

REPORT TO: Executive Board Sub-Committee

DATE: 1st April 2011

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Environment and Economy

SUBJECT: Proposed Refurbishment of the Runcorn Market Hall

WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of a feasibility study into a proposed refurbishment of the existing Runcorn Market Hall. The feasibility investigates the possibility of providing combined Library and Direct Link Services within the Hall.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) Members agree in principle to the further development of the proposals for the existing Runcorn Market Hall; and**
- 2) Authority be given to review the Capital Programme to identify the funding required to achieve the proposed refurbishment and that a further report be presented to Members on the results of this work.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 For a number of years, the Council has been considering options for the improvement of the Library and Direct Link facilities provided in Runcorn Town Centre. Some of these options were linked to the Canal Quarter redevelopment proposal, which, as a result of the recession, has stalled.

However, there is recognition that the services we provide in our libraries need to reflect growing customer expectations in respect of state of the art facilities set within an ever-increasing Information Technology led society,

3.2 In January 2011 the Market Hall in Runcorn closed. Although there were strong financial and operational reasons for taking the decision to close the building, this has resulted in a relatively new building remaining vacant.

3.3 Given the need to offer improved Library and HDL facilities to residents in Runcorn and the fact that the Market Hall is currently unused, it was considered appropriate to investigate the feasibility of accommodating both the library and HDL within the “former” Market Hall.

- 3.4 A feasibility study has now been completed which demonstrates that it is possible to refurbish and remodel space within the Market Hall to accommodate both the Library and Direct Link.
- 3.5 There are, however, a number of factors that were considered as part of this study.
- 3.6 The floor area of the Market Building is 550m². The HDL service to transfer currently uses a floor area of 338m² and the Library service currently uses a floor area of 528m². A compromise on requirements was, therefore, necessary if both services were to be accommodated within the overall smaller Market building. A plan of the proposals is appended to this report.
- 3.7 Full consultation was undertaken with officers of both services to establish a briefing document for the study including agreeing space requirements that could be accommodated into the existing Market floor area.
- 3.8 The brief set out the minimum space requirements that would still enable two viable services to be provided, but with an arrangement to allow the sharing of back office space at the same time.
- 3.9 The brief also asked that costs would be provided on a specification range that would still provide the necessary services requested, but would also enable a choice to be made on the quality and type of materials used and finish of the end product.
- 3.10 The building was constructed specifically to be used as a market hall, rather than to provide office accommodation. For example, the building comprises a main market hall space which houses approximately 20 indoor market stalls. The building is of a steel frame construction with a double pitch metal roof and facing brick external cladding. Equally, there are no windows in the main lobby of the hall, but a glazed roof light along the main part of the hall at ridge level. The internal walls are generally facing brick and block. Costs reflect adherence to planning and building regulations. There are also different entrance levels to consider.
- 3.11 As a result, consideration was given to providing accommodation within the external envelope of the building whilst meeting an appropriate floor area requirement for both the Library and Direct Link.
- 3.12 The proposed scheme also allows for new windows and integral roller shutters to the front elevation, to provide daylight and a more inviting aspect. In addition, there is a requirement for the layout and acoustic separation within the building to reflect the differing requirements of respective services. For example, regarding the Direct Link, there was a need to balance privacy and security whilst allowing for a visual openness within the building. Regarding the Library, an assessment of appropriate storage, shelving and IT workstations.

- 3.13 Staff accommodation as well as public and staff toilet facilities have also been factored into the feasibility study.
- 3.14 The feasibility study has also included higher and lower specification solutions.
- 3.15 Assuming Members were to approve the further development of this scheme, the estimated timetable for taking forward this proposal would be as follows: -

April – July 2011 Design/Production

May – June 2011 Planning

August 2011 – Tender Period

September 2011 – Mobilisation

October 2011 – Start on Site

February 2012 Completion

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The proposed works will be reviewed in line with the draft Climate Change Policy and Outline Carbon Management Plan as a number of sustainability elements will be built into the scheme which will contribute to reducing carbon emissions within the Borough.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Any proposed refurbishment of the Market Hall as a library and direct link would require a substantial investment from the Council (currently estimated at between £500 - 850k) and would, therefore, require an amendment to the Capital Programme. Authority is sought to review the Capital Programme to identify the funding required to achieve the proposed refurbishment and that a further report be present to members on the results of this work

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

A new library in the former Market Hall will allow for facilities to be provided which meet the needs of young people in the 21st century. For example, use of computers, wi-fi access in addition to a wide range of books, magazines and audio-visual materials.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton Borough Council

The provision of a new Library supports local people in acquiring skills and knowledge which will help them either to develop their learning and or improve their prospects of remaining in or gaining employment.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Not Applicable.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Not Applicable.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The relocation of the Library and Direct Link will help to consolidate the core of Runcorn Town Centre and will help to contribute to the wider regeneration of the area.

6.6 Corporate Effectiveness and Business Efficiency

Including a direct facility will provide a customer facing service which is readily accessible by local residents.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Not applicable.

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

8.1 None under the meaning of the Act.