the two main first floor rooms in the Hayloft are used for meetings and training activities, predominantly by the Council itself and are serviced by a smaller secondary kitchen on the ground floor which also provides service to the café in the Stables.

10.2 This use is long established but lack of investment means the facilities became tired and had a municipal feel both of which contributed low levels of use and business activity reflected in the figures set out in Section 6 above.

10.3 One of the main users of the conference space is UWE which uses the Music Room and adjacent spaces for some of its general purpose teaching and accounts for approximately a third of the revenue generated by the Mansion

10.4 The market for conferences, functions and events is relatively robust even though there are a number of successful local specialist conference and events venues such as Leigh Court, Coombe Lodge in Somerset and others as well as hotel provision in central Bristol. Coombe Lodge has demonstrated the potential for growth of the business at Ashton Court as since it opened in 2008/9 its turnover has grown steadily to in excess of £3.5m per year in the 2016/17 financial year compared to Ashton Court's income from

conferencing and events of just £148,000

10.5 One factor in the success of venues such as Leigh Court and Coombe Lodge is that they combine a number of other compatible uses with their conference, functions and events business both providing flexible serviced small business office accommodation, conventional office letting and some limited hospitality capacity allowing guests at functions to stay overnight – this is seen as particularly important for functions such as weddings where family and main guests do not want to be too far from the venue itself. Combining these uses gives business flexibility and reduces dependence on a single stream of income and is seen by operators of both venues as an important aspect of what they do.

10.6 In comparison to venues such as Coombe Lodge Ashton Court as a conference, functions and events venue was significantly under-performing and its assets, its historic interest, its prominence as a landmark in Bristol and its fine location and setting in the estate give it great potential in this market if rigorously managed and creatively and energetically promoted.

10.7 Impact on Historic Fabric

10.7.1 Ashton Court has already been in use as a conference and functions venue and has the main facilities it needs to develop further and hence the impact the provision of such facilities



might have on the historic fabric has already taken place. Further expansion of the conferencing and events facilities would therefore have a relatively limited impact on the remaining historic fabric of the Mansion. Development of the upper floors would require additional lift access in the south and north west ranges which would have an impact on the historic fabric but our initial studies have shown that this could be designed to be at an acceptable level.

10.7.2 An interesting issue raised by several of the consultees during the original study has been the potential for reversing some of the more detrimental changes made in the 1970's in particular the demolition of the Winter Gardens and the insensitive alterations to the Great Hall to install new sanitary services in the north west range. If these alterations could be reversed as part of any development of the conferencing and functions use at Ashton Court this would amount to a positive and beneficial impact on its historic fabric but implementation would depend heavily on the available funding.

10.8 Public Access

10.8.1 The conferencing and functions use gives good levels of public access to the mansion albeit largely on a paid basis and there is a strong marketing benefit in maintaining public access even when conferences and functions are not taking place. This combination of a revenue generating core use supplemented by public access and operation as a heritage visitor asset could be of significant benefit in making the business plan for the Mansion more robust and in the negotiation of the key grants which will be essential to bring the project close to viability.

10.8.2 Whilst some of the functions and conference uses require exclusivity whilst they are in progress when the facilities are not in use public access can be provided with a minimum disruption to

the main business.

10.9 Impact on the Estate

10.9.1 The years of use of the Mansion as a conference and functions venue has demonstrated that continued use should have a minimum impact on the wider estate. Increased levels of use may require additional car parking space or temporary allocation of existing car parking to users for important events and functions.

10.10 Use Compatibility

10.10.1 The conferencing and functions use of the Mansion has very good compatibility with other use options such as hospitality uses, office and learning functions and indeed evidence from the wider market and facilities such as Coombe Lodge suggests that combining several compatible use options around a core conferencing and functions use helps build a robust business plan by developing a range of income streams

10.10.2 Uses of the conferencing facility at Ashton Court included UWE, a learning based use, as an important source of income and appears to present no major operational problems if well managed. UWE book space a year in advance and so this gives a degree of certainty in planning other conferences and functions.

10.10.3 The Council is a significant user of the Hayloft facility for training and meetings and this is clearly operationally also compatible with the wider use of the Mansion for conferencing and functions.

10.11 Financial Viability – Capital

10.11.1 There are few large specialist developers of conferencing, events and functions facilities and many such facilities in the South

West are developed by universities and colleges as a way of enhancing their business or as at Dillington House in Somerset (Somerset Council) or Callington Hall also in Somerset (EDF) by major organisations with training needs which provide a core business on which to build a wider conferencing and functions business.

10.11.2 As with other uses conversion and upgrading of Ashton Court to provide a major conferencing and functions venue will have the same problem of a major conservation deficit to overcome. Although there is no clear market for conference venues which provides a guide to values and they tend to be sold as business concerns rather than property assets, we would expect the value of a completed facility at Ashton Court to lie between the values likely for hospitality and office uses which implies a shortfall between costs and value or a conservation deficit in the region of £6m.

10.11.3 If the conservation deficit can be funded by grant aid and given the interest of UWE in continuing use of the Mansion alongside the Council's likely continuing need to train its staff and accommodation to meet the training needs as well as the existing conferencing business at Ashton Court there is a potential and demonstrable level of use which could justify a significant level of capital investment even if on an incremental basis.

10.12 Financial Viability – Revenue

10.12.1 Continued conferencing and functions use at Ashton Court as it was operated at present was clearly not viable but there are good examples in the region notably Coombe Lodge and Dillington House both in Somerset and Leigh Court closer by where successful businesses are developed and run with conferencing and functions as a core part of their offer. These successful venues demonstrate both the need for a range of

compatible uses and ideally and underpinning use, such as training provision for the County Council at Dillington, or the regional Chamber of Commerce use at Leigh Court which give a continuity of income independent of the conferencing and business market and seasonal factors. For each of them very high levels of space and facility utilisation combines with rigorous management and effective marketing is a key to their success.

10.12.2 At present the Council do not pay for their use of the facilities at Ashton Court or make any internal transfers to cover the cost of their use and hence the current trading figures provided for the Mansion do not reflect accurately the balance between its operating costs and income earned through use. (Check current status and levels of use) Looked at from an alternative viewpoint the Council's use of the Mansion for meetings and accommodating training activities currently costs it several hundred thousand pounds a year and hence it should arguably use it more and certainly should not incur expense elsewhere when accommodation is available at the Mansion

10.13 External Grant Funding

10.13.1 If conferencing and functions use can be combined with a level of public access to the Mansion as a heritage visitor asset and some broad learning functions this would create an activity with high levels of public access and a viable operational basis in the long term which are both key issues for funding agencies.

10.13.2 As noted above the NLHF have indicated a possible grant of up to £5m which would come close to accounting for the conservation deficit Ashton Court poses. The NLHF's Heritage Enterprise grant scheme would be the most appropriate route to obtain a significant grant for Ashton Court and the Mansion in a mix of uses based around conferencing and functions with some development as a modest heritage visitor asset would come very close to meeting the assessment criteria for Heritage Enterprise

grants.

10.13.3 Historic England funding would be available towards the Mansion's fabric repairs although they might have to be undertaken as a separate phase of works to access and maximise any NLHF grant.

10.13.4 Combination of conferencing and functions use with training activities and learning might also assist in access funding from non-heritage sources and direct investment from organisations such as UWE or commercial operators such as Coombe Lodge, who have expressed an interest.

10.14 Potential Users & Developing Agencies

10.14.1 The existing market for conferencing at the Mansion and the potential for use by UWE and the Council are potentially significant in terms of securing future uses and identifying a market for conferencing and functions at Ashton Court

10.14.2 In addition during the course of the original study the owners of Coombe Lodge and Priston Mill, both successful conferencing and business venues in the region, expressed a strong interest in an engagement in developing Ashton Court possibly in partnership with the Council or UWE. They have indicated they have resources to invest but not at a level to undertake the entire project in a single phase and hence if involved would wish to pursue an incremental development strategy. More recently other enquiries have been received by the City which should be followed up.

II HERITAGE VISITOR ASSET OPTIONS

11.1 Ashton Court Mansion is a major heritage asset in its own right and the estate has for many years been an important visitor asset and attraction for the City. Many similar buildings are open to the public and locally Tyntesfield, Clevedon Court, Dyrham Park and other major country houses attract large numbers of visitors.

11.2 Ashton Court has a fascinating history and although its interior is largely derelict it has some fine rooms in good condition such as the Music Room and Entrance Hall and other rooms such as the Billiard Room and first floor bedrooms, whose panelling and architectural features survive although they were removed in the 1970's, and which could be restored given the availability of funding. Together these rooms have very significant historic value and are of significant potential interest to the public.

11.3 Ashton Court however, unlike Tyntesfield and similar heritage visitor assets has no internal furnishings and all its contents have been dispersed with no likelihood of them being returned in sufficient quantity to be displayed in the building and to enhance its interest as a major heritage asset.

11.4 One possible option would be to house some of the City's reserve collections in the Mansion or to seek to bring collections to the Mansion, perhaps those from one of the major national collections or museums, and use these with the interior of the building itself as the core of a heritage visitor attraction.

11.5 The key issue with the use of the Mansion as a heritage visitor asset is the feasibility of raising the capital funding necessary to complete its careful conservation and upgrading as a major heritage asset and equally if not more challenging, how to secure its viability in the longer term. The City in setting the terms of reference for the study emphasised the complete lack of capital funding it has available and its inability to provide any future

revenue funding and therefore the need for all capital costs and future revenue costs for Ashton Court to be achievable without any contribution from the Council. However, when considering the reality of the current annual costs and operating deficit of the Mansion as set out in Section 4&5 above some Council funding may be essential to mitigate the substantial longer term costs of doing nothing, or even closing and mothballing the Mansion.

11.6 Costs for development of the Mansion as a heritage visitor attraction are likely to be higher than those indicated on Table 3 for other uses and could be very significantly higher when exhibition and interpretation costs are taken into account. This could mean overall development costs of the Mansion as a major heritage visitor asset of between £15-20m. Against this the Heritage Lottery Fund have advised the maximum level of grant available from them towards the Mansion is unlikely to be greater than £5m and cannot be guaranteed. So even if this level of NLHF funding is obtained further funding of at least £10-15m would have to be found from other sources for any heritage visitor asset use. There are no other sources of grant funding currently available to the Council which could meet this level of funding shortfall even if the Mansion could be demonstrated to be operationally viable. Furthermore without any financial commitment from the Council and given the competitive funding environment, funders are likely to prioritise and target the monies they do have available to projects which have significant local authority financial support.

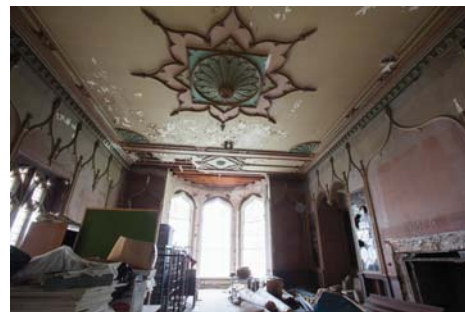
11.7 Impact on Historic Fabric

11.7.1 The impact of a heritage visitor asset on the historic fabric of the Mansion could be significant even though there would be a close compatibility between the two. For example any heritage visitor use involving the housing of important collections would be likely to involve major works to re-service the building and achieve acceptable environmental standards along with security and fire

protection works all of which could have significant impact on the Mansion's historic fabric.

11.7.2 Simple presentation of the building itself as the focus of a heritage attraction would obviously involve much less extensive works and consequently much less impact on its historic fabric. Public access to the building, whatever the nature of the heritage visitor asset, would require high levels of DDA compliance including lifts to give access for public and staff to all main areas of the building, again with potentially significant impact.

11.7.2 Any heritage use involving storage of archival material or collections would be expected by the funding agencies to achieve BS5454 standards. This would involve very high levels of fire protection, robust structural improvements to achieve necessary loadings and high levels of servicing to achieve the necessary level of environmental control also with high levels of impact on the Mansion's fabric.



Ashton Court - The library before 2013 fire

11.8 Public Accessibility

11.8.1 This option would provide very high levels of public use and accessibility albeit entrance charges would be likely to be necessary to achieve long term viability.

11.9 Impact on the Estate

11.9.1 If a heritage visitor attraction at the Mansion is to be viable high visitor numbers will be essential which will be likely to require the provision of additional car parking on the site adjacent to the building or significantly improved public transport provision and access routes. The use would be compatible with the use of the estate for events subject to the resolution of security issues.

11.9.2 The use would be unlikely to have any significant wider impact on the estate

11.10 Use Compatibility

11.10.1 Heritage visitor use could be compatible with a range of other use options and indeed there could be mutual benefits in the combination of heritage visitor use with some learning and conference options. In particular peak periods of public access would be likely to be at weekends and during holiday periods over the summer whilst peak periods of learning use and conference use would be during the week and between the autumn and early spring, allowing both uses to be accommodated with a minimum of conflict and increasing both space utilisation and income generation. This assumes heritage visitor use is based on the Mansion itself being the attraction rather than it housing significant collections.

11.11 Financial Viability - Capital

11.11.1 A heritage visitor use option will rely very heavily if not entirely on the availability of capital grants from a wide range of sources rather than conventional investment as income generation will not be sufficient to service any significant borrowings and in effect 100% capital funding will be necessary to implement the project.

11.12 Financial Viability – Revenue

11.12.1 Most heritage and cultural visitor assets require revenue grant support unless they have significant revenue generating activities as an alternative source of income. This could be achieved at Ashton Court by combining heritage visitor asset use with other uses which help provide revenue support to underpin the heritage asset use. Ideally the supporting uses would be ones which require little management effort to allow focus on the operation and management of the heritage asset so for example in this context office use would be preferable to hospitality use. Achieving viability for a heritage/cultural asset use of the Mansion is likely to require between 60-70% of the building being retained in commercial revenue generating uses.

11.12.2 Ongoing viability is likely to be a key issue for the main funding agencies who will not want to make major capital grants if the operational viability of the heritage visitor asset is uncertain or is not underwritten by the Council or a similar body.

11.13 External Grant Funding

11.13.1 The City wishes to find a use for Ashton Court which is funded without any input from the City and hence would be entirely reliant on grant funding or investment. In the case of a heritage visitor asset this means Ashton Court would have to rely



Rose Garden

entirely on grants to meet the capital costs.

11.13.2 The key source of funding available is likely to be the National Lottery Heritage Fund who have indicated their willingness to consider a capital grant application for up to £5m. As noted above even if successful at this level a further £10-15m would need to be raised from other sources. Unfortunately there are few other major sources of funding applicable to Ashton Court and available in the region with the exception of Historic England as discussed above. For example EU funding through ERDF or other programmes is not available in Bristol neither is any significant funding likely to be available through the Regional Growth Fund and Local Enterprise Partnerships. Reliance would therefore have to be placed on a major fundraising campaign with applications to a combination of grant giving charities and commercial sponsors combined with a public appeal. However, achieving the levels of capital funding required through such a strategy and with the Council unwilling itself to support the project with capital finance would be very unlikely to be successful.

11.13.3 Enabling development could produce some funding but insufficient to meet the shortfall assuming an NLHF input of £5m. Enabling development is discussed further below.

11.13.4 An incremental development of the Mansion would have to be pursued over an extended period of time if the option of a heritage visitor asset at the Mansion is selected. Incremental development would have to progress at the rate allowed by the project fundraising with each incremental phase being completed within the funding available and operationally self-supporting on completion. This would place an emphasis on revenue generating supporting uses being completed at an early stage rather than the core heritage visitor asset use. A key issue with an incremental development option would be the response and willingness of the NLHF to assist with funding if the eventual outcome of the project

is uncertain and its willingness to consider a series of smaller funding bids rather than a single large one.

11.14 Potential Users & Developing Agencies

11.14.1 No significant interested users or potential developing agencies for a heritage visitor asset have been identified during the study period to date although enquiries have been received from a number of museum and heritage organisations looking for space to house their collections, such as the Bakelight Museum in Williton in Somerset. These organisations have no capital resources to invest in the project and would be reliant on grant aid to meet their costs facing the same problems in raising the necessary funding as outlined above.



CASE STUDY: WOLLATON HALL

Wollaton Hall and Park have been open to the public since their acquisition by Nottingham City Council in the 1930's. Entrance to the Hall which houses a large Museum is free but there is a charge for car parking which generates significant revenue. Guided tours to the Hall are also charged for.

The Hall's State Rooms can be visited but are also extensively used for functions and events for which charges are made. Open air concerts and theatrical performances are held in the Park using the Hall as a back drop – even the most recent Batman film was set there! The adjacent stable block and estate buildings house a large refreshment facility, a shop, an Art Gallery and an Industrial Museum. Although the Hall's income is substantial it has to be heavily subsidized by the City Council to allow free access.

12 OFFICE/WORKSPACE OPTIONS

12.1 There are many examples of historic country houses like Ashton Court in commercial, local authority and other office uses, ranging from corporate headquarters buildings to small business centres. Good examples locally include Leigh Court in Abbots Leigh and Kelston Park outside Bath. Ashton Court already houses office provision for the City officers looking after the Ashton Court Estate and the Mansion and for some external agencies. Conventional office development particularly when speculative is located in prime city centre locations or in new regional development areas at motorway intersections or transport interchanges and speculative development of major historic houses for commercial office space is unusual particularly in the current economic climate.

12.2 The nature of the workplace is changing significantly and there is now a very significant focus on workspace for start-up, creative media and new industries and technologies. This is usually provided in smaller units with flexible 'easy in easy out' lease arrangements. There is considerable investment by universities in providing linked graduate start-up accommodation and the links and proximity between UWE and the Mansion have interesting potential in this respect. A clear trend is for space with unusual character and visual interest – very high speed internet connections being of key importance – accommodation offering both rarely takes long to let; for example, the Arkwright Society developed one of the larger Grade I mill buildings at its Cromford Mill site near Matlock in rural Derbyshire. Careful conservation combined with creative contemporary design and highly serviced space with very high speed broadband resulted in the building's 21,000 sq.ft being fully let within five months of completion

12.2 Impact on Historic Fabric

12.2.1 Office conversion of major historic buildings if the space brief requirements are flexible can be achieved with little change

that has a detrimental impact on their historic fabric, especially where existing spaces can be used with little or no subdivision and where the principal rooms can be used for open plan spaces or special uses such as boardrooms or conference and meeting rooms; for example where a historic mansion is used for corporate headquarters.

12.2.2 The major impact is likely to result from re-servicing and in particular the achievement of high lighting levels and high levels of power and data services distribution. However, an intelligent design approach and the fact that at Ashton Court the building has very good levels of natural ventilation and daylighting could significantly reduce the impact of excessive servicing requirements on its historic fabric. Unlike uses such as hospitality or residential conversion the provision of wet services to kitchens and sanitary fittings is very limited for commercial office development of a historic building such as Ashton Court and could be simply planned to minimise its impact.

12.2.3 Where buildings such as Ashton Court are used for small business purposes using the existing room and spatial subdivisions will give a range of office sizes to meet variations in user demand and can allow business growth by facilitating easy office moves within the building. For small business centre use the principal rooms could provide common reception facilities and shared meeting and conference accommodation.

12.2.4 Provision of disabled access would be little different to other uses in its impact on the Mansion's historic fabric and indeed could be reduced as the imperative to provide compliant access is lower than for uses involving high levels of public use and access; for example, for learning or heritage visitor asset uses.

12.2.5 Office use of Ashton Court could therefore be achieved with minimal impact on its historic fabric compared to most other

use options with careful design and thought.

12.3 Public Accessibility

12.3.1 Office use of the Mansion would be likely to mean little public access is possible except by special arrangement or if the office use had a public interface; for example, an inquiry or consultation area. If the works are funded in part by agencies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund or English Heritage then the grants conditions would require some public access provision but this would be on the basis of access by appointment and for a specified number of days through the year as would also be the case for residential use as outlined below.

12.3.2 Office use of the Mansion by a public authority such as the Council might provide better levels of public access but privacy and security issues would mean the level of access would remain limited.



Markets in the courtyard could still take place

12.4 Impact on the Estate

12.4.1 Office use would have little impact on the wider estate although an increase in parking provision would be likely to be necessary, particularly if no improvements in public transport are made. However, the location of the Long Ashton park and ride facility relatively close to the Mansion could provide for any additional parking needed for office use with a minor amendment to the bus routes and/or footpath alterations and improvements providing easy links to the building.

12.4.2 Office use of the Mansion would not place any significant constraints on public access to the gardens or to events on the estate as would residential or hospitality uses.

12.5 Use Compatibility

12.5.1 Office use would have very good levels of compatibility



Café function could be retained

with uses such as conference and training use and indeed would reinforce their viability and hence reduce risk through shared use of common spaces, reception and meeting spaces and greater space utilisation. A combination of office and conference uses is quite common where historic buildings such as Ashton Court are used and indeed the examples of Leigh Court, Staunton Harold and Kelston Park cited elsewhere in this summary combine conferencing and events use with office use to good effect.

12.5.2 Office use would also be compatible with learning uses and heritage visitor asset use and would pose few problems of compatibility with both hospitality and residential uses.

12.6 Financial Viability – Capital

12.6.1 Good data is available on local and regional office rents from CBRE and local agencies such as Colliers and Savills who publish recent data regularly. Using this data and the construction cost information provided by Bare Leaning & Bare we have undertaken a preliminary and simple residual valuation calculation for Ashton Court assuming general office use. The calculation is set out on Table 3 & 5 and is based on a rent of £24.75/sq.ft excluding any service charges, no void allowances, a yield of 6.5% and a net lettable area of 38,000sqft with circulation and common spaces amounting to just over 20% of the gross internal area again reflecting the inefficiency of space use at Ashton Court.

12.6.2 Despite these assumptions being relatively generous the calculation set out on Table 3 still nevertheless shows that speculative office development of Ashton Court falls considerably short of viability even with a nominal acquisition cost, although at a deficit of approximately £4.5m it is the lowest of the deficits for the calculated use options. Table 5 shows that to break even would require either construction costs to be reduced by over 25%, rents of £30.22/sq.ft to be achieved or a yield of 4.8% to be acceptable,

none of which is likely. (Check data)

12.6.3 Significantly higher rents can be achieved for small business space although only on the basis of flexible lease terms but which would provide insufficient covenant to justify bank funding at the levels necessary if at all.

12.7 Financial Viability – Revenue

12.7.1 In general for office uses and developments rents are used to cover capital development costs including funding costs whilst service charges are used to meet ongoing building property costs, effectively the building's revenue or operating costs.

12.7.2 Office service charges levied on tenants would be used to cover the maintenance of the Mansion's fabric, common spaces and building services and infrastructure and would be set at a level sufficient to meet these costs. In the longer term they would only be sufficient if occupancy levels were high enough after void allowances to meet the costs and if not this risk would fall on the developer, reducing the profitability of the development. In funding the project any funding agency would expect to see an appraisal of the impact of voids on service cost levels and viability and they would be a factor in determining the availability of any loan funds.

12.7.3 Service costs are a substantial part of any property costs for a tenant and they would be scrutinised by any potential tenant in the same way as rent costs in making decisions with the implication that a developer would have to ensure they were reasonable as well as delivering long term viability.

12.8 External Grant Funding

12.8.1 External grant funding could be available from the National Lottery Heritage Fund but as with other primarily commercial

Table 5 : Ashton Court Commercial Office
Variables & Sensitivity

		Cost	Rent £/sqft	Net Lettable 80%	Void Allowance	Yield	Value	Surplus (shortfall)
Main Calculation		19442588	24.5	38400	0	6.5	14473846	-4968742
Variable Costs								
-10%		17498329	24.5	38400	0	6.5	14473846	-6156050
-20%		15554070	24.5	38400	0	6.5	14473846	-3858711
10%		21386847	22.5	38400	0	6.5	14473846	-10750728
20%		23331106	22.5	38400	0	6.5	14473846	-13048067
Breakeven	-25.60%	14473846	22.5	38400	0	6.5	14473846	0
Variable Rent								
£15		19442588	15	38400	0	6.5	8861538	-1081050
£20		19442588	20	38400	0	6.5	11815385	-7627203
£25		19442588	25	38400	0	6.5	14769231	-4673357
Breakeven	£32.91	19442588	32.91	38400	0	6.5	19442588	0
Variable Yield								
5%		19442588	24.5	38400	0	5.0	17280000	-11357389
6%		19442588	24.5	38400	0	6.0	1440000	-9905389
7%		19442588	24.5	38400	0	7.0	12342857	-7001389
Breakeven	4.84%	19442588	22.5	38400	0	4.84	19442588	0
Void Allowance								
10%		19442588	22.5	38400	10%	6.5	11963077	-7479511
20%		19442588	22.5	38400	20%	6.5	10633846	-8808742

uses with significant constraints on public access a successful bid would be unlikely unless the project was initiated by a third sector charitable organisation. This is especially the case with the current high levels of competition for grants from charitable and non-profit making organisations with projects providing for much better public access and outcomes such as training and long term volunteer engagement. As with residential use the National Lottery Heritage Fund could in theory provide funding up to a level of £5m or up to 95% of the conservation deficit whichever is the lower but only if the primary developing agency was the City or a charitable organisation rather than a commercial developer. However, the NLHF's Heritage Enterprise grant scheme could be ideal for a project at Ashton Court involving a mix of uses with significant office or workspace use especially if targeted at small and new innovative businesses

12.8.2 Historic England could provide grant aid for fabric repairs even with a commercial developing agency but only at low levels unlikely to come anywhere near to meeting the likely conservation deficit. For example English Heritage rarely makes grants for secular projects in excess of £400-500,000. In addition combined Historic England and NLHF funding is unlikely for the same project and with the level of deficit likely only the NLHF has the potential to make grants at a level to bring the Ashton Court project close to viability.

12.8.3 Enabling development either adjacent to the Mansion of elsewhere on the estate could assist in bringing a project at Ashton Court closer to viability and this is discussed below in more detail.

12.9 Potential Users & Developing Agencies

12.9.1 During the course of the original study we made numerous enquiries across the commercial office and workplace sector to try to identify any potential interested developers but unfortunately

we were unable to identify any interest in the market. The commercial office development market is gradually improving but even if this improvement continues and banks start increasing their funding, not being in a prime location, this is unlikely to bring any early interest in office development of Ashton Court. There are now a number of specialist workspace developers providing start-up space, space for creative industries and artisan users; as for example at the Engine Shed at Temple Meads. Approaches to these newer more innovative developers might bring some interest in a development partnership for Ashton Court

12.9.2 The City has recently occupied space in the Hayloft for office use and there is no reason why if additional office space is required by the City that it could not be accommodated at Ashton Court.



CASE STUDY: BREWERY ARTS

Brewery Arts is an Arts and Fine Crafts Centre house in a converted C19 brewery building. Although operating for over 20 years it has recently undergone a major £2.5 million upgrade to create a new gallery, much improved café and shop and to facilitate full access for disabled users. Of particular interest are the Centre's sixteen craft studios/workshops which are let to local artists and craftsmen and, as well as providing a focus for visitor interest, provide substantial income for the Trust; enough to allow the gallery to be open at no charge. Also an important revenue generating activity is the popular arts and crafts focused leisure learning classes. The Café specialises in good quality homemade food with locally sourced organic ingredients. Brewery Arts is run by a small project specific Charitable Trust with very little revenue subsidy.

13 RESIDENTIAL OPTIONS

13.1 There are very many examples of substantial country mansions being developed for residential accommodation ranging from straightforward conversions to self-contained apartments to specialist residential uses such as retirement homes; Barrow Court nearby is a good example. Most of these projects have involved buildings which are in relatively good condition and with their interiors relatively intact although some notable exceptions including those under taken by Kit Martin in the 1990's have involved buildings in very poor repair. The economic climate over recent years has seen a collapse in the development of country houses for residential use and even in the current housing market upturn the risks associated with developing historic buildings in poor repair deter developers and more importantly their funders. Where examples do exist they are often associated with large amounts of new development and are in prime locations; for example, Bristol General Hospital in Bristol's docklands or high



High value development in the City Centre at Bristol General Hospital

value schemes in Clifton.

13.2 Impact on Historic Fabric

13.2.1 Residential conversion is reasonably compatible with the historic fabric of buildings such as Ashton Court although the principal rooms present problems due to their scale and the requirement by agencies such as English Heritage that they are maintained in their existing form and not sub-divided. This tends to push average floor areas up without a corresponding proportional increase in values.

13.2.2 Multiple residential use requires extensive re-working of services and provision of new kitchen and sanitary accommodation for each unit and the impact of the required new servicing on the historic fabric can be significant if not carefully planned. In addition fire escape and protection works to separate residential units can be destructive of historic fabric if not carefully resolved.

13.2.3 However, there is a good level of compatibility where the original historic building as at Ashton Court provided for residential use and a sensitive scheme can usually be negotiated through the planning process and agreed with English Heritage if the density of provision is not excessive.

13.3 Public Access

13.3.1 Clearly development of Ashton Court for private residential use would prevent public access to the major part of the Mansion and is also likely to need restriction of public access to the grounds and gardens immediately around the building due to the need to provide private external spaces, especially for any up-market residential development.

13.3.2 Historic England do provide grants for fabric repairs for

residential development of country houses but this is conditional on the provision of some modest public access; usually by appointment on a specified number of days each year and so its extent is very limited and constrained.

13.4 Impact on the Estate

13.4.1 Residential use of Ashton Court will constrain the use of the estate around the building as residents would expect quite enjoyment of their property. They will also expect a level of privacy and higher value schemes are likely to require dedicated garden areas and secure private parking provision. Other than on the immediate environs of the Mansion and in constraining events and functions held in the estate close to the mansion, the impact of residential use on the estate would be nominal.

13.5 Use Compatibility

13.5.1 Residential uses can be compatible with other use options which do not involve excessive disturbance from out of hours activities or noise etc and which do not prejudice their privacy. If residential use is part of a mixed use scheme there would need to be clear separation between the uses with identified private areas and a minimum of common facilities to achieve the levels of privacy and separation that would be required.

13.6 Financial Viability – Capital

13.6.1 Using current residential market values advised by Savills (and from data sites such as Zoopla and Rightmove) and the construction costs advised by Bare Leaning and Bare Synergy we have undertaken a simple residual value calculation for residential use of Ashton Court assuming that 30 residential apartments, maisonettes and houses could be provided within the mansion without any additional new build. This would mean unit sizes

averaging about 1100sqft each, leaving 13,500 sq.ft for public spaces and circulation – about 28-30% of the gross floor area. Both the unit sizes and floor area net to gross ratio are higher than would normally be expected for a residential development but these reflect the inefficiencies of the Mansion's plan and the difficulty of sub-dividing major spaces such as the Music Room, Hall, Billiard Room and others.

13.6.2 The residual value calculation is shown on Table 3 and illustrates that even with a nominal acquisition cost development for residential use falls far short of viability with a deficit of between £4.2m to over £6m. The simple sensitivity analysis set out on Table 6 shows that to reduce the deficit to zero, still assuming a nominal acquisition value, construction costs would have to fall by over 30% to achieve viability. Similarly to achieve viability sales values per square foot would have to increase by over 43%. Increasing the number of individual units would only make a significant impact on viability if sales values per square foot did not fall significantly. The values per square foot we have used (between £400-450/sq.ft) are based on 2 bedroom units which have significantly higher values per square foot than larger units and hence any increase in unit numbers by reducing floor space is already effectively accounted for in our assumptions about sales value levels.

13.6.3 Even though Table 3 indicates a significant deficit between cost and value, using the above square foot sales figures values a large area 2 bedroom apartment at Ashton Court in the region of £400-450,000 which would clearly imply sales at the very top end of the current market. Furthermore even if unit sizes could be reduced to say 650-700sqft, which would be equivalent to a 2 bedroom new build floor area, without impact on sales values per square foot, apartment sales values would still have to be between £250-290,000 to avoid the deficit increasing shown on Table 3 increasing

13.6.4 Our analysis therefore shows that residential development which produces a positive site value at Ashton Court is unlikely in the current climate and that the scale of the capital deficit will make any commercial funding unobtainable. However, the rise in house prices relative to the comparative rise in commercial real estate values has been substantial and the conservation deficit for a residential option has been significantly reduced as a consequence. With house prices currently considered to be softening significantly and the peak in prices passing no further improvement in viability is likely and indeed it is may well decline if house prices fall from current levels.

13.6.5 Enabling development and grants could reduce the deficit indicated substantially and there is precedent for combining both enabling development and grant aid on major historic building residential projects to achieve viability, as for example at Bank Hall in Bretherton in Lancashire. However, these are very exceptional cases involving exceptionally complex development partnerships between charitable and commercial development agencies and even where successful they are only successful on the basis of nominal acquisition costs due to the reluctance of funding agencies to provide grants towards acquisition or agree excessive enabling development where the building value is clearly negative as such this would lead to unacceptable private gain. Enabling development



Sub-division of significant spaces such as the Music Room would be difficult

is discussed further separately below.

13.7 Financial Viability - Revenue

13.7.1 A residential development at Ashton Court would be likely to involve an over-arching management company to which residents would contribute sufficient to ensure the maintenance of the Mansion in good completion. Such management and maintenance companies are commonplace. The nature of the fabric at Ashton Court and the inefficiency of its planning leaving a larger than usual extent of common areas would mean management charges are much higher than for comparable new build residential developments. This will have the effect of reducing sales values as maintenance charges have to be met out of the householder's income.

13.8 External Grant Funding

13.8.1 The National Lottery Heritage Fund could assist in



Barrow Court - successful local residential centre

providing funding for the residential conversion of Ashton Court and could in theory provide a grant of up to £5m or up to a maximum of 95% of the conservation deficit, whichever is the smaller. The remaining deficit would have to be raised from other sources. Examples of the NLHF contributing to the residential conversion of major historic buildings include Bank Hall in Lancashire and Stoneleigh Abbey in Warwickshire. However such projects are very unusual indeed and in both cases the projects involve significant public access to their grounds and gardens and to small visitor attractions within them. The current competition for National Lottery Heritage Funds grants would make a successful application for the maximum levels of grant theoretically possible highly unlikely. Furthermore, such as development would have to involve either the Council (as at Stoneleigh) or a special purpose charitable trust (as at Bank Hall) as the primary developer rather than a commercial developer in order to meet the NLHF's funding constraints on private gain.

13.8.2 Historic England could provide grant aid towards the repair of the Mansion's fabric as part of a commercial or other residential development but would include conditions about public access in any funding contract. In addition the engagement in English Heritage through the use of their grant would require very high conservation standards and the development of a scheme of exceptional sensitivity and care. The largest Historic England grants given to secular buildings have rarely exceeded £4-500,000 and hence any Historic England grant would have a minimal real impact on viability. Furthermore there is an agreement between Historic England that in general they should not fund projects together to avoid duplicating use of resources although on projects such as Delapre Abbey in Northampton dividing the project into separate phases with each funding separate phases has worked as a mechanism to allow both organisations to fund the same historic building project.

13.9 Potential Users & Developing Agencies

13.9.1 During the course of this study we made numerous enquiries across the residential sector to try to identify any potential interested residential developers both in the main sectors and in more specialised sectors such as retirement homes but unfortunately we were unable to identify any interest in the market. If the residential development continues with its recent improvement and banks start increasing their funding this situation may improve but only in the areas of the market involving lower risks at first.



Public access conditions would be included in any Historic England funding application for substantial fabric repairs costs

Table 6 : Ashton Court Residential
Variables & Sensitivity

		Cost	Unit Numbers	Average Unit Areas (sqft)	Value £/sqft	Sales £	Surplus (shortfall)
Main Calculation		21564365	30	1150	507	17491500	-4072865
Variable Costs							
-20%		17251492	30	1150	507	17491500	240008
-10%		19407929	30	1150	507	17491500	-1916429
10%		23720802	30	1150	507	17491500	-6229302
20%		25877238	30	1150	507	17491500	-8385738
Breakeven	-18.90%	17491500	30	1150	507	17491500	0
Variable Sales Value/sqft							
350		21564365	30	1150	350	12075000	-9489365
450		21564365	30	1150	450	15525000	-6039365
500		21564365	30	1150	500	17250000	-4314365
Breakeven	625	21564365	30	1150	625	21562500	-1865

14 RETAIL OPTIONS

14.1 Retail options at Ashton Court Mansion were also included in the Tessa Coombes appraisal but as with entertainment options are likely to be very limited due to the constraints of the building, funding and other issues. There is a fundamental lack of fit between these retail uses and a major historic mansion, particularly for larger retail units such as a supermarket.

14.2 Impact on Historic Fabric

14.2.1 Major retail uses including supermarkets require large open span spaces with no external daylighting but with prominent frontages and substantial immediately adjacent car parking provision. As these do not exist at Ashton Court they would have to be created and it is inconceivable that this could be achieved within the historic spaces of the mansion without a level of change and alteration which would be unacceptable to English Heritage, the planning authority and statutory consultees. The only option would be to accommodate such uses in a new building on the site but again this would be almost certain to be unacceptable to English Heritage and lie well outside North Somerset and Bristol City Council planning policies.

14.2.2 Speciality and specialist food retail uses require much smaller spaces and do not necessarily need to exclude daylight. Theoretically they could probably be designed and provided within the existing spaces at Ashton Court in a way which could satisfy English Heritage but the use is likely to be one outside the acceptable use options both in planning policy terms and to the general public.

14.3 Public Access

14.3.1 Public access would be provided by retail use options.

14.4 Impact on the Estate

14.4.1 The major impact on the estate would arise from the need for easily accessible car parking provision dedicated to the retail uses and hence increasing significantly the current levels of parking on site and require additional parking provision. In addition late night use would increase the associated security and vandalism problems.

14.4.2 Servicing retail provision would mean creating access for large vehicles through the estate and unsightly service yards

14.4.2 The location of Ashton Court relative to the city centre and transport and the isolation of the estate make it unlikely that it would be of interest to a developer for these uses.

14.5 Use Compatibility

14.5.1 The problems attendant with these uses mean they would have little compatibility with other uses such as residential or conferences and learning.

14.6 Financial Viability - Capital

14.6.1 No detailed appraisal has been undertaken for this option as other criteria effectively rule it out of consideration. However, the market for major retail development is in large new build edge of town complexes or in existing retail areas in central established retail locations and not for locations such as Ashton Court. This means any values at Ashton Court would be low compared to other sites whilst the costs of construction and development relative to new build and other options would be so high as to leave exceptional levels of deficit likely to be greater than those for uses such as hospitality

14.7 Financial Viability – Revenue

14.7.1 No detailed appraisal of the revenue aspects of retail options at Ashton Court have been undertaken but the constraints of operating retail activities within a historic building are significant and would increase operational costs compared with purpose built new facilities to levels likely to be unviable. There are no good precedent examples we are aware of for major retail use of a historic country house although there is some precedent for the development of associated stable or service buildings for speciality retail usually associated with heritage asset use of the main building; for example at Staunton Harold in Staffordshire or Dartington in Devon. These small scale developments produce modest rental revenues being outside normal retail areas and are unlikely to justify major investment where a substantial conservation deficit has to be overcome.

14.8 External Grant Funding

14.8.1 No external grant funding is likely to be available for retail options at Ashton Court and hence all development costs would have to be funded by any developer.

14.9 Potential Users & Developing Agencies

14.9.1 No potential users or developing agencies for retail uses with any interest in considering Ashton Court Mansion were identified during the course of this study.

15 HEALTH SECTOR OPTIONS

15.1 Health sector uses were also mentioned in the Tessa Coombes appraisal and there is some limited precedent for health related uses of major country mansions for hospices, nursing homes, convalescent centres, rehabilitation and drug treatment centres and similar uses; for example the Priory Group operate a number of rehabilitation centres in converted country houses. However, in developing new facilities and centres such organisations respond to need and demand first and foremost and prioritise purpose built new facilities over the use of existing buildings for reasons of building efficiency, a need for purpose designed accommodation to meet specific requirements and much lower comparative capital and operational costs.

15.2 Impact on Historic Fabric

15.2.1 Health uses will require very high standards of building services, easy circulation for patient and user movement, specialist space provision for specific purposes such as treatment rooms, X-Ray facilities and similar uses, very high standards of finishes suitable for the maintenance of high levels of hygiene and high levels of wet services such as sanitary provision. In addition health use options will have specific space requirements and layouts. All of these requirements will mean the impact of a health use option on the historic fabric of Ashton Court would be very significant and would result in major problems in negotiating the necessary statutory consents.

15.3 Public Accessibility

15.3.1 Health use options for Ashton Court would involve very significant constraints on public access with problems of patient security, infection control and other factors effectively ruling out any access except for specific reasons such as being a patient or a visiting relative.

15.4 Impact on the Estate

15.4.1 Health uses could have significant impact on the wider estate with requirements for access of emergency vehicles, site and building security, additional parking provision and other requirements. In addition events or functions on the estate might need to be limited to avoid disruption and disturbance of any health use such as a hospice where quiet conditions are essential.

15.5 Use Compatibility

15.5.1 The compatibility of health uses with other potential use options is poor and in a building such as Ashton Court circulation planning, fire escape and related problems could pose insurmountable obstacles in any mixed use scheme involving a health function. The only possible exception would be a health spa or gym which could be compatible with a number of potential uses such as hospitality, learning, conference or residential uses.

15.6 Financial Viability – Capital & Revenue

15.6.1 No detailed appraisal has been undertaken for this option as other criteria effectively rule it out of consideration. Implementing health use options at Ashton Court would be significantly more expensive in capital terms than options involving purpose built new build accommodation with little or no advantage. Similarly operating costs for health options at Ashton Court would be significantly higher than for new build options due to the inefficiencies which would be inherent in planning any health facilities in the building.

15.8 External Grant Funding

15.8.1 No external heritage based grant funding is likely to be available for health options at Ashton Court and hence all development costs would have to be funded by any developing

agency from other sources.

15.9 Potential Users & Developing Agencies

15.9.1 No potential users or developing agencies for health uses with any interest in considering Ashton Court Mansion were identified during the course of this study.



Significant alterations would be required to the historic fabric accommodate a health care facility

16 OTHER OPTIONS

16.1 Outside the main sectors outlined above there may be highly specialist use options that might arise, although none have during the course of this study. The Tessa Coombes report raised the possibility of uses including storage and warehousing and as a remand centre. In respect of each of these uses:

- Their impact on the Mansion's historic fabric would be very substantial
- They would not enhance the estate and indeed security and access would have a significant and detrimental impact.
- Their ability to provide public access would be minimal
- Their compatibility with other potential uses would be poor
- Their capacity to attract grant funding would be minimal.
- Comparable new build accommodation would be very significantly cheaper and deliver operational and management benefits compared with any provision at Ashton Court and hence viability would be exceptionally poor
- Revenue costs unrealistically high for the same reasons.

16.2 Above all however, the public response to the use and or disposal of such an important heritage asset as the Mansion for such uses would be very likely to prevent the necessary political decision by the Council to implement any such proposal.



17 ENABLING DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

17.1 Enabling development is defined as a development which is negotiated for uses outside normal planning policies where the consent creates additional value for a site over and above the value that would be achieved by applying normal planning policies and so that the additional value created can be applied to the conservation deficit posed by the repair of an important historic building. A typical enabling scheme would involve gaining consent for a residential development in the grounds of a historic building in the green belt where the value created by the consent is essential to meet the conservation deficit involved in the development of the historic building itself. The policies behind the concept of enabling development are set out in Historic England's Guidance Notes titled 'Enabling Development and the Conservation of Significant Places' published in 2008.

17.2 At Ashton Court there are three main options for enabling development although given that enabling development does not have to be contiguous with the heritage asset to which the benefits are being applied there may be other enabling development options in the wider Ashton Court estate. The options considered to date are discussed below.

17.3 Enabling Development in the Walled Area Immediately Adjacent to the Mansion

17.3.1 The enclosed garden and service areas immediately north of Ashton Court were originally occupied by buildings constructed as part of the Mansion but which were demolished in the 1970's works. Initial discussions with English Heritage and the planning authority North Somerset, have indicated that this site could be developed if it contributed by either by providing the opportunity to provide accommodation which could not be provided within the Mansion, such as a performance space, if essential to any potential user or if it would give a site value that could be used towards meeting the conservation deficit.

17.3.2 In terms of being able to realise any financial contribution from the site it would not be substantial relative to the conservation deficit, probably not more than £1m, as it is less than 0.5 hectares in area.

17.4 Enabling Development in the Wood Yard

17.4.1 The Wood Yard is a substantial group of buildings and a site with access from an existing road on the south side of the UWE Bower Ashton campus. UWE have previously been in discussions with the City on their potential acquisition of this site for possible expansion of their facilities and temporarily decanting accommodation during the development of their campus but these discussions did not progress and the campus development was achieved without the use of the Wood Yard.

17.4.2 The site is partly occupied at present by City staff and tenants who would have to be re-located prior to any development. The main user is the Forest of Avon Wood Products Co-Operative which is an umbrella for a range of small social enterprises making and recycling wood products. The use generates low value rents but is considered by the City as an important initiative

17.4.3 With a flexible approach to the application of the Council's planning policies on the basis that the development of UWE facilities on the site would help provide funding to meet the Mansion's conservation deficit and hence would be an enabling development this site could have significant value to the university and hence financial value. The site could be used for a range of teaching and academic facilities but could also be used for student residential accommodation and related uses.

17.4.4 The site is in an excellent location and its development for residential or other uses if alternative accommodation could

be provided for the existing users could develop significant land value. (Check what this could be). The existing buildings were formerly part of the estate and although not listed would have to be retained in any development

17.5 The Ashton Court Allotments

17.5.1 Immediately east of Kennel Lodge Road on the approach to Ashton Court Mansion and north of the A369 is an area of allotments largely concealed from view as they sit behind the original estate boundary wall. They total an area of approximately 6 acres (see Ashton Court site plan page 20)

17.5.2 The allotments are physically well located for residential development and sit on the perimeter of the estate and so would have minimum impact on either the Mansion or the wider estate. The site could be accessed without undue difficulty from Kennel Lodge Road. However, not only would the closure of the allotments be controversial, but the location would be highly sensitive and very clear justification would need to be made and extensive consultations undertaken to secure consents. The resulting land value would be substantial, probably between £8-12m and could make a substantial contribution towards securing the future of Ashton Court.

17.6 Other locations on the estate may be possible for enabling development and in addition the future of the quarry and its use and development might also contribute to the funding of the Mansion's future. The Ashton Court Estate totals approximately 850 acres and given its location and setting, if enabling consent can be obtained, the land values are such that using less than 1% of the total estate area would provide sufficient capital to meet the Mansion's conservation deficit and match funding from key potential funding agencies such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund thus securing the future of the mansion in a sustainable use.

17.7 The basis of any enabling development on any part of the estate and as set out in Historic England's publication 'Enabling Development and the Conservation of Significant Places' is quite clear; that any value created by an enabling consent can only be applied to the conservation of the specified heritage asset. The value cannot be taken and used by the City for any other purposes or diverted to cover any other expenditure as any consent granted is covered by rigorous legal agreements controlling the use of the resulting value and capital receipt. The costs of securing the consent can be taken from the enabling value and hence enabling development is an option for the City to fund the Mansion that need have no impact on any expenditure on any of its other City-wide priorities, compared with funding the conservation deficit by direct grant which would.



18 FINANCIAL VIABILITY

18.1 As part of the study commission the costs of the conservation and upgrading of Ashton Court Mansion have been estimated by BLB Synergy for each of the principal use options explored. These costs have then been used as a basis of a simple exercise to calculate and test the development viability of the principal commercial options comparing the overall development costs with current end values. The viability calculations have also included a simple sensitivity analysis to identify the impact on viability of the variables in the calculations such as construction costs and end values. The development viability is summarised on Table 7 opposite.

17.3 The viability appraisal shows that using conventional development appraisal and costings none of the commercial or residential options assessed for the development of Ashton Court are viable and the level of shortfall is significant according to the variables used when tested for sensitivity. The development shortfall ranges from £4-13m and explains why so many of those expressing a potential interest in Ashton Court as a development have not progressed beyond an initial enquiry.

17.4 For the City the implications are significant as it is unlikely that straightforward sale and commercial development of the Mansion will be a realistic option and will not be achieved without very significant risks. To secure the future of Ashton Court it is therefore likely that the City will have to both play an active ongoing role in securing the future of the building working with potential development partners from both commercial and third sectors to package uses and funding from grant sources, possible enabling development and commercial investment to achieve viability. The City will have to lead and resource the early stages of any project strategy working to a long-term development plan.

17.5 For many the lack of viability of a building such as Ashton Court with its fine imposing architecture, wonderful setting and

Table 7 : Development Viability

Option	Overall Development Cost	Development Shortfall	Variable - 20% Cost Increase	Variable
Commercial Office Development	£19.4m	£4.82m	£8.79m	£8.8m (Void allowance of 20%)
Hotel/ Hospitality Development	£23.0m	£8.43m	£13.0m	£11.34m (20% reduction in assumed room values)
Residential Development	£21.6m	£4.07m	£8.35m	£9.49m (20% reduction in sales values)

excellent location will be difficult to comprehend but it is a very real challenge and in large part explains why the City has struggled for over 50 years with the Mansion and how to develop and use it effectively. This lack of comprehension will be a constraint on the City leading a major strategic effort to develop the Mansion in partnership with others and particularly in investing in leading, funding, developing and implementing a master plan and development partnership itself. The problem may only be overcome by running a marketing exercise to establish if there is any commercial or other potential developer willing to take on the Mansion and with the intent and resources to meet its conservation deficit, or with the ingenuity and drive to deliver an innovative development strategy – as Signature Living have at the Coal Exchange in Cardiff.

17.6 The work on this study has demonstrated a wide range of interest in the Mansion and its potential use and organisations

willing to partner with the City to seek a route to successful development, including Bristol Civic Society, who under the leadership of their current Chairman, Simon Birch, are anxious to play a more active role in helping secure the future of Bristol's architectural heritage, Historic England who would like to assist in getting the Mansion off the Heritage at Risk Register and the National Trust who have shown an interest in using its expertise to help at Ashton Court. None of these organisations have the capacity or are willing to face the challenges of Ashton Court by themselves but are willing to work in partnership with others to see what can be achieved.

17.7 Equally, the study has shown that there are many organisations who would like to use space in the Mansion if it were available and the funding issues can be resolved and for commercial rents and uses, ranging from UWE, to commercial conference and hospitality operators to third sector organisations such as the Bristol Pre-Conservatoire and Artspace Lifespace.

19 A STRATEGY FOR ASHTON COURT

19.1 Our proposed strategy for Ashton Court Mansion is based on some simple conclusions discussed and reached through this study and which can be summarised as follows;

- Commercial development is not viable without grant or subsidy to cover the conservation deficit
- A single user/developer for a building with 48000sqft of complex space with important historic interiors is unlikely to be identified easily, if at all
- The Mansion can accommodate a mix of compatible and complementary uses and there appears to be demand
- Options are available to raise significant funds through grant aid and enabling development but require considerable up-front effort and investment to achieve
- There are a range of organisations willing to partner and support the City in the development of the Mansion
- There is precedent elsewhere of local authorities working in partnership with both commercial and third sector organisation to tackle challenging building conservation and re-use projects (see Case Studies)
- There is considerable public affection and concern over the Mansion and that prioritising expenditure and effort on securing its future would garner very significant public support for the City's efforts and could be harnessed to overcome perceived obstacles to its development
- The building is an outstanding, important and beautiful historic heritage asset and bringing it back into good condition and use could have a significant and beneficial impact on the City and for its citizens

19.2 Use Strategy

19.2.1 The strategy for the use of the building is important but it is the route to determining what the use strategy will be that

needs resolution and will in part depend on the City's view on the level of its future involvement and support should be; whether to sell the building and let someone else worry about it or to actively participate in its development either on its own or through partnership with others.

19.2.2 The likely most outcome to the Mansion's end use will be a mixed-use strategy, bringing together complementary and mutually supporting activities which generate revenue and high levels of building utilisation. These do not need to be defined in detail at the moment and given the long development period the Mansion will involve are quite likely to change in response to the market and opportunities that arise.

19.2.3 A mixed use strategy is difficult to sell as a 'vision' for the Mansion but the precedent studies indicate how creatively combining a set or relatively straight forward uses can create something greater than the sum of its parts which becomes visionary. For many the process of sorting the future of the Mansion out, getting it back into use and open to the public will be visionary and in reality the end result would have significant impact on the City, its community, how it perceives itself and is perceived by others. Good examples have been Clevedon Pier in Somerset which lay in complete dereliction for decades with many repeated calls for its demolition, but which once restored has become an iconic flagship for its community and the local North Somerset Council and Tynesfield which lay dormant and unknown for a century until the National Trust's efforts changed it into one of the most visited of its properties in the country.

19.2.4 A mixed use option has the significant benefit that it can access a wider range of funding and resources than a single use option and as important can attract a wider range of interested agencies and organisations to get involved in securing its future. The more and stronger the development partnership the more

likely the success – and the past 50 years of effort demonstrates the City cannot do Ashton Court on its own.

19.3 Organisational Development Strategy

19.3.1 Several issues that are clear from looking through the studies previously undertaken on Ashton Court and the precedent discussed in the previous section are that;

- The development period for a project such as Ashton Court Mansion is both lengthy and the route uncertain
- Delivery of a successful project requires long term commitment and the championing of individuals to drive it forward through challenges and adversity
- A City Council with changing political priorities, changing elected members and staff struggles to provide the level of long term commitment necessary to drive the project to a successful completion on its own
- Partnerships can maintain the level of commitment necessary through combining human and financial resources and through externalising development activity separating it and insulating it from the City's complex decision-making processes
- Third sector, local authority and commercial interests can be combined to take advantage of the best each can offer and their respective strengths and experience
- External funding agencies are given the confidence to invest when they see committed and effective partnerships with a clear direction and a defined end goal
- Complex projects benefit from being delivered incrementally as they can be flexible and responsive to change and new opportunities, can learn from their mistakes and successes, can build confidence, can work within their defined capabilities and capacity and the resources that become available over the life of the project
- Complex incrementally delivered projects need a master-

plan or overarching framework which defines the end objective, but which is flexible and responsive to change and opportunities

- Stakeholder ownership and engagement is fundamental to a successful outcome and that the skills of stakeholders can be an immense resource and asset
- Nothing is impossible given the resolution of the above

19.3.2 These issues will be difficult to resolve at Ashton Court Mansion if those responsible for decision making on the Mansion think there is any easier way to secure its development and are consequently reluctant to make the commitment to both resource and build the partnerships and organisational structure necessary to achieve success. With the benefit of hindsight and the previous difficulties of the City in maintaining its commitment to progressing towards a sustainable future for Ashton Court Mansion we can see no way of resolving this using the evidence of the viability appraisal alone. An alternative route is to seek interest through a marketing exercise aimed at identifying an appropriate commercial or alternative developer. Such an exercise if successful would have been of value in securing the future of the Mansion and if not will highlight for the City's decision makers the need to progress a more complex organisational and delivery strategy. Any marketing of the Mansion needs to be carefully and rigorously framed to ensure that its delivery is a success and the risks of the building coming back to the City and the current problems being much exacerbated are understood, clearly evaluated and minimised.

19.3.3 With the City focused on the fact that there is no easy development solution for the Mansion it then needs to commence with implementing an organisational development strategy and setting up an appropriate development vehicle. This organisational vehicle needs to have the backing of the City and support of its staff and resources, as happened very successfully at Arnos Vale

Cemetery. Independent of the Council it can maintain the level of commitment the project will need without juggling with the other priorities as the City has to. There are a number of organisations willing to participate in forming and participating in such a vehicle including the Bristol Civic Society, the National Trust, UWE and others and they would be strong and important partners. The working and advisory group set up during the original study period included several of these organisations and representatives of others and they proved committed and intelligent in their approach and were an important potential resource. We recommend that the City continues our initial discussions with these and other potential partners on the establishment of a new project specific, non-profit, development trust for the Mansion which in partnership with the City, leads the initiative to bring the Mansion back into use and to which in due course the ownership and responsibility for the Mansion is passed, along with agreed resources including possibly funds from any enabling development.

19.4 Implementation Strategy

19.4.1 The key to implementing plans for the future of Ashton Court Mansion will be the resourcing of the project in both the long and short term. It is unlikely that other agencies such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund who can commit significant resources will commit their constrained resources if the City who own the building and will benefit from its success are not prepared to make any commitment. The City needs to address this issue and clearly set out its intent and the level of resource it may be able to apply. If this is to be found through enabling development then the City needs to commence the process of agreeing the enabling site(s) and progressing the necessary decision making.

19.4.2 Working forward towards finding a solution, including if the Mansion is to be initially marketed, will require significant 'pump priming' by the City before other resources start to be drawn in. The quantum of the 'start-up' or 'pump priming' funds necessary

needs to be defined and budgeted by the City – it is likely to be substantial in the order of several hundred of thousand pounds over a period of perhaps three to four years. By contrast however, any such 'pump-priming' funding will be comparable with the City's current ongoing Mansion costs!

19.4.3 An initial programming exercise will be important to establish both the funding and time resources necessary to move the implementation forward.

19.5 Case Studies

On the following pages we have illustrated some comparable project where threatened historic buildings in Local Authority ownership have been developed in partnership with Third Sector charitable organisations successfully drawing in major funding from NLHF and other sources.

CASE STUDY : DELAPRE ABBEY

Delapre Abbey in Northampton is a large complex of buildings centred round the remains of the medieval Abbey which after the Reformation became a large country house with alterations and extensions in the C17,18 & 19th. The Grade 2* listed Abbey sits in 450 acres of formal gardens and parkland fully accessible to the public about a mile from the centre of Northampton.

Following the departure of the Country Records Office in 1992 the Abbey remained almost entirely unused, empty and in increasing dereliction becoming a significant problem for its owner; Northampton Borough Council despite its unsuccessful efforts to dispose of the building for development. In 2007 a small project specific charitable trust, the Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust founded by local people concerned about the future of the building, commissioned an Options Appraisal to try to find a solution that could persuade the local authority to take action.

The study identified a mixed-use option that combined public access and use of the main parts of the building as a heritage visitor asset with revenue generating uses such as holiday lettings, workspace and conferencing and functions facilities would be both viable and a sustainable potential future use. The Trust offered to lead the development in partnership with the Council and working together the scheme was advanced.

To implement the £15m project an incremental development plan was agreed and following successful bids to the Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic England and with funding from the local authority, the Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust have completed the first phases of the overall project, undertaking the main fabric repairs and re-roofing followed by the conservation, alteration and upgrading of the principal ranges of the main House and the fine C18 stable block and coach house, including the construction of a new link building between the South Range and restored Billiard Room. Since re-opening in 2017 the Abbey has been very

successful achieving its business planning objectives and providing a major new community and heritage asset for Northampton.

Explore Delapre Abbey further at www.delapreabbey.org.uk





CASE STUDY : INSOLE COURT

Insole Court is a fine Grade 2* C19 mansion built for a South Wales coal baron in Llandaff on the outskirts of Cardiff. Whilst its 14 acres of formal terraced gardens have been well-maintained and have become a much-loved public asset the mansion itself along with its stable block and other outbuildings had fallen into disuse and over many years their fabric had deteriorated with large parts becoming derelict and subject to arson attacks, posing its owners Cardiff City Council years of uncertainty and difficulty. Even some small investment in the principal rooms in early 2000 to give some public access failed to lead towards identifying a future for the mansion.

To try to resolve the ongoing problems the Council commissioned a CMP and an Options Appraisal to both understand the building's significance and to find a viable and sustainable use which would secure its future and create public access to the mansion as well as the gardens. During the study consultations an existing community group, the Friends of Insole Court, expressed an interest in taking a much more active role in the future of the mansion and their willingness to work in partnership with the Council to try to find a solution. They formed a new charitable trust called the Insole Court Trust to undertake the project with the Council and eventually took the lease of the mansion after completion of the main works in 2017.

The studies identified that the core of the mansion could be retained for a combination of heritage visitor asset and conferencing and functions uses, whilst the secondary spaces could be commercially let, and the Stables, Coach House and outbuildings could be used for new community facilities, a café and workspaces for small local businesses and start-ups.

Following successful bids to the HLF, Cadw and the Big Lottery's Community Asset Transfer Fund (CAT) and others, along with a capital contribution from Cardiff Council, the building has been

repaired, upgraded and re-serviced and new car parking created to allow the tarmac surrounding the mansion to be replaced by lawns and gardens. The works have been completed incrementally at a total development cost to date of over £6m and the buildings and the facilities they offer opened to the public with the latest major phase being completed in 2017. The commercial space has been fully and successfully let, including the letting of the Swiss Wing to the Montessori School, and provides important and substantial income which allows the mansion's fine restored principal rooms to be opened free to the public. The workspaces in the stables have been fully let and the new community facilities are heavily used and much valued.

To find out more about Insole Court visit the Trust's website www.insolecourt.org





CASE STUDY : CARDIGAN CASTLE

Cardigan Castle is the remains of a large medieval Castle in the small town of Cardigan in West Wales. It is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and the extensive buildings within its C12 curtain walls are all listed Grade 2*. It is culturally of great significance as it was the setting for the first ever recorded Eisteddfod held by Lord ap Rhys in 1176 to celebrate its completion.

After many decades of complete neglect, as a consequence of the Castle walls collapsing into Cardigan's main thoroughfare and the complete and dangerous dereliction of its buildings, the local authority had to CPO the Castle in the late 1990's. Years of unsuccessful Council effort followed to try to find a use for the Castle and save the building. The Council's failure led to increasing local concern and a group of local people established a project specific charity called the Cadwgan Trust to put pressure on the Council and to try to find a solution.

An initial options appraisal identified that there was no single use option for the Castle that could be achieved but that a mixed-use option with the main Castle and its grounds restored as a regional heritage visitor asset supported by commercial uses including holiday lets, a restaurant, a Welsh language school (run in conjunction with the University of Aberystwyth), artisan and creative workspace and longer letting residential space could probably attract sufficient funds to cover the anticipated £10.5m capital costs (2005).

However, the business plan identified that ongoing sustainability and the ability to meet the high long-term cyclical maintenance costs of the Castle's fabric was problematic. The Council was persuaded that if it underwrote the business plan by retaining freeholder's responsibility for the repair of the Castle walls and external fabric of its buildings, viability could be achieved.

Fortunately, with the Council's guarantee of ongoing support to

achieve sustainability, major grants from the HLF and the ERDF (EU) combined with substantial grants from Cadw, Big Lottery under the community asset transfer programme (CAT) along with a range of grants from charitable sources could then be packaged to meet the development costs including revenue support during the first three years of operation.

Works on site commenced in 2010 with the £1.4m contract to stabilise the Castle walls followed by a main contract to conserve, repair and convert all the Castle's buildings and to construct a dramatic new café which projects out over the Castle walls. Completed and opened to the public in June 2015 at an eventual

cost of £12.5m The Castle has been an exceptional success both meeting its business plan targets and winning many major awards including being the winning project in Kevin McLeod's Channel 4 programme 'Great British Buildings – Restoration of the Year'. Most significant however has been its huge but largely unanticipated beneficial impact on the town as a whole which has prospered with the income 50,000 new visitors a year have brought and from the confidence that its small community have earned through the success of their efforts.

Follow up the Castle on www.cardigancastle.com





20 CONCLUSION

Ashton Court Mansion has languished under-used and largely neglected despite it being one of the City's most prominent historic buildings and being the centrepiece of a fine estate much loved and used by the people of Bristol. In the sixty years since its acquisition by the City, little progress has been made in identifying and implementing any proposals which would give it a sustainable future and consequently today its condition is poor and worsening and it is very largely empty and silent. This has not been because sustainable uses cannot be found and the Mansion adapted to house them but because the City has never been able to give sufficient and consistent priority to the long and complex process of doing so, nor has it been willing to prioritise the resources necessary.

The Mansion even empty has significant ongoing non-occupation costs for which no benefit is derived by the people of Bristol – especially as ironically the substantial annual rates payment goes not into the City's coffers but those of the neighbouring authority, North Somerset District Council. The Mansion is vulnerable to vandalism and an arson attack in 2013 has already badly damaged the very fine Library in the West Range. Ashton Court is not only a continuing and expensive problem that must be resolved by the City but more important is a lost opportunity for the people of Bristol.

Due to its poor condition and the lack of any resolution over its future, the Mansion has been included on Historic England's Buildings at Risk Register which marks it out as one of the most urgent conservation problems in the country to resolve.

The resolution of its future depends not so much in identifying uses or users for the building but setting in place a development structure and process that will not be hostage to the political processes and uncertainties of the City's decision making and importantly its inevitably changing priorities. Simple commercial

disposal of the Mansion is unlikely to result in a successful outcome but probably the market for the building must be tested before the alternative proposed in this study can be effectively progressed.

This summary recommends that the future of Ashton Court Mansion will be best secured by establishing an independent project specific charitable trust in which to vest the Mansion, to work in partnership with the City and others to take responsibility for it and drive the wide range activities necessary to secure its future. The organisational mechanism of an independent charitable trust would release the implementation of the development process from the direct control of the City Council to secure continuity and progress, whilst ensuring an ongoing City role in the development partnership.

This is not a new idea and we have included a number of case studies showing how charitable trusts have been established to successfully tackle key heritage buildings elsewhere, working in partnership with their local authorities. Bristol itself has an excellent example of what is possible through this approach at Arnos Vale Cemetery; long a major problem for the City but now one of its most important and innovative community heritage assets run and managed by the Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust.

This is a development mechanism understood and supported by the key funders and in particular the National Lottery Heritage Fund, who believe that a project specific charitable development trust working in partnership with a local authority is a highly effective way of securing the future of a major heritage building at risk. Support for such an approach will be greater than for the City acting alone and a charitable trust opens doors to other sources of grant particularly from grant giving charitable trusts, not available to the City.

The current national funding situation is such that 100% funding

for Ashton Court Mansion is unlikely to come from external grant sources alone and the City will have to make some commitment, both initially to get the project underway and fund the early project development stages and key funding bids and later towards the capital costs. If the City cannot make funding available from existing resources then the opportunity exists for enabling development on the periphery of the Ashton Court Estate that could provide the essential and significant matching funds for the capital works and also even form the core of a possible endowment for the Mansion's future.

Enabling development at Ashton Court would only achieve consents if legally linked to the conservation of the Mansion and so any resource raised could not be diverted elsewhere and could only be applied to the Mansion. In effect the enabling development is a resource only available to the City for the Mansion and would have no impact on its other spending priorities, although delivering the consent for an enabling development would require very careful consultation to ensure full support from the community.

Arnos Vale Cemetery is a good example of the support needed from the City for Ashton Court; the City had to commit significant early development stage funding mainly to progress the contested CPO of the Cemetery; it did not put any capital funding whatsoever into the main capital works on site but instead contributed a significant sum to setting up an endowment to ensure the Cemetery's sustainability in the future. The result at Arnos Vale has been a resounding success.

There is considerable public concern over Ashton Court the consequence of which is that Bristol Civic Society has offered to become involved in the possible establishment of a charitable development trust for the Mansion and to play a leading role in securing its future. The Society would be a powerful voice, advocate and ally for Ashton Court Mansion.

Great historic buildings like Ashton Court Mansion have no easy answers but where successfully resolved the outcomes and benefits can be immeasurable. Ashton Court is a problem that can be solved given the will and vision to take the risks and steps necessary. It will be a long and complex process but others have achieved it before with outstanding results. Ashton Court deserves the chance too!

Niall Phillips BA DipArch RIBA Lethaby Scholar

Partner

Purcell LLP



