

NON-EXEMPT

EAST HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Cabinet
ALTON COMMUNITY CENTRE/THEATRE
Head Of Community And Democratic Services**

09 September 2009

CT055/09

FOR DECISION

REPORT DETAILS

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Cabinet on the findings of a combined community centre/theatre feasibility study undertaken on the Bank Car Park, Alton and to explain the constraints identified with this location. Following an exercise which looked at alternative sites within Alton town centre, to inform Cabinet of further feasibility work which was undertaken on the Lady Place Car Park, Alton. This site has now emerged as a viable site within EHDC's ownership to accommodate a combined Community centre/theatre facility. Cabinet approval is sought to progress the scheme on Lady Place Car Park subject to a full financial appraisal and public consultation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:-

- i) Agrees in principle to the use of Lady Place car park for a combined community centre/theatre facility, subject to a full financial appraisal and the outcome for further public consultation on this location.
- ii) Subject to the outcome of recommendation (i), authorises the Deputy Chief Executive/Acting Chief Executive to progress the scheme and go out to tender for an employer's agent to take the project forward.

RESOURCING IMPLICATIONS

There is currently £3.67m over 2 years, allocated for the provision of a new Alton Community Centre in the approved Capital Programme.

In addition, the Holybourne Theatre has recently received a revised valuation of their existing Holybourne Theatre site at £726k (15/5/09), which would go towards funding this facility.

CONSULTATION

Leader of the Council

Deputy Leader

Lead Councillor for Alton

Cabinet Member for Sustainable Market Towns and Villages

East Hampshire District Councillors for the Alton area

Alton Town Council

Alton Community Association and Holybourne Theatre

CONTRIBUTION TO CORPORATE PRIORITIES:

Safer and More Vibrant Communities

Improve Our Focus on Special Community Groups

Intensify Our Protection of the Built and Natural Environment

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ALTON COMMUNITY CENTRE/THEATRE

1.0 BACKGROUND

Cabinet considered a report in November 2008 (DCE02/08) which approved the commissioning of a feasibility study of a combined Community Centre/theatre facility at Bank Car Park, Alton. Pottinger Architects were commissioned to undertake this study and reported preliminary findings to officers/Councillors and key stakeholders (Alton Community Association, Holybourne Theatre, Alton Town Council) in April/May 2009.

- 1.1 Further work was required on the feasibility study to address the constraints of the site; this would consequently provide overall direction as to whether a joint facility was capable of being delivered on this site.
- 1.2 It was also clear that the combined facility required a larger footprint than originally envisaged, resulting in more space on the car park being required.

2.0 BANK CAR PARK FEASIBILITY STUDY

2.1 As detailed work emerged from the feasibility study, it became clear that given the site requirements for either a combined facility or stand alone Community Centre that considerable physical site issues would compromise any scheme on this site. A detailed summary of the Feasibility Study, including constraints on the site is attached to this report as Appendix 1. However most notably these are:

- Constraints imposed on the site as a result of Environment Agency requirements which considerably reduce the available space on the site for construction;
- The likely water table/ sub-terrain construction issues which will increase the cost of the build.
- The protection of specimen trees that run through the middle of the site. Their removal would be considered as a departure from the Local Plan. This is further compounded by large Root Protection Areas (RPA) required to keep the trees healthy, thereby reducing further the available space for development.
- Bank Car Park is EHDC's most profitable car park. A significant loss of car parking space would result, both during construction of the facility and ongoing availability once the building is completed. There would be a significant impact on Car Parking revenue, in the region £140k during the build, and approximately £69k per annum given the number of spaces that would be lost. It was estimated that approximately 50 bays would be lost, resulting in only 68 bays remaining; this is a key issue for Alton given its existing pressures on car parking provision.
- The site's previous use as a tannery is likely to present some ground remediation costs associated with possible contamination. No costs have been built in to this scheme to allow for this.

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- A Community Centre alone on the site would not deliver the enhanced extra space requirements and flexibility the Community Association needs.
- The compactness of the Bank Car Park with several rights of way and easements across it restricts any development to the centre of the site. Given the issues raised above, Councillors and stakeholders felt the site was not feasible for the proposed combined facility.

3.0 REVIEW OF ALTERNATIVE SITES

- 3.1 Given the issues raised from the Bank Car Park feasibility study an exercise was undertaken to identify whether any alternative town centre sites may be more suitable. These would need to have the potential of meeting the space requirements of a combined facility and not present the numerous physical site constraints as detailed above.
- 3.2 All large EHDC car parks were considered as possible option sites, along with a possible location at Oceanic House. Oceanic House, whilst a prime site for such a development is not owned by EHDC and is currently on the market for £2.4m. Purchasing this site would leave little in the budget to demolish and re-provide a facility and the site is constrained by a Listed Building to the front elevation.
- 3.3 Following analysis of alternative sites, the Lady Place Car Park given its size, parking configuration, access and proximity to the Public Gardens and town centre, was considered the most appropriate site for a combined building.

4.0 LADY PLACE CAR PARK OPTION

- 4.1 A further 'light touch' feasibility study was undertaken by Pottinger Architects to identify whether the Lady Place Car Park would meet the space requirements for a combined facility, and to consider possible opportunities and issues with the site. A summary of this study can be found appended as Appendix 2, to this report.
- 4.2 A conceptual 'footprint' design of a building approximately 2-3 storeys high, has been produced (see Appendix 3), which clearly indicates that the Lady Place Car Park is large enough to accommodate such a building. Fundamentally the site has many positive features which include:
- Scope for a landmark building with civic presence in the heart of Alton, complemented by its proximity to the Public Gardens which enhances its location and offer of facilities and activities for e.g. children.
 - Net loss of car parking space is 36-40 spaces, leaving approximately 145 bays, which would result in a loss of income of approximately £30k per annum. The car park would continue generating circa. £113k. However, unlike proposals for Bank Car Park, 50% of the car park could remain in operation whilst the new facility is being built, thus continuing to provide parking in the town and generating revenue circa £73k. Once built, the Community Centre/Theatre would increase demand and stimulate greater usage/income per space.

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- The Community Association can continue in the existing facility in Bank Car Park.
- Possible complementary use of Centre and Gardens.
- Added stimulus and support to the local economy to the western end of the High Street/Market Street.
- No significant tree issues. Whilst some trees are present in planters/raised beds they are young trees and can be relocated elsewhere on site.
- No immediate ground contamination issues are known about.
- The site is clear of Environment Agency flood zone restrictions.
- Possible location of a building on this site may discourage current anti-social behaviour in the vicinity by having a presence throughout the day and evenings.
- Site constraints are manageable and are not expected to be costly, resulting in possible cost savings in comparison to the Bank site.
- The location at Lady Place is supported and favoured by both the Alton Community Association and the Holybourne Theatre.

4.3 The total building contract cost is estimated (based on indicative size requirements/ uses and finishes) to be between £4.09m- £4.37m which includes internal fit out costs for both the Community Centre and Theatre. This is inclusive of all VAT, contingency fees and design fees but excludes furniture/specialist equipment e.g. lighting gantries/stage etc. Cost of the Community Centre alone is estimated to be £3.1m. The Theatre, depending on whether a medium or low specification, is estimated to be between £1.03m-£1.25m (this includes the cost of raked/tiered seating in the auditorium). The likely contribution from the Holybourne Theatre is £726k, leaving a remaining balance of between £3.3m-£3.6m to be funded from EHDC.

4.4 There is currently £3.67m over 2 years allocated to this project in the approved capital programme. It is proposed that any potential capital receipt for the existing Community Centre building in Bank Car Park would go towards offsetting the costs to EHDC.

5.0 NEXT STEPS

5.1 Overall, given the limited range of site options that are available in Alton for a new community facility, the Lady Place car park is the only site within EHDC's ownership which is able to accommodate a scheme of this size.

5.2 In order to gauge initial thoughts with both EHDC (Alton area) and Alton Town Councillors, three briefing sessions were held in July. Initial reactions were overall positive with some considerations raised.

5.3 EHDC wrote to Alton Town Council asking them for their official opinion of using this site for the location of a new Community Centre/Theatre at Lady Place. This was considered at their Policy and Resources Committee on 29 July 2009. Alton Town Councillors have indicated that with regard to this location that *'they would like to discover what the wider community thoughts are on this location before*

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committing to a plan of action', additionally they would like EHDC to proceed to a full and open consultation exercise on the Lady Place proposal.

- 5.4 In order to progress this scheme to the next stage, Cabinet is asked to give approval in principle for a combined Community Centre/Theatre to be explored and built on the Lady Place Car Park (in the vicinity of the area marked on the diagram Appendix 3).
- 5.5 In providing this approval, Officers will undertake a comprehensive community consultation process with stakeholders and the wider community. The purpose of this will be to test support for this scheme on the Lady Place site.
- 5.6 As a majority of capital funds to deliver this scheme will be from EHDC, it will be necessary for EHDC to negotiate an arrangement with the Holybourne Theatre Group to enable wider community use of the Theatre.
- 5.7 In parallel to this, a full financial appraisal of the scheme will also be undertaken, clarifying further EHDC's VAT position and identifying cost efficiencies and funding opportunities.

6.0 RISK ASSESSMENT (TO INCLUDE ENVIRONMENTAL, FINANCIAL AND EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT)

- 6.1 In order to ensure that the scheme at the Lady Place location is supported by local people, it will be necessary to undertake consultation with the community.
- 6.2 In order to minimise both financial and environmental risks it is proposed that detailed site investigations will be necessary before any scheme proceeds.
- 6.3 Steps will be taken to minimise the risks detailed in the Risk Register of the feasibility report through various stages of the project.
- 6.4 Cabinet will already be aware of the risks associated with capital build projects. The appointment of specialist advisers, including the employer's agent, will help to mitigate against these risks.
- 6.5 Risks associated with the funding for this scheme will be explored fully as part of a financial appraisal.

7.0 CONTRIBUTION TO CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 7.1 The proposal for a community centre/theatre facility in Alton will contribute to all corporate priorities, in particular encouraging, strengthening and sustaining vibrant local communities.

8.0 CONCLUSION

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8.1 The report updates Cabinet on the findings of the Bank Car Park feasibility study and outlines the many constraints associated with the site. After analysis of other alternative sites in the town, and following further feasibility work on the Lady Place Car Park site, this site has emerged and has been identified as the most suitable site which is capable of providing such a facility with an opportunity to compliment existing uses close to the site. This is a really exciting opportunity for Alton to deliver a landmark building in a sustainable town centre location. Further detailed work on the site and full community consultation will decide whether the scheme will progress at this location.

EHDC Readability Level: 3.1

This score is based on average word and sentence lengths. Writers should be aiming for a score of around 6.

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