

CAMBRIDGE, MILTON ROAD COMMUNITY HUB

To: General Purposes Committee

Meeting Date: 28th July 2015

From: Executive Director: Economy, Transport & Environment
and Chief Finance Officer

Electoral division(s): West Chesterton

Forward Plan ref: 2015/034 **Key decision:** Yes

Purpose: To decide on the preferred procurement option for progressing the proposed replacement of Milton Road Library in Cambridge, and the construction of a new Community Hub building.

Recommendation: General Purposes Committee authorises *either*

- a) Do nothing – Cambridgeshire County Council maintains delivery from the existing library building;
or
- b) Market test – Cambridgeshire County Council reviews the parameters for delivering a viable and sustainable scheme for the provision of a new library and community building, procuring delivery of the scheme through part disposal (long leasehold) of the site on the open market; *or*
- c) Implement existing project – Cambridgeshire County Council enters into an agreement with the construction company currently providing advice to the project to deliver existing plans, on terms to be agreed by the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Chairman of General Purposes Committee;
or
- d) Self-develop – Cambridgeshire County Council reviews the parameters for delivering a viable and sustainable scheme for the provision of a new library and community building, procuring planning, design and construction resources from the market, managing and funding the development by retaining revenue producing elements of the site.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Milton Road Library was built in 1936 and is located in West Chesterton Division, Cambridge. The Library serves customers mainly from North Cambridge and neighbouring villages. Around 54%¹ of all the library's users live in West Chesterton and East Chesterton Divisions. Current performance indicators show that Milton Road Library ranks 8th highest out of the 25 community libraries across the county in terms of the number of items borrowed and 6th highest in terms of the number of visitors.
- 1.2 The library holds regular events, such as children's storytimes, reading groups, school visits and public talks. There are currently no partner services delivered at the library, however leaflets and notice boards provide information on various services available locally. Local County Councillors use the library building outside normal operating hours for Councillor Surgeries and public meetings. The building is also used as a polling station for all local and parliamentary elections. The library service generates a (very small) income from hiring the building to other organisations, but the potential is limited by the character and condition of the current building.
- 1.3 There are currently 23 volunteers based at the Library, including 12 self-service support volunteers. There is also an active friends group, Friends of Milton Road Library, who already play an important role in supporting the library through advocacy, fundraising for library furniture and equipment, organising talks and activities, and providing a regular programme of storytelling for children. The Friends have provided crucial support and encouragement for the Community Hub project, having led a bid for City Council's 106 funding, and delivered many of the consultation events. They are actively considering options for developing the partnership with Cambridgeshire County Council further, including becoming a charity or merging with an existing local charity.

1.4 DEVELOPMENT OF THE LIBRARY AS A COMMUNITY HUB

- 1.4.1 In 2010/11, Milton Road Library was identified by the Council as one of 13 libraries shortlisted for possible closure or to become community run. As a result, there was extensive campaigning from the local community, largely led by the Friends of Milton Road Library, to keep the library open. The intention to close any libraries in the county was subsequently abandoned following new leadership at the Council and a new strategy to develop a 21st Century Library Service. An approach to develop libraries as Community Hubs was pursued instead. This recognises the important role that libraries play in local communities, and seeks to make library buildings even more useful to the community by providing a range of services and facilities that are tailored to local community needs, with the hub acting as the 'face to face channel' for council services. Milton Road Library was one of several libraries that were identified for development into a Community Hub, especially given the structural problems with the building and the opportunity that redevelopment would provide to refocus the use of the building.
- 1.4.2 In Autumn 2013, an options appraisal was submitted to the Effective Property Asset Management (EPAM) Board. Three options were evaluated, and

¹ 2010 data from previous snapshot survey

EPAM accepted the recommendation to redevelop the site, and approved further work to progress this option.

- 1.4.3 On 20 January 2015 Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee approved a draft strategy for the future of the library service, *Library Services in Cambridgeshire: Developing our approach for the future*. The creation of further Community Hubs is a key element of the “Maximising the use of our assets” theme of the strategy.
- 1.4.4 The community has been consulted in different forms on what they feel is lacking in the area and what can be improved. With regards to facilities, there is local demand for a community room, which can be used flexibly by the community, library and other partners, and creates some income through hire. Other facilities needed include a kitchenette, community notice board and community garden with children’s play space.

1.5 BUILDING ISSUES

- 1.5.1 Over the years the library has had structural problems manifested in movement and noticeable cracks in walls. This is most likely caused by thermal movement of the concrete roof, during long periods of cold (when the roof contracts) or heat (when the roof expands). In addition, roots from the mature trees near the building have caused drainage problems and cracking in the pavement outside the building.
- 1.5.2 There have been several structural engineering surveys carried out at the site in recent years. The survey reports from 2013, 2008, 2006 and 2003 (relevant extracts are in the Project Implementation Document referred to in Source Documents below) explore the site issues and make recommendations. The most recent report indicates that movement is continuing, resulting in more extensive cracking and peeling of plaster from the walls. In the survey report from May 2013, Atkins advises that there is no economic solution to thermal movement of the concrete roof, which will move by about 3 to 4mm each year. Also, settlement at the front of the building could increase rapidly at any time, requiring local underpinning of the affected areas. Atkins concludes:

“... the building is uneconomic to repair to give a continued useful life. We therefore recommend that the building is used for as long as it remains serviceable but that either alternatives premises is sought or funds found to redevelop the site.”

- 1.5.3 Officers estimate that any major works would cost the Council between £200k - £300k. In addition, any large-scale repairs such as these would need to conform to higher modern building standards, which could raise this estimate even further. This option also relies heavily on the assumption that the building would last for another 35 years at least, which could be annulled if other underlying problems arose.

1.6 DELIVERING A COST-NEUTRAL SCHEME

- 1.6.1 In 2012 at Great Shelford the Council secured a new long leasehold library at nominal cost funded by the disposal of the site to a housing association who built 5 key worker flats above. That project was a partnership between Bedford Pilgrims Housing Association (BPHA) and a private developer, Hill.

- 1.6.2 A similar approach is proposed at Milton Road library with flats above and a new community room part funded by up to £100,000 s106 funding from Cambridge City Council. The City Council funding is time limited and will require substantial progress on the project before autumn 2015 or risk losing the funding and the room.
- 1.6.3 Discussions about the replacement of the current Milton Road library began in 2012 and BPHA, who had initiated the Great Shelford scheme, provided an initial appraisal. It was clear that following Government grant changes, a scheme with key worker houses was unlikely to generate sufficient funds to provide a scheme that would be cost neutral or at minimal cost to the Council.
- 1.6.4 Based on the Council's experience at Great Shelford, Hill² (Hill) was asked if they could produce options for a viable scheme, work that they did at their own risk. They concluded that there was a feasible project that would deliver the following benefits:
- A new library building at nil cost to Cambridgeshire County Council (however cost of partial fit out would be carried by Cambridgeshire County Council).
 - A new community room at nil cost to Cambridgeshire County Council, supported by s106.
 - Cambridgeshire County Council will retain the freehold of the whole site.
 - Provision of private flats.
- 1.6.5 Cambridgeshire County Council would grant a long lease of the flats to the developer to enable them to sell the flats to make the capital return on the project. The grant of the long lease will be at a peppercorn, in return for the construction of the library and community room, which would remain in County Council ownership.
- 1.6.6 The library and community room elements would be designed in such a way that they could be converted to alternative uses should the proposed uses no longer be required.
- 1.6.7 Hill, at their own expense, obtained pre planning application advice from Cambridge City Council's, Planning Department. The complexity of the project necessitated two rounds of pre planning applications and required significant design work. In June 2014 the City Council's Senior Planner wrote to Hill and said 'In conclusion, and on balance, I consider that this scheme, with amendments, could be supported subject to full consultation of neighbours and consultees'.

2. MAIN ISSUES

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to decide the most appropriate route forward for the Council in the current circumstances. Because the information needed to make this judgement is dependent on commercial and market factors, and this information will influence the way in which the Council implements the project, the detail of the background to each option is set out in a confidential **Appendix 1**, with a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of each

² Hill Residential Ltd are niche developer providing a blend of design, planning, construction and marketing skills

option at confidential **Appendix 2**.

3. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

3.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

There are no significant implications for this priority.

4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Resource Implications

The report above sets out details of significant implications in confidential Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

4.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

The report above sets out details of significant implications in confidential Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

4.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications

The report above sets out details of significant implications in confidential Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

4.5 Localism and Local Member Involvement

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Local Members and the local community have been consulted and engaged through the life of this project.

4.6 Public Health Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

Source Documents	Location
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jan – Sept 2013 - Consultation overview • Combined feedback summer 2013 – Young People, Online, Primary School • Brief for Milton Road Library and Community Hub- drawn up in consultation with the community Steering Group 	<p>All available in: Room SH008, Shire Hall, Cambridge</p>