

TITLE	Relocation of Wokingham Library
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 30 March 2017
WARD	Wescott
DIRECTOR	Josie Wragg, Interim Director of Environment
LEAD MEMBER	Pauline Jorgensen, Executive Member for Resident Services

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The relocation of Wokingham Library to the Carnival Pool site will provide the Library Service with greater flexibility and adaptability in its service delivery. Residents will be able to combine visits to the library with a range of other activities. The Carnival Pool site offers better access and parking.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive agree:

- 1) in principle to relocate Wokingham Library to a new building on the Carnival Phase II site;
- 2) that the approval to relocate is subject to full impact assessment and detailed business case being agreed by the Executive Member for Resident Services.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

There is an opportunity for the Council to relocate Wokingham Library to a new site within the Carnival development. The new site will offer greater flexibility for the delivery of library services and provide improved access to other leisure and cultural activities. Opportunities for the redevelopment of the existing library site consistent with the vision for the town centre mean that the move could also deliver a financial benefit for the Council.

Background

In June 2016, the Council agreed the Library Offer for the borough. The Library Offer was developed to establish and promote the activities that our residents can expect when visiting or using our libraries, including a clear understanding of their contribution to the borough and how they will evolve within the future means of the Council.

The ambition is that libraries are welcoming and vibrant places that people are drawn to. They will protect the clearly valued heritage of our library services whilst evolving naturally to offer more and more opportunity for residents of all ages to engage in activities and access services. The libraries themselves will be flexible and adaptable in terms of their space and their uses, aligning seamlessly with other provision in their area.

Within the Library Offer there are specific statements about promoting and improving the access to library services and what our residents can expect when visiting our libraries. These are summarised as:

Access to Services

- The Library Service will adapt to meet the growing population and changing behaviours of our residents.
- The Library Service will utilise opportunities to provide residents with a flexible mix of physical and virtual options for accessing all services
- Improve access to other Wokingham Borough Council services in line with Customer Services vision
- Strong partnership working to ensure flexibility of delivery and access to library Services

Visiting and Using Library Buildings

- The environment within libraries will be welcoming and enjoyable
- Buildings will be flexible and adaptable to changing demands for their use
- Enable access to other types of services including other council services, health services and local community and voluntary services
- They will provide space for locally focused events and activities that develop a sense of community
- Actively identify events and services that support the broader Council vision

It is within this context that the Library Service is continually open to assessing its effectiveness in delivering the Library Offer and exploring new opportunities to improve its services for our residents. This includes considering alternative locations for the libraries across the borough.

Analysis of Issues

- **Wokingham Library**

The current library is a purpose built two storey library building built by Berkshire County Council in 1996. Based upon a standard of 28 sq. m per 1000 head of population, at 1324m² it is suitably sized to serve a population of 47,000 residents. The current space allows for different zoned areas to meet different library user's needs, such as children's

areas, space for events, computer usage areas and quiet study areas.

Broadly speaking the current building is in a good state of repair and is fit for usage for the foreseeable future. Overall, visits to Wokingham Borough libraries have been increasing in recent years; however, visits to the main Wokingham Library have reduced slightly over the past three years from 146,448 in 2013/14 to 142,900 visits during 2015/16.

It is currently located at the outer edge of Wokingham town centre, next to a Council car park with 46 spaces.

- **Carnival Phase II**

One of the objectives of the Carnival Phase II development is to support the arts and cultural activities in Wokingham, which complements the function and activities of the library service. The proposed design seeks to co-locate flexible spaces which support these cultural/arts activities. The proposed sports hall will have fold-out seating to enable performances to take place in the sports hall and there are two studio spaces which could be utilised for evening classes. The reception area has also been design to have some exhibition space within it.

The library could be located on the main pedestrianised route through the site, which links the new multi-storey car park in the south to the Elms Field development and the wider town centre. The current design for the library assumes a floor area of 1000m², which is similar to the floor area of the current facility on Denmark Street, on a single floor/storey.

- **Relocation**

It is clear that in its current location, Wokingham Library has been successful and continues to provide a range of well-used services and activities for people of all ages. However, the current library site does have its challenges and there are areas where improvements could be made.

A key limitation to the current site is the two storey layout and the location of the library meeting rooms. This necessitates additional staffing and reduces options for utilising the library space in different ways. Of the library's 1324m² of space, 170m² is taken up with stairs and entrance lobbies, the café area takes up 133m² and the Elevate Hub takes up 180m² of space. In total this comes to 483m² of space, leaving 841m² for library services. Therefore, the floor area of 1000m² available on the Carnival Phase II site represents a similar or possibly slightly larger amount of available flexible space.

Having the library on one floor will benefit the staffing and operation of the facility, with a clearer line of site across all the activities taking place. The proposed library would share a reception area and café with the leisure centre, which could result in economics of scale relating to staff.

The current library site is somewhat isolated from the rest of the town centre and has limited ability to align itself directly with other activities, or to utilise any extra space for larger events.

Within the Carnival Phase II site, high levels of footfall are expected along the main

pedestrian route giving the library an increased presence in the heart of the development. It would also increase the opportunity for “linked trips”, with visitors to the leisure centre or the other commercial use on the site, also combining this with a visit to the library. The proximity to substantial amounts of public parking close to the library and proximity to public transport will also improve access for visitors.

The proximity to other leisure and cultural activities also presents a positive opportunity to further enhance the usage of library services by children and young people.

The location of the library on the same site as the leisure centre and sharing facilities supports the wider principle of the co-location of Council services and the creation of flexible, multi-functional facilities. Co-location will enable residents to access more than one Council service on a single visit. There may also be opportunities to locate other Council services or advice points within the building which share similar facility specifications and/or there may be opportunities for the location of self-service machines for paying Council tax or collection of blue bags as an example.

The co-location of the library and leisure centre could result in longer operating hours for the library. The current leisure centre operates from Mon-Fri 06:20-22:30 and Saturday and Sunday 07:30-19:30 and it is likely that the new centre will operate similar hours. In this scenario, customers may be able to access library services for longer hours than is currently, including use of automated systems if implemented.

The Carnival Phase II development will also include provision for a café on site, meaning that people will still be able to enjoy drinks and snacks when visiting the library. The current café within Wokingham Library only provides a negligible amount of income for the Council each year; although this may be able to improve if a stronger commercial approach was adopted.

- **Costs of Relocating**

The capital costs of building the new library space are factored into the existing Medium Term Financial Plan allocation for the Carnival Pool Phase II scheme.

If the space within the development is used by the library service it is assumed that no rental income will be accrued as the building will be owned by Wokingham Borough Council and a Council service will operate from it.

As the building will be a new build, with a life span of circa 30 years and built to the latest energy efficiency standards, we would expect some reduction in running and maintenance costs than the existing Denmark Street facility, although costs such as business rates will be similar.

The relocation of the library to the Carnival site or an alternative site in the town centre would release the existing library site for an alternative use and/or redevelopment.

The following options have been identified:

- Reuse the existing building
- Redevelopment by WBC (knock down & rebuild)
- Sell site to private developer

Appraisals of the development value that could be generated from the existing site show that this value would be higher than the costs of building the new facility, and thus deliver a positive return to the Council overall.

- Other sites for Wokingham Library

An initial assessment of any other potential sites to locate Wokingham Library has been conducted using the following criteria:

- Within Wokingham town centre boundary
- Circa 1000m² floor area (ideally over one floor)
- Adjacent / close to public car parking
- Proximity to public transport links
- It is also advantageous that the site is within WBC ownership

A desktop assessment has identified that there are no suitable alternative sites within Wokingham town centre to accommodate a relocated library.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The capital costs of building the new library space are factored into the existing Medium Term Financial Plan allocation for the Carnival Pool Phase II scheme.

Construction of the Carnival Phase II development is expected to start in mid-late 2019 so construction expenditure will come through from financial year 2019/20 (year 4). It is expected that a relocated library would open in early 2021.

Cross-Council Implications

The opportunity to relocate the library to the Carnival Phase II site enables the co-location of Council services in one location, delivering service and cost efficiencies and a positive customer experience.

List of Background Papers

Library Offer 2016

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