

Chief Executive's Office

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Councillor G.V. Hyde (Deputy Leader)
Councillor Mrs. L.O. Barnett
Councillor P.J. Edwards
Councillor Mrs. J.P. French
Councillor J.C. Mayson
Councillor R.V. Stockton
Councillor D.W. Rule MBE
Councillor D.B. Wilcox
Councillor R.M. Wilson

9th July, 2003

Dear Councillor,

MEETING OF CABINET

THURSDAY, 17TH JULY, 2003 AT 2.00 P.M.

COUNCIL CHAMBER, BROCKINGTON, 35 HAFOD ROAD, HEREFORD

AGENDA (03/11)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive any declarations of interest by members in respect of items on this agenda.

3. NOTES OF CABINET MEETING HELD ON (03/10)

To receive the notes of Meeting (03/10) held on 10th July, 2003. *(Cabinet Members only and notes to be tabled at meeting)*

4. EDGAR STREET GRID MASTERPLAN

To give views on the preferred masterplanning option for the Edgar Street Grid site in Hereford. *(Pages 1 - 8)*

5. HEREFORDSHIRE MATTERS SURVEYS FOLLOWING TWO PILOT EDITIONS

To give views on the future of the newspaper published in two pilot editions (Herefordshire Matters). *(Pages 9 - 14)*

6. POSITION STATEMENT ON REPLACEMENT SWIMMING POOL FOR NORTH HEREFORDSHIRE

To note the outcome of Sport England's Facilities Planning Model Exercise to determine the demand for water space in Herefordshire and to consider the issues which need to be considered by the Council in seeking to deliver replacement swimming facility to serve the residents of North Herefordshire. (Pages 15 - 20)

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

In the opinion of the Proper Officer, the next item will not be, or is likely not to be, open to the public and press at the time it is considered.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12(A) of the Local Government Act, 1972 as indicated below.

7. PROCUREMENT OF CONTRACT SERVICES

To authorise conclusion of negotiations. (Pages 21 - 38)

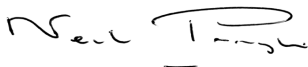
This item discloses information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office-holders under, the authority.

8. PROCUREMENT OF TECHNICAL CONSULTANCY SERVICES

To authorise conclusions of negotiations. (Pages 39 - 46)

This item discloses information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office-holders under, the authority.

Yours sincerely,



**N.M. PRINGLE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Copies to: Chairman of the Council
Chairman of Strategic Monitoring Committee
Vice-Chairman of Strategic Monitoring Committee
Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees
Group Leaders
Directors
Herefordshire Commercial Services Manager
County Secretary and Solicitor
County Treasurer

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- Inspect agenda and public reports at least three clear days before the date of the meeting.
- Inspect minutes of the Council and all Committees and Sub-Committees and written statements of decisions taken by the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members for up to six years following a meeting.
- Inspect background papers used in the preparation of public reports for a period of up to four years from the date of the meeting. A list of the background papers to a report is given at the end of each report. A background paper is a document on which the officer has relied in writing the report and which otherwise is not available to the public.
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- Have a reasonable number of copies of agenda and reports (relating to items to be considered in public) made available to the public attending meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Committees and Sub-Committees.
- Have access to a list specifying those powers on which the Council have delegated decision making to their officers identifying the officers concerned by title.
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- The nearest bus-stop to Brockington is located in Old Eign Hill near to its junction with Hafod Road. The return journey can be made from the same bus stop.

If you have any questions about this agenda, how the Council works or would like more information or wish to exercise your rights to access the information described above, you may do so either by telephoning officer named on the front cover of this agenda or by visiting in person during office hours (8.45 a.m. - 5.00 p.m. Monday - Thursday and 8.45 a.m. - 4.45 p.m. Friday) at the Council Offices, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford.

COUNTY OF HEREFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

BROCKINGTON, 35 HAFOD ROAD, HEREFORD.

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EDGAR STREET GRID MASTERPLAN

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, MARKETS AND PROPERTY, ENVIRONMENT/PLANNING AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

CABINET

17TH JULY, 2003

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To give views on the preferred masterplanning option for the Edgar Street Grid site in Hereford.

Key Decision

This is a Key Decision because it is significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards. It was included in the Forward Plan published on 7th May, 2003.

Recommendation

THAT the preferred masterplan for the Edgar Street Grid site be based on Option 3, as a basis for further consultation, and that an implementation plan be developed on this basis.

Reasons

As a result of feedback from the Consultation exercise, technical and design issues and in particular in order to generate sufficient capital to implement the proposals Option 3 is preferred.

Considerations

1. During 2002, Herefordshire Council and Advantage West Midlands agreed to jointly commission a masterplanning exercise to inform the redevelopment of the Edgar Street Grid site in Hereford. Hereford is an important sub regional employment and service centre for a large rural hinterland. The majority of rural Herefordshire and parts of the City fall within Advantage West Midlands Rural Regeneration Zone and within the West Midlands Objective 2 area. Significant investment is required in order for the City to move forward and fulfil its potential as a sub regional employment and service centre which will help to address wider issues in the County's rural economy. The 43 hectare (100 acre) Edgar Street Grid site immediately to the north of the existing city centre offers a strategic opportunity to address these issues.
2. In maximising the contribution to wider economic development, a range of issues must be addressed including traffic congestion, poor strategic infrastructure, a lack of high quality leisure facilities and the need to strengthen the retail offer of the centre.

In working towards this, the preparation of a deliverable masterplan will serve to integrate the site with the city centre, stimulate a new civic and cultural presence on site, enhance the tourism offer and facilitate city living through the establishment of a vibrant and high quality location.

3. In March 2003 DTZ Pineda were commissioned to lead a multi disciplinary consultancy team to prepare a strategic vision, masterplan and implementation strategy for the Edgar Street Grid, located immediately to the north of Hereford's historic city centre. The Council's Regeneration Board has overseen the Consultants' work to date. The study area incorporates the area of land bounded by Edgar Street (the A49), Newmarket Street, Blue School Street, Commercial Road and the railway line. The site extends to approximately 43 hectares (100 acres) and incorporates a number of significant uses including the Livestock Market, Hereford United Football Club, railway station, various commercial uses and a number of buildings of architectural and historic importance such as the Blackfriars Friary.
4. In addition to these existing uses, the study brief took as its starting point the Council's proposals for the area in the draft UDP. Several uses requiring a city centre location were identified including a site for the Council Headquarters, Police Authority Headquarters, a Primary Care Trust facility, potential learning village, multiplex cinema and a public transport interchange. These uses could provide opportunities for new development within the masterplan area.
5. The brief for the masterplanning exercise set out the following key objectives:
 - to create a main focus for regeneration within the context of an historic city centre;
 - to create a development that is accessible to sustainable transport modes, that contributes to development in the wider city centre, with an emphasis on the development and improvement of sustainable access links to the city centre and other adjacent areas;
 - to utilise key locations and physical attributes associated with the project area including opportunities offered by the Livestock Market site, the existing railway station and the former canal basins;
 - to set an aspirational, but achievable and robust masterplan for the project area within the context of sustainable developments reflecting the heritage of the city and the use of the new and emerging economy of the 21st century;
 - to focus on delivery and the mechanism for implementation.
6. The timetable for the commissioning and completion of Consultants to undertake the Edgar Street Grid masterplanning work is summarised below:

Brief agreed by Cabinet 3rd December, 2002

Consultants appointed February 2003

Consultation with key stakeholders March – May 2003

Members Seminar presenting masterplan options 5th June, 2003

Public consultation on masterplan options June/July 2003

Masterplan options to Cabinet to select preferred option 17th July, 2003

Implementation Plan for preferred option to Cabinet September/October 2003

7. In preparing options for the future development of the area, the following key actions have been undertaken:
 - a review of existing technical studies relevant to the site;
 - detailed site analysis of technical issues by members of the consulting team (including the wider policy context, the economic context and opportunities of Hereford, engineering, archaeology, flooding, highways/transportation, the property market context/conditions, existing planning consents, development requirements and design considerations): It must be noted that at the time of writing the technical work on traffic modelling was not complete and so no capacity analyses of the proposed junctions has yet been carried out.
 - an extensive consultation exercise (including meetings with officers, a range of interest groups, the establishment of an advisory forum and the presentation of emerging options to Members of Herefordshire Council as part of a workshop session).
8. The work undertaken to date has informed the establishment of a series of criteria that any masterplan option must satisfy and four masterplan options 1(a), 1(b), 2 and 3. The criteria and masterplan options are set out in Appendix 1 attached, in particular in the section on the development framework. Option 1a most closely reflects the proposals published in the draft UDP, while the others explore different possibilities. All four options have been subject to a wide ranging consultation exercise. This has included coverage in the Hereford Times, letters to stakeholders and to all occupiers of premises on the site and a call in facility with exhibition material at the Council's Planning Offices at Blueschool House, Hereford. All Ambition Groups of the Herefordshire Partnership have been consulted as have all services within the Council. There has also been an opportunity for the public to comment over the internet.

Option 3 is emerging as the preferred Option, the key features of Option 3 are:

- the new A49/Commercial Road link joins the A49 in the vicinity of the Courtyard Arts Centre, raising the profile of this venue and allowing in the longer term for a reorientation of the football ground. Details of the junction with A49 will be subject to agreement with the Highways Agency. There are concerns about the capacity of existing junctions to deal with these new proposals. These concerns will need to be addressed in the next phase of the work.
- a new civic focus away from the Market site (as proposed in the UDP) to the Blueschool Street area.
- the introduction of retail uses onto the Livestock Market site. This serves to help the overall economic viability of the scheme and ensures the Council is making best use of its assets. However retail uses need careful handling from a planning point of view. One of the main objectives of the study is to integrate with the existing city centre and it is important that what is effectively a separate focus for investment is not created which would compete rather than complement the main shopping areas to the south. In particular city centre shopping uses are not to be preferred on the Market site. This could weaken the retail emphasis in the existing centre which contributes to the vitality and viability of the historic core. It

is essential that this is maintained. In terms of other retail uses, the capacity in the City to accommodate additional food retail is limited and a case would need to be made to or by the Council, acting as planning authority, that additional provision of this nature could be justified by other considerations. Bulky goods retailing could be another possibility, for which there is a need to identify additional land.

- Other uses such as a Hereford Learning Village, multiplex cinema and public transport provision/interchange are not explicitly provided for in the option as it stands. These need to be further considered as part of the development of the implementation plan.

Links to other strategies

The brief requires consultancy teams to integrate fully with other strategies and development policies. Foremost here is the Council's transport role. As part of the development of the implementation plan, detailed consideration is needed to the implications of the road proposal on which Option 3 rests and this should be set within the context of the Hereford Transport Review. Consultation with the Highways Agency will also be essential. Advantage West Midlands have also asked for clarification of how the proposals for the Edgar Street Grid link to the City of Living Craft proposals and the emerging ideas for a Hereford Learning Village. Finally, while the current UDP proposals have been taken as the starting point for the study, it is acknowledged that there may be a need to revise the relevant UDP policies following the conclusion of the work. This can be accommodated within the UDP process.

9. Next Steps

Once Cabinet has confirmed the Council's favoured masterplanning option this will be the subject of further consultation and the Consortium of Consultants will develop an implementation plan. This implementation plan will set out how the Council and its partners could achieve the development of the favoured option. It is anticipated that the consultants will complete this work during September 2003, a further report will then be brought to Cabinet for consideration. Progress on implementation will be linked to the success of the Hereford Markets Bill and the Unitary Development Plan process. It is anticipated that the Council and Advantage West Midlands will commission a further study on the future requirements of the Livestock Market.

Alternative Options

The alternative options are options 1(a), 1(b) and 2 as described in the report. A further alternative would be to do nothing and allow the site to evolve without preferred masterplan

Risk Management

Risk Management issues will be dealt with as part of the implementation proposals developed by the Consortium of Consultants led by DTZ Pineda.

Consultees

A wide ranging consultation exercise has been undertaken including press and radio coverage inviting comments from the general public, direct one to one meetings with a series of land owners and leaseholders on the site and meetings with an Advisory Group consisting of other stakeholders and interested parties in the City. A briefing meeting for all

Herefordshire Council Members took place on 5th June, 2003.

Background Papers

None identified

MASTERPLAN OPTIONS

This section provides a brief overview of the evolution of the masterplan options, drawing on the consultation process and our detailed analysis of current conditions, policy objectives and future opportunities.

Consultation Responses

As already noted, an extensive consultation process has been undertaken and is still ongoing. This process has been critical to informing the preparation of masterplan options with key emerging messages including:

- the importance of addressing traffic congestion on Edgar Street and the Inner Ring Road (New Market Street and Blue School Street);
- support for the downgrading of the Inner Ring Road in order to enhance linkages to the city centre;
- the need to enhance the quality and diversity of leisure facilities;
- the need to enhance the quality and variety of retail provision;
- support for the introduction of a waterway in the general area of the former canal basin;
- support for the principle of a mix of uses within the area;
- the need to maximise revenue generated from public assets in order to support project funding.

Design Aspirations

Whilst the masterplan area incorporates a number of attractive buildings and active pedestrian routes, it has over time been severed from the city centre (predominantly by the Inner Ring Road) and has evolved in an unplanned manner. In re-knitting the masterplan area with the city centre, a number of design objectives must be satisfied:

- reinforcing the vitality and quality of the city centre;
- reinforce existing land uses around the site boundary to integrate it more effectively with its context;
- reinforce the vibrancy of the Courtyard Arts Centre, Widemarsh Street and Commercial Road;
- provide better access across and into the site for pedestrians (including links from the city centre to the station);
- break down the barrier between the area and city centre;
- provide new public open space;
- provide adequate car parking for new uses and to serve the city centre;
- reinforce key vistas and views from the site to city centre landmarks.

Transportation

Our detailed analysis has confirmed that the highways network is already operating above capacity which causes considerable congestion and delays - particularly along the A49 and Inner Ring Road. Therefore, in order to facilitate any development within the masterplan area, a fundamental redesign of the highways network is required. This will incorporate the downgrading of the Inner Relief Road (thereby also serving to enhance links to the city centre from the area) and a new link from Commercial Road to the A49.

Flooding

The study brief noted the historic use of part of northern area as a canal basin and the potential requirement for flood storage capacity to be provided on site. Our research has demonstrated that the introduction of a formal waterway would not serve as a flood alleviation measure but would be highly attractive in design terms and serve to act as a

focus of activity for this area. On this basis, a waterway and separate flood alleviation measures are proposed within the masterplan options.

Hereford United Football Club (HUFC)

HUFC provides an important community facility for Herefordshire and has a well established presence within the masterplan area. However, the ground is in a poor condition and in need of modernisation. Further enhancements to the ground would probably be required if the team were promoted to the Football League. Consultations have identified the potential for the development of facilities associated with the club including a conference room, bar facilities, an enhanced club shop and other sports related uses. Our design analysis has confirmed that as part of any redevelopment proposals the ground should ideally be set back from the A49 in order to reduce visual impact and enhance pedestrian linkages around the area.

The redevelopment of the ground will require a significant financial commitment and whilst this is a long term aspiration for all masterplan options, it is recognised that in the short term funding is not likely to be available for such a course of action.

Council Offices Accommodation

The study brief identified the fact that the Council is seeking a new site for its own headquarters within a city centre location. Whilst precise floorspace requirements have yet to be confirmed, consideration has been given to the potential of the masterplan area to accommodate the development in several related buildings that would be appropriate in terms of the relationship of scale and massing to the surrounding area and could also act as a catalyst to introduce other occupiers and uses within the area. Two general locations have been considered:

- the Livestock Market site - in line with proposals already incorporated in the emerging UDP;
- Blue School Street/Catherine Street area - whilst the Council already has offices in this area, such a development would play a major role in linking the site to the city centre and promoting wider regeneration.

Development Framework

The stages of the process set out above confirmed a series of common themes that must be incorporated in any masterplan option for the area. These development requirements establish a series of common themes to be incorporated in any masterplan. Therefore, each masterplan option incorporates:

- enhanced connections with the city centre;
- a mix of uses including residential, retail, leisure, commercial and cultural;
- the downgrading of the Inner Ring Road and a new road link between the A49 and Commercial Road;
- a waterway in the north eastern area of the site around which a range of uses including residential, commercial, leisure, live/work, pub and hotel could be provided;
- reinforcement of the historic core around Widemarsh Street/Conningsby Street;
- new mixed use development along Widemarsh Street;
- retention of the football club within the masterplan area;
- provision of Council office accommodation;
- environmental enhancements and enhanced pedestrian linkages.

Key differences of each option are set out below and highlighted on the exhibition masterplan options boards:

- *Option 1a* - this option most closely follows that identified in the emerging UDP, with council offices proposed on the Livestock Market site and an enhancement of football

club facilities in the general area of the current ground;

- *Option 1b* - in line with consultation responses, consideration is given to new retail development on the Livestock Market site. In association with the downgrading of the Inner Ring Road, this would facilitate an enhancement of city centre retail provision and generate revenue to support infrastructure provision within the masterplan area. The option also proposed the development of Council offices around Blue School Street;
- *Option 2* - consideration is given to Council offices and arts related uses on the Livestock Market site in order to create a Civic/Cultural presence;
- *Option 3* - this option mirrors Option 1b with the exception that the new Commercial Road - A49 link joins the A49 in the vicinity of the Courtyard Arts Centre in order to contribute towards raising the profile of the venue. This also allows for a radical relocation of the football ground in the longer term.

Funding and Delivery

The masterplan options create an opportunity to establish a planning framework for long term change and the future development of the city. However, the delivery of such an ambitious plan will require major commitment from the public and private sectors in bringing forward development and securing wider benefits. Such commitment will include dedicating resources to driving the project forward, strategic land acquisitions and ensuring that development proposals are consistent with masterplan aims.

In delivering the project, enabling infrastructure works will be required (including the new Commercial Road - Edgar Street link, waterway, environmental enhancements, land acquisition and public realm works). At this stage, only the masterplan options promoting additional retail development (1b and 3) generate sufficient funding to complete such works.

Given that the potential council offices development would not generate any land value if brought forward on the Livestock Market site (options 1a and 2), it is not considered to be viable to promote such options without identifying other funding sources to support the wider regeneration aims.

HEREFORDSHIRE MATTERS SURVEYS FOLLOWING TWO PILOT EDITIONS

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE

CABINET

17TH JULY, 2003

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To give views on the future of the newspaper published in two pilot editions (Herefordshire Matters).

Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

Recommendation

THAT the continuation of the publication of Herefordshire Matters be approved on a quarterly basis in line with the first two editions and taking on board comments following consultation via Herefordshire Voice.

Reasons

Last year it was agreed that two pilot editions of Herefordshire Matters be produced and, following evaluation, a decision would be taken in relation to the future of the magazine.

Considerations

1. Herefordshire Council has been involved in the "Connecting with Communities" initiative since January 2002. This initiative, supported by Department of Transport Local Government and the Regions (DTLR), Local Government Association (LGA), Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), Audit Commission and MORI, looked at best communications practice among eight local authorities and explored the ways this best practice could be put to use in six authorities which faced particular communication challenges. An on-line communication toolkit was produced.
2. It concluded that Herefordshire Council has a good story to tell, but isn't telling it. One of the key recommendations was that the authority needed to establish a regular newspaper or magazine for its residents. Other recommendations included the establishment of a Council-wide Communications Network and the development of the Council's key messages. These have been achieved.
3. In June 2002 two focus groups were arranged to determine what people would want from a regular Council publication. These groups were drawn from members of

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
John Burnett on (01432) 260224.

Herefordshire Voice, the Herefordshire Partnership's 1,000-strong citizens panel. The panel is broadly representative of the population of the county and is used to gauge feedback on a wide variety of issues and is managed independently on behalf of the Herefordshire Partnership by Birmingham-based BMG.

4. On the basis of the feedback from these two groups (one of whose membership ranged from 18 to 44, the other from 44 years of age and upwards) two pilot editions were published – the first in September and the second in December 2002.
5. Early feedback was good with the vast majority of comments favourable about the style and layout of the magazine, its content and the cost of production and distribution.
6. The two editions were evaluated by a further two focus groups in February 2003 (same age groupings) and a questionnaire sent to all members of Herefordshire Voice. A summary of the questions asked and the key findings are included at Appendix 1 to this report.
7. The production and distribution cost for each of the first two editions of Herefordshire Matters stands at £21,510. A breakdown of these costs is laid out as follows:

ACTIVITY	QUANTITY	COST
• Printing	(76,000)	£ 5,075.15
• Postage	(76,185)	£11,869.62
• Polybag/maillort	(76,185)	£ 4,565.39
<u>Total cost:</u>		<u>£21,510.16</u>

8. Advertising could be sought to offset some of the costs of future editions – it is suggested that a maximum of 10 per cent of magazine (equivalent to 1.5 pages) be allocated for advertising. This would ensure that the impact of Council messages is not lost in a sea of adverts. Strict criteria would have to be drawn up to ensure any external advertising is from organisations with the same ethos as Herefordshire Council.
9. At this level advertising would bring in a maximum of £1,500 per edition if taken from organisations external to the Council (@ £1,000 per page). Internal adverts placed by directorates/divisions would be given a discount.
10. Should Cabinet approve the establishment of Herefordshire Matters the next edition would be produced September 2003.

Risk Management

Not continuing with Herefordshire Matters will compromise efforts to improve public awareness and perception of the Council. This could, in turn, have a negative impact on the Council's next CPA in 2005/6.

Satisfaction levels with the Council and its services were measured three years ago the figure then stood at 59%. This will be measured again in the autumn this year - the Council's target is 70% but based on national trends this is unlikely to be achieved.

There is a well-established link between satisfaction and information provision. To cancel the production of Herefordshire Matters would only hinder the authority's bid to raise satisfaction

levels – although our Connecting with Communities’ consultant’s advice is that in the current climate nationally even a break-even figure would be considered a satisfactory achievement.

Consultees

Consultation was carried out via two focus groups consisting of members from Herefordshire Voice

These took place in February 2003 and were conducted on behalf of Herefordshire Council by BMG, which runs Herefordshire Voice.

The first group consisted of 16 to 44-year-olds and the second of 45-year-olds and upwards

The general questionnaire went to all members of Herefordshire Voice

Background Papers

None identified

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS FROM SURVEYS

Herefordshire Voice questionnaire:

- 80% of respondents rate the magazine in positive terms (fairly or very good)
- 82% found the magazine interesting
- 72% found the information useful
- More than 75% think the 28p cost per copy for printing and distribution represents good value for money
- 88% think the magazine should continue
- 9% felt the magazine should be discontinued
- 68% said they feel better informed about the Council having read the magazine

Focus groups:

- In general, residents feel that 28p per copy is a reasonable sum
- Most participants agree that the magazine represented good value for money
- Herefordshire Matters is seen as superior to other Council or other public sector direct mail communication
- The two groups agreed strongly that Herefordshire Matters' content is interesting and well written
- The magazine's design is seen as "lively and colourful" with photography especially liked
- One group liked the seasonal approach – the other group suggested six editions a year with fewer pages in each edition
- The reason for postal delivery (i.e. that every household receives a copy) was acceptable to the groups

EXAMPLE OF QUESTIONS ASKED

Herefordshire Voice questionnaire:

- How interesting did you find Herefordshire Matters?
- Was it easy to read?
- Was the information useful?
- Did you like the style/layout of the magazine?
- Does Herefordshire Matters represent value for money?

Focus groups:

- How long did you spend reading Herefordshire Matters?
- Is Herefordshire Matters' content interesting?
- What was your preferred frequency for the magazine?
- Is it a pleasant read?
- Is it well written?
- Do you think the publication should be available on line?
- It costs 28p per household to print and deliver Herefordshire Matters. Do you think this represents good value for money?

POSITION STATEMENT ON REPLACEMENT SWIMMING POOL FOR NORTH HEREFORDSHIRE

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

CABINET

17TH JULY, 2003

Wards Affected

All wards in North Herefordshire (North of Roman Road).

Purpose

To advise Members of the outcome of Sport England's Facilities Planning Model Exercise to determine the demand for water space in Herefordshire and to indicate the issues which need to be considered by the Council in seeking to deliver a replacement swimming facility to serve the residents of North Herefordshire.

Key Decision

This is a Key Decision because it is significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards. A Notice in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information) Regulations 2000 was sent on to the Chairman of Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendation

- THAT:**
- (a) the content of the report and its supporting papers be noted;**
 - (b) the information provided in the Report be used as a basis to formulate a decision on how to proceed with the issue;**
- and**
- (c) Sport England be notified of the Council's view in accordance with their request following our receipt of the completed Study Documents.**

Reasons

1. In October 2002 as a result of a failed National Lottery Sports Fund bid and on the advice of Sport England, the Herefordshire Council agreed to work with Sport England to undertake a Joint Facilities Planning Model Study to ascertain the likely demand for water space in Herefordshire. The aim of the study was to inform the Council on the most appropriate swimming provision for North Herefordshire based upon an assessment of aggregated unmet demand.
2. This work was carried out over a 6 month period using staff from Herefordshire Council, Sport England's Regional Office and the Sheffield Hallam University. The final report of April 2003 contained the results of a comprehensive study of supply and demand for water space across all providing sectors in both Herefordshire and

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Tony Featherstone, Parks, Countryside and Leisure Development Manager on (01568) 798321

its surrounding Local Authority neighbours.

3. It was agreed that the findings of the study would be presented to the Council following the May Local Government elections.
4. Following consideration of the content and implications of the report, Sport England suggested that the Herefordshire Council formulates a decision as to how it wishes to now proceed given the evidence provided. Sport England would then respond indicating whether or not the Council's new proposals provide a more solid basis for a renewed Lottery bid.

Considerations

Background

1. Previous reports to Cabinet dated 12th September, 2002 regarding Sport England's refusal of funding, and to Cabinet on 28th March, 2002 regarding the closure of the Pool refer. The Sydonia Swimming Pool was built in 1937 as an outdoor facility. The facility was enclosed to form an indoor pool at Local Government Reorganisation in 1973/4. Over the period during which the Leominster District Council held responsibility for the Pool, the Council was aware that the structural condition had deteriorated to a point when its condition was irretrievable from a purely maintenance perspective. When the pool became the responsibility of the Herefordshire Council in April 1998, the transferred Client Maintenance budget for the facility was less than £10,000 p.a. In the Autumn of that year the Council's Property Services Department undertook a Building Condition Survey which confirmed that the building was in very poor structural condition and had a limited useful life. Following this survey, Leisure and Property Services jointly undertook work to bring forward proposals for a replacement facility based upon comprehensive community consultation undertaken by the then Community Liaison Service. A proposed scheme with approved planning consent was produced in August 2001. In March 2002 the pool was closed on grounds of Health and Safety, and it was resolved that the Council submit an application to the National Lottery Sports Fund for a replacement facility based upon the scheme provided. The application was submitted in May 2002 and was rejected in September 2002 at Stage One of the process. Following various discussions with both Regional and National Officers of Sport England, in October 2002 the Council was advised to undertake a Facility Planning Model exercise prior to consideration of resubmitting a further application.
2. The National Lottery Sports Fund was suspended in December 2002 to enable a fundamental stock take of the Lottery's impact to date. This suspension was due to be lifted in April 2003, but has since been extended to September and lately December of this year. The Council has been advised that any new applications to the fund are unlikely to be invited until April 2004 at the earliest. No details have yet been provided as to the priorities of the new programme and the timescales and process for bid determination.
3. The key indicative message emanating from the study is that there is a case for some indoor swimming provision in Leominster, but this is not an overwhelming one – only 29m² of water space deemed to be needed. (A small community pool of 20m x 8m = 160m² of water space). The Model suggests that 84.8% of demand for swimming in the county is already met with current provision. Further assertions are that:
 - a) a 20m x 8m pool would attract a projected 77,100 potential users;

- b) a 25m x 8.5m pool would attract the same potential users as a);
- c) a 25m x 12.5m pool with a 50m² learning bay would attract a projected 97,550 potential users.

In each of the above scenarios it is indicated that between 38,400 (a) and 63,700 (c) visitors would be at the expense of users currently attending other neighbouring pools (both within and without the county).

- 4. Based upon actual throughput information provided by the Herefordshire Council and Halo (the Herefordshire Community Leisure Trust), these projections are seen to be significantly understated. The actual throughput for the Sydonia Pool over the four years of operation since Local Government Reorganisation have consistently averaged over 130,000 with a figure close to 140,000 for the year immediately prior to closure. Further, given more in-depth research undertaken by Halo since April 2002 there is a significant risk that these figures may well have been understated.
- 5. Recent research undertaken by the Council's Research Unit in relation to the Housing Needs Study in the Leominster area (January 2003) has highlighted that the issue of swimming provision in the Leominster and greater North Herefordshire area has risen to one of the single most significant priorities for the residents of North Herefordshire. Given this strength of feeling in the local community, a campaign to secure a replacement pool has been mounted which has rapidly gathered momentum attracting the interest of media at a regional level.
- 6. Consideration should be given to the implications in financial terms (both capital and revenue) to the Council of the scale of provision, should a facility be developed at the Leominster location. The Council's appointed project team for the facility, as proposed within the submitted Lottery bid, have maintained that reductions in size, as considered by Sport England may have only a marginal reduction in the capital build cost, but will have a highly significant impact on the revenue generation capacity of the future operation. This is a view that is strongly echoed by Halo.
- 7. In arriving at a decision as to the scale of the project the potential to attract revenue income should be assessed against any potential savings in capital costs arriving from building a smaller facility. The project as proposed was designed to a scale of provision acceptable to the local community.
- 8. The initial view from the Council's Property Service section would suggest that a reduction in the capacity of the pool tank to provide a water capacity of 20m x 8m might result in a 5% reduction in capital build costs. Further detailed work would need to be done to confirm this.
- 9. Given the uncharacteristically high level of usage afforded to the former Sydonia Pool, the following points need to be considered:
 - a) the pool fell well short of accepted technical specifications for the Amateur Swimming Association;
 - b) the quality of the building and its fabric was a known deterrent to use;
 - c) its capacity to accommodate swimming tuition for both public and educational use was severely constrained.
- 10. Despite these factors, the Sydonia Pool when open, operated as the most cost-effective pool in the County and ranked high in comparison with national best value

indicators for comparable provision elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

11. Should an alternative proposal involving consideration of either downsizing the existing scheme or adopting a completely new scheme in a different location, then all the assumptions behind this Report will need to be revisited.

Financial Implications

12. The new Prudential Guidelines system for local authority capital expenditure could potentially give greater discretion for the Council to take decisions on the extent of borrowing undertaken to resource capital projects. Under the anticipated new system the key constraining factor will be the on-going revenue costs of financing the borrowing required to support that capital expenditure. In terms of any provision made within the annual revenue settlement to support such borrowing then such provision is likely to be led by government priorities for local authority capital spending. Schemes such as the swimming pool have not in the past been generously supported through block allocations. Furthermore there can be no guarantee that legislation required to introduce the new system would be in place in time for the next financial year. A delay until the 2005/06 financial year is therefore a distinct possibility.
13. The only other available sources of finance would be through the utilisation of reserves or Private Financing Initiative (PFI). The scale, nature and timescale of the project all militate against a successful PFI bid.
14. That leaves only the issue of reserves. Based on the last report to Council then the 'useable reserve' stands at approximately £5.5 million. It excludes that part of the usable LSVT receipt which was earmarked as part of the transfer process for future investment in housing. That element of the receipt stands at £10 million. From within the 'usable reserve' the Council has determined to maintain a 'minimum reserve' of £3 million (reduced to £2 million in the 2003/04 financial year with a clear commitment to replenish that 'minimum reserve' from the revenue budget in 2004/05). That leaves a balance of £3.5 million available for immediate application if the Council so determines. Clearly any call on that reserve would need to take account the priority of any other calls on reserves.
15. The figures in this paragraph are as reported last to Council. The County Treasurer has not undertaken a full update at this stage but confirmed that there are no pending calls of significance in the context of this report.
16. This paragraph does not analyse in detail those parts of the reserves which are restricted to applications for capital purposes because that is not likely to cause any difficulty in relation to what would be a capital scheme. The greater difficulty the Council will face is in utilising reserves for revenue purposes hence the commitment by Council as part of the 2003/04 to replenish the revenue reserve as part of the 2004/05 revenue budget consideration.

Alternative Options

Alternative Option 1

There are no options proposed within this report. However, the options for provision indicated within the Sport England report Swimming Facility Provision in Herefordshire (Runs 2-7) should be considered in advance of any decision relating to the scale and location of

any future provision.

Alternative Option 2

Given the uncertainty described elsewhere within the Report, Cabinet may wish to review the proposal to continue to pursue the Lottery Funding route. However, it will need to be aware that any alternative sources of external funding (given that these were fully explored as part of the original Lottery application) are highly unlikely to be forthcoming. In this case it will need to be recognised that Council funding may be the only option.

Risk Management

Given that the outcome of the study indicates that the case for a replacement swimming facility to meet the unmet demand in North Herefordshire is “not an overwhelming one”, any decision to resubmit an application to the National Lottery Sports Fund when it is relaunched is considered to be very high risk with low likelihood of success.

Further consideration should be given to the fact that when the availability of Lottery Funds is eventually announced, the allocation will be Regional and not National in nature. Original estimates indicated that for the entire West Midlands Region this would be less than £3 million to cover all programmes. (This indication was intimated prior to the proposal to further top slice the fund to resource a prospective Olympic Bid by London.) Given this scenario, there is considerable risk that there may be insufficient funds available in the Regional allocation to support a project of this size and nature, the case having been identified by Sport England as ‘not an overwhelming one’.

The County Treasurer advises that the potential delay in the introduction of the Prudential guidelines could result in a strain on the Council’s limited capital resources in 2004/05, with little scope to progress any further projects a possibility.

Consultees

None beyond the original National Lottery Sports Fund bid submission of May 2003.

Background Papers

1. National Lottery Sports Fund Application, May 2002.
2. Sport England Report - Swimming Facility Provision in Herefordshire, April 2003.
3. Statistics
 - a) throughput Sydonia Swimming Pool 1998 – 2002;
 - b) throughput Herefordshire Council Pools 2001 – 2003;
 - c) throughput East Radnor Leisure Centre 2001 – 2003 (Report awaited from Powys County Council);
 - d) throughput South Shropshire Leisure Centre 2001 – 2003;
 - e) throughput Tenbury Swimming Pool 2001 – 2003 (Report awaited from Malvern Hills District Council).
4. Leominster Housing Needs Survey – Leisure Issues
Herefordshire Council Research Unit – January 2003.

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