

**RELOCATION OF ELY REGISTRATION OFFICE TO CAMBRIDGESHIRE ARCHIVES**

*To:* **Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee**

*Meeting Date:* **10 October 2017**

*From:* **Graham Hughes, Executive Director Economy Transport and Environment**

*Electoral division(s):* **Ely South and Ely North**

*Forward Plan ref:* **N/a** *Key decision:* **No**

*Purpose:* **The Committee is asked to consider plans to relocate the registration service currently provided at Ely Registration Office to the new Cambridgeshire Archives property in Ely.**

*Recommendation:* **Members are asked to endorse the additional use of the Cambridgeshire Archives scheme and agree to the relocation of Ely Registration Office.**

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## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 It is proposed to relocate the registration service currently offered at Ely Registration Office to the new Cambridgeshire Archives building in Ely. This would include the provision of customer facing appointments and provide a venue for ceremonies.
- 1.2 Currently Ely Registration Office is based in a central Ely location in a property leased from East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC). We have a lease to December 2018, with a view to extending this to April 2019. The rent is currently £12,500 per annum, plus £10,555 other running costs. We have extended the lease three times but are unable to secure long term tenure as ECDC have other plans long term for the building and immediate area. It is also the County Council's policy to exit from leased buildings wherever possible. A number of other potential building options for relocating the service have been investigated, however none of these have proved to be viable.
- 1.3 It has already been agreed that the Cambridgeshire Archives building will provide a new storage facility for Cambridgeshire archives and all registration records. An office is also available for the registration service in the archive design plans, which is suitable for appointments with the public. The Archive Service plans to use the public reading room for three days per week and open it once a month on a Saturday. It is proposed that this be used to double up as a ceremony room on some weekends and occasional weekdays during peak season. Therefore this proposal would require only minimal modifications to enable use by the registration service.
- 1.4 It is important to note that an earlier plan to include a mezzanine floor, which was rejected by Members as too expensive, was not required for the registration service but as part of a broader plan to relocate staff from Noble House. The scheme has subsequently been limited to a single storey facility, with full approval to proceed agreed by the Asset and Investment committee in January 2017. Detailed design and pricing is underway. A further planning application is required for some external changes to the scheme and to this would be added an application for change of use (provision of Registration Service customer facing appointments and ceremonies in addition to Archive Service). Assuming approval of planning, construction is due to begin in January 2018, with expected handover by October 2018.

## 2. BENEFITS

The benefits of this proposal are:

- 2.1 **Improved utilisation of a County Council asset:** We would increase use of the Cambridgeshire Archives building by consolidating the registration and archive provision - for example extending the use and income from the search room through the provision of ceremonies. Ely Registration Office is currently only used three days a week (limited opening hours due to lone working issues), this proposal will remove this inefficient use of building space.
- 2.2 **Improved customer access:** public appointments with the Registration Service will be available five days per week (currently three days per week). The new building would offer onsite parking, disabled parking and the ability to drop off the bridal party directly outside

the building (this is not possible at the current location) all of which will be attractive to potential customers. The Archives building is also located near to the train station.

- 2.3 **Income generation:** Whilst we do not have a statutory requirement to offer a ceremony room in Ely, the opportunity to use the Archives Search Room on a shared basis would help to maintain current levels of service, likely to be popular with residents and members. We anticipate a continued revenue stream from ceremonies of at least £28,000 per annum, without a ceremony room this income will not be achieved and represent a loss to Cambridgeshire County Council. We will market the new provision.
- 2.4 **Financial savings:** The proposal will deliver a £23,000 annual saving from vacating the Ely Register Office. In addition we could reduce staffing costs by around £5,000 (we currently employ two staff for three days per week, we would be able to move to one person five days per week). There are also potential future savings through greater integration and sharing of archive and registration staff and roles.
- 2.5 There are some minor adaptations and costs to accommodate the ceremony provision (including small scale landscaping, curtains to screen search room equipment, “tip and tilt” tables, chairs and trolley ) these will cost around £6,000 to be funded by the Registration Service, sponsorship will also be explored.

### 3. ISSUES

The key issues to be considered are:

- 3.1 **Planning permission:** The current planning permission for the Cambridgeshire Archives building details the specific purpose for a public Archives facility. We are therefore required to apply for revised permission to extend the use of the building for the purpose of ceremonies and registration service appointments. However, it should be noted that we are already in the process of submitting a new planning application to gain approval for some external changes to the scheme (relating to parking spaces, an external water tank for sprinkler system, bin store and windows). We propose to combine these two applications. A Planning Consultant has been appointed by the contractors to ensure the application is progressed as quickly as possible. The planning application will need to consider the impact on parking and traffic, however we do not expect this additional provision to have an adverse impact. Ceremonies will be held when the search room is closed, so people attending will not be in addition to search room customers. Customer facing appointments are normally attended by one or two customers per appointment.
- 3.2 **Customer appeal:** The current Ely Registration Office is an attractive building in a central location that the public are familiar with, although it does not have parking facilities or access to drop off bridal parties. Cambridgeshire Archives is a redevelopment of a former bowling alley. While the search room itself will provide a good space for a ceremony the external appeal may be limited. However this is no different to some of the other locations we use for ceremonies, as the exterior of Castle Lodge, Cambridge is also not a selling point. The results of a recent customer survey confirmed that ceremony couples rank the exterior of the building one of the lowest factors when choosing a council ceremony venue, with a suitable photographic area being a more important criteria. We are currently working with the Communications Team to look at the best way to market the archives venue, and

are confident we can do so. Whilst we do estimate a small drop in ceremony bookings compared to the current venue this will be a much lower decrease than if we offer no alternative.

#### **4. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

##### **4.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all**

There are no significant implications for this priority.

##### **4.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives**

There are no significant implications for this priority.

##### **4.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people**

There are no significant implications for this priority.

#### **5. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

##### **5.1 Resource Implications**

Section 2.4 details the savings from this proposal.

##### **5.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.

##### **5.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications**

By law, each Registration District must have at least one room in the county/borough where legal ceremonies can be performed ( a “register office”) and provide a Civil Marriage or Civil Partnership ceremony at a statutory rate set by the government (see paragraph 2.3)

##### **5.4 Equality and Diversity Implications**

The Cambridgeshire Archives site will improve accessibility for Registration Service users with the provision of onsite parking and disabled parking spaces. (See paragraph 2.2)

##### **5.5 Engagement and Communications Implications**

A marketing plan for the new venue will be progressed (See paragraph 3.2) and a suitable photographic area for ceremonies established (See paragraph 3.2)

## 5.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

The changes to the car park were as a result of member request at HCI Committee to enable shared provision with ECDC.

## 5.7 Public Health Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

Implications	Officer Clearance
Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance?	Yes Name of Financial Officer: <b><i>Sarah Heywood</i></b>
Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by Finance?	No Name of Financial Officer: <b><i>Paul White</i></b>
Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by LGSS Law?	Yes Name of Legal Officer: <b><i>Fiona McMillan</i></b>
Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?	Yes Name of Officer: <b><i>Tamar Oviatt-Ham</i></b>
Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?	Yes Name of Officer: <b><i>Eleanor Bell</i></b>
Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact?	Yes Name of Officer: <b><i>Tamar Oviatt-Ham</i></b>
Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health	No Name of Officer: <b><i>Iain Green</i></b>

Source Documents	Location
None	