

**Chambers Institution Trust**  
**Draft Full Project Vision and Ambition**

**Project Vision Statement**

*A vibrant cultural and heritage hub at the heart of the Tweeddale community in line with the original vision of William Chambers, providing a comprehensive range of social, education and business facilities and creating a unique, accessible and self-sustaining attraction for local people and visitors now and in the future.*

**Original Vision of William Chambers**

*The building is for the social, moral and intellectual improvement of the community of the said Burgh and county of Peeblesshire general and comprehends to be used as a public reading library, gallery of arts and museum of natural and other objects for the instruction of the public, and a great hall for public meetings and exhibitions of various kinds.*

**Purpose of this Document & Background**

The purpose of this document is to articulate the full capital ambition for the Chambers Institution and to set in the context against that ambition, the scope of works envisaged to be undertaken with support from the Levelling Up Fund.

In November 2023 it was confirmed that a joint bid by Dumfries and Galloway Council, South Lanarkshire Council and Scottish Borders Council had been successful. This was for funding of up to £22,809,416 from the UK Government's Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to support the Three Rivers Active Tourism Project.

The Three Rivers Active Tourism Project consists of three projects, one led by each council as follows:

- Annan Harbour Project (Dumfries and Galloway) – the refurbishment of a B listed former warehouse (Collett's Building) into a hub of activities including a workshop for heritage boat craft skills; a flexible café; meeting/community and event space and harbourside landscape improvements, including the construction of a new footbridge, to create a new focal point for water sports and activities for the local community and tourists.
- Chambers Institution in Peebles (Scottish Borders Council) – Refurbish the A listed Chambers Institute to become a cultural and heritage hub for the Tweeddale community and to become a visitor attraction within the region.
- The Clydesdale Way (South Lanarkshire Council) - a vision for a brand-new route for walkers and cyclists – the Clydesdale Way – that will hugely enhance connectivity across southern Scotland by joining up our communities and beauty spots with the Southern Upland Way, the River Ayr Way and the John Buchan Way.

The three councils aim to build on the above to foster joint marketing and to develop the tourism offering, bringing in additional tourists right across the area. All three areas are linked by the three great Scottish Rivers that have their source in the Southern Uplands – the River Annan, the River Tweed and the River Ayr. All three rivers supported the development of ancient cultures and communities that imbue this region with a unique culture and history that encapsulates the whole of the south of Scotland. This culture gave rise to a rich mythology that in turn led to the development

of a strong literary and folk tradition, encompassing Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott, John Buchan, James Hogg and William Chambers.

The Chambers Institution Trust is committed, as part of its vision, to support the development of the Three Rivers Active Tourism Project and is ideally placed to link this project with other tourism and cultural projects underway in the region, including the Connecting Threads: Tweed River Culture project which is part of the Destination Tweed initiative and the South of Scotland Cycling Partnership strategy.

### **The Full Capital Ambition for the Chambers Institution**

The Chambers Institution Trust has an ambitious vision for what the building could be once all capital works have been completed. The vision incorporates all the following to be delivered to the highest standards and fitting for the local community and visitors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The building will incorporate museums, an art gallery, a public library, changing exhibitions space, meeting spaces, events spaces, information points for the council and for tourists to the Tweed Valley and Tweeddale as well as a connected museum store.

This ambition extends beyond the scope of what will be covered by funding from the Levelling Up Fund, with the Trust looking to secure further funding to achieve the final ambition from a range of philanthropic sources. This document walks through the full vision floor by floor with an acknowledgement by the Trust that depending on costs, some ambitions may have to be revised to deliver maximum cost/benefit ratios.

### **The Ground Floor**

The vision for the Ground floor pivots around creating a new entrance to the building from the High Street. This new entrance will lead into an atmospheric modern space where there will be a reception space (staffed) as well as self-orientation digital screens that can be always accessed and when the reception area is not staffed.

There will be digital signage in this part of the building, visible from the high street, indicating what is on within the building.

The reception area will contain tourist information, linking to the Tweed Valley and the Three Rivers Tourism project. There will also be a community accessible point focused on Scottish Borders Council information. This space will include waymarking for the rest of the building and all it will have to offer and some digital interpretation pertaining to the history and heritage of William Chambers. A box office facility for booking tickets could also be offered from this space, again inclusive of a digital box office provision for out of hours use (this could also act as a box office for other venues in the town).

Flowing through from the Visitor Reception will be the Children's Library including a co-located child focused museum offer, a dedicated space for Bookbug activities, with a raised stage within the round and also a dynamic learning space that incorporates storage for school group needs (coats, places to eat packed lunches, facility for wet and dry work including sinks/materials storage) and accessible toilet provision with baby changing facilities, for all users of the building. The vision for this space is for a vibrant noisy, family-friendly and children focused area – a place that highlights the building as a living and vital community asset.

There is a desire to include an internal connection including security zoning to facilitate out of hours access at ground floor and first floor levels to the Burgh Hall and at ground floor level to the Registrar's Office/Burgh Chambers.

An accessible lift to all floors will be accessed from the ground floor – this lift will need to also be able to act as a lift for the movement of various museum objects, library items and goods to all floors.

Also on the ground floor, the ambition is to have a small, informal café space, run as a community café or run by local young people/special needs groups – it is important to ensure the café is not in competition with established businesses in the town and has direct community benefits. Alongside this there will be a retail space.

Consideration needs to be given for being able to secure/divide off the café, retail and museum spaces out of hours through security keypad/zoning access, if and when people are accessing the building for evening and weekend events.

Ideally, across the Pend, in what is currently the John Buchan Museum, new museum/library/halls service staff offices will be created with separate kitchen and toilet facilities, possibly extending into the flat on the first floor above this museum (which may also provide some much-needed work/equipment and stock storage spaces). The John Buchan Museum Trust will be approached to see if they will move into the main museum space on the first floor, hopefully connecting the cultural and literary links and optimising visitor flow.

The Citizens Advice Bureau will be helped to identify a new home with appropriate privacy and security required for its clients, out with the institution building, therefore freeing up more space on the ground floor.

### **The First Floor**

The First Floor will be home to a state-of-the-art modern museum space and adult lending library/public access computers.

The Museum will have modern display cases and dynamic interpretation displays, including interactive digital displays. The aim will be for the Museum to become a destination that highlights Tweeddale and the regions covered by the three rivers, highlight showstopper objects within the collection. In terms of the collection, it will incorporate the town collections and blend with the archives. Importantly the Museum will be fully compliant with the government indemnity scheme (GIS), which means the Museum will need to demonstrate that it can meet certain requirements around security, environmental control, and standards for packing, transport, and display.

The Museum layout will need to incorporate a separate space for the John Buchan Museum (which has its own management body and collects donations and so will need clear definition as an independent tenant space on this floor) if feasible.

The development work will highlight Tweeddale's permanent collections of regional/national importance. There is an opportunity to create highlights including – a Museum of the Bronze Age and/or a Museum of Tweeddale's Written Word Heritage as part of the overall Peebles museum & library/and the John Buchan museum offer and for the Museum to be able to work with National partners and private lenders in museum/archive sector. This could attract touring exhibitions of local and national importance, and iconic loans from the National Museums /Archive Records Scotland, if the space is GIS compliant.

The Chambers (Plaster Frieze) Room is a long windowless room housing neo-classical plaster cast replicas of the Parthenon Sculptures and another frieze entitled The Triumph of Alexander, re-created from the original by Danish sculptor, Bertel Thorvaldsen. This could become an atmospheric extension to the Museum (and fits into the Bronze Age period that incorporates this period of Ancient Greek history), using lighting and effective interpretation to tell the stories locked away within the friezes. This is a unique element of the collection, allowing visitors the only opportunity to get up close to the Parthenon friezes, aside from the originals held in the British Museum and some fragments remaining in the Acropolis Museum in Greece.

The Adult Library will be spacious and comfortable and provide access to computers for study/self-directed browsing. As co-located services, the library and museum will present an immersive, merged presentation of book stock, information, digital access, interpretation and museum objects/artworks.

### **The Second Floor**

The Art Gallery will become a GIS compliant space with adequate fire safety provision so that it again can house important loans to the collection and highlight key items in the regional permanent collections, acting as a changing exhibition space. If the Art Gallery remains in the current location, there will need to be lift access to this level and storage for equipment/exhibition packaging.

The area above the current first floor Museum Room is currently of limited use as it is a balcony area with adjacent museum collections stores leading off. This area does not comply with health and safety rules for public access/safe working practices. The preferred vision for the space is to floor over the void while retaining the original balcony, to create a quiet and reflective space for the public, with interpretation on how the room originally looked, with emphasis on the written word relevant to Tweeddale including life and work of William Chambers/Chambers dictionary and encyclopaedia publishing history. This space will need thought depending on how best to resolve the current health and safety issues.

### **The Third Floor**

This area will remain for accommodating equipment/general storage/exhibition packaging etc., noting that storage and access to this floor level will be limited by lack of lift provision and adequate fire escape routes.

### **The Burgh Hall**

The Burgh Hall has enormous potential, and the vision would see the creation of a Mezzanine floor space. This space could create a high value meeting space for commercial hire and to create a new sustainable public hall at the upper level. There will be additional accommodation at ground floor level to provide space for a professional catering kitchen, high quality meeting rooms and hot desking facilities and a Green Room for visiting performers in the Hall. The Mezzanine level will also provide the public with the opportunity to get up close to the detailing at roof level in the Burgh Hall and see the views down to the River Tweed.

If possible, an extension will be created at the rear of the Burgh Hall (depending on the status of land currently used/designated as allotments) to facilitate the creation of the meeting and kitchen spaces mentioned above.

### **Museum Collection Stores**

As part of the full vision for the building, ideally a new Museum Collections Resource Centre will be created offsite but nearby. This will provide space for, development and care of Tweeddale's Museum Objects and Fine Art reserve collections. Display-storage approaches would also enhance access for behind-the-scenes tours, incorporate museum/archive volunteer workspace, collections focused activity spaces and full security/environmental controls. Where security allows, there could be other adjacent community engagement spaces.

The Centre could offer behind the scenes tours/masterclasses and skills development programmes on a regular basis for members of the community, schools and other learning groups and visitors to the region to see parts of the collection not on show. It will reveal documentation/conservation work etc underway and providing opportunities for Tweeddale communities to become involved in various museum/archives collections volunteer activities. A suitable building/site near to the Chambers Institution, with level vehicular access, will need to be identified for the Museum Collections Resource Centre.

### **The Courtyard**

This should be an attractively landscaped, welcoming and contemplative space that helps to draw people in and down to the Burgh Hall. The space needs to work sensitively with the War Memorial and should have spaces where people can sit and reflect.

### **Other Considerations**

Adequate space will be needed for storage across the building as well as for plant and control rooms for utilities, the lift, environmental controls and security.

Full connectivity public access WIFI for the main building is currently problematic. WIFI is a key requirement and in particular, for the library/museum will be essential to fulfil service user and staff communications needs/digital interactive interpretation aspirations. In addition, to future proof the building it will be essential to ensure that power and data is easily accessible across all floors of the building.

The Burgh Hall and courtyard external space have fully functioning WIFI at present but could benefit from additional interpretation highlights accessed through use of Q code information links, a heritage trail APP etc.

Green credentials/Transition to Net Zero – the vision is for the building to be as energy efficient and sustainable as possible. Specialist advice will be required to investigate this potential but there is funding available from a range of sources that could support this.

### **Income Generation Opportunities**

The full vision has been developed to maximise commercial income generation opportunities as follows:

- Hire of various spaces created in the building for events (the Burgh Hall, the Burgh Hall Mezzanine, the Visitor Reception Area, possibly the Courtyard as an outdoor venue space (weather permitting)
- Hire of spaces for Weddings, Corporate Entertaining and Product Launches (The Burgh Hall and Burgh Hall Mezzanine)
- Hire of Meeting Rooms (created within the Burgh Hall full vision) and hot desking facilities.
- Retail Space

- Café space (direct or as a franchise)
- Tenancy income
- Museum donations
- Social Prescription activities to enhance culture-based health and well-being activities and foster partnership-funded programmes with NHS, SBC, Social Care, Dementia support, Tackling Poverty/Isolation etc.
- Museum Collections Resource Centre- paid-for offer including talks/tours, employability skills/training placement partnerships, and premium masterclass events.
- Commission income from high quality art exhibition gallery sales- of commercial benefit to creative practitioners in art/crafts as a retail opportunity for highlighting and selling works.
- Digital links to free and paid-for access to digitised archives, purchasing photographic images and bespoke genealogy research services (including the Scotland's People records database and the Archive service/borders collections on-line).

### **The Levelling Up Funded Scope of Works**

Considering the full vision for the building as outlined above in this document and considering the priorities identified through consultation to date, the key focus for Levelling Up funding is around accessibility across the building.

Levelling up funding 2024-2026 will focus on:

- The creation of a new entrance from the high street.
- The fit out of a new visitor reception on the ground floor and the creation of the new spaces for the Children's Library, Children focused museum displays, the Bookbug activity space and a co-located education/learning space.
- Lift access to all floors
- Second Floor Art Gallery made accessible by lift, and where funding in phase 1 allows, fire exit compliant.
- New link corridor to provide an internal connection to the Registrar's office, Burgh Chambers/Marriage Room and Burgh Hall.
- New fire exits from rear wing at first floor and scoping of second floor level alignment for fire exit requirements, to comply with fire safety.

It is likely that all the above, inclusive of all professional fees will meet the Levelling Up funding being allocated to the Chambers Institution Trust for period 2024-2026.

The work to achieve the vision for the First and Second Floor, the Museum Collections Resource Centre, the Burgh Hall, the moving of the John Buchan Museum and subsequent creation of staff rooms and offices would all fall into a second phase of development for which the Chambers Institution Trust is committed to securing funding. If there is room within the Levelling Up funding to include any elements of this work, the Trust will prioritise which elements of work should move into the Levelling Up phase of refurbishment.

### **Next Steps**

The key next steps in relation to all the above is:

1. Identify the estimated costs to achieve the full vision.
2. Confirm the costs identified for the Levelling Up Funded phase and related to this, clarify the full scope of works in consideration of Levelling Up time scales.

3. Appoint a design team to assist with all the above and begin to produce artist impressions for the Levelling up Phase and for the full ambition. These will be hugely helpful for additional fundraising effort and for further community consultation.
4. Appoint a project manager to co-ordinate project delivery phase 1, monitoring/evaluation, budget reporting and communications across the partners/tenants/communities.
5. Commence discussions with key tenants in the building – The Citizens Advice Bureau, Live Borders, SBC contact centre, Go Tweed valley, Registrar’s Service, The John Buchan Museum, and private tenancy (courtyard flat).
6. Undertake new community consultation on plans for the full vision for the building.
7. Identify potential alternative destinations in the locality for relocating services/bookings, staff and collections impacted by anticipated closure periods during building works. Consult with tenants/key community groups on decant plans.

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