



OUR RESPONSE TO THE CABINET INVITATION OF 9TH DECEMBER 2015

Objective

In the accompanying papers HLUG make proposals, which if accepted and implemented by Herefordshire Council, show how the present Broad Street Library and Museum could be renewed, improved and revitalised to provide the county with a 21st century innovative, cultural and community centre to the considerable benefit of the city and the county's economy.

Background

In December 2015 the Cabinet of Herefordshire Council resolved that:-

- (a) Subject to Council approval of the capital programme in December 2015; the Hereford Library Users Group (working with other relevant stakeholders) be invited to confirm by the end of February 2016, whether or not they wish to work with the council to explore options for future service delivery of a library in Hereford;
- (b) Subject to Council approval of the capital programme works be undertaken at the earliest opportunity to remove asbestos from the Broad Street building at a cost of £86k and
- (c) A further report be brought forward following consultation with stakeholders to determine a preferred option.

HLUG accepted this invitation and is now submitting its proposals to Cabinet.

History

HLUG has been in existence for nearly 20 years and, in that time, has had two main objectives; to support the library service in its work and to obtain a library building that can provide an up to date and efficient service. Such a service is not possible in the present Broad Street building which is widely seen as not fit for purpose.

We have been asked to consider the options for the future of the Herefordshire library service. Our view is that the necessary improvement in the service will not be achieved within the Broad Street building in its present unsatisfactory state which is completely inadequate and cannot fulfil its role as the central county library.

The best solution to this problem would be a completely new and modern building on a city centre site. This was envisaged in the original schemes for a Civic Quarter as part of the Old Market development but has not come to fruition. With the increasing difficulties of the Council's finances, HLUG has been considering a number of other options.

The present alternatives

There are a number of options that should be considered by the Council.

- 1) To build an entirely new library leaving Broad Street as a museum.
- 2) Once the asbestos problem in the building is cleared up to spend another £900k on repairs and maintenance of the present building.
- 3) Make only absolutely necessary repairs, reopen the library and set aside the rest of the budget for development and subsequent construction of our proposals. These comprise demolishing and removing all the internal rear areas (with the listed frontage preserved and modernised internally) and installing a new structure. This would provide additional floor space and modern facilities not only for the library but for other community and cultural services. We estimate that this would double the present useable floor space.

Alternative 1 could still be possible if the funding can be raised.

Alternative 2 would result in a building that would remain very much as it is at present with no improvement in the space available for the library or other services. This alternative would not result in the desired modern library service, nor could it include provision for the new university library or for other services.

Alternative 3 is the basis of our proposals to Cabinet which are submitted herewith.

The proposals.

Our proposals are described in detail in the accompanying document. This is in two parts;-

- i) A description of how the building structure could be modified to provide additional space and the resulting benefits .
- ii) Details of how the considerably improved facility and services could be achieved.

The outcome would be a building in an excellent location that would provide much more than just a library. We envisage a centre for housing the library; space for exhibiting museum, art gallery and archive items; community, care, well-being and business services;, tourism; meeting rooms, café etc. – a true cultural and community hub for the future benefit to the economic development and prosperity of the whole county.

As this facility is not just a library or a museum we have provisionally called it The Rankin Centre to recognise James Rankin who was the principal benefactor of the original construction in 1875.

Consultations

Our proposals are the result of considerable long term research and study of, and visits to, modern libraries and similar facilities both in the UK and overseas together with the many advances that have been made in layout, equipment, communications and access to the digital world.

In Herefordshire we have consulted widely with other interested parties. These include, The Woolhope Club; the museum and the archive centre and their support groups; the other library support groups around the county; schools and colleges; the City Council, The Courtyard, the cathedral, the Enterprise Zone, BID and other businesses, HVOSS, WISH and a number of local societies with an interest in the library and museum. Library staff and management have been kept closely in touch as the proposal has been developed. We have obtained preliminary advice on fund raising. A public meeting was held on 29th January when our proposals for a Rankin Centre were presented and discussed and where they received nearly unanimous support from the many present. A further point raised at this meeting was the need for the Council to develop a county wide cultural strategy.

Most recently we have consulted with NMITE who have shown considerable interest in the project and may well be able to help with funding, and the Arts College who have a particular interest in exploiting the art gallery facilities in the building.

Going forward.

We believe our proposals are such that they should be developed further and there is a considerable amount of work needed which will require time, effort, enthusiasm, finance and support. Critical areas are capital cost, revenue, fund raising and further design work needed for estimates of costs and programme to be firmed up so that a business plan can be produced. This work requires the formation of a supervising body (subsequently becoming a trust with charity status so as to aid fund raising) with representation from the Council and interested organisations .This organisation would then appoint a project manager able to draw on suitable expertise and experience to produce the business plan and to raise funding. Depending on time needed for sourcing the necessary funds, this could take at least 18months. From initial studies we believe sources of funding for this initial work are available. It would need match funding and carefully targeted drafting of applications to such sources as HLF, Arts Council, Architectural Heritage Fund and possibly the EU.

A project team needs to be put in place. For whilst the proposal originated from Hereford Library Users' Group, realization of the project requires an independent, well-informed and enthusiastic working group to be established including various user groups and interested members of the public, together with representation from the Council, the proposed university, the colleges, and professionals from the library, museum and customer services operating staff. The task of this group would be to:-

- Resolve the uses of the building and how the new ideas can be introduced.
- Find the necessary funding for initial studies, examine future revenue and expenditure.
- Develop an outline design and estimate of costs.
- Explore alternative models for delivery, e.g. by setting up a charitable trust or another form of independent body
- Find a temporary location for the present library.

HLUG has produced a 16 pp document that includes sections on these topics with explanatory notes about our ideas for a truly innovative library and museum building with full access to archives and the digital world.

Some options for a community hub: Social Care – Wellbeing Information Signposting Herefordshire WISH; Getting people into jobs; Health advice; Tourism offers; Business advice and guidance on Entrepreneurship

The Economic Benefits of the Rankin Centre are described based on several studies recently published. The document stresses that the overall effect of the renovated building, given a creative designer, could be stunning: of great value to school children; of interest to adults; and a valuable tourist attraction. It could also provide incentives for young people wishing to join with participants in the county's economy.

Money matters: how to finance the project; ideas are given on Revenue generation through commercial exploitation, events and fees and Expenditure concerns through economies and different forms of organization.

We highlight the Synergies for the Rankin Centre: Museum and Library working together
Children and reading – libraries can play a valuable role in the education of all ages

The new university - the New Model in Technology and Engineering can be supported by a dedicated Library with enhanced digital access.

We stress the importance of 'discoverability' in our complex world for the modern library and museum.
We survey how libraries are changing: the need for a Digital Library

A Local History resource worthy of the county stresses the uniqueness of Herefordshire is a key feature.
The organization of the Rankin Centre: its administration, the question of ownership are considered.
Some alternative methods of delivering a library & museum service are proposed other than by the local government.

Our **Conclusion** is that with the central location of the Broad street building and its special architectural frontage the Rankin Centre can provide a major community resource for information, learning, culture and entertainment for all ages in a transformed and modern interior in a historic setting. It will become a major feature in the cultural life of the city and the county. Such re-use of a valuable heritage site provides an opportunity to achieve major funding from a range of sources.

By introducing a number of unique features, we anticipate that the Rankin Centre, as well as being a national and possibly international venue, will be promoting the entrepreneurial spirit of the city and of

The paper has been issued by the **Hereford Library Users Group**. Chairman John Faulkner jfaulkner@talktalk.net
Secretary John Hitchin A full version as a pdf file is obtainable from John Hitchin via email: johnhitchin@ereal.net

