

ACCESS TO SERVICES IN KINGTON AND SURROUNDING AREAS

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, AND HUMAN RESOURCES AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES

CABINET

15TH JULY, 2004

Wards Affected

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

Purpose

To agree a way forward for the provision of local services in Kington and the surrounding area.

Key Decision

This is a key decision because it is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in Herefordshire in an area comprising of one or more wards. A notice was sent in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information) Regulations 2000 to the Chairman of the Strategic Monitoring Committee.

Recommendations

THAT it be agreed that

- (a) based on the reviewed funding requirements, the original proposal for redeveloping the Wesleyan Chapel is no longer viable;**
- (b) subject to that agreement, it be agreed that:-**
 - (i) Kington library be redeveloped to provide a library and INFO service, with a ceiling cost set at £500,000; and**
 - (ii) the Council works with the local community, including Kington Area Regeneration Partnership, Town Council and Local Members to determine a future use for the Wesleyan Chapel; and**
- (c) local consultation be undertaken, with a full report back to Cabinet.**

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Jane Jones, Director of Policy and Community on (01432) 260042 or Mark Warren, Head of Customer Services and Libraries on (01432) 260617

Reasons

1. Cabinet approved the proposals to develop the Wesleyan Chapel in April 2003; subject to a viable business case being reported to Cabinet.
2. Kington library does not fulfil the Disability Discrimination Act requirements that come into force in October 2004.
3. Redevelopment of services in Kington will represent a significant investment from Council resources, in line with its Customer Services Strategy 2003 - 2007

Considerations

1. Plans to develop the Wesleyan Chapel to incorporate the library, INFO in Herefordshire, Tourist Information Centre together with other service providers were developed following local consultation. The potential for external funding associated with the proposed development of the Wesleyan Chapel has reduced requiring greater financial support from the Council. In light of the changes it is sensible to revisit an earlier proposal to redevelop the existing library. Members should then be in a better position to make an informed decision about the option.
2. Currently the space available in Kington library is below that in the other market towns. The ambition is to provide Kington with an improved service and facilities, provide additional library space, better environment and bring together customer facing services within the library. Appendix 1 shows the comparison of space available in each library throughout the county.

Comparison of space availability in Kington

Existing library area	▪ 85.4 m.sq
Redeveloped library	▪ 194 m.sq
Wesleyan Chapel	▪ 538 m.sq

3. Costs of the schemes are shown below

Scheme	Timescales	Likely costs	External funding	Net cost (Council)
Redevelop existing library	By summer 2005	£500,000	Nil	£500,000
Wesleyan Chapel – original funding package	By end 2006	£1.7m	Arch Objective 2 funding - £400,000 Market Towns Initiative - £100,000 RRZ funding - £400,000 Capital receipt (sale of existing library) - £187,000	£703,000
Wesleyan Chapel – reduced external funding	By end 2006	£1.7m	Arch - £250,000 Market Towns Initiative - £100,000 Capital receipt (sale of existing library)	In excess of £1-3 Million

4. **Wesleyan Chapel – update on funding.**

There were risks associated with the external funding package originally proposed for the development of the Wesleyan Chapel. These are described below.

Objective 2 (ARCH programme) - £250,000

- The Objective 2 Programme (which is funded via the Government office of West Midlands) at an allocation of around £400,000. Since this time a local allocation of money has been firmed up for the allocation of £250,000 to the Kington area. The final allocation of this money comes through the local partnership group and if this sum was to be supported the Wesleyan Chapel Scheme would need to take 100% of the available funding for the whole area. Originally the spend on this funding was restricted to 2004, however it has been approved in principle for spending in 2005. The amount available is subject to certain conditions however the proposals for the development of the Wesleyan Chapel would fulfil the requirements for successfully achieving this level of funding. Therefore the risk is low provided the scheme meets the timescales required.

Market Towns Initiative - £100,000

- Funding has been approved and set aside

Capital receipt from sale of assets

- If the scheme goes ahead in 2005/2006 it should release the existing Kington library and potentially the area office. This receipt could be used to support the further development of INFO shops and offset the costs of the Kington Project. The main risks around this sale are the availability of potential purchasers, and the time it will take to sell the property.
5. There are implications for the Council in terms of on-going maintenance for both the Wesleyan Chapel and the library building. The Council has a responsibility to maintain the buildings it owns, particularly from a health and safety perspective. Both currently require work, and consequently there are costs associated with both buildings that will be incurred whatever decisions are made on the future development proposals.
 6. If the Wesleyan Chapel is not developed there are options around its future use and the Council would explore this with local parties. The options could include –
 - Passing ownership to the Kington Area Regeneration Partnership
 - Application for delisting the building, and possibly demolishing it

7. **Kington Libraries and Services**

The role of libraries is under greater focus since an Audit Commission report (August 2002) describing the service as 'one star, with uncertain prospects for improvement'. The new division of Customer Services, Libraries and Information (from October 2002 with the Policy and Community Directorate) has started to bring access to information and resources under a single operation. This includes joint physical locations where possible. The latest development in Bromyard, which is also in a low-income town, demonstrates the success of a joined-up service.

8. The current library does not meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). To meet the requirements of the DDA without expanding the overall library area onto the first floor would affect and take out of library use significant ground floor space bearing in mind that the allocation of space for a library serving a catchment of this nature is already well below the required levels.
9. Property Services undertook a feasibility study in August 2003 looking at converting Kington library into an INFO shop and library at a cost in the region of £158,200. The costs achieved a bare minimum of improvements to the existing library though they would ensure that the library complied with the DDA (including access to the first floor). The cost did not include any reference to fixtures, fittings, ICT, signage and stock, nor did it refer to the cost of closing the library and providing an alternative provision for approximately six months.

10. **INFO in Herefordshire**

INFO in Herefordshire in Kington operates out of 2 Mill Street. INFO staff saw 1,995 customers in the last 3 months. Because of the distance between the INFO shop and library they are less likely to share users. Co-locating these services would improve customer access and increase the use of these services. It would also increase and improve the facilities provided and the opening hours.

11. Re-locating INFO and the Tourist Information Centre into the library and releasing the lease on 2 Mill Street would generate savings. The Tourist Information Centre in Kington is not a service provided by Herefordshire Council, and there would be certain considerations in terms of staffing and the services provided if it were bought under the umbrella of the Council.

12. **Tourist Information Services**

The Kington Tourist Group is a voluntary organisation that operates from the Mill Street offices building. The Council has direct responsibility for the group. Further discussions would be needed before relocating to any new site, and a range of issues to be resolved. In the interim, there is no immediate difficulty to offer some space to the group within a redeveloped Kington library.

13. **Regeneration of the area**

It would benefit Kington town centre environment to bring the entire library building back into full use and to protect and enhance a Grade II listed building. If the library were re-located to a newly developed Wesleyan Chapel, the current library building could be sold.

14. It would be advantageous to the viability of Kington town centre to provide enhanced facilities and meeting areas in the library thereby encouraging and providing for an improved level of community activity.

15. **Factors to take account of for the redevelopment of library on existing site**

- Closure of library for potentially 6 months
- Cost of relocating library and associated advertising (There are no appropriate Council owned buildings in Kington, therefore the most likely solution would be a mobile facility, either as a static facility or a more frequent visiting rota by the County's mobile fleet.)
- Disabled parking – there is no provision for this facility currently, however an application would be made to provide for spaces alongside the library on High Street
- A design prepared by Property Services is attached as Appendix 2; this gives a potential scheme for the remodeling of the existing library.

16. The report attached as Appendix 2 gives a design for a remodeled and redeveloped library within the existing building, opening up both floors for use. The purpose behind this initial design is to show that it is feasible to provide an improved library for Kington, and to bring together the library, INFO and potentially the Tourist Information Centre into the one building.

17. The design shows some of the main features including: -

- The various library areas, an interview or private study room and storage space
- A modular counter (with the ability to cope with the demands of different use – library and INFO, and able to accommodate people with different levels of need, for example wheelchair access, and giving a secure cash point area)

- Libraries face real challenges in meeting the rapid social and technical changes of our time. Quality design will have a major role in delivering a twenty first century library service; drawing in the diverse communities they serve. Design is not just about big city centre libraries but also about the small branch libraries and thoughtful refurbishments and conversion – providing a better and more popular library service. Libraries are competing with other leisure activities and provision. The aim in Herefordshire is to provide an environment that people want to visit and use time and time again. This has been evidenced in the new facility in Bromyard, by the increased level of library users.
18. The cost of the development will be limited to not more than £500,000, the detail is shown in Appendix 2. Whilst the use of the existing library is a compromise for Kington, the aim for the provision within the building is that it is of a high standard. In order to achieve this there may be a need to use specialist design and interior design consultants.
19. A consultation strategy on the detail for the upgraded library scheme needs to be agreed. As a minimum it is recommended that this should include:
- Staff in relevant services within Kington
 - Local Members
 - Local Area Forum

Risk Management

The identified risks are:

- The progression of the scheme to redevelop the Wesleyan Chapel would require successfully achieving funding from other sources. In particular the Kington Regeneration Partnership plays a key role in supporting funding applications of this nature. A decision not to progress the proposed Wesleyan Chapel scheme would trigger financial issues for the Kington Regeneration Partnership.
- The Council's Corporate Performance Assessment will include reference to performance of the libraries as a statutory service. Improving facilities and services would improve the position.
- If work is not done to address the DDA issues in the library then a legal challenge is probable
- The Council has a responsibility to maintain a Grade II listed building and will continue to incur costs to maintain the building as it currently stands. Costs are currently incurred on an emergency basis.
- The existing library is itself a Grade II listed building which brings implications for any development of this building in terms of English Heritage involvement in the planning process and obtaining the statutory consents, and in achieving a higher build cost for any works on the building. Opening up the second floor of the building, together with extended hours of opening may also give rise to increased revenue implications for staffing.

Consultees

Local Area Forum, North Herefordshire

Kington Area local Council members and partners

Background Papers

None identified.

LIBRARY SPACE – HEREFORDSHIRE

Library	Gross m sq	Net m sq
Hereford	1057.61	585.97
Leominster	811.31	678.64
Bromyard	172	125
Kington	128.77	85.4
Ross	665.14	469.22
Ledbury	143	139.53
Weobley	83	79.28
Lentwardine	51.62	51.62
Belmont	66.58	66.58
Colwall	150.26	109.35

Definitions –

- Gross – area over which librarian has control

Information taken from the most recent CIPFA return

PROPOSED ALTERATIONS TO FORM LIBRARY AND INFO CENTRE

The attached plan indicates the existing and proposed layouts library and INFO accommodation. The general points to note on the design are as follows.

- 1 The main entrance will be the existing front door and provision for a ramp will be necessary in this instance.
- 2 The space available for a library after taking out toilets, lift and staff work area will be 97.2 m² per floor.
- 3 If separate interviews are required in the Info. Centre we will have to omit an additional 9.8m² of floor area.
- 4 The staircase will remain in its current position, however work will be undertaken to conform to the Building Regulations and Fire Regulations.
- 5 The works will require Listed Building Consent. However this will probably be obtained, as English Heritage is unlikely to object to internal walls being removed.
- 6 There are no changes to the external elevations proposed.