

To: Communities Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee

From: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member and Amanda Honey,
Managing Director, Communities

Date: 6th April 2010

Subject: The Kent History and Library Centre

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This report updates Members on progress made on the Kent History and Library Centre since the last report to Communities POSC on 11th November 2009 and outlines the future timeline and key activities over the next eighteen months. It also describes the benefits that the new centre will deliver to the people of Kent.

FOR INFORMATION AND COMMENT

1. Background

- 1.1 The Kent History and Library Centre will provide a centre of excellence for the archive service, replacing the current centres at the Centre for Kentish Studies, Sessions House and East Kent Archives, Whitfield. The existing archive buildings have inadequate and unsuitable storage facilities for the documents and artefacts which cover over 1000 years of the county's administrative, economic and social history. The public facilities are intimidating and old-fashioned and have inadequate space to cope with the rapidly growing interest in family and local history.
- 1.2 The centre will also replace the existing libraries at Springfield and Maidstone, both of which have significant access and maintenance issues, resulting in a centre of excellence for library services in Maidstone.
- 1.3 Bouygues Development was appointed as preferred contractor in December 2007, with a proposal to build the History and Library Centre on James Whatman Way in Maidstone. The project has been financed through an innovative arrangement with Bouygues which allows the building of enabling developments on the rest of the James Whatman Way site and the Springfield library site.

- 1.4 Since the original plans were submitted, the residential property market and the general economy have both suffered a downturn and the anticipated receipts from the enabling developments were considerably reduced. This has led to a revision of the plans and the centre is now being built in conjunction with an Extra Care facility for Housing 21 and affordable flats managed by West Kent Housing Association.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 The Kent History and Library Centre project was initially reported to POC in June 2008 when the first designs were launched for public consultation. A paper on the related vision for the archives service was presented to POC in November 2008 and an update on delays and challenges to the project was reported to POSC in November 2009.
- 2.2 Libraries and Archives leads on Target 26 of Towards 2010: 'Modernise the library service to act as a focal point for KCC services and widen access to Kent's rich culture'. The History and Library Centre development contributes to the achievement of that target as it will provide a centre of excellence for both the archive service in Kent and a modern hub library for Maidstone, aiding the further integration of the library and archive services.
- 2.3 The service is also actively engaged with Kent Agreement 2 (KA2) themes and is supporting a large number of those targets, many of which will benefit from the widening of access to local and family history material. History has the power to change lives and can contribute significantly to targets in education, community cohesion and the health agenda in particular and the Library and Archive service is already engaged in some innovative cross-agency projects in these areas.

3. Process

- 3.1 A full planning application for the development was submitted to Maidstone Borough Council in June 2009 and was approved by the MBC Planning Committee on 15th October 2009. An outline planning application for a residential development including a community facility was approved at the same time for the Springfield site. The judicial review period ended on 24th February 2010 without further challenge to the project.
- 3.2 A stopping up order was granted on James Whatman Way in February 2010 to enable works to commence.
- 3.3 Heads of Terms and the Developer Agreement have been agreed and the latter was signed on 8th January 2010.

- 3.4 The ground breaking ceremony and public signing of the Developer Agreement was held on 26th February 2010 on the site followed by a reception for all partners at the Archbishop's Palace, Maidstone.
- 3.5 Public consultation on the project has been ongoing throughout this period encompassing general consultation on the design, consultation with local history groups and community archives, community groups across Maidstone District and young people and local and county members. The project was also presented at the Maidstone Local Board in July 2008. A full public consultation plan has been developed which will ensure that community involvement continues throughout the life of the construction project and beyond.

4. Benefits

- 4.1 This is a groundbreaking project in terms of the development of the whole site and the potential for partnership working. Discussions are already taking place with our partners, Housing 21 and West Kent Housing Association on the management of the site and how to involve the residents of the two developments in the activities of the building. Restaurant and shop facilities in the Housing 21 building will be available for staff and users of the centre and activities to involve residents are already being planned, such as a community history project based on the history of the site.
- 4.2 The centre will also be adjacent to the new ground for Maidstone United Football Club and preliminary discussions have already taken place with them about joint working in the future, particularly around projects designed improve literacy skills by linking sport with reading initiatives, particularly involving boys and men.
- 4.3 While the new centre will provide a stunning new library for the county town, it is primarily designed to widen access to Kent's rich history and heritage. It will have:
- Archive storage of 2100 sq m, to take current holdings and provide 15 years accrual space. This is designed to BS5454 standards of security and climate control
 - A modern search room for access to original documents
 - A modern conservation studio
 - A Community History room for access to local history material and digital copies of original documents.
- 4.4 Not only will this provide much better access to the vast range of material held in the archives, but will also enable us to put on show some wonderful treasures such as the Jane Austen letters, Joseph Bank's Diaries and King Withred's Charter of 699 AD.
- 4.5 The centre will also be a hub for the development of community history activities throughout the county, both through the network of local

libraries and by supporting the development of community archives. The vision for this new direction of the archives service is encapsulated in the consultation document "Understanding Our Past, Changing our Future" which describes not only the difference the service is already making to the people of Kent but also how it will impact positively on communities in the future.

- 4.6 A real benefit for KCC is the experience of forging a Developer Agreement (DA) to bring about the financing of the project through a land deal. This is the first time a Developer Agreement process has been utilised by KCC. Highly complex issues of finance and contractual obligation had to be resolved to ensure both value for money from the land assets for KCC yet leave sufficient room for the developer to make a margin in building to our requirements. The process offers exciting opportunities to work creatively to unlock further assets for the authority.

5. Next steps

- 5.1 Work will start on site in March 2010 and KCC officers have regular site meetings with Bouygues Development and Warings Construction, a subsidiary of Bouygues Development, who will build the centre. Planning is also underway on the internal design and layout which will complement the innovative architecture and enable the provision of 21st century services in an attractive, modern environment.

6. Updated timeline

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| 6.1 | October 15th 2009 | Planning application approved by MBC Planning Committee subject to section 106 agreements |
| | January 8th 2010 | Developer Agreement signed |
| | February 24th 2010 | End of judicial review period |
| | March 2010 | Start on site |
| | Spring 2012 | Centre completed |
| | Summer 2012 | Centre opens |

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 Members are asked to NOTE the progress on the Kent History and Library Centre and comment on the opportunities that will arise when it is completed.

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