

The Beehive

This is the name of the aspirational venue for the designated civic and culture quarter of Burgess Hill. The site determined for the build is the site of the old RBL building on Cyprus Road with links in to Cyprus Hall, to create a larger venue. The Cyprus Hall and the RBL site both belong to the Town Council, the Cyprus Hall is on lease to the Cyprus Hall Association. The lease is due to end in 2026 and discussions are underway as to the letting of a new lease. The build of a theatre/ performance venue to replace the demolished Martlets Hall is part of Core objective (CO) 7 in the current Neighbourhood Plan which was adopted in 2015 following a referendum.

1. Beehive: How we got here

1. 2015 - Burgess Hill Town Council (BHTC) opened discussions to purchase the former RBL building in Cyprus Road
2. 2016 - MSDC decided to close the Martlets Hall following a report from Max associates
3. 2016 - A 7,000 strong petition to retain the hall was submitted. Following this BHTC began to think about the RBL site being a potential for a new facility to replace Martlets Hall.
4. 2016 -BHTC commissioned a report from DCA consultants regarding the demand for a facility, they concluded a facility could be viable.
5. 2017 – RBL building purchase completed at a purchase price of £254k which was favourable rate given the condition of the building and with the intention of providing a community / cultural facility. An overage clause is in the contract of sale should the building be sold.
6. 2017- Colliers International prepared a Business Case for the venue
7. 2018 – a public consultation for a venue costing £6.9m was held. The result was support for a venue but not support for the Council to take a loan of £5m to build it (as this would affect the precept).
8. 2018 – The Martlets Hall was closed
9. 2018 – BHTC prepared smaller plans at a less expensive scheme £5.5m with a £3m loan.
10. 2019 – Greenwoods prepared estimates for a RIBA stage 2 scheme
11. 2019 - a public poll gave the name “The Beehive” to the future venue
12. 2020 – planning permission was granted
13. 2020 - the Beehive CIO was set up (three trustees)

14. 2020 - an updated business plan was drawn up by Festival and Events International
15. 2021 - townwide consultation on proposals. £4.8m loan would be needed, was approved with 2470 residents supporting the proposal and 340 against (but turnout was only 8%).
16. 2021 Public works Loan Board approved the loan as three separate loans
17. 2022 RBL building was demolished
18. 2022 - a revised cost plan showed significant increases in costs – project was paused
19. 2023 – March - Unknown Works appointed as the new architects and Greenwoods reaffirmed as project managers, but no progress until the investigations in to alternate sites was concluded.
20. 2023 - September – no alternative sites were deemed suitable and work would continue on considering a plan for the RBL site.
21. 2024- Unknown Works were instructed to prepare a new concept design
22. 2024 – October – design was presented to Councillors in October, Beehive was reaffirmed as an aim for the Council
23. 2024 – Greenwoods provide a build cost for the new concept design 5.2m
24. 2025 – February – consideration of the principle discussed at working group and Strategic Development Key Area Group with recommendation to go to Council whether to persevere with next steps.
25. 2025 - February - Greenwoods and Unknown Works provide updated sketch design Pack for Council consideration
26. 2025 – Stakeholder meeting to share the proposed design with invited stakeholders representing 11 community groups/ organisations to determine appetite for the scheme before returning to Council with recommendation to proceed to RIBA stage 2 and seeking overall view of the Council as to the project.

2. [S106 monies available as at February 2025 for use with the Beehive:](#)

£252,583 for the Beehive and RBL is available and can be applied for, as at August 2024

3. [Overage of RBL building](#)

If the Council determine not to go ahead and look for alternate uses of the site, should it not be used for community purposes or should be sold then an overage payment of 50% of the difference between the 2017 sale price and the then market value will need to be paid to the RBL trust. The overage clause is complicated and there are various triggers, but in essence this is what the Council, who have sought KC opinion believes that it means. As there is some ambiguity with this overage clause the Council are seeking a meeting with the

trustees of the RBL (Burgess Hill) to agree a way forward to ensure that it is clear to all parties, this may involve redrafting the agreement and therefore some costs. If we cannot agree we would be potentially faced with a judicial decision in a court. The overage is registered as a restriction on the title deeds making a sale impossible with it in place.

Cyprus Hall lease

The lease is due to expire on 1st February 2026, the lease is governed by the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954. The Council are currently in talks with the Cyprus Hall Association as to a variation to the lease to potentially allow the Beehive to be built should Council agree that the project is to continue and consultation is in favour and funding can be established.

It is unlikely that the build for the Beehive would start within the next two years, however that is time to secure funding, planning and contractors.

4. PWLB Loans

The UK Debt Management Office (DMO) on behalf of HM Treasury, has a public works loan board (PWLB), available to Local Government to borrow with fixed rates for short or long periods. The loans are for capital projects. This Council has secured loans from them in the past. Most recently the loan for the burial ground extension. The fixed interest rate (fixed on the date of the draw down) is published daily and is currently ranging between 5 and 6 % return, depending on the term. Terms can last from less than 6 months to 50 years and can be repaid early at a premium calculation.

The current loan that the Council has with PWLB is for up to £300,000 over 25 years. The repayment rate is expected to be around £23,000 per annum (it will be fixed when we draw down later in 2025). The Council also took out a loan to fund the purchase of the RBL building in 2017 and repayments are around £17,000 per annum.

The Council considers that it would need to see rates fall from their current levels before taking on a material loan.

In order to borrow from PWLB, the process is that we need to apply and be supported by our local county association of local councils which is West Sussex Association of Local Councils (WSALC). They effectively are assuring the treasury that our proposal is sound. They will require evidence that where the precept is to be affected (precept increased in order to meet the repayments) by the borrowing that there is tax payer support for the loan. In the past the Council has undertaken the referendum on the Beehive to provide this evidence. While a “referendum” is not necessary, public consultation and a way to demonstrate public views is necessary which could be in the form of consultation and submitted comments or a vote. But the process is not prescribed.

5. Stakeholder Feedback

On 25th February a stakeholder presentation was given with representatives from 11 different local groups. The meeting was led by Cllr Eggleston (five Councillors in total were present).

Unknown Works explained the basics of the proposals for the revised plans and then threw this open to comment. There were a number of suggestions to meet the needs of users which were fed in to the project for consideration.

The project would be phased with phase one bringing in the theatre on the old RBL site and phase two upgrading of the Cyprus Hall.

Comments included:

- 1) large productions would need better access than shown as the lift would be too small for sets and costume rails. A ramp may be needed from the rear of the building to facilitate this to the side of the stage.
- 2) Provision for a technical desk was needed on the theatre plan, if the seats are fold back would there be room for this?
- 3) Fire exits and building regulations regarding access to the courtyard were queried
- 4) Toilets for performers were not shown
- 5) Toilets for youngsters in shows needed to have separate security
- 6) Public access may need further thought as to operationally how this works on a show night
- 7) Store for a bar is essential
- 8) Soundproofing at the venue was needed
- 9) The dimensions of the stage were asked about as this would be crucial
- 10) The identified space for community groups use was supported with requests for even more.

Much of this will be considered during the process as to the building regulations requirements. There were other questions around the operating model, bar and catering, how it would be funded and legalities. There was a strong statement of need for a venue such as this and with a few changes as per comments this design could work. 8 of the stakeholders on line indicated support for the project to proceed. No one indicated that they would not support this.

One quote from several received follows;

“Following yesterday's meeting, I am writing to express my support, for the proposed new Beehive development plan. As I mentioned in the meeting, the orchestra felt that previous plans for the Beehive did not offer enough seating for our (larger!) audiences. The proposed capacity of 295 seats overcomes this problem. There is also the challenge of finding space for a full orchestra on the stage,

where the proposed flexible design and the ability to use the full width of the auditorium will be advantages. Apart from possible use for our concerts, the auditorium would be an excellent venue for our regular Wednesday evening rehearsals.

Since the other participants were focusing more on theatre, I would like to point out that there is a flourishing musical scene locally, with a number of groups having to make do with e.g. churches as performance venues, in the absence of a properly equipped venue. For example, Ensemble Reza offer a wide variety of professional standard classical concerts, and I'm sure they would love to bring their music to Burgess Hill. The Beehive would be a great venue for a folk club - at present the only one I know of meets in the Woolpack.

Combining music and drama, there is the Burgess Hill Musical Theatre Society, which despite its name has not been able to perform in Burgess Hill for a number of years (as far as I know).

I encourage the Town Council to support the proposal to take this project forward."

Groups present : Burgess Hill Theatre Club / Creative Community / Orion Cinema / Mid Sussex Radio / Lions / Ariel Theatre / Friday Night Comedy Club/ Beehive Trust /Burgess hill Symphony Orchestra / Burgess Hill Business Park Association/ Dance Academy.

6. Considerations

The current administration have not publicly discussed the Beehive project, it is a project that started back in 2015 and has been supported through three administrations since then. There has been significant investment in the project in time and finance.

The stakeholder feedback suggests that there is still an active appetite for the scheme with users who are waiting and willing to use it.

The cost to proceed with a current plan to RIBA stage 2 is estimated at £31,000. If the Council are to continue with the project, it is vital that a plan be settled on and the road to identifying and securing the funds to build the project be agreed. RIBA stage 2 is the minimum stage in identifying and securing external funding as well as PWLB loans.

The decision to not proceed with the next phase would effectively stop the project, the chance of resurrecting it at a later time with increasing costs is slim. The Council would then need to decide what its views are regarding the former RBL land and the Cyprus Hall Lease.

Public Borrowing at some point is almost guaranteed to be necessary if this project goes ahead. While Greenwoods have indicated there are grants to be had it must be remembered that the Council did engage a fundraising professional to identify grants before. It is likely that even if successful the Council will still need to find at least 50% of the costs.

At this time the Council is not being asked to agree to take any loans out, it is a step to firm up plans. If the Council were to decide to take out a loan this would come back to Council for this decision.

The Council has a fund of £446,102 in the Community Building Fund as at 1st April 2025, at this time the Council has committed to support the refurbishment of the Park Centre up to £400,000 (of which £118,695 has already been granted. Assuming that the Park Centre claim up to the ceiling amount, this will leave a fund balance of £164,797), significantly reducing the available funding for further project work on the Beehive or other community projects. This fund grows by £47,000 per annum.

The operating module, ongoing costs and how this would be funded have not as yet been agreed and all of this still would need to come back to the Council for consideration should the next stage of RIBA stage 2 be progressed.

7. Conclusion

The current costed design from Unknown Works and Greenwoods is included in these papers. That along with the background and information given above are now presented to Council

The Community Buildings Development Working Group met on 3rd February to discuss the project as a whole. They felt that there was still potential in the project to reach a scheme which can be supported by future users and the wider town residents. They did not discuss the operating model nor where financial grants would be sought but accept that these workstreams need to be completed and be supportive of the project for it to proceed. They were mindful of the significant cost of borrowing. They wanted to test the water to demonstrate the level of support and if still evident to take this to the Council as part of the overall discussion as to this project continuing.

The Strategic Development Key Area Group approved the recommendation from the Working Group and arranged the stakeholder meeting to ensure that Council would have some indication of the appetite for the project from potential users. Their resolution was that if there was still support following the stakeholder meeting then to recommend to council as follows:

That the project proceed with the previously appointed architects and project managers to RIBA stage 2

Environmental risks: there will be disruption during the building of the venue, but otherwise the sustainable methods to be incorporated in the design would be expected to result in a net offset. There are no risks at RIBA stage 2.

Financial Risks: There is provision in the Community Buildings Fund to meet the cost of progressing to RIBA stage 2

To proceed with the plans, the Council is mindful that a PWLB loan at this time would be a significant financial burden to the Council and the towns' residents. Therefore additional grants and funding must be sought, if they are not achieved the project will fail.

If a PWLB loan is sought any substantial amount may affect the Council Tax precept which would trigger a requirement for significant public consultation possibly another referendum, if the town do not support the loan the project would at that point fail.

If the plans are progressed to RIBA stage 2 or stage 3 and yet the finances are not in place the plans will need to be paused again. This may result in reputational damage to the Council that it has not been able to deliver the project. However, it will also leave the project in a position for a future administration to return to providing the Council still retained the land.

Public Safety risk : there is none, growing the night time economy results in more people in the town during the evenings and can increase the feeling of public safety in the area.