

TO: LEISURE COMMITTEE - 21 SEPTEMBER 1999

SUBJECT: ROYAL PUMP ROOMS - UPDATE ON OPENING OF FINAL TWOPHASES

FROM: HEAD OF LEISURE AND AMENITIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report to members the outcome of the final two phases of the opening to the public of the Royal Pump Rooms.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The £7 million project to create new cultural and tourism facilities in the Royal Pump Rooms began on site in December 1997 and was completed in August 1999. The redeveloped building opened in three stages between June and August 1999.

3. OPENING - PHASE ONE

- 3.1 The following facilities were opened to the public as **phase one** during the week beginning Monday 21 June:

•**Assembly Rooms** (including Annexe with Bar) - operated by Warwick District Council.

•**Café** - operated by Hudson Rowe Ltd.

•**Entrance Concourse** - managed by Warwick District Council.

•**Tourist Information Centre** and **Shop** - operated by South Warwickshire Tourism.

- 3.2 A more detailed report on the highly successful outcome of the first phase of opening the building to the public was presented to the Leisure Committee of July 1999 (Royal Pump Rooms - Update on Opening of First Phase).

4. OPENING - PHASES TWO AND THREE

- 4.1 The remainder of the facilities in the Royal Pump Rooms were opened to the public in two further phases in the course of August 1999.

- 4.2 On Thursday 12 August the following facilities were opened as **phase two**:

•**Library** - operated by Warwickshire County Council.

•**Art Gallery** and **Children's Interactive Gallery** - operated by Warwick District Council.

4.3 On Saturday 28 August the following facilities were opened as **phase three**:

•**History of Leamington Gallery** (including Hammam) and **Temporary Exhibition Gallery** - operated by Warwick District Council.

4.4 The inaugural temporary exhibition, *Max Ernst: A Life and Work in Photographs*, opened to the public in the new Temporary Exhibition Gallery on Saturday 28 August and remains on show until 16 October. The exhibition comprises photographs of the surrealist pioneer drawn from the collections of the Max-Ernst-Kabinett in Brühl, Leamington's German twin town.

4.5 All Members were invited to a private view which took place on Friday 27 August. The exhibition was opened by the Chairman of Warwick District Council Josephine Compton and Deputy Mayor Christian Engels of Stadt Brühl. As well as being the inaugural exhibition in the new gallery the exhibition also marks 25 years of town twinning between Leamington and Brühl.

5. **MEDIA COVERAGE**

5.1 The new facilities in the Royal Pump Rooms have been extensively promoted through coverage in the local and regional media.

5.2 The opening in June of phase one featured in: Central Television News, BBC Radio CWR (Stuart Linnell morning programme), Radio Bear, The Birmingham Post, The Leamington Observer, The Leamington Courier and The Coventry Evening Telegraph.

5.3 The opening in the second week of August of phase two was covered in: BBC Midlands Today, Central Television News, BBC Radio CWR, Radio Mercia, The Leamington Observer, The Leamington Courier and The Coventry Evening Telegraph.

5.4 The opening at the end of August of phase three was covered in: BBC Radio CWR, The Guardian, The Leamington Observer, The Leamington Courier, The Coventry Evening Telegraph and The Art Newspaper.

6 **PUBLIC RESPONSE**

6.1 Media coverage and local promotion of the project, combined with the summer weather and school holidays, has meant that each phase of opening has drawn large numbers of visitors.

- 6.2 In the 17 days that the Art Gallery and Museum was open between the first day of operation on 12 August to and including the Bank Holiday Monday of 30 August, it received 12,735 visitors. A further 350+ are estimated to have attended the private view of 27 August. (This compares with a best ever yearly visitor figure of 21,894 for the Art Gallery and Museum on Avenue Road in 1997).
- 6.3 Comments in the Visitors Book are almost without exception full of praise for the new galleries and their displays. Recurrent comments are: "brilliant", "marvellous", "beautiful", "excellent", "fantastic", "stunning", "very enjoyable", "stimulating". One says: "A brilliant asset for Leamington".
- 6.4 Judging from the accompanying addresses in the Book, most of the visitors came from the Warwick District, although there are a significant number of people from further afield in the UK and a number from overseas. Countries of origin for the latter include Canada, Spain, Brasil, Japan, Czech Republic, USA, Germany, Kenya, Cyprus and the Netherlands.
- 6.5 The Assembly Rooms which opened in June have also quickly established themselves as sought after facilities for receptions, conferences, public meetings, training sessions, musical events, etc. From the opening event of 26 June to the Bank Holiday of 30 August there have been 34 events in the Assembly Rooms. A further 34 are booked for September and the following months are filling rapidly, with a particular demand for the Christmas period.
- 6.6 The facilities in the building operated by other organisations are also prospering. The Library, which opened on 12 August, has experienced an increase in visitor numbers, enquiries and items issued, compared to its old premises on Avenue Road. The café has achieved more than double its anticipated turnover since it opened in June. The Tourist Information Centre, which also opened in June, has had a good public response to its new facilities, particularly noticing more enquiries from local people and selling more items from the shop than previously.

7. THE FUTURE

Works programme

- 7.1 Work on an external information point sited between the Entrance Concourse and The Parade began in the first week of September and is programmed for completion by 17 September. The information point will display the introductory information panel for the Old Town Heritage Trail and a plan of the town, and will also have space for each Royal Pump Rooms service operator to display a poster. The external information point will thus not only form a prominent beginning to the Old Town Trail but will also draw the attention of passers by to the new cultural and tourism services available in the building.

- 7.2 The process of desnagging will continue for some months ahead. This is because the building is architecturally complex, with a mixture of old and new fabric, and contains a very elaborate infrastructure of sophisticated security, information technology and building management systems. Once desnagging is complete and new equipment is out of warranty Property Services staff will organise the maintenance of the fabric of the building and its equipment.
- 7.3 A small scale external commission by the riverside will be completed. The old tap for spa water which used to be sited near the bridge over the Leam was removed as part of the site works. Artist Celia Kilner has now been commissioned to create a high quality sculpted stone housing for a new spa water tap on the same site. This should be installed by October 1999.

Warwick District Council Services

- 7.4 The key to the long-term success of the Royal Pump Rooms is, firstly, the maintenance of high quality facilities in the Assembly Rooms; and, secondly, the provision of a wide range of activities in the Art Gallery, Museum and Library. Together these should ensure that the District Council's facilities in the Royal Pump Rooms remain a popular attraction for local people and tourists.
- 7.5 The Heritage and Arts Section already has in place ambitious programmes of exhibitions, events and educational activities (see report to Leisure Committee January 1999 - Review of Royal Pump Rooms Project). These programmes will be further developed over the coming months and linked to the Council's wider strategic aims.
- 7.6 A suite of leaflets has been produced to promote the Assembly Rooms and the exhibitions and events programmes. These leaflets will be updated and supplemented over the coming months.

8. OFFICIAL OPENING

- 8.1 The official opening will take place in the earlier part of 2000. In the meantime the actual opening of the different parts of the building over June to August this year has been marked by receptions attended by the Warwick District Council Chairman (see above).
- 8.2 There will also be a reception held by the Chairman in Autumn to thank those people and organisations who have supported the project through donations and sponsorship totalling £37,500.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The Royal Pump Rooms has opened to great acclaim, winning near universal praise from those that have visited the new facilities. The project has also received very favourable media coverage.
- 9.2 The smooth and highly successful implementation of the project is a great tribute to the many people who have worked on it over the past two years: the Project Manager, architects, builders, designers and specialists of various kinds. Members of the Heritage and Arts Section have played a key role in the project since its inception, and in recent weeks have been crucial to the successful opening of the building (and in managing the many and various problems that are inevitable when taking over a building like the Royal Pump Rooms). It has been a tremendous team effort, with staff working very extended and unsocial hours.
- 9.3 The challenge for the future is to ensure that the success of the first few weeks is maintained and improved upon over the long term by maintaining the building to a high standard and providing a range of high quality, innovative services which meet the needs and expectations of local residents and tourists.

10. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 That members note this report.

Author/Contact Officer: Jeff Watkin (Heritage and Arts Manager)
Direct line: 01926 742708

Areas in District Affected: all