

Central Bedfordshire Council

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Executive

Proposals for undertaking Public Consultation on the relocation and new fit out of Stotfold Library

Report of:

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This report relates to a decision that is Key

Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to outline the proposals for the relocation of Stotfold Library and its fit out with new furniture, fixtures and fittings and to authorise the public consultation on these proposals.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive Committee is asked to:

- 1. authorise undertaking public consultation on the proposed project to relocate and enhance with new furniture and fixtures Stotfold Library, the proposal being to relocate the library from its existing location within Stotfold at Hitchin Road, Stotfold SG5 4HP to a new location in Stotfold at the Greenacre Centre.**

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. The paper has not been discussed at Overview and Scrutiny; this matter is for Executive rather than Overview and Scrutiny to consider the request for authorisation to undertake public consultation on the relocation of Stotfold Library from its existing location to a new location within Stotfold.

Executive Summary

2. This report is seeking authorisation for undertaking public consultation on the proposed project to relocate Stotfold Library and enhance it with new furniture, fixtures and equipment. The proposal is to relocate the library from its existing location within Stotfold to a new location in the hall of the Greenacre Centre.
3. Stotfold Town Council (STC) approached CBC and the Library Service with a proposal to relocate the existing library (leased from STC) to their new Greenacre Centre. The new location is 0.5 miles distance from the current library building. The proposed space that the library would occupy in the Greenacre Centre is a large hall that is currently available for hire. Residents would be affected in that there would be a new location to travel to for library services. They would also be affected in that the existing community space offered by the hall would no longer be available, although other community space: the Maple Room and the Council Chamber, would continue to be available at the Greenacre centre.
4. The new location for the library offers the potential to enhance the library service offer and to secure the long-term future provision of library services in Stotfold.
5. There are alternative venues within Stotfold that are available and can accommodate existing and hirers of the Greenacre Centre's Hall
6. The recommended approach is to undertake a 12-week public consultation, in partnership with Stotfold Town Council, with Stotfold residents so that all residents have the opportunity to have their say on the proposals and that the Council can consider the impact of the proposed changes before making a final decision.
7. It is felt that this is the most appropriate approach as it will provide the opportunity to provide information on the proposals to residents and for them to have the opportunity to have their say on the proposed relocation of the library.
8. The impact of this approach is expected to be a high level of engagement from residents in the proposals.

Background

9. A capital business case was developed and aligned to the Library Services' strategic objectives and the impact on growth within the Stotfold area. In 2020, Stotfold Town Council approached CBC and the Library Service with the proposal to relocate the existing library (leased from STC) to their new Greenacre Centre and specifically in their main hall which was originally designed as a two-court sports hall.
10. Equalities issues would be given due regard and an equalities impact assessment would be undertaken.

11. The main objective is to: secure the long-term future of library provision in Stotfold as the existing lease expires in 2026; to improve the look and feel of the library with new furniture and equipment in a space larger than the existing library; an opportunity to form a new community hub within the Greenacre Centre, which would include: the Town Council, Citizens Advice Bureau, who hire other rooms there, and also the potential for a café, not run by CBC, to be co-located with the library at the Greenacre centre.

Public Consultation

12. Consultation, in partnership with Stotfold Town Council, would potentially begin in April and run for 12 weeks. Information on the proposals would be made available at the existing library and as well as online and would be shared as widely as possible with residents so that everyone would have an opportunity to have their say.
13. The Council would consider the results of the survey and the impact of the proposed changes before making any decisions.

Reason/s for decision

14. Members are being asked to authorise the undertaking of Public Consultation to ensure that the proposal is subject to full consultation before any decision is made.

Council priorities

15. The proposed relocation and fit out of the library support the following Council priorities:
 - Enhancing Central Bedfordshire – Having an improved library service would mean better access to free Wi-Fi and internet access in the library which would support those without access at home.
 - Great Resident Services – the enhanced library would provide a modern, attractive facility for the benefit of Stotfold residents.
 - Improving Education and Skills – Access to high-speed internet would enable library users to access information, services and educational and skills opportunities.
 - Creating Stronger Communities – Libraries have a role to play as acting as a community hub, creating a freely accessible focal point for communities and the proposed new location alongside other services would potentially enhance this.

Corporate Implications

16. The Town Council owns both the existing library building and the proposed new site at the Greenacre Centre. If the decision is to proceed with the proposed new library location, then a planning application would be submitted and some adaptive work on the hall would be carried out.

Legal Implications

17. The authorisation of this report would enable public consultation to be undertaken, which is the advised course of action of the Monitoring Officer, along with undertaking an Equalities Risk Assessment.
18. The general principles derived from case law as to how consultations should be conducted, known as the “Gunning principles” are: consultation should occur when proposals are at a formative stage; consultations should give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit intelligent consideration; consultations should allow adequate time for consideration and response. There must be clear evidence that the decision maker has considered the consultation responses, or a summary of them, before taking its decision.
19. The consultation responses, or a summary of them, therefore, must be before the decision maker before making a decision on the substantive issue.
20. The Council would need to end the current lease agreement with Stotfold Town Council at the Hitchin Road site and enter into a new lease agreement for the space at the Greenacres Centre.

Financial and Risk Implications

21. If the proposed relocation is put into place there are the following implications:
 - A new lease and charges would need to be negotiated between CBC and Stotfold Town Council for the Greenacre Centre. There are no costs relating to leaving the existing lease agreement.
 - A Planning Application is required for change of use and minor structural changes
 - There is a budget of £256K, comprising a capital budget of £200k and S106 funding of £56k, for the relocation project, the majority of which would be spent in 2022/3 if the proposal goes ahead.
 - It is noted that building costs are going up nationally by between 15-25% so there may be increased costs building costs to be considered.

Equalities Implications

22. By virtue of the Equality Act 2010 the Council must have due regard to its public sector equality duty (PSED) to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
23. It is important that the Council in compliance with its PSED, and the need to demonstrate that it has given due regard to it, that the findings of an equality impact/risk assessment are before the decision maker.

24. The Library Service will seek to enhance rather than reduce all existing library services and an equalities risk assessment will be undertaken alongside public consultation. This would consider several factors including that the proposed new library location is 0.5 miles distance from the existing location. For those travelling by bus via the high-street, there would be an additional 200m walk, which might take between 5-15 minutes extra than from the current library's location. There would be other potential mitigations including use of the Home Library Service and the Good Neighbourhood scheme to assist those who need it. For those that drive there would be easier access; more car parking and disabled bays/disabled access; which would be better than what is on offer at the current library location.

Sustainability Implications

25. The definition of sustainability that underpins the Council's Sustainability Plan is underpinned by the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This includes aspects that focus on building resilient infrastructure, making settlements inclusive and sustainable, and promote sustained, inclusive, and inclusive economic growth.
26. The existing library is in an old building and therefore, due to its age, comes with many issues (building/mechanical & electrical, which will require considerable capital outlay by CBC to maintain the building to an adequate level and there is little scope for reconfiguration and development.
27. The Greenacre building is a relatively new build its infrastructure is built to the latest standards, both from an efficiency and environmental perspective. The library would be able to operate in a more sustainable way in the new location than the existing building and its more central location than the existing location may facilitate access by Stotfold residents.

Conclusion and next Steps

28. Approval of this report would enable Council Officers to undertake public consultation which will give all residents the opportunity to have their say on the proposed relocation and fit out of Stotfold Library. Council Officers would consider all feedback from the public consultation before any decision is taken to proceed with what is proposed.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None

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