

COMMUNITY AND LEISURE SERVICES POLICY & SCRUTINY PANEL
CIVIC HALL, STOURPORT-ON-SEVERN
THURSDAY 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2004

PRESENT:

Councillors: B T Glass (Chairman), J Baker (Vice-Chairman), A J Buckley, Mrs P V Hayward, Mrs L Hyde, Mrs R L Lewis, Miss M A Mason, M J Shellie.

Observers:

Councillor N J Desmond, Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services
Councillor Mrs M B Aston, Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Rural Affairs
Councillor P Dyke
Councillor Mrs J Fairbrother-Millis
Councillor M B Kelly
Councillor J C Simmonds

CM.249 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R Wheway.

CM.250 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTES

There were no appointments of substitutes.

CM.251 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were made.

CM.252 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd July 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CM.253 VERBAL UPDATE ON LEISURE TOUR

Further to Minute 73 of the Panel's 22nd July 2004 meeting, the

Cultural Services Manager informed the Panel that the Leisure Tour had been well attended by Members who had taken the opportunity to visit the Leisure facilities within the District.

Several Members commented that they had found the Tour beneficial and hoped that it would be an annual event.

The Chairman thanked Members for their comments.

CM.254

POSSIBLE CONVERSION OF KIDDERMINSTER TOWN HALL TO AN ARTS CENTRE

Members considered a draft report from the Head of Cultural, Leisure and Commercial Services on the provision of Arts Facilities at Kidderminster Town Hall, which was due to be presented at the Cabinet meeting on 28th October 2004.

The Cultural Services Manager reiterated that the report was in draft form and this explained why the financial implications were not yet available.

She advised Members that a number of previous schemes and feasibility studies had been considered for the District, but none had resulted in firm proposals being adopted by the Council, due to the reduction in Arts Lottery capital funding and the prohibitive revenue and capital costs.

Members raised their general concerns about the lack of financial information.

Presentation – Possible conversion of Kidderminster Town Hall to an Arts Centre

The Chairman welcomed Mark Dorril, Architect from Glenn Howells Architects and Alun Bond, Consultant from Artservice and thanked them for attending to give a presentation to the Panel on the possible conversion of Kidderminster Town Hall to an Arts Centre.

Mr Bond advised the panel that his role was to advise the Council on the management, programme, operational and financial aspects of running the Town Hall as a modern arts and entertainment venue. The building was owned and run by the Council and would remain the responsibility of the Council, and the Council already had a revenue commitment to the building,

which would reduce the need for additional revenue expenditure.

He explained that the Town Hall was a landmark building favourably situated in the centre of Kidderminster in the existing 'heart' of the town and within close proximity of the new development at Weaver's Wharf.

The aim was to provide the District with a dedicated arts and entertainment facility comparable to those in other parts of the country. The Town Hall would provide a venue for a range of touring professional theatres, music, dance comedy and other live entertainment catering for a wide variety of tastes. The building needed significant investment to upgrade it and bring it into line with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

Mr Dorril thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to present the plans to the Panel. He explained that the key aim of the design scheme was not only to comply with the necessary DDA requirements, but also to improve the facilities to create a properly equipped venue for a variety of performances. The challenge was to adapt a building designed over 150 years ago to one that could meet present day technical standards.

Members noted that the current building had no wheelchair access from street level, a stairway that did not comply with building regulations, and four different floor levels on the first floor. There were no changing rooms, very little foyer space, and limited toilet provision.

Mr Dorril produced plans for the ground and first floors and went through these in detail. Members noted that the facilities for the proposed Arts Centre would include:

- Auditorium with retractable seating, capacity of approximately 400 seats, suitable for a flat floor; tiered seating, and cinema projection. The acoustics would be adjustable to suit all performing arts.
- A café/bistro, with an area outside the current Corn Exchange/Rehearsal/meeting/small performance area in the current King Charles Room.
- Box office, toilets, lift access and other ancillary facilities.

The Chairman thanked Mr Bond and Mr Dorril for their informative presentations, and invited questions and comments from the Panel.

Councillor Mrs R L Lewis left the meeting at this point (6.35 pm).

The following comments and observations were made.

- (a) A Member advised the Panel that he supported the project in principle, but wished to raise his ongoing concerns about the financial implications and asked for clarification on the matter.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that the financial implications would be considered in greater detail at a future time and that the Panel was just concerned with scrutinising the principles and concepts of the overall project.

- (b) A Member enquired whether there would still be car parking for dignitaries if the refurbishment plans were implemented. Mr Dorril confirmed that the current car parking for dignitaries would no longer be available.
- (c) In response to a query from a Member about the possible closure of the Town Hall during the refurbishment period, Mr Dorril confirmed that the whole building would be out of use for approximately 12 months. It would be more cost effective to close the whole building rather than particular sections. Mr Dorril also informed Members that the Council Chamber and Magistrates Court had not been incorporated into the refurbishment scheme at the present time.
- (d) A Member pointed out that the building was a traditional, well used and well liked venue as it currently stood and that changes to its interior design might not be appreciated. However he understood the problems associated with DDA requirements and that these needed to be considered and implemented in the near future.
- (e) A Member who had attended the meeting as an Observer congratulated Mr Dorril on his sensitive approach to the potential refurbishment of the Town Hall.

- (f) Members generally enthusiastically supported the project in principle, pending the outcome of the financial implications.
- (g) The Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services advised the Panel that the Cabinet, in principle, supported the possible conversion of the Town Hall to an Arts Centre, and was fully aware that there were financial implications involved. He assured Members that the Cabinet would be considering the financial aspects in detail before committing the Council to the venture.

AGREED:

- 1) **The draft report be noted and the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services take Members' comments back to the Cabinet particularly their concerns on the financial implications.**
- 2) **The Cabinet Member feed back to Panel Members once the Cabinet has considered the report on 28th October 2004.**

Councillor Miss Mason left the meeting at this point (6.45 pm).

CM.255

SKATEBOARDING

Members considered a briefing paper by the Head of Cultural, Leisure and Commercial Services on the provision of skateboarding within the District.

(a) **Mobile Skateboard Unit ('The Fun Box')**

Members were pleased to note that the mobile skateboard unit ('The Fun Box') had proved a popular alternative to fixed skate parks and was still in operation in the District.

Members were reminded that 'The Fun Box' had been purchased as a short term solution to skateboarding, and was transported around the District accordingly. At the time of its purchase it was anticipated that it would meet the demand until a permanent solution was agreed, as it was expensive and time consuming to move the equipment. A survey had originally been undertaken to identify 'priority' sites that would benefit from hosting the mobile skateboard

unit.

(b) Spennells

A Member informed the Panel that although Spennells play area adequately catered for children up to the age of 10 years, she felt that there was a general lack of facilities for older children, including provision of a skate park in the area. Members also considered a petition which had been referred to the Panel by Council at its meeting on 18th August 2004 (Minute CM 142(a) refers) requesting consideration of a skateboarding facility in the area.

She also informed Members of a makeshift BMX site next to 3 and 4 Morillion Court, which the Council could potentially lease and develop into a properly maintained track, if the funds were available.

(c) Skateboarding – general issues

Members noted that the Council's public liability insurance covered the Council's equipment and that the insurers were aware of the use of the equipment.

The Chairman suggested that the Panel might consider inviting outside organisations to present evidence to the review, as detailed in 'Potential Witnesses' in the briefing paper. A Member advised the Group that Stourport-on-Severn Town Centre Forum had undertaken some exploratory work into skateboarding within the area and that the Chairman of the Forum, Derek Fradgley, might like to attend a future meeting to give his views.

The Vice Chairman proposed and Members agreed that a Task and Finish Group be formed to further investigate skateboarding within the District.

AGREED:

- 1. A Task and Finish Group comprising the following Members be established to scrutinise skateboarding: Councillors Mrs Maureen Aston, Mrs Jill Fairbrother-Millis, Mrs P V Hayward, M J Shellie and J C Simmonds.**

2. Councillor M J Shellie to chair the aforementioned Task and Finish Group.
3. Members of the Task and Finish Group meet with the Cultural Services Manager, the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services and representatives from relevant outside organisations.
4. The Task and Finish Group report its findings to the Panel on 11th November 2004.

Councillors Peter Dyke and Mrs J Fairbrother-Millis left the meeting at this point (7.25 pm).

CM.256

WORK PROGRAMME

Members studied the forthcoming Work Programme and noted a number of issues that needed to be prioritised and incorporated into the Work Programme.

AGREED:

1. At the meeting on 11th November 2004, a presentation be made to the Panel from the Community Development Section outlining the Section's responsibilities.
2. The following additional items to be included in the Panel's Work Programme for its meeting on 6th January 2005, subject to time availability:
 - i) Cinema provision within the District;
 - ii) A strategic review of the District's play facilities by all providers;
 - iii) Funding of street wardens.

The meeting ended at 7.40 p.m.

