

# PROPOSED REVISED APPROACH TO PROVIDE THE CENTRAL LIBRARY, HEREFORD

## PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

CABINET

25TH NOVEMBER, 2004

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### Wards Affected

County-wide

### Purpose

To receive a report on a revised approach to the development of The Central Library, Hereford and access to Council Services in Hereford City.

To formally approve the preferred site for a new Central Library, based in Hereford City.

### Key Decision

This is a key decision because it is significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in Herefordshire in an area comprising one or more wards. It was included in the Forward Plan.

### Recommendation

- THAT (a) approval be given to develop an outline design for a new Central Library and associated services on the Edgar Street Grid Hereford; and**
- (b) further more detailed work be advised as part of the Edgar Street Development Implementation Plan.**

### Reasons

The Council's current formal position for a new Hereford Central library supports the development of a new library on the Kemble House site, Broad Street, Hereford (28th September, 2000). This approach cannot be realised without significant capital investment from Council funding. This position is regarded as no longer sustainable and an alternative approach is needed.

The Council has committed itself to a major redevelopment on the Edgar Street grid Hereford. This can potentially include a new Library and One Stop Shop (INFO in Herefordshire). Significant work will be required to ensure any plan is co-terminus with the overall Edgar Street development.

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
Mark Warren, Head of Customer Services and Libraries on 01432 260617

## Considerations

1. The Council continues to hold to its approach to achieve modern customer facing services, and improvement to its accommodation for office based staff. It has yet to decide on its approach for Hereford City. The consideration of this report should be viewed as part of the whole accommodation review and efficiency gains debate.
2. The Council has a commitment to roll out the provision of INFO shops across the County (Council's Customer Service Strategy 2003-2007). These are now being planned in a way that links with improved library provision (Bromyard, Kington, Ledbury, Ross). At the present time the largest catchment for library and INFO services is the city area, where there is the poorest and most restricted provision. In line with the roll out of the INFO model, new provision could provide for a significant presence in Hereford City. There are continuous changes in customer expectations of Council services and the present fragmented customer service receptions in the Hereford city area could be improved significantly.
3. Considerable advantage could be gained by a model of co-location with a new Central Library for the 21st Century and emphasise the importance of a sustainable flexible provision. The possibilities for establishing a civic living and learning space in a modern city centre have been demonstrated in a number of examples (Building Better Libraries).
4. The relative merits of the previously identified sites were outlined in the Cabinet Report (28th September, 2000). Kemble House emerged as the preferred site, above that of:

Town Hall adjoining car park and buildings;  
Gaul Street Car Park;  
Buttermarket.

The Council has subsequently further developed its support to the regeneration of Hereford City and the Edgar Street grid in particular.

Therefore the Kemble House option is not regarded as sustainable. The Kemble House location was for a library only, provides limited street frontage for customers, and will not resolve difficulties with car parking.

Libraries of the future are being set with a new local strategic framework ("Eye on the Future") and co-located with partner organisations. Modern library environments at the heart of retail is a key consideration for a new Central Library.

5. At a local level the opportunities for achieving the level of funding required on any of the existing sites (Cabinet Report 28th September, 2000) are regarded as negligible. These sites (Kemble House, Goal Street, Buttermarket) are restricted in their scope to make flexible changes to layout. They also present less opportunities for any longer changes in demand for library services. (Framework for Future). In addition the sites offer no opportunity for planning gain, that would act as a significant contribution to the current estimated cost of £6 million plus.

The major opportunity that now exists is for the development to be located to the Edgar Street Grid site, Hereford. These are a number of factors which would now support this recommendation.

6. Since the previous site search work was completed the Council and Advantage West Midlands have commissioned a detailed Master planning exercise for the 100 acre

Edgar Street Grid site to the north of the existing City Centre. The resultant Master plan was adopted by the Council in December 2003 and subsequently incorporated into the second deposit draft of the Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan.

7. The Master plan includes provision for a Civic Quarter adjacent to Blueschool Street and a new food retail development on the Cattle Market site. The Council is currently considering an appropriate delivery vehicle to take forward the implementation of the Master plan.
8. The redevelopment of the Edgar Street Grid therefore provides the opportunity to develop a new Library as part of the wider development of this part of the City. In order to inform the Council's negotiations with potential developers it would be useful at this stage if there was further clarity about the actual space and design requirements associated with a new Library for the City.
9. The new Library will clearly have a significant capital cost, in the order of millions. Further feasibility work is required to clarify how much it would cost to provide an appropriate facility on the Edgar Street Grid site. Officers will need to explore a range of funding options for the new Library in more detail.
10. In the present financial climate it is highly unlikely that there will be the scope to fund the development of a new Library solely through the Council's Capital Programme. Neither is there any scope to secure external government funding for the provision of a statutory service such as a new Library. It may be possible to secure some external funding to assist with the fitting out of the building for associated uses but not for the main capital cost. Private sector sponsorship is a possibility but it is unlikely that sufficient funds could be secured through this route. In the medium term the only viable funding route would be through planning gain as part of the redevelopment of the Edgar Street Grid site. The Council and its partners on the Edgar Street Grid site will however have to weigh up various competing demands on the value generated from the redevelopment. In order to inform this decision it would be helpful to quantify the cost of the new Library in more detail and to be clear about its preferred location and design on the Edgar Street Grid.
11. A new Library on the Edgar Street Grid site should be an asset to the City Centre and should generate additional footfall which should benefit retailers and other services. There is also an opportunity to significantly increase the attractiveness of the current Hereford Museum by relocating the Library from Broad Street and freeing up space for expanded exhibition facilities for the Museum in the existing building.
12. To move forward on the Edgar Street grid considerable work needs to take place. The scope of a new provision needs to be agreed in broad terms over the coming weeks. This will involve seeking to establish:
  - ~ type/scope of services
  - ~ preferred location within Edgar Street grid
  - ~ funding package potential
  - ~ floor space requirements
  - ~ design brief
  - ~ the feasibility brief can be drawn up by Council officers with a range of professional inputs. However the production of the feasibility study will require investment or work in hand with external bodies and appropriate consultancy input.

## **Alternative Options**

1. Maintain existing provision at Broad Street. This is not sustainable and retention of the current service in the long term will have a significant detrimental effect. The Council's public assessment is likely to be significantly affected in respect of its Cultural Services provision. The existing library is general regarding as one third of the required provision.
2. Pursue Kemble House as original preferred option. This matter is regarded as not sustainable for reasons of capital funding and long term investment.

## **Risk Management**

The current Hereford Library is significantly below requirements and was a major highlight in the Audit Commission Report on the service in June 2002. Putting in place a clear strategy for improvement was recommended.

The financial package for the realisation of a New Hereford Library cannot be realised with existing formal proposals (Cabinet 28th September, 2000)

The successful realisation of improvements to the Broad Street Museum site cannot be achieved without an exit strategy for the library services to a new site.

## **Consultees**

Hereford Library User Group.

Forward Plan

## **Background Papers**

None identified