

## **PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 26 October 2023**

### **Question 1**

**Dr Nichola Geeson – Hereford**

**To: Councillor Bramer, Community Services and Assets**

The Maylords is an ideal location for a new Library, being central, close to frequently-used shops, and beside the Job Centre, so ideal for people researching employment opportunities. A new Library could open there in April 2024. We read: “The cost of moving the library service from Broad Street to either Maylord Orchards or Shirehall will require an increase in budget as the footprint for the library in both locations will be greater. For Maylord Orchards, the increase was estimated at £515,973 and for the Shirehall £390,077”. If this is the basis for preferring the Shire Hall, it is very misleading. Why is it not made clearer that £4.2million needs to be spent on renovating the fabric of Shire Hall before it can even open its doors again, and that the earliest a new Library could open is June 2026?

### **Response**

Thank you for the question.

You are correct that the Shirehall does require investment to enable the library and learning centre to be located there and bring the building back into use. This is noted in the report.

The additional revenue running costs for the library service are set out in the report for completeness. However, there are many other reasons why the Shirehall is recommended as the preferred location as it would:

- bring a valuable heritage asset back into community use
- make more visible the civic, communal and built heritage of Shirehall, connecting to the wider cultural and visitor attraction aspirations of the city
- deliver 895m<sup>2</sup> total floor space, which includes a 435m<sup>2</sup> Library footprint, 174m<sup>2</sup> Learning Centre footprint and 286m<sup>2</sup> back of house, circulation and other space.
- maximise the potential to integrate the library, adult learning, health and wellbeing and other community services under one roof
- provide residents with new access to sensory learning, digital skills lounge, makerspace and business development advice in a series of dedicated spaces (these resources would not be achievable at Maylord Orchards due to space limitation)
- provide a dedicated events space on the Assembly Hall stage to enable the delivery of a broad-ranging and quality cultural programme to widen participation
- generate income through hire of spaces and events and programmes in the Assembly Hall (income to library service plus income provided to Property Services from hire of training rooms)
- retain the earmarked space in Maylord Orchards for commercial purposes

It does mean that the library would reopen in June 2026 but temporary arrangements will continue to be put in place to enable residents to access the services.

### **Question 2**

**John Harrington – Hereford**

**To: Councillor Price, Transport and Infrastructure**

Can I ask Cllr. Price where is the Strategic Outline Business Case for ERIC, the Eastern Crossing at Rotherwas, that was supposed to land in Spring - by anyone's calculations, 5 months ago?

And can I ask if Cllr. Price has any objections to the Eastern Crossing which will deliver a bridge more quickly, more efficiently and for less environmental and financial cost and which was agreed as policy by Full Council and has been championed by opposition members such as Cllr. Bob Matthews, the business community and our MP.

**Response**

Whilst I have no doubt that the Eastern River Crossing, in providing a second bridge over the River Wye, would add some resilience to the highway network I continue to believe that the city's economy and need for housing would be better served by a western bypass. This would provide a complete alternative alignment for the A49 trunk road, thereby removing traffic from the city and handing responsibility for local accessibility and traffic improvements back to the council for the current route.

The Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) includes an updated cost estimate for the scheme. Far from the original £56m cost estimate from last year, anticipated project costs would be in the region of circa £150m. The SOBC does not include a benefit cost ratio calculation – this is normally carried out at a later stage - so the scheme's value for money is uncertain but it clearly no longer looks such an attractive proposition as is suggested.

When the final report has been received, it will be presented to Cabinet for consideration, but I do not see any value in publishing it out of context until we fully understand all the options open to us.