

JOINT MEETING OF BRIERLEY HILL AND STOURBRIDGE AREA COMMITTEES

Tuesday, 29th September, 2009, at 7.00 p.m.
at the Brier School, Bromley Lane, Kingswinford

PRESENT:-

BRIERLEY HILL AREA COMMITTEE

Councillor Mrs Greenaway (Vice-Chairman) (In the Chair)
Councillors D Blood, Mrs E Blood, Ms Boleyn, Foster, Ms Harris, Mrs Jordan, Miller, Nottingham, Southall, Tyler and Mrs M Wilson.

STOURBRIDGE AREA COMMITTEE

Councillors Adams, Attwood, Banks, Barlow, Mrs Cowell, Hanif, Jones, Lowe, Mrs Rogers and Mrs Walker, and Mr Downing Co-opted Member of Stourbridge Area Committee.

Officers

Assistant Director of Culture and Leisure, Head of Museums, Greenspace and Bereavement Services, (Both Directorate of the Urban Environment), Mr T Holder, Solicitor and Miss K Fellows (Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources).

Also in attendance

Councillors Stanley and K Turner and Mr P Middleton, Director of L&R Consulting Limited together with two colleagues.

together with Forty members of the public.

29. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs D Harley, P Harley, Islam, Knowles, Mrs P Martin, A Turner, C Wilson and members of the Stourbridge Township Council.

30. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No Member made a Declaration of Interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

31. BRIEF INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman outlined the proceedings for the meeting, stating that there would be a presentation by L&R Consulting Limited, in relation to stage one of the glass feasibility study, which would be followed by feedback from both the public and Members.

32. PRESENTATION BY L&R CONSULTING AS PART OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS ON THE REVIEW OF THE MUSEUMS SERVICE.

Mr P Middleton, Director of L&R Consulting Limited, and his two colleagues gave a power point presentation on stage one of the Glass Feasibility Study.

He advised that the proposition that L&R Consulting Limited were testing was whether relocating the collection from Broadfield House to the Red House Glass Cone could lead to an improved visitor attraction; a better heritage asset, and a facility of sufficient stature to celebrate the internationally renowned glass collection.

Mr Middleton summarised the results of the on line questionnaire relating to the feasibility study, advising of the concerns expressed through the consultation period including that investments should be made in Broadfield House and the industrial perception of the Red House Glass Cone; that the glass should be moved to a less industrial setting and the possibility of glass remaining in storage thus restricting accessibility to the Borough's glass collection.

Particular reference was made to the frequency of glass heritage visitors indicated in a table headed Performance Market Audiences being visually displayed; the weaknesses of Broadfield House, as a venue for the glass collection; the key possible priorities for the glass collection which included increasing accessibility to and displaying more of the glass collection; the benefits of bringing the glass collections together and the increased revenue burden for the Council.

The analysis of the existing buildings was referred to and maps showing internal visual and aerial views of both Broadfield House and the Red House Glass Cone were displayed and particular reference was made to the ground floor analysis, storage facilities and the level of space for exhibiting.

The three Red House Glass Cone development options referred to were elaborated upon. It was indicated that option one would result in remaining within the existing leased space at the Red House Glass Cone, which would be sufficient to house the Broadfield House glass collection, however the Himley Hall archived glass would remain; option two would involve the

adaptation and refurbishment of the development including the Stuart Crystal building which would include retail space and would include facilities to provide for education, administration and archiving, maximising the space at first floor level providing further craft work shop units, however this would be dependent upon the Council acquiring the Stuart Crystal buildings. Option three would be similar to option two but would include, further work being undertaken with planning, conservation and archaeology officers.

In relation to the Red House Glass Cone it was advocated that the building should be re-organised in order to provide more space, with the upper floors being utilised for display and storage, and to create the gallery spaces required. The installation of stairs and lifts to raise visitors up to the first floor was referred to, together with opening up the courtyard area and linking in the adjacent canal network.

The second stage of the feasibility study was referred to when it was stated that traffic assessments would be required to address issues relating to highway networks surrounding the Red House Glass Cone.

It was reported that option one would be a compromise solution, with more detailed work being required in order to maximise the current space at the Red House Glass Cone; option two would accommodate the Council's brief and option three would meet the full brief and provided more beyond this.

In relation to development option costs it was stated that in broad terms these would be between £3 and £5 million depended upon the option chosen which excluded maintenance work which the Council would be responsible for.

In respect of funding, it was indicated that this could be acquired from the Council's Capital Programme, the Heritage Lottery Fund; Advantage West Midlands; Trusts and Foundations and Benefactors and Sponsors. It was noted however that lottery grants comprising of £1 million or more would be few, and obtaining funding from Trusts and Foundations would be difficult given increasing demand. In view of challenging times the sponsorship environment would also be difficult.

It was stated that, from provisional conclusions, it was believed that the Red House Glass Cone could facilitate the glass collection and there would be no reason why access and mobility problems could not be dealt with, with interpretation of glass collections being improved by the re-ordering of visitor routes, although it was accepted that car parking would need to be addressed.

It was stated that there would be challenges with the floor space at the Red House Glass Cone as this was long and narrow at present, and further investment and research in relation to the industrial heritage of the site could mean a design challenge with funding being a significant issue.

It was noted that the completed Stage one report which would include feedback and discussion from this meeting would now be presented to Cabinet on 9th December, 2009, and should the Council wish to proceed to Stage two of the Feasibility Study, it would be recommended that it should be supported by a Stakeholder Group embracing the key Glass Quarter partners and wider glass heritage interests in order to ensure development of proposals for the site.

It was further noted that the presentation would be available to download from the Council's website shortly.

33. QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND ELECTED MEMBERS

Arising from the presentation given a number of questions, comments and responses were then made and given in particular referring to the following issues:-

- That Broadfield House contained the best glass collection in the world housing a state of the art exhibition and disagreement that the Red House Glass Cone would be the most appropriate site for the Borough's glass collection;
- That Broadfield House should not be closed until a new site had been built and funded, with a request that the threat of closure should be lifted;
- Had there been an extensive study of the Red House Glass Cone buildings? – In response it was indicated that the Council would be commissioning further building surveys should they proceed to Stage 2 of the project;
- The cost implications of the development options and the possible impact upon ratepayers? – In response it was stated that the feasibility study process had been commenced in order to assess the viability of the Red House Glass Cone housing the glass collection and if it were not viable no building costs would be incurred. It was indicated that further detailed work would be completed at stage two of the feasibility study, and Cabinet would decide whether the feasibility study should progress to the second stage;
- The costs of implementing any of the options indicated outweighing the saving the Council would make by closing Broadfield House and utilising £3 to £5 million to build a new purpose built museum? – In response it was indicated that the Council must determine whether the investment referred to could be financed and, should the glass collection be moved, the Council would eventually dispose of Broadfield House for the best consideration possible;

- That should the Red House Glass Cone house the Broadfield House glass collection this would not resolve traffic problems at the Red House Glass Cone; that development option three may not be possible in view of new consultative documentation relating to views and vistas, which would affect the proposal to erect a second storey on the Stuart Crystal building; that the Council should work with the glass quarter and the people and organisations involved to help raise funds and that Council officers were failing to communicate with staff at Broadfield House in relation to possible closure? – In response it was stated that the Red House Glass Cone was a heritage site and would be protected against inappropriate development; that Broadfield House would not close should the proposals to re-house the glass collection at the Red House Glass Cone not be viable and the staff would be advised of the closure process as and when this became necessary;
- In responding to a question relating to economic viability, it was confirmed that the economic viability of moving the glass collection would be considered as part of Stage 2 of the Feasibility Study;
- Had the Council considered the possibility of extending Broadfield House, and promoting and marketing the facility to attract more visitors? – In response it was indicated that this had not been considered, however should it not be viable to move the glass collection, the Council would need to address the question of how the glass should be displayed in the future. It was further stated that the glass was moved to Broadfield House on a temporary basis, from Mary Stevens Park, as the building had never been considered to be suitable as a glass museum;
- In responding to a question relating to the cost to purchase the Stuart Crystal buildings it was indicated that this was commercially sensitive information, as the receiver was currently considering the bids made for the buildings;
- What was the term of the current lease in relation to the Red House Glass Cone? – In response it was stated that the term of the Lease was ninety nine years from 2001;
- Should the Council's bid for the Stuart Crystal Buildings be unsuccessful, would the Council continue with option one outlined above, utilising the space already available at the Red House Glass Cone to house the Borough's glass collection? – In response it was indicated that this would be a decision to make in the future and further consideration of this matter would take place following the meeting of Cabinet on 9th December, 2009;
- There was a suggestion that the parking issues surrounding the Red House Glass Cone should be prioritised and addressed prior to any decision relating to the proposed development options;

- A comment that the feasibility study was too narrow and biased and the Broadfield House site should be considered first together with the cost of updating that venue – in response it was stated that the original process had been commenced in order to consider provision of a better facility, taking advantage of the sites that the Council had in order to improve the museum service, which would make a greater visitor attraction and bringing the collection to a wider audience;
- It was commented that glass should be viewed through natural light and not through artificial lighting which would be the case at the Red House Glass Cone;
- Suggestions that Broadfield House should be enhanced together with improvements to ensure access to the building;
- In the event that the Council were unable to obtain funding in order to achieve the recommendations of the feasibility study, assurances were requested that parts of the glass collection would not be moved to other museums to save storage costs? – In response it was stated that should the feasibility study conclude that there were no viable options to re-house the glass collection that this would remain at Broadfield House, until a viable alternative had been found;
- An assurance was requested that whatever the decision of the Council the maximum amount of the Borough's glass would be displayed to all residents despite their disabilities? – In response this was confirmed.

At the conclusion of questions asked by members of the public, members of the Committee then raised a number of points and made comments, with particular reference to the following: -

- Concerns that the Council were not the best organisation to manage an international glass museum, and a suggestion that the glass should be put into trust, in order to preserve this with the Council sharing a place on the Broad of the trust? – In response the Capital Strategy Report that was presented to members of the Cabinet in 2006 was referred to, and it was stated that this had been discussed at the Select Committee for Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education, when it had been agreed that a feasibility study would be undertaken to address creating a single iconic Museum and Tourism facility and had subsequently been referred to in other Capital Strategy Reports with no member commenting upon this;
- A suggestion that all interested local groups should be consulted in order to protect the Borough's glass collection for future generations – In response it was stated that the Council had consulted with all interested parties thus far and would continue to do so;

- Concerns were raised in relation to the possibility of losing funding from the Council's culture and leisure department, which would impact upon continuing maintenance of the glass museums and the Council may struggle to maintain Broadfield House? – In response the statement made was agreed. It was indicated that the Council had to maintain essential services first and foremost, however it could reduce its overheads as the Council were currently maintaining two sites instead of one;
- In responding to a question in relation to the market price of the Stuart Crystal Buildings it was stated that this was not known, as the Company had been wound up and the receiver was currently receiving bids upon the property. It was confirmed that the Council had made a bid for the buildings;
- Concerns were raised in relation to the issues surrounding the Red House Glass Cone site, indicating that this was an historical site and required capital investment;
- In responding to a question in relation to problems with the highways surrounding the Red House Glass Cone it was confirmed that should the feasibility study proceed to stage two, highway problems would be considered in conjunction with traffic engineers at that stage;
- A suggestion that the Red House Glass Cone site be turned into a marketable commodity and that changing the layout of the site would bring regeneration into the Brierley Hill Ward;
- Concerns were raised in relation to the potential visitors at the Red House Glass Cone impacting upon parking problems should one of the development options be chosen for the site, with no nearby sites being available to provide parking facilities – In response it was stated that issues surrounding parking would be considered at stage two of the glass feasibility study;
- A recommendation that a new purpose built glass museum should be constructed – In response it was stated that the cost of constructing a new purpose built museum would outweigh those costs that may be incurred to implement the development options outlined;
- A recommendation that the Council should be working with partners in order to find a solution to house the Borough's glass collection and to fund the new museum – In response it was stated that partners had been consulted in relation to the feasibility study process, and funding would be considered at stage two of the feasibility study;
- A comment that in view of the current financial climate it would not be possible to fund the construction of a new purpose built museum to house the Borough's glass;

- A comment that all present had a vested interest to retain and improve the Borough's glass collection.
- A Member thanked the Deputy Leader of the Council for his full and frank responses to both members of the Public and elected Members during the meeting.

RESOLVED

That the comments made at this meeting be included and considered as part of stage one of the glass feasibility study in respect of the review of the museums service.

The meeting ended at 9.15 p.m.

CHAIRMAN