

CAMBRIDGE, MILTON ROAD COMMUNITY HUB

To: General Purposes Committee

Meeting Date: 28th July 2015

From: Michael Bond on behalf of Chesterton Community Association

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Chesterton Community Association is a registered charity set up to support community buildings and activities in East and West Chesterton. It has taken an active interest in the future of library services in Cambridge generally and in seeking an assured future for Milton Road Library in particular.
- 1.2 Milton Road Library is one of two libraries built in Cambridge in the 1930s broadly to the same design by the same builder. Rock Road was built on good ground and has an assured future with an active friends group and an increasingly popular community room.
- 1.3 Milton Road Library was not built on good ground and started to fail before the war and the massive buttresses against the rear wall were an emergency measure put in a few years after it opened. It appears that there is an underground water flow that affects Ascham Road and follows a line to the river and affects a number of houses along its route. Such flows are part of the geology of the alluvial plain and the developers of Elizabeth House on Chesterton High Street found themselves having to remove 800,000 gallons of water from their site a few months ago where no water had been expected.
- 1.4 Whilst the Community Association originally proposed a refurbishment and possible extension of the library building in Appendix 4 of its report on the City's libraries in 2010 (attached to this report) we now accept that on cost grounds alone the condition of the building makes this a non-starter.

2. Comments on the recommendations before you

- 2.1 We have not had sight of the appendices to your report but we have been involved in the Milton Road Library Hub working party so have an appreciation of many of the considerations that will have been discussed in those appendices.
- 2.2 *Do nothing – Cambridgeshire County Council maintains delivery from the existing library building;*
This is not a realistic option. The building is becoming increasingly expensive to maintain, does not meet current standards in terms of energy efficiency and its fundamental problems makes major repairs very expensive. This option is not supported by the Association.

- 2.3 *Market test – Cambridgeshire County Council reviews the parameters for delivering a viable and sustainable scheme for the provision of a new library and community building, procuring delivery of the scheme through part disposal (long leasehold) of the site on the open market;*

This pushes any change into the future and is unlikely to produce a solution that will satisfy residents of Ascham Road who are looking for a replacement in scale with the existing building. Any commercial developer coming in at this stage is likely to seek to maximise the potential of the site with little regard for local sensitivities. Recent market experience in Cambridge indicates that the accommodation is likely to be for students rather than permanent residents.

A variant of the above could be seriously considered with a lease at peppercorn to a community organisation such as Chesterton Community Association that would then take on the task of running the building and seeking funding for a permanent replacement that would not be dependent on a residential element to pay for it. Local authorities could make a contribution to the capital cost which would help to attract external funds. Such a project would also attract participation from professionals within the community and achieve a realisation of “The Big Society” in action here in Cambridge.

- 2.4 *Implement existing project – Cambridgeshire County Council enters into an agreement with the construction company currently providing advice to the project to deliver existing plans, on terms to be agreed by the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Chairman of General Purposes Committee;*

This is the ‘ready to go’ option that the Community Association would wish to see adopted and the one that attracted the grant offer from the City Council. A lot of work has already been done and as part of this option we suggest that the new premises be leased at peppercorn to a community organisation to run with the Library service as a core tenant and other ‘hub’ services also paying directly for their use as part of the operation. Members of the Community Association have been involved in the running of St. Andrew’s Hall in East Chesterton since its inception so have the knowledge to make a success of a new community building.

- 2.5 *Self-develop – Cambridgeshire County Council reviews the parameters for delivering a viable and sustainable scheme for the provision of a new library and community building, procuring planning, design and construction resources from the market, managing and funding the development by retaining revenue producing elements of the site.*

We have to question how this can possibly be considered given the pressures on County Council resources. If the answer is that it is capital spending rather than revenue so different rules apply then we suggest the capital is best spent on our suggested variant to recommendation (b).

Michael Bond
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Appendix 4.

Milton Road Library

8.8. Milton Road

The library is located in a purpose-built single storey building opened in 1937. It sits on the one mile radius from the Central Library and is approximately three quarters of a mile from Arbury Court Library. A Level 2 Library, the floor space is 211.11 sq metres spread over three main rooms: a large children's library, a reading room with computer terminals and the main adult collection. There is concern about possible subsidence but plans to investigate the structural issues and refurbish the library were postponed until after the Central Library had re-opened. Milton Road Library is open for 63 hours a week.

Kentwood Associates "A Strategic Review of the Library Archive & Information Service

Current hours: Library 29 hours

Status: Purpose built library currently owned by the County Council

Local Services: There is on street car parking only, the nearest buses are Citi1 serving the southern part of Milton Road and Citi4 serving part of Milton Road beyond its junction with Elizabeth Way. There are shops close to both bus stops but none really close to the library. Milton Road School has an entrance on Ascham Road, Chesterton Community College is at some distance in Gilbert Road. There is a meeting room at the adjacent St Laurence Catholic Church and some community use of the school but otherwise there is no community facility in this part of the City.

Users: The library is used by residents of Arbury, Castle, East and West Chesterton. It probably has the largest population of the five Cambridge local libraries within its catchment area.

Potential for development: The scope for development on this site is significant although it is recognised that the building is the second oldest and most neglected of the five and will need major work to make it more energy efficient. The rear wall is extensively buttressed indicating a significant problem in the past and there are steel tension rods apparent on the front of the building. I have been told that the structural problem first became apparent shortly after the library opened and it seems to be related to extremely friable soil conditions for which deep piling appears to be the only answer. It is noted that recent new buildings in Chesterton above two stories are all being deep piled.

However the size and proportions of the building indicate that a second floor might be added by raising the roof and inserting a level resting on its own piled foundation. This could remove stress from the existing walls and create an extensive area for other uses at a location where there is little in the way of community facilities outside the schools. In the past the Friends of Milton Road Library have suggested use of the open space between the library and Milton Road and this idea is well worth pursuing.