

REPORT TO: CABINET 9th November 2009

**REPORT BY: Head of Culture
Acting Head of Asset Management Service**

WRITTEN BY: Stephen Baily / Mike Arthur

**REPORT TITLE: NEW SOUTHSEA LIBRARY, CULTURAL CENTRE AND
CONTACT CENTRE**

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the opportunity for the acquisition of the Woolworths store in Southsea and its potential for conversion into a library with contact point and café.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That members consider the opportunity described.

2.2 That the City Council authorises the Acting Head of Asset Management Services to proceed with negotiations for the acquisition of the former Woolworths site.

2.3 That should these negotiations be successful the Acting Head of Asset Management Services will bring back any proposal to the Cabinet for approval to proceed.

2.4 The Acting Head of Asset Management is authorised to proceed with the design development of the project through feasibility and to bring back a scheme for approval for the refurbishment of the former Woolworths Store.

2.5 The costs of a conceptual design development and feasibility works for the former Woolworths Store in the sum of £30,000 be funded from the feasibility studies budget contained within the Resources Portfolio cash limit.

2.6 If a retail bidder for the former Woolworths site makes a formal offer then the City Council reconsiders its intent to acquire the site.

3. Leisure Services Assessment

Introduction

The availability of the Woolworths site in Southsea offers a unique opportunity for the Library Service to re-locate its south of the city library into the heart of Southsea within the retail centre. The site provides scope to extend the current library offer and broaden

the range of services to existing users and all members of the community who live in or visit the area. This will enhance use of library services in terms of visits and library issues in line with business plan aims and the recommendations of the Library Development Report 2009. This report also identified the existing Elm Grove Library as a service poorly sited in terms of serving the Southsea community and recommended relocation to the Palmerston Road area.

Elm Grove Library

The Library Development Report building audit included the following extract in respect of the existing Elm Grove Library:

“The building does not lend itself to further adaptation and the nature of the surrounding area is increasingly residential. It is not an area where the community naturally gather, although there are shops in easy walking distance in both directions. Parking in the area is difficult. The building lacks space to easily develop a public access toilet and baby changing facility and there is ongoing negotiation regarding the creation and use of a garden area at the back of the site. Wall shelving is fixed and lacks flexibility and the counter is in very poor condition with wall pillars restrict visibility”

The report concluded with a recommendation to consider relocating to the Palmerston Road area if a suitable site were to become available.

Library services delivered by the Southsea Library

The Library Service would seek to deliver the following services and facilities from the ground floor of the Woolworths site in Palmerston Road:

- All library services offered in the existing Elm Grove Library i.e. lending books, audio books, music and film, for all ages, abilities and cultures. Enquiry and information services and Peoples Network IT.
- Self issue facilities to extend the hours of access
- An IT Learning Zone with white board facilities. This would be a flexible suite offering enabling technology to facilitate use by individuals with a range of disabilities.
- A community space to enable the building to become a focus for activity by local groups liaising with the library service. I.e. Reading groups, parent and toddler story times and Rhymetimes, school class visits, cultural groups, evening meetings and talks and adult learning sessions.
- Disability library services to be relocated to this site capitalising on the IT Learning Zone as a focus for activity.
- Housebound volunteer activity to be relocated to this site capitalising on good pedestrian access from the precinct at the front of the building and excellent facilities for loading at the rear.
- An enhanced offer of One2One IT sessions, and workshops targeting the use of specific on-line resources for interest groups.
- WIFI to enable Broadband access for private laptops anywhere in the building.

Aims

- Increase library visits and issues
- Increase participation and learning by individuals with disabilities

- Increase opportunities for formal and informal learning in the Southsea area.
- Increase participation in all aspects of Information Technology
- Enhance partnership working
- Increase community engagement and cultural participation
- Increase the profile of library volunteering and the opportunities for training, support and participation
- Support the Southsea economy and local retailers through attracting library users, learners and volunteers to the locality.

The Access Strategy feasibility work identified inequities in frontline service provision for different parts of the City and in particular this part of Southsea. It was identified as an area lacking a locally accessible access point. It is intended that provision will be made for customers to both self-serve and have direct contact with staff who will be able to deal with the full range of services currently available through the City Helpdesk.

Specifications and requirements

In terms of library space, the service would seek a minimum of 400 square meters for a library space and a further 30 square meters for an IT Learning Zone. It is vital that the library offer is clearly visible and promoted in the window area opening out onto the shopping precinct.

However it is recommended that the space occupied by the café, information services and the library be integrated, allowing users to move freely through the whole space, with no delineated barriers. Libraries would seek to offer, newspapers, magazines and “Quick Choice” displays within the café area along with quick use PC’s for checking email. They would also seek to work with the Information Service supporting the offer with library stock and leaflets.

To prevent the introduction of unnecessary barriers, the library service would avoid the installation of a traditional library counter. Services would be delivered from a low enquiry desk and self-issue facilities would be available at the front and rear of the space to retaining access through the building. This would maximise the advantage and potential for engaging “passing trade” created by the “walk through” between the precinct and Waitrose supermarket and car park at the rear, which would be to the benefit all partners.

The only exception to the principle of open access should be the IT Learning Zone, located to the side of the direct walk through and potentially in the darker area near the back of the building. This would benefit from a glass partition to reduce noise levels during taught sessions. Toilets to include disabled use and baby changing should also be located towards the rear of the building.

It is recommended that if the future plans for the building is to include public access to the first floor, and then a public staircase and public access lift need to be put in place as part of the initial ground floor refurbishments. This would prevent subsequent disruption to established ground floor services at such time as the first floor is developed. The current staircase and goods lift are acceptable for staff use but not fit for purpose in terms of public access. The area under a public access staircase could

usefully be designated for the parking and storage of children's buggies. For libraries, space for buggy parking is frequently an issue at early years events and this measure would avoid the blocking of access routes through the building.

Conclusion

In conclusion the availability of the Woolworths site presents an opportunity for the Library Service, to occupy a site in the retail heart of Southsea which is unlikely to occur again. The opportunity would enable the service to enhance participation in learning, community engagement and cultural activities.

4. Design and Construction

An outline scheme has been developed which demonstrates that a library with contact point and café can be accommodated on the ground floor of the Woolworth's store.

Such refurbishment works could be completed by the second half of 2010, dependant on when possession of the building can be achieved.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 An equality impact assessment will be carried out for this proposal.

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Acting Head of Asset Management Service

Background Papers – none

The recommendations set out above were approved/approved as amended/deferred/rejected by the Cabinet on.....

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Leader of the Council



17th November 2009

We the undersigned wish to call in
the cabinet decision taken 9th November
in respect of item 10 concerning a library,
Cultural Centre and Contact Centre.

[Signature]

[Signature] D Jones

[Signature]

S. BOWEN

[Signature]

[Signature] M. KEY

[Signature]

[Signature] F. JONES

Rec'd
9.15
18/11/09