

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-052d-2020-21

**Date of meeting: 22 December
2020**



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Leader

Subject: Waltham Abbey Community and Cultural Hub

Responsible Officer: Jennifer Gould (01992 564073).

Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).

Executive Summary:

A feasibility study has been undertaken in line with the 2020/21 Budget, by officers for the creation of a Community and Cultural Hub in Waltham Abbey 'the hub,' which will see the District Museum combine with Waltham Abbey Library, owned and managed by Essex County Council.

This proposal is seen as a key opportunity to provide improved Council services to local residents in the area and at the same time, provide a mechanism for supporting economic and community regeneration of the town centre through new and additional footfall to Sun Street and provision of a multi-purpose community learning and skills space.

This report seeks Cabinet approval to continue dialogue with Essex County Council in respect of a potential Service Level Agreement (SLA) and to enable officers to progress discussions with appropriate parties (including Qualis) in respect of funding capital works.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The Council has a unique opportunity to improve local services to its residents in Waltham Abbey through the establishment of a Community and Cultural Hub that will extend the community hub model currently being built with the Civic Office at its heart. The Waltham Abbey hub will incorporate Essex County Council Library Services, EFDC Customer Services as well as space for partners (e.g. VAEF and EFCA) and the wider community which can be used for learning and skills, drop-in workspace, activities and events.

This hub will be a catalyst for increasing footfall to the Town Centre and supporting the long-term sustainability of retail and local business.

This proposal therefore brings together the benefits of; strengthening the community, assisting regeneration of the high-street and the approach to using the District's buildings as community hubs wherever practical.

Other Options for Action:

Not to proceed with the proposal. However, this will prevent the opportunity for the Council to provide much needed Customer Services and learning opportunities in a disadvantaged area of the district, which is significantly limited by public transport services.

Report:

1. The Council's Museum has operated from Sun Street, Waltham Abbey since 1981 and over the years has attracted significant funding for development from the heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England, which in the last four years has seen a 61% increase in visitors to the service.
2. It is envisaged that the new facilities and community offer provided through creation of a Community and Cultural Hub in Sun Street, will help to sustain and increase this trajectory through generating new footfall by the local population, and wider catchment area who are attracted to new services and available opportunities.
3. The potential for collaboration and increased partnership working with the library was highlighted in the Local Government Association Peer Review of the Service in 2018 (Appendix 4) and now, with the Council's drive to support regeneration of local town centres, the opportunity has arisen to establish an anchor, community facility in Waltham Abbey.
4. As such, Architects Hawkins\Brown, who led on the museum's redevelopment in 2016, have recently been commissioned to develop an initial options appraisal for the scheme (Appendix 1) which sets out three possibilities, ranging from 'basic' to 'best, and includes Waltham Abbey Police Station, but this has since been ruled out due to cost and availability of the site. Also, due to the significant pressures currently on Council budgets this report seeks Cabinet approval to progress with Option 1 presented in the report, confident that a step change is still possible with this option.
5. The following information highlights the key opportunities arising from provision of a hub in Waltham Abbey.

Economic Contribution

6. During 2019-20, the combined visitor numbers for Epping Forest District Museum Service and Waltham Abbey Library was 105,722 with 46% of visitors being local residents. Additionally, remote digital usage of 507,249 online visits in the same year clearly demonstrates a strong following for the service. Investment at this site would build on this success, providing a catalyst for the regeneration of the town centre and reinforcing a sense of place for local people, increasing footfall to Sun Street and dwell time.
7. In 2018, the population in the Epping Forest District numbered 131,137 and rising. The population across the authority areas surrounding EFDC within Essex, Herts and Greater London is around 1.9million. The site is currently attracting around 7% of the potential market population, therefore investment has great potential to attract new visitors, by providing an anchor point for the Town Centre.
8. A cost study analysis has been undertaken to determine the potential income for the hub. See Appendix 3. The proposal provides the opportunity to create a cohesive, physical and conceptual engine for enterprise, learning, leisure, cultural and community engagement via a range of income initiatives including events, early years play resources, external hire, exhibitions, refreshments, retail and training initiatives. These interventions will help to reinvigorate Waltham Abbey's high street through introducing new facilities alternative to retail.
9. Prior to Covid a number of reports into the future of our high streets highlighted that in a declining retail environment, culture, community and leisure provision are key elements in creating a successful high street offer and this has been stressed as of greater importance in the emerging post Covid-19 environment.

'We firmly believe that our high streets and town centres can have a better and more balanced future ahead of them if our recommendations are followed. This will require a shift from the retail focused activities of high streets and town centres today to new uses and purposes which foster greater social interaction, community spirit and local identity and characteristics. With a properly planned strategic intervention led by the local authority, with the backing of local stakeholders and the wider community, we can redefine our high streets and town centres and ensure their long-term sustainability for future generations to come.'

Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, 2019. Report on High streets and town centres in 2030

Contribution to Health & Wellbeing

10. Combined museum and library venues have the ability to create centres of excellence for community engagement and research, reinforcing a sense of place and belonging. A good example of the potential of this approach is the Beaney House of Art and Knowledge in Canterbury which is operated in partnership by Kent County Council and Canterbury Town Council.
11. The proposal for an integrated Community and Cultural Hub in Waltham Abbey will provide a unique offer in the Eastern Region, which could act as a model for other authorities. More importantly, its position in Waltham Abbey will provide a range of enhanced services for the public, in an area where it is most needed.
12. Our local health statistics show that in the worst-case scenario a male from Paternoster in Waltham Abbey can expect to live 13 years less than a male in Loughton Forest, and 11 years less for a female.
13. Some of the wards in Waltham Abbey also have some of the highest rates of child poverty in our district. This impacts on a child's educational development as those on free school meals are more at risk of falling behind. This is also evidenced by GCSE attainment levels throughout the district, with Waltham Abbey having some of the lowest attainment of 5 GCSEs at grade A*- C across all our wards. Whilst the Council has a strong programme to support our children and young people, the hub will enable a strong base in which to increase and enhance our offer, particularly for those that need it most.
14. Culture and heritage can have significant impact on health and wellbeing, and can be accessed at any stage of life, offering opportunity for people to connect with each other and supporting lifelong learning. Participation and volunteering in culture and community initiatives support individual wellbeing by broadening the horizons of participants, providing opportunities for the vulnerable thus helping to reduce social isolation. Waltham Abbey records some of our highest preventable death rates within our district along with high rates of older people living in deprivation. Investment in the creation of a community and cultural hub within this area, can significantly support the wellbeing of residents leading to improved health.
15. Whilst much of our data is pre-pandemic, the trends will be similar if not reinforced because of COVID-19.

Resource Implications:

16. The estimated costs for this scheme have been provided by Stockdales Quantity Surveyors and as stated, it is proposed to undertake the light refurbishment specification, Option A. See Appendix 2. The figure of £1,540,000 allows for a 10% contingency for any unexpected costs which may arise.

17. A number of income opportunities have been investigated. See Appendix 3. Depending on capital works start and finish time, the likely first financial year reporting on increased income will be 2022/23. We propose that the scheme has the potential to bring in an annual gross income of £212,300.00. It should be noted that these implications have been subject to robust review and are based on prudential estimates.
18. Any additional operational and maintenance costings for the scheme will be investigated in the development of a Service Level Agreement for EFDC to manage the library provision in partnership with Essex. We propose all additional operational costs to be covered under this Service Level Agreement or offset via the additional income received. Officers are preparing a briefing paper on this, to follow, in order to scope out the parameters of the SLA.
19. The scheme also will bring savings to EFDC, which are estimated to the value of £23,280 per annum through collections storage and workshop facilities being brought on to the site.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The transfer of the freehold ownership of 37 Sun Street from Essex County Council to EFDC is being reviewed as ECC's capital contribution to the project. A Service Level Agreement between EFDC and ECC for the management of the building is being investigated; with the ongoing library provision remaining the responsibility of ECC.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The creation of a community and cultural hub fits within a strategy for the economic regeneration and sustainability of Waltham Abbey Town Centre, which has a range of benefits for people of all ages and abilities living in Waltham Abbey, including opportunities to utilise the community space to train and enhance skills of local young people, including those at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

Consultation Undertaken:

An initial stakeholder review was undertaken in 2018 as part of the Local Government Association Peer Challenge Review (See Appendix 4). Since then, consultation has been undertaken with Essex County Council Senior Library staff and Estates team, as well as Essex County Councillors. A briefing meeting was held with Epping Forest District Councillors in the development of this scheme. Representatives from both Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund have also welcomed the concept.

Background Papers:

- Appendix 1: Hawkins\Brown Feasibility Study, July 2020
- Appendix 2: Stockdale Order of Cost Estimate, July 2020
- Appendix 3: Income Projections for Waltham Abbey Hub
- Appendix 4: LGA Peer Challenge Review April 2018

Risk Management:

- Potential footfall and demand impact if resurgence of Covid 19 (Low risk), learn from actions undertaken to offset lost operating income during the current crisis from various sources of support. We do not anticipate the site to be open to the public until 2022 at the earliest.
- ECC decide not to transfer the capital asset (Medium risk) and prefer to act as capital partners for development cost. Potential reduction in revenue for EFDC off set by reduction in capital outlay.

- Legal delay in the transfer of Freehold of 37 Sun Street (Medium risk), result in delay of project start and finish, impact on project timetable and revenue stream
- Annual Revenue costs exceed budget (Low risk) Well costed proposals, build in efficiencies.

Equality Impact Assessment

1. Under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010, when making decisions, Epping District Council must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, ie have due regard to:
 - eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and other conduct prohibited by the Act,
 - advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not,
 - fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
2. The characteristics protected by the Equality Act are:
 - age
 - disability
 - gender
 - gender reassignment
 - marriage/civil partnership
 - pregnancy/maternity
 - race
 - religion/belief
 - sexual orientation.
3. In addition to the above protected characteristics you should consider the cross-cutting elements of the proposed policy, namely the social, economic and environmental impact (including rurality) as part of this assessment. These cross-cutting elements are not a characteristic protected by law but are regarded as good practice to include.
4. The Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) document should be used as a tool to test and analyse the nature and impact of either what we do or are planning to do in the future. It can be used flexibly for reviewing existing arrangements but in particular should enable identification where further consultation, engagement and data is required.
5. Use the questions in this document to record your findings. This should include the nature and extent of the impact on those likely to be affected by the proposed policy or change.
6. Where this EqIA relates to a continuing project, it must be reviewed and updated at each stage of the decision.
7. **All Cabinet, Council, and Portfolio Holder reports must be accompanied by an EqIA.** An EqIA should also be completed/reviewed at key stages of projects.
8. To assist you in completing this report, please ensure you read the guidance notes in the Equality Analysis Toolkit and refer to the following Factsheets:
 - Factsheet 1: Equality Profile of the Epping Forest District
 - Factsheet 2: Sources of information about equality protected characteristics
 - Factsheet 3: Glossary of equality related terms
 - Factsheet 4: Common misunderstandings about the Equality Duty
 - Factsheet 5: Frequently asked questions
 - Factsheet 6: Reporting equality analysis to a committee or other decision making body

Section 1: Identifying details
Your function, service area and team:
If you are submitting this EqIA on behalf of another function, service area or team, specify the originating function, service area or team:
Title of policy or decision:
Officer completing the EqIA: Tel: Email:
Date of completing the assessment:

Section 2: Policy to be analysed	
2.1	Is this a new policy (or decision) or a change to an existing policy, practice or project?
2.2	Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the policy (or decision): What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve (ie decommissioning or commissioning a service)?
2.3	Does or will the policy or decision affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • service users • employees • the wider community or groups of people, particularly where there are areas of known inequalities? Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate?
2.4	Will the policy or decision involve substantial changes in resources?
2.5	Is this policy or decision associated with any of the Council's other policies and how, if applicable, does the proposed policy support corporate outcomes?

Section 3: Evidence/data about the user population and consultation¹

As a minimum you must consider what is known about the population likely to be affected which will support your understanding of the impact of the policy, eg service uptake/usage, customer satisfaction surveys, staffing data, performance data, research information (national, regional and local data sources).

3.1	What does the information tell you about those groups identified?
3.2	Have you consulted or involved those groups that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision you want to implement? If so, what were their views and how have their views influenced your decision?
3.3	If you have not consulted or engaged with communities that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision, give details about when you intend to carry out consultation or provide reasons for why you feel this is not necessary:

Section 4: Impact of policy or decision

Use this section to assess any potential impact on equality groups based on what you now know.

Description of impact	Nature of impact Positive, neutral, adverse (explain why)	Extent of impact Low, medium, high (use L, M or H)
Age		
Disability		
Gender		
Gender reassignment		
Marriage/civil partnership		
Pregnancy/maternity		
Race		
Religion/belief		
Sexual orientation		

Section 5: Conclusion

		Tick Yes/No as appropriate	
5.1	Does the EqIA in Section 4 indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more equality groups?	No	
		Yes	If ' YES ', use the action plan at Section 6 to describe the adverse impacts and what mitigating actions you could put in place.

Section 6: Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

What are the potential adverse impacts?	What are the mitigating actions?	Date they will be achieved.

Section 7: Sign off

**I confirm that this initial analysis has been completed appropriately.
(A typed signature is sufficient.)**

Signature of Head of Service:

Date:

Signature of person completing the EqIA:

Date:

Advice

Keep your director informed of all equality & diversity issues. We recommend that you forward a copy of every EqIA you undertake to the director responsible for the service area. Retain a copy of this EqIA for your records. If this EqIA relates to a continuing project, ensure this document is kept under review and updated, eg after a consultation has been undertaken.