

## **PROGRESS REPORT ON ACCESS TO SERVICES IN KINGTON AND SURROUNDING AREAS: WESLEYAN CHAPEL.**

**Report By: Head of Customer Services and Libraries.**

### **Wards Affected**

Bircher; Castle; Golden Cross with Weobley; Kington Town; Pembridge & Lyonshall with Titley; Mortimer

### **Purpose**

1. To receive a progress report on the possible refurbishment and conversion of the Wesleyan Chapel, Kington.

### **Financial Implications**

2. The projected capital contribution costs of the options identified will be in excess of £500,000.

### **Considerations**

3. At its meeting on 27th March, 2003 Cabinet agreed that:
  - (a) subject to a viable Business Case being reported to Cabinet, the Wesleyan Chapel adopted as the preferred location to develop a new Library, INFO shop, and associated community and business services;
  - (b) the issue of ownership of the Wesleyan Chapel be considered as part of the business case;
  - (c) community consultation with Kington Regeneration Partnership be undertaken on the proposal.
4. Following consideration by Cabinet the decision was called in for consideration at a Special Meeting of the Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee on 9th April 2003. The call in of the Cabinet Report brought particular emphasis on the Business Case and consultation within the catchment area.
5. Advantage West Midlands on behalf of Herefordshire Council and Kington Regeneration Partnership commissioned work that has now produced an outline design and costings for the Wesleyan Chapel scheme.
6. This draft scheme provides for a plan over 4 floors (potentially incorporating a new Library, INFO shop, TIC, Registrars Office, Citizens Advice Bureau and commercial office space.)

7. At this time the capital cost of the building works for the scheme has a provisional estimate to cover capital and fitting out costs in the region of £1.61 million. It must be emphasised that these are only provisional estimated costs and previous experience with large capital schemes suggests these costs could grow significantly. Previous costs were estimated at £1.1 million on a reduced floor space.
8. Initial discussions with AWM indicate that it may be prepared to consider a capital contribution in the order of 25% of the total capital cost through the Rural Regeneration Zone. There are also other external funding opportunities, which could be explored including Objective 2 and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Initial indications suggest that if applications for all these sources of funding were successful approximately £1.1 million of the capital costs could be sourced externally leaving approximately £0.5 million to be found by the Council. There is of course no guarantee that any of these applications for funding will be successful. These figures do not allow for capital receipts that may be realised as part of the package.
9. The Revenue budget to support a project of this nature is not insignificant and again it should be emphasised that a project of this nature will seek to increase the public uptake of services, and where possible extend the available hours of access. Modernised buildings can reduce running costs, and a commercial element can provide income. However the majority of services for the building are publicly funded and free at point of access. The initial projections represent an increase of £28,000 pa above current available Revenue budgets.
10. With reference to the Library service the professional view of the Libraries Operations Manager (County Librarian) is that a significantly larger shared facility with much improved physical access and parking will give major benefits to the local community. The current library will not meet the minimum requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act; and due to the small size (140m<sup>2</sup> - less than 20% of Ross and Leominster) and poor design can only offer a limited range of services (e.g. no study facilities; no activity/display areas). The Kington library currently occupies 85m<sup>2</sup>.
11. AWM wrote to the Council on 11th June 2003 indicating that they would be prepared to become involved in the project as part of a funding package involving local partners including Herefordshire Council. AWM also suggest the establishment of a tight and realistic partnership to implement, fund and manage the project.
12. The potential to bring a significant redundant building into beneficial use clearly exists, and will represent a significant milestone for the re-development of Kington and services for the hinterland.
13. A Leader's briefing was held on 21st August on the proposals. This was followed by a consultation meeting with representatives of the local community including the Kington Town Council, representatives of neighbouring parishes, local Councillors and Kington Regeneration Partnership. There was broad agreement that the scheme as presented represented a means of resolving many of the issues related to access to services in Kington. There was a strong sense that the Council should progress the scheme as quickly as possible.
14. The Council's Cabinet at its meeting on 4th September agreed the following recommendation: "Cabinet agrees that further development work is undertaken by establishing a partnership based project team to establish funding, develop and implement the scheme". This recommendation is now being actioned and there will be a verbal update on progress at the meeting.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT the contents of the report be noted.**

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- None identified

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
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