



Strategic Review of Hereford Library and Learning Centre Location

July 2023

Summary

1. In July 2022 full Council approved the submission of the business case and additional funding into the capital programme for the redevelopment of Maylord Orchards to incorporate the city centre Library and Learning Centre. However, in response to a changing strategic and operational environment and following recent changes in priorities, a strategic review was approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 22 June 2023 to consider the best possible location for the library whilst maximising the use of all council assets.
2. This review has analysed available locations against clear criteria, including their ability to deliver the outcomes of the Stronger Towns Funding/Hereford Town Improvement Plan within prescribed timescales and their alignment to strategic opportunities.
3. A new vision for a Library and Learning Centre has been put forward which sets a high level of ambition (see Appendix 2(1) Draft Vision for the Library and Learning Centre) and is summarised below:

To establish an outstanding and vibrant cultural hub which brings arts, culture, entertainment and education together in a showpiece library and learning centre. It will create a place that the community will be rightly proud of and where they feel they belong. It will be a home for creatives, for culture and for community and will emphasise the importance of learning and literacy to the county's future success.

4. The intention of the original plans for the library to locate in Maylord Orchards was to form part of a cluster of cultural organisations and users in a refurbished city centre location. However partners key to that project have since found alternative sites thus reducing the impact and vision of the proposed cultural hub. At the same time, improvements in the commercial letting potential of the Maylord Orchard have introduced opportunity costs, removing a key driver for that location.
5. The Shirehall, meanwhile, is currently vacant due to the requirement to refurbish and repair. The Shirehall is a prominent city centre location with an opportunity to catalyse wider regeneration and create a new venue which brings a significant heritage site back into use as a civic asset.
6. Other council owned sites have also been considered for their deliverability but have been discounted on the grounds of suitability, availability and accessibility (Appendix 2 (3)).
7. This review concludes that the Shirehall now offers the greatest potential for a truly transformative project - one that can create a destination in the city that offers an outstanding 21st century library within a high quality venue for events and learning facilities that equip

residents for the future and complements the world class museum project.

8. The strategic review therefore recommends the Shirehall as the preferred option for a new library and learning centre in principle. The library and learning centre project would form part of a reinstated the Shirehall refurbishment project, subject to development of a Full Business Case following further work, financial modelling and consultation with stakeholders.

Background, purpose and scope of the strategic review

9. In 2020 government selected Hereford to be one of 101 towns/ cities from across England who were eligible to seek up to £25m of funding to support regeneration and enable economic growth. As required by the funding guidance, a Hereford Stronger Towns Partnership Board was formed including wide ranging representation across the public, private and community sectors. The Board oversaw the development of a Town Investment Plan through extensive local community engagement, inviting people to put forward project proposals for submission to government in the Plan, subsequently securing £22.4m.
10. The Hereford Town Investment Plan recognises the need to re-purpose and regenerate the city centre. As national demand for physical retail space and office space declines, accelerated by the impact of Covid 19, there is a need to consider the future role of town and city centres in generating trade and jobs. In supporting the regeneration of Hereford, the Town Investment Plan has a focus on realising our significant opportunities in art, culture, heritage, tourism and learning.
11. One of the Council-led projects identified in the Town Investment Plan is to relocate the current Hereford Library into the Maylord Orchards shopping centre and create a new Learning Resource Centre. The original purpose of the project was to enable the current Broad Street library space to be better utilised as part of the flagship £18m linked project to create a new Hereford Museum and Art Gallery, and at the same time, create a mixed-use cultural hub within Maylord Orchards. The Town Investment Plan states *'this ecosystem of inter-connected projects stakes out a transformational post-Covid future for our city. It repurposes the Maylord Shopping Centre at the heart of the city as the base for a new Library and Learning Centre, a new Digital Culture Hub, and an enhanced creative and performance space linked to the Powerhouse and Encore initiatives which will attract footfall in its own right'*.
12. However, some of the initial drivers have changed since the original project was identified in 2020. The demand for retail/ commercial space in Maylord Orchards has remained relatively high, and other Town Investment Plan projects that were originally due to be clustered with the library in Maylord Orchards (Rural Media Digital Culture Hub, Powerhouse and Encore) to create a cultural hub are now locating elsewhere. The draft Hereford City Masterplan has identified a wide range of future needs for strategically significant sites across the city centre, and alternative locations have become available for redevelopment.
13. The Cabinet has expressed a need for ambition for the library to match the intention of creating a world class museum; making a compelling library destination that enhances the cultural offer. At its meeting on 22nd June 2023, Herefordshire Council's Cabinet therefore decided to undertake an internal review of the options for the location in Hereford for the Library and Resource Centre project, pausing the current Maylord Orchards Library and Learning Resource

Centre project ([Decision - Review of New Hereford Library and Learning Resource Centre Location - Herefordshire Council](#)).

14. The scoping document for the review (see Appendix 2(2) Scope of Review) sets the approach taken, seeking the site with greatest potential for the Library and Learning Centre to deliver the most significant public benefit, while taking account of any related financial, reputational and operational risks.
15. The terms are to consider available publicly owned city centre locations to establish their feasibility and desirability in delivering the greatest impact against the set criteria as alternative sites for the new library and learning centre:
 - Strategic fit – with the Big Economic Plan, Town Investment Plan, City Masterplan, Health and Wellbeing strategy and other key partnership strategies.
 - Value for money – in delivering improved perceptions of Hereford by residents, visitors and businesses, increasing visitors to arts, heritage and cultural events and venues and assisting new learners, as well as the optimum use of council assets.
 - Financial Viability (including any aid implications).
 - Ability to deliver the Stronger Towns Business Case outcomes of
 - ✓ More accessible and improved facilities for skills
 - ✓ Increased skills responding to local need
 - ✓ Upgraded or protected libraries
 - ✓ Delivery of new public spaces
 - ✓ Community non-accredited learning
 - Statutory Duty Compliance
 - Deliverability
 - Legal constraints
 - Equality impact potential

Review Process

16. The review followed the agreed steps:
 - a. Initial high-level consideration of council owned city centre sites to narrow down to deliverable options
 - b. More detailed consideration of sites with greatest potential
 - c. Consultation with Stronger Towns Board
 - d. Consultation with stakeholders
 - e. Review of financial and legal position
 - f. Formulation of recommendations for decision

Initial high-level review of available sites

17. An initial high-level review considered a range of potential assets owned by the Council, to determine their feasibility as possible locations of a library and learning centre. This attached as an Appendix 3.

Analysis of sites identified to progress to evaluation

18. The initial high-level review identified two short listed sites to be brought forward as feasible options for further evaluation. These are the site originally proposed at Maylord Orchards, and the Assembly Hall & Undercroft of the Shirehall. Floor plans showing the areas under consideration are attached in Appendix 2 (4, 5, 6 and 7). The following section evaluates the two sites.

Strategic fit analysis

19. The extent to which the sites can deliver on the ambitions of the Council and its partners:

Draft Hereford City Masterplan	
<p>With an emerging Local Plan, a recently approved Big Economic Plan in development and a new Local Transport Plan, including a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan to come, Herefordshire Council will publish in draft for consultation a detailed masterplan for Hereford. This celebrates the city’s character and provides a blueprint for making it an even better place to live, work and visit in the future. The draft masterplan will set out our vision to enhance the character of the city and improve connections to the market towns and villages nearby. The aim is to make Hereford an even better city, a greener, healthier and safer place to live, work, study and visit – and crucially, an easier place to get around. Investing in good comprehensive planning for the city, comprising a strategy and outline plans, will mean we are ready to make compelling bids for capital funding when the opportunities arise.</p>	
Maylord Orchards	The Shirehall Assembly Hall and Undercroft
<p>The Masterplan as currently drafted identifies the previously agreed library relocation within Maylord Orchards Shopping Centre as part of the agenda to diversify the city centre and drive footfall. However, it noted the need to strengthen the centre as a whole.</p> <p>The Masterplan further identifies Maylord Orchards as a potential site for NMITE to occupy which would provide the university a home in the heart of the city.</p> <p>However, since the Masterplan was drafted, it has become apparent that there is a greater demand for the units within Maylord Orchards than originally identified requiring a further assessment of the site.</p>	<p>The proposals to locate the library and learning resource centre within the Shirehall are clearly aligned with the draft Hereford City Masterplan “Big Idea 5: A Vibrant Historic Core” pages 140-155. This envisages a dynamic and flexible role for the future of the Shirehall supporting the creation of a multifaceted space that can accommodate a wide range of events and activities for a diverse range of user including both the local community and visitors.</p> <p>The flexible approach to the design of the library space to allow the creation of a performance space within the building could be of considerable benefit to the cultural life of the city and the attractiveness of Hereford as a place to live, visit and study. Together with other heritage buildings within this area, the Shirehall could help redefine the area as a cultural focus for the city.</p> <p>The proposals will also potentially act as a catalyst for other proposals in this area such as the aspirations for the restoration of St Peter’s square, strengthening the walking and cycling connections between St Peter’s Square and Gaol Street and the potential for a more extensive placemaking scheme such as lawns, gardens and tree planting to create an</p>

	alternative tranquil space destination within the city that would also allow the building to function as both an indoor and outdoor space.
Big Economic Plan	
Developed in partnership, the Big Economic Plan sets out a vision for 2050 which sees Herefordshire as a vibrant, healthy, zero carbon and inclusive place to live, work study and visit at all stages of life. The plan aims to grow and distribute wealth across several key areas and has adopted the 'Six Capitals' approach: people, community and partnerships, environment and climate change, enterprise, infrastructure and investment. The two potential locations for the Library and Learning Centre align with the outcomes of the Big Economic Plan across a number of these key areas	
Maylord Orchards	The Shirehall Assembly Hall and Undercroft
The library and learning centre at Maylord Orchards was predicated on generating a new reason for people to visit, spend time and money in Hereford as retail declines as a primary attractor. A means to regenerate the Maylord Orchards site (a key location in the city centre) the project also includes deliver aesthetic enhancements to Trinity Square and open the Atrium to create a new public space for social engagement/events and improved quality of life. In alignment with the Big Economic Plan, the location of the library at Maylords would create a positive environment for children and young people, residents and visitors. It would enhance the social and cultural offer within the city centre, drive footfall and rejuvenate the retail area. However, recently there has been a high level of interest from prospective tenants which suggests there is potential for alternative uses for this site, which in turn could have the equal benefit of increasing footfall and creating a positive city centre environment for residents and visitors alike.	<p>A key focal point of the Economic Plan is focussed on quality of life offer through place shaping, utilising the county's heritage, natural environment, and strengths in the arts and creative industries.</p> <p>The proposed redevelopment of the Shirehall will bring a redundant Grade 2 listed building back into economic use, creating a focal point to for the regeneration of the northern part of the city centre adding value to the proposed Hereford Museum and Art Gallery to the south.</p> <p>The project would generate new reasons to visit the city centre driving footfall and trade between these two historic flagship buildings in supporting the regeneration, opposed to leaving the current the Shirehall building boarded up and a blight to the centre of the city.</p> <p>The scale of the Shirehall building also offers future opportunities for creative industries and possibly business space. It also ensures Maylord Orchards can continue to offer commercial opportunities at the heart of the city centre.</p>
Town Investment Plan	
The Town Investment Plan sets out a "cultural assets" package which seeks to develop (amongst other cultural, sporting and community facilities) new, upgraded or protected libraries, prominent landmarks or historical buildings.	
Maylord Orchards	The Shirehall Assembly Hall and Undercroft
Maylord Orchards can deliver an upgraded library and learning centre. However, with the movement of the original partners (Rural Media Company, Powerhouse, Encore) away from the site, the original ambition to cluster assets and create a "hub" can no longer be delivered.	The Shirehall has the potential to deliver the original vision for the Library and Learning Centre, being part of a wider cultural hub, but also bringing a Grade 2 listed building back into use.

	<p>Utilising the Shirehall building will create two complementary significant heritage focussed attractions at the north and south of the city centre (complementing the Hereford Museum and Art Gallery project), enhancing the visitor and cultural offer of the city.</p> <p>The Town Investment Plan recognises that the city currently underperforms in tourism due to the lack of key attractors.</p>
<p>Health and Wellbeing strategy</p>	
<p>The Health& Wellbeing Strategy seeks to ensure residents are resilient; lead fulfilling lives; are emotionally and physically healthy and feel safe and secure. It targets health and wellbeing inequalities and makes a clear link between health and employment. Health and Wellbeing work is one of the national Universal Library Offers and working with this sector to deliver information, advice, guidance and signposting will be part of the future library offer.</p>	
<p>Maylord Orchards</p>	<p>The Shirehall Assembly Hall and Undercroft</p>
<p>The priorities of the Health & Wellbeing Strategy will be supported by providing library services which address mental health & wellbeing, early literacy, addressing social isolation and providing advice and resources for health lifestyles. The library and learning centre will also provide safe and neutral space for work with partners to support people with additional needs identified as priorities within the strategy. The provision of one-to-one consultation space, space for exhibition of materials and events in conjunction with public health partners has been included in the specification for the Maylord Orchards site (although space is limited for this purpose).</p>	<p>At the Shirehall in the Undercroft there is space to create additional confidential consultation provision, and for exhibitions on a wide range of topics of interest to residents. There is also space to consider a sensory room for people with disabilities to be created. The offer is therefore expected to be similar in nature, but the space offers greater potential for delivery of a wider range of activities.</p>

<p>Stronger Towns Fund Outcomes</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving perceptions of Hereford by residents, visitors and businesses • Increasing visitors to arts, heritage and cultural events and venues • Assisting new learners <p>Both sites are geographically central and can contribute to the Outcomes of the Stronger Towns funding. Maylord Orchards was conceived with a separate learning resource centre on the first floor opposite the library and is fully accessible. The Shirehall Undercroft is accessible and would be the location for the digital literacy/makerspace. The Assembly Hall is accessible, but a platform lift is needed to enable full access to the stage. Both potential locations offer a range of ways to support both formal and informal learning through use of newly equipped and digitally enabled rooms, reliable and fast Wi-Fi connectivity, provision of both Council owned fixed pcs and tablet technology and space to Bring your Own Device. Both sites have capacity to accommodate the needs of the Adult Education Service and to support a wide range of community learning activities. As detailed design work is not yet undertaken for either site, further consultation with partners will be undertaken to inform this and will include, for example, consideration of the needs of different learners across all backgrounds.</p>

Maylord Orchards	The Shirehall Assembly Hall and Undercroft
Maylord Orchards as a location for the library and learning centre has potential to provide an accessible, city centre facility operating as a modern library building primarily to serve residents and businesses. The site is within the main retail quarter which creates strong reason to visit and the increased footfall to the precinct could have knock-on benefits to other businesses located there. The space in the Adult Learning Centre in the old Food Hall unit would offer high quality training space with good connectivity and would be a home for the Adult Education service as well as a potential space for business support activities.	The Shirehall as a location would have greater public impact as it is more visible and the building itself has heritage value and is visually impressive. The Assembly Hall, in particular, has significant potential as a venue to build a statement library that would be a talking point for residents and visitors, as well as a great place for service users on a day-to-day basis. The hall could also be used for a wider range of public events, drawing in visitors, who might also be interested in the history of the building. The Undercroft will offer a quality space to hire for training and for business support consultations.
Maylord Orchards lends itself more to a local focus and while it may play some part in attracting visitors into the retail area, and could certainly host cultural activities and audiences, the principal increase would be in footfall to the library service and adult education	The Shirehall has potential to become a highly visible “statement” cultural facility in a listed building and both the vision for a high-quality cultural offer in the Assembly Hall and the seating capacity offer greater potential to increase visitors and to collaborate with partners in the cultural sector to develop and deepen visitors’ experience of the city’s cultural life.
Stronger Towns Fund Outputs	
More accessible and improved facilities for skills – target 1 new facility	
Achieves target	Achieves target
Increased skills responding to local need – target 584 participations, 74 accredited learners	
Detail of delivery still in design to achieve target	Service not yet designed but greater space provides opportunity to exceed target
Upgraded or protected libraries – target 674.3 square metres	
Achieves target	Exceeds target (861.98 square metres)
Community non-accredited learning – target 400 learners	
Detail of delivery still in design to achieve target	Service not yet designed but greater space provides opportunity to exceed target

Deliverability assessment

20. The factors affecting deliverability of each site:

Projected timescales	
Work on the project at either site can start following the Cabinet’s decision and both locations remain achievable within the Stronger Towns timeframes (See pages 16-17 in appendix).	
Maylord Orchards	The Shirehall Assembly Hall and Undercroft
Maylord Orchards completion would be September 2024, reflecting the more advanced stage of development at the point of undertaking the review.	Shirehall completion would be currently estimated July 2025 (subject to a formal project plan being put in place and approvals)

Planning Considerations	
Planning permissions are dependent on design which will be realised at a later date.	
Maylord Orchards	The Shirehall Assembly Hall and Undercroft
Maylord Orchards has already successfully achieved planning permission as it is a fully developed construction project.	The Shirehall may require Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent subject to the extent of the proposed works. The Shirehall is unlikely to require change of use consent given current status. This would be considered through the development of the design process and the full business case.

Scope of Works	
Maylord Orchards	The Shirehall Assembly Hall and Undercroft
Maylord Orchards is at RIBA 3+ with a Design and Build contractor procured. Further detailed design works are required for this site, including the design of the library interior fixtures, fittings and equipment. Demolition and renovation works could then start. The proposed scheme will require works to the public areas which have potential to disrupt customers and may also impact businesses in the vicinity.	<p>Shirehall works to install the library and learning centre may be less onerous in comparison as the Undercroft has relatively recently been refurbished. However, technical surveys would be required to further assess the structural integrity, and load-bearing capacity, of the Assembly Hall and the supporting walls within the Undercroft. Acoustic surveys would also need to be revisited to ensure any work required to achieve the revised purpose set out in the library vision, is identified.</p> <p>Wider works would be required to the Shirehall before the library could be installed, to address the structural defects within the building. Work carried out in preparation of this review demonstrates that these wider works would not be a barrier to the installation of the library, and that the outline timeframes are compatible with the Stronger Town grant requirements. However, it should be noted that the identified works to the Shirehall will be required in advance of the library fit out and will require further capital funding to be approved.</p>

Availability of Asset	
Both Maylord Orchards Units and the Shirehall Undercroft & Assembly Hall are fully owned by the council and are currently vacant.	
Maylord Orchards	The Shirehall Assembly Hall and Undercroft

Maylord Orchards units identified for the Library and Learning Centre are available for immediate use.

However, the Council has worked hard to understand the centre since its purchase in 2020 and how to run it effectively. This is currently bearing fruit and there is a strong interest and demand for the units with the centre becoming a vibrant community centre and a key player in regenerating the city centre. Footfall figures, although not expressly captured at Maylord Orchards, are obtained from BID and indicate that from March-end June we are already seeing a circa 44,000 increase in visits; a 50% rise on the previous period last year. Works are progressing to expand a community, health and wellbeing offer to help bring footfall for retail clients but this is in the context of a national retail picture that will remain hard for the foreseeable future; therefore we expect to see some churn across the centre for a while. Our appointed agents inform us however, that we are performing very well against the national picture (figures below as at 5/6/23).

Total:	41 units
Vacant	5
In legals	2
Occupied	27
In negotiation	2
Library Project	5

By continuing to offer the identified library and learning resource units for use by commercial tenants, the Council would not only cover the service charge costs (costs of running the centre), have an external party cover non-domestic rates liability charges and expect to see a rental income in the region of £55k pa. It should be noted that the market, although positive at Maylord Orchards, is still under significant pressure and rentals are negotiated

Despite the availability of the Shirehall, heating replacement, wiring, damp ingress and structural elements all need to be undertaken across the site. The programme will mean that the whole site will be a phased construction site and therefore it will not be possible to bring one part into commission before the rest. The wider works required to the Shirehall to rectify building defects will need to be undertaken before works to the library space can be undertaken as these are either whole site or limiting works. The Shirehall project will include the library element and will need to be run as one project, although it may be possible ultimately to realise the new library and learning centre in advance of the rest of the site.

When the ceiling collapsed in 2020, the HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMC&TS) were left without any facility to operate as the site had to be shut down. Since then, the council has worked with HMC&TS to find a temporary location for a Crown Court pending a decision on the future of the Shirehall. The Council recently received notification that HMC&TS now wish to terminate their occupation of the Shirehall site. Whereas the HMC&TS accommodation did not utilise the Undercroft nor Assembly Hall, their notification has allowed a fresh rethink of how the council might use the Shirehall building and enhance the civic nature of it.

21. *High level risks / opportunities for Maylord Orchards:*

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
<p>The Maylord Orchards project is fully developed and ready to proceed. Programmed to be completed by summer 2024, it is estimated that it could still be accomplished by September 2024.</p>	<p>Should the existing construction partner remain engaged, the construction could commence approximately 2 months after the Cabinet decision, if required due to contractor remobilisation.</p>
<p>The delay to allow for the review of the Library and Learning Resource centre location may increase costs for the Maylord Orchards construction owing to extension of programme and the possible impact of inflation and appears likely to exceed the currently allocated budget.</p>	<p>If a decision to proceed with the project at Maylord Orchards location, the construction contract is ready, subject to a) construction partner remaining committed b) any cost revisions within the scope of currently allocated budget or ability to value engineer the scope back into available budget.</p>
<p>There may be reputational damage associated with proceeding with the project at Maylord Orchards, following the pause for review.</p>	<p>The review is necessary given the change in circumstances set out in the report to Cabinet at the June meeting to enable the best possible location for the library and resource centre.</p>
<p>The viability of creating the community and cultural hub as initially intended within the project full business case for Maylord Orchards may be affected by the changing circumstances set out in the report to Cabinet (i.e. relocation of other partners).</p>	<p>This was considered as part of the original decision to proceed with Maylord Orchards. Commercial interest has continued in the Maylord Orchards units, and at the same time further opportunities have been identified through the process of developing the Masterplan.</p>
<p>There is an opportunity cost to the Council if the library and learning centre is provided in Maylord Orchards from loss of potential rental income from tenanted space.</p>	<p>Maylord Orchards has received a greater level of enquiry from potential tenants than anticipated. In order to secure optimum use of existing assets,-the commercial use of the site should be fully optimised.</p>
<p>The delay caused by the review, or a decision to locate the Library and Learning Resource Centre project elsewhere may impact the Hereford Museum and Art Gallery project.</p>	<p>The HMAG project will not be impacted by the review or a potential change of location. The library is moving into a temporary location within the Friars Street Resource Centre to ensure that HMAG is successful.</p>

Potential abortive costs for Maylord Orchards project are not yet fully ascertained

Verification and checks for all abortive costs claimed would be required to be undertaken and a revenue budget identified.

22. High level risks / opportunities for Shirehall:

Risk / opportunity

The costs for the installation of the library and learning centre into Shirehall (together with all enabling and wider works) are to be identified within a FBC

Any works to Shirehall will be subject to listed building consent. It may also be necessary to gain planning permission and building control approvals.

Any installation of library and learning centre to Shirehall will be subject to refurbishment and renovation of the wider Shirehall building. Currently the remaining budget of £1.2m for these works is not sufficient for the level of works required.

The transfer of grant funding to an alternative location would be subject to agreement by the Stronger Towns Board and a Project Adjustment Report to central Government.

The Stronger Town timeframes would still apply to the project.

Mitigation

The professional partners for the project are also cognisant of the Shirehall building and have provided high-level cost estimates for the library and learning centre. However, this is dependent on a series of intrusive surveys which will be required e.g., structural loading and acoustic surveys which would then inform costs to be provided in a full business.

This would be dependent on the future designs and will be assessed in more detail in a full business case.

If Cabinet decide to proceed with the installation of the library and learning centre to Shirehall, there would be a reinvigoration of the project to renovate the Shirehall to ensure that the two projects are aligned. The capital programme would need to be adjusted to provide budget for the Shirehall wider works (subject to Full Council approval).

An application to the Stronger Towns Board will be made and a further Project Adjustment Report prepared however confirmation of transfer will be subject to a formal decision by the full board and the agreement of DHLUC.

It is considered that the Stronger Town grant timeframe would be achievable as the library and learning centre project could be completed by July 2025

<p>The Stronger Town grant was £3m. Of that amount approximately £684k has already been spent on the Maylord Orchard design and fees. The remaining budget may not be transferred to the new location.</p>	<p>Discussions with the Stronger Towns Board will take place as noted above. If the transfer is not agreed, alternative funding must be identified from revenue or Directorate Earmarked Reserves.</p>
<p>DHLUC could clawback any funding already provided to the council.</p>	<p>If DHLUC clawback, the costs already paid, and the additional costs would require de-capitalisation. Funding for these costs would need to be identified from Directorate Earmarked Reserves in 2023/24.</p>
<p>Potential abortive costs for Maylord Orchards project are not yet fully ascertained</p>	<p>Verification and checks for all abortive costs claimed would be required to be undertaken and a revenue budget identified.</p>
<p>Shirehall is able to provide space for a wider and more diverse learning offer than Maylord Orchards</p>	<p>There is the opportunity to enhance the library service provision, serve a broader range of purposes/stakeholders/residents and provide improved outcomes</p>
<p>There may be reputational damage in amending the project to Shire Hall.</p>	<p>The Shirehall is considered to be a much better location providing greater space for flexible usage and capacity for additional events and resource for the library and learning centre. It will also provide a more revenue efficient location than Maylord Orchards.</p>
<p>The original intention of the project was to provide a cultural and community hub with various organisations co-located.</p>	<p>Due to changes in location for a number of other organisations, the initial vision had altered slightly. Whilst still a good offer at Maylord Orchards, the Shirehall has the ability to provide an enhanced resource utilising the greater space and gravitas of the historic building.</p>

Statutory service requirements - the Library Duty

23. Herefordshire Council is a Library Authority with statutory responsibility to deliver library services which are comprehensive and efficient, available to all persons desiring to make use thereof, and to employ such officers, provide and maintain such buildings and equipment, and such books and other materials, and to do such other things, as are required for that purpose. The city library and learning centre is part of the wider county service and the site chosen will need to ensure that the wider service needs (for example, for storage and staffing) are considered. The city library is relocating to facilitate redevelopment of the museum and art gallery. Provision of library services in the city centre will continue at Friars Street MRLC while the project to develop a permanent, high-quality library is delivered. Sites and services proposed have been reviewed to ensure compliance with the Council's obligations as a

statutory library authority and the public and stakeholders will continue to be consulted as plans develop.

Delivery of the Universal Library Offers (ULO)

24. The Universal Library Offers developed by Libraries Connected and national library partners including Arts Council England and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals aim to connect communities, improve wellbeing and promote equality through learning, literacy and cultural activity. Herefordshire Libraries have been working with partners and colleagues in recent months to develop a wider service offer that could be delivered from a new Hereford library and rolled out to cover the service across the county. They include culture, health & wellbeing, business & economy, digital literacy and the Children's promise. Each of the proposed sites evaluated have opportunities to deliver the ULOs with a different mix of activities, sector partners and potential audiences for participation to be developed in consultation with stakeholders and reflected in the detailed design.

Culture – including reading for pleasure, cultural events and activities

There would be access to reading materials for all ages and backgrounds, including accessible formats. Activities and events for all ages could range from rhyme times for under 5s through to book groups, talks and other events. The library could be a meeting place for clubs and societies and with opportunities for developing craft and makerspaces.

Health and wellbeing – supporting people to lead healthy lives

The library provides a safe, warm, neutral and free to access space to connect with others or spend some quiet time. It would be a source of health information with professionals from health and wellbeing partners running activities and advice sessions covering areas such as the cost of living, healthy eating and how to stay active. It would be a place where people can learn about Hereford and Herefordshire, local and family history and connect with their locality

Economy – Support for business, skills and employment

The library could be a venue to work with partners to deliver Small & Medium-sized Business (SME) clinics and business advice, to host business networking and special events and to provide access to resources to support businesses. There could be informal progression and learning activities as well as more structured adult education classes. The Adult Education service is a key partner in delivery, resident in the new library and providing outputs associated with the Stronger Towns Fund grant and its needs can be accommodated at both sites.

Digital Literacy – Free access to the internet and help to develop skills and confidence

The library would provide free access to the public network as well as providing fast Wi-Fi. There would be the opportunity to provide informal support to help people get online and to access council services as well as more formal training opportunities for people to develop their digital skills.

Children's Promise - every child and young person in libraries is inspired to read for pleasure, has access to a diverse range of materials, can engage in a variety of digital activities and can take part in activities that improve their well-being.

Engagement with stakeholders

25. Key stakeholders for the project have been engaged as part of the review. These have included the Stronger Towns Board, Herefordshire Cultural Partnership, internal delivery partners, Hereford Business Improvement District, Hereford City Council and the Joint Action on Herefordshire Libraries (JAHL) group, representing service users. The Maylord Orchards project was at an advanced level of development prior to this strategic review and consultees were therefore familiar with the detail of the project whereas for the Shirehall option the consultees had only high-level information on which to comment.
26. Given the relocation of other related projects (Encore, Rural Media Company, Powerhouse) away from Maylord Orchards, some respondents felt the original vision to create a clustering or cultural hub could no longer be realised and therefore the location was no longer suitable for a library. Other respondents referred to the potential for loss of momentum and potential delay to delivery of a new library in the city centre if the location is changed and for the costs involved. The JAHL expressed continuing concern about the suitability of Maylord Orchards as a location and stressed a willingness to work closely with the Council on improving the library service county-wide.
27. Some comments raised the issue of how a library in the Assembly Hall might affect historic use of the hall as a venue for concerts and other performances. Use of the Assembly Hall for a wide range of events is part of the draft vision for the library and continued engagement with stakeholders will be required as the Full Business Case is developed, to ensure that any concerns are addressed as far as possible.

Finances

Capital

28. The approved capital programme for 2023/24 includes budget of £3.5m for the Maylord Orchard Redevelopment and Learning Resource Centre project funded by £3.0m of Stronger Towns Grant funding and £0.5m use of the capital receipts reserve.
29. If an alternate location for the project is agreed by Cabinet, the continuation of Stronger Towns Grant funding will be subject to approval by the Stronger Towns Fund Board and, if required, a Project Adjustment Report to be agreed by DLUHC. Subject to this approval, a detailed business case will be prepared for the alternative location and presented to Cabinet at a future date. A decision by full Council will be required if there are any resulting changes to the approved capital programme.
30. The Maylord Orchards project has incurred costs of £434k up to the end of March 2023; funded by £329k of Stronger Towns Grant and £105k from the capital receipts reserve. A further £250k is estimated to be spent in 2023/24 to give a total project cost of £684k by the end of July 2023.

31. Cessation of the project may incur additional abortive costs which will be a further revenue pressure for the council. Costs pursuant to the Letter of Intent have a cap of £86k, however, de-mobilisation costs, referenced in the Letter of Intent between the council and contractor, may be payable by the council. At the date of this review, the procured contractor has indicated that it has placed orders to a value of £608k. Where a claim for de-mobilisation costs is made by the contractor, this will be subject to verification checks by the council to confirm that an obligation exists.
32. If the Stronger Towns Fund Board do not agree to transfer funding to an alternative location, there is a risk that the £329k grant funding awarded to date may be clawed back by the Board. Furthermore, if the grant cannot be used to fund costs incurred in 2023/24, the additional £250k will be an unbudgeted revenue pressure for the council.
33. The repayment of grant funding and any additional cessation costs will require identification of funding from revenue or Directorate Earmarked Reserves in 2023/24.
34. The total project costs of £1,292k, analysed between expenditure incurred to date and estimated future costs are noted in the table below.

	Expenditure to March 2023	Estimated spend to July 2023	Potential Abortive Costs	Total Project Costs to be decapitalised
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Capital expenditure	434	250		684
Potential liability for abortive costs (refer to paras 31 and 36)	-	-	608	608
Total costs	434	250	608	1,292
Funded by:				
Stronger Towns Grant	329	-	-	329
Capital Receipts Reserve	105	-	-	105
Revenue cost pressure	-	250	608	858
Total	434	250	608	1,292

Revenue

35. A revised business case detailing the revenue implications of relocation of the library service will be prepared pending the decision of Cabinet of the proposed relocation

Legal implications

36. Consideration of the Stronger Towns Funding and existing contracts has been undertaken. If the project location were to be changed to the Shirehall, Stronger Towns Funding approvals would be required to enable the funding to be utilised for the alternative location. In addition, abortive costs would be payable pursuant to the termination of existing contracts and agreements relating to Maylord Orchards in accordance with the terms therein although a final figure cannot be ascertained at this stage. The Letter of Intent with the procured contractor has a cap of £86,000 (the main contract had not yet been entered into), however, the contractor

may seek de-mobilisation costs and indicated that it has placed orders totalling £608,000. As these costs are not subject to the Letter of Intent the Council would seek to minimise any additional costs.

37. The Shirehall is in the freehold ownership of the Council and the proposed location of the library within the Shirehall is not subject to any leasehold interest. Change of use is unlikely to be required for use of the Shirehall as a library; however, further permissions will depend on the extent of proposed changes and the impact on the listed building.

Equalities

38. As part of the strategic review looking at options for a permanent location for Hereford library, Equality Impact Assessments have been undertaken on the proposed sites at the Shirehall and Maylord Orchards. The Equality Impact Assessments indicate that both sites would be appropriate venues for hosting a new library. Consideration needs to be given to the issue of people with disabilities or those with prams or pushchairs accessing the main entrance of the Shirehall building as part of the wider redevelopment of the site, however level access is available to the Undercroft area of the Shirehall from where there is lift access to all areas of the building in which the library service would be housed. Public transport links to both sites are an improvement on the library's current permanent location in Broad Street. The walk from the train station to both sites is of identical distance and shorter than the walk to the current permanent location and there is plentiful pay and display parking available near both proposed sites with a number of spaces available for blue badge holders.

Conclusions and Recommendations

39. The strategic review has been completed against the criteria approved by the Cabinet Member for Community and Assets and by the Corporate Director for Community Wellbeing. The review was undertaken with engagement from a number of stakeholders and consultees to provide initial feedback into the location options. In addition, the initial high-level costings for the Shirehall have been provided based on assumptions and ahead of full completion of surveys.
40. The review highlights that the decision for the library to be relocated into Maylord Orchards was underpinned by the opportunity to create a cultural cluster. However, as described some of the initial drivers have changed since the original project was identified. The demand for space in Maylord Orchards has remained relatively high from other potential tenants, and other Town Investment Plan projects that were originally due to be clustered with the library in Maylord Orchards (Rural Media Digital Culture Hub, Powerhouse and Encore) to create a cultural hub are now locating elsewhere. There is now a greater likelihood for the Council to achieve an income from letting the units identified in Maylord Orchards for the library project.
41. The draft Hereford City Masterplan has identified a wide range of future needs for strategically significant sites across the city centre, and alternative locations have become available for redevelopment.
42. The review has identified that the revenue costs for the service would reduce by relocating the library to the Shirehall. The Stronger Towns Board have provided initial feedback on the relocation and the review has identified that the funding timetables for the Stronger Towns can

be met.

43. Although Maylord Orchards provides an opportunity for a city centre location on the high street, the relocation and redevelopment of the Shirehall provides greater public value by repurposing an important civic building to create a new, innovative and creative library within a cultural hub that complements the vision for the world class museum on Broad Street. Basing the Library and Learning Centre in the Shirehall would create to significant new attractions based in key heritage buildings to the north and south of the city centre.
44. Overall, the review recognises that these are significant merits to both locations. Both have significant strategic fit, both would deliver a new modern library service and learning centre at the heart of the city, and achieve the Town Investment Plan outputs and outcomes. However on balance, the Shirehall brings a currently redundant historic building back into use, the scale of the building offers opportunities to provide a wider cultural hub, whilst also offering operational revenue savings. Utilising the Shirehall also then frees up the intended Library and Learning Centre space for commercial activity creating more jobs and investment in the city centre.
45. Therefore, it is recommended that the preferred new location of the Library and Learning Centre is the Shirehall Assembly Hall and Undercroft (as evidenced in the above strategic review) and that the project to relocate the Library and Learning Centre to the Maylord Orchards site is cancelled, all related contracts and agreements relating to the project terminated, and the capital project is removed from the capital programme.
46. A full business case should be progressed (to include the library works and all enabling works) and reported back to Cabinet in October 2023 with any associated changes to the capital programme being submitted to full Council for agreement.
47. The full business case would support a case to the Hereford Stronger Towns Fund Board and Department of Levelling Up and Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to redirect the current grant terms and conditions to the Shirehall location.

Appendices

- 1 - Draft Vision for Library & Learning Centre
- 2 - Scope of Review of Potential Alternative Sites for Location of Hereford Library
- 3 - High Level Review of Alternative Sites
- 4 - Map showing location of alternative sites
- 5 - Floor plans the Shirehall
- 6 –Ground Floor Plan Maylord Orchards
- 7 – First Floor Plan Maylords Orchards

