

Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee: Questions from members of the public and the responses, plus a supplementary question and the response

19 July 2023

Question

From Nina Shields, Ledbury

- i. I would like to submit a question about the review of the location for Hereford Library.

What account has been taken of the impact on High Town if Maylords is returned to being retail premises?

- ii. With regard to the review of the location of Hereford Library, Ledbury Library Development Group would like to ask the following question.

Additional services were to be housed in Maylords, adjacent to the library. Where will they be located if the plan to locate the library in Shire Hall goes ahead?

- iii. With regard to the location of Hereford Library, Sustainable Ledbury welcomes the repurposing of existing buildings but has the following question.

We understand that Shire Hall is in a state of poor repair. What are the Council's plans to repair the building and make it energy efficient and how much will this cost?

Response to Question

By Cabinet Member Community Services and Assets

- i. The strategic review has considered both locations in detail against the set criteria. With the recommendation of the library moving to the Shirehall this will enable Maylord Orchards to continue to successfully operate commercial and retail units and to create new opportunities at the heart of the city centre. Since the purchase of Maylord Orchards the council has endeavoured to ensure that the centre is run effectively and it is noted that 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 Business Improvement District 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. Our appointed agents inform us that we are performing very well against the national picture.
- ii. The Learning Resource Centre was to be located on the first floor of Maylord Orchards. The suggested location for this is now within the Undercroft area of Shirehall. The space is comparatively larger with further rooms available. This could increase the provision to potentially include areas such as a Maker Space and Sensory Room. The Shirehall is significantly larger and will not only meet the needs of the library but also provide flexible space to be used for wider events and activities such as refreshment facilities, civil ceremonies, weddings, registration of births, poetry readings, exhibitions, TED talks, business breakfasts, film screenings, health and wellbeing clinics etc. (subject to available future funding and any necessary consents).
- iii. The previous cabinet made a decision in November 2022 to delay a formal position on the future of the Shirehall, pending a Corporate Asset Review that is being undertaken. If the cabinet paper is approved on 20th July 2023 to agree the principle of the Library and Learning Centre relocating to Shirehall, then a detailed business plan will be developed.

Prior to the report in November 2022, many building surveys were undertaken to understand the failings of the building and to provide a cost estimate of likely repair. Carbon reduction formed a part of this and where possible, measures designed in. The cost estimate for a full refurbishment (significantly in excess of repairs only), as agreed by the previous cabinet, was noted in the November 2022 report as £7.5m. A recent report prepared to inform this review has identified that repair costs to be circa £3.6m.

With the new, proposed use of Shirehall by the Library and Learning Centre, the design will be revisited and re-costed. A full business plan will be developed for consideration by the cabinet in October, setting out the costs of the project.

Supplementary Question

From Nina Shields, Ledbury

Unfortunately I cannot attend the meeting but I would like to submit the following supplementary question to part ii:

With the adult library and children's library planned to be two floors apart, with the subsequent potential for safeguarding issues, will the library team be increased in number to adequately cover both areas?

Response to Supplementary Question

By Cabinet Member Community Services and Assets

A design for the library within the Shirehall has not yet been developed, however the staffing establishment will need to be designed around the agreed service model and the member of the public can be assured that the new library will be adequately staffed as necessary.