

**To:** Communities Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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

**Date:** 11<sup>th</sup> November 2009

**Subject:** **The Kent History Centre**

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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## **Summary**

This report

- Summarises progress made to date on the Kent Library History Centre
- Summarises challenges and changes to the original programme and cost profile
- Outlines the current situation and revised timeline
- Provides information regarding resource implications

Members are asked to NOTE progress made

## **FOR INFORMATION**

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### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Kent Library and History Centre will provide a centre of excellence for the archive service, replacing the current centres at 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 UK were appointed as preferred contractor for the development of the Library and History Centre in December 2007, with a proposal to build the Library and History centre on James Whatman Way together with an enabling development of apartments on the same site.
- 1.4 Since the original appointment the residential property market and the general economy have both suffered a serious downturn and the anticipated receipts from the enabling development have been considerably reduced. This has led to a revision of the enabling

development and a delay to progress of the scheme. A revised timeline is included in this document.

## **2. Policy Context**

- 2.1 The Library and History 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.
- 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 Library History 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 centre will provide greater access to Kent's historical resources through a fully DDA accessible building, state of the art document search room and Community History areas. It will also provide access to both original documents and digital facsimiles. In addition the centre will have a robust digitisation programme that will widen access to documents through electronic means and enable the dissemination of digitised copies through the network of libraries and Community Archives across the county.
- 2.4 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 KCC officers have been working with the preferred developer Bouygues UK and their architects, Astudio, over the last eighteen months to refine the design of the centre and to finalise the details of the enabling developments on James Whatman Way and Springfield.
- 3.2 The original plans included residential accommodation of 66 private apartments and 44 affordable units wrapped around the library and history centre and a mixed residential development was also planned for the Springfield site.

- 3.3 Additional costs in 2010-11 and 2011-12 totalling £1.332m have been identified by the developers. This combined with reduced land values for James Whatman Way, has led to a pressure of £2.562m. Proposals for resolving this funding shortfall are now being developed.
- 3.4 The revised designs left the Library and History Centre largely unchanged but altered the make-up of the enabling development. This now comprises a block of extra care accommodation administered by Housing 21, and a development of affordable housing administered by West Kent Housing Association.
- 3.5 A full planning application for this revised development was submitted to Maidstone Borough Council in June 2009 and was approved by the MBC Planning Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2009. An outline planning application for a residential development including a community facility was approved at the same time for the Springfield site.
- 3.6 Heads of Terms and the Developer Agreement have been agreed and it is anticipated that the latter will be signed in 2010 assuming a successful outcome to the planning application and the judicial review period. Work could therefore begin on site in early 2010 with the centre opening in late 2011.
- 3.7 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.
- 3.8 Consultation has also taken place with current depositors over proposed changes to their archive storage arrangements.
- 3.9 KCC Officers are now in discussions with Bouygues UK and Astudio on the internal design and layout of the centre which comprises:
- 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
  - Modern search room for access to original documents
  - A modern up to date conservation studio
  - Community History room for access to local history material and digital copies of original documents
  - Public library with lending, information and children's area
  - Meeting room/training suite
  - Shop and refreshment area
  - Staff workroom and office space
  - Public and staff IT facilities throughout the building.
- 3.10 The centre is designed to be open and welcoming with all the public areas on the ground floor. Further consultation will take place with

users and non-users on the exact layout and the facilities to be provided.

#### **4. Revised timeline**

- 4.1 September 2009 - Developer Agreement agreed
- October 15<sup>th</sup> 2009 - Planning application approved by MBC Planning Committee
- January 15<sup>th</sup> 2010 - end of judicial review period
- Late January 2010 - signing of Developer Agreement
- February 2010 - start on site
- Autumn 2011 - centre opens

#### **5. Resource implications**

- 5.1 Paragraph 3.3 notes changing circumstances which have resulted in a gross funding gap of £2.562m, for which funding proposals are being finalised.

#### **6. Recommendations**

- 6.1 Members are asked to NOTE the progress on the Kent History Centre.

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