

Meeting of the Cabinet – 22nd September 2010

Report of the Director of the Urban Environment

Glass Museum Feasibility Study

Purpose of Report

1. To advise Cabinet of the findings from further work undertaken as part of the Glass Museum Feasibility Study.

Background

2. Members will recall that the Council undertook a feasibility study conducted to test the proposition of whether it was possible to amalgamate the services provided by the Red House Glass Cone and Broadfield House Glass Museum, thereby creating an improved visitor attraction and heritage asset of sufficient stature to celebrate the Borough's international renowned position as a centre of Glass making excellence.
3. This aspiration was reaffirmed at the meeting of Council on 12 September 2009 where it was resolved to:
 - Source external funding to support a partnership plan for the museum.
 - Establish a joint working party involving representatives of all political groups on the Council.
 - Consider how this project could integrate other facets of our history such as the canal network, to establish a first class visitor attraction.
 - Fully engage local experts, glass enthusiasts and other interested parties that have an invaluable insight into our glass collection, for example 'The Friends' and historical groups.
 - Determine that all profits from any land or property disposal be ring-fenced for the establishment of the said Museum.
4. L & R Consulting, supported by Brock Carmichael Architects and Headland Design Associates undertook an initial assessment of the potential for such a development based at the Red House Glass Cone and their findings were reported to Cabinet on 9 December 2009.
5. Specifically the initial study involved an analysis of the spaces within three existing buildings, namely; Broadfield House, Red House Glass Cone and

Himley Hall, to identify the current level of provision for museum functions and allow assessment of the overall spatial requirements to amalgamate facilities at the Red House glass Cone.

6. Alongside this the Consultants engaged with a wide variety of interested parties, individuals and representatives of interest groups (such as the Friends of Broadfield House) and the Council's staff based at the two sites through face to face meetings and phone discussions. In addition they attended two Special Joint Area Committee meetings during the study and ran an on line survey posted on the Council's web site.
7. The study identified three possible options for the Council's consideration:-

Option A:

Reconfiguration and development of the accommodation within the existing leased area at Red House Glass Cone.

It was felt that this would be a compromise solution, would be cramped and would eliminate the current provision of craft workspace.

Option B:

Development of the buildings within the current leased area PLUS adaptation and refurbishment of the former Stuart Crystal shop, tearoom, associated stores and accommodation which is currently for sale.

It was felt that this option would meet the client's accommodation brief but is subject to the Council acquiring the additional areas.

Option C:

As Option B but replacing the former Stuart Crystal shop, with a new two storey building.

It was felt that this option would meet the client's accommodation brief and provide the greatest level of accommodation and flexibility for current and future demands, albeit the most expensive option, and allow for the accommodation of the current off site glass store. This option is also subject to the Council acquiring the additional areas.

8. Detailed costings of these Options was not specified as part of the initial part of the study but it was estimated that Options A – C would be in the order of £3 – 5m to deliver and in the current economic and funding climate all would be difficult to achieve.
9. Cabinet resolved that should the Council's bid to purchase the freehold of the Red House Glass Cone site be successful, the consultants be asked to progress on to Stage 2 of the study, involving detailed designs, interpretation

and management plans, costs and funding strategy, for Option B as detailed above.

10. The current position is that the council are the successful bidder for the freehold of the Red House site but the sale has not yet been finalised due to delays on the vendor's side. However, this should be resolved in the near future and the council's acquisition of the site's freehold will follow in due course.
11. In the interim period whilst the sale of the site has been progressed a further opportunity has arisen and the Council has taken advantage of this opportunity and pursued it further.
12. An approach was made to the Council earlier this year, by a third party being the owners of the former Stuart Crystal site (White House Cone site) which is opposite the Red House Glass Cone site, to investigate whether there was an opportunity to utilise part of the White House Cone site to create the improved museum facility.
13. The owners of the White House Cone site had produced some indicative drawings, sketch plans and costs within an outline proposal entitled 'Wordsley Museum of Glass'. The Council instructed L & R Consulting to evaluate them and advise on their feasibility, to reassess the existing Stage 1 recommendations for the Red House Cone in light of the potential impact that the alternative site could have on these plans and advise on modifications to those plans as necessary, and to provide a summary report with a recommended option to pursue further.
14. There are a number of positive aspects that the White House Cone option could bring in terms of the Council's overall regeneration and cultural aspirations for the area and the Museums Service, but that needs to be considered against it being a more difficult project to deliver than the Red House Cone site alone given land ownership and external funding complexities.
15. Indicative design drawings have identified the potential gallery/display space on the White House site that would be both suitable and sufficient to house items from the Borough's glass collection with the ability to release space on the Red House site for other uses eg Craft Units, Shop etc.,
16. This option could also provide additional car parking and starter units on the White House site with the potential to re-locate both reception and catering functions with a better visitor flow between the sites. Critical to the success of the option would be the creation of a tunnel access between the sites under the main road.
17. There are several critical aspects to making the White House/Red House option viable, not least the requirement to work closely with the site owners to deliver successful funding applications to the various agencies that could fund different elements of the overall project.

18. Initially this will require an outline European Regional Development Funding submission to be made by the White House site owners. This would be done on an 'at risk' basis by the site owners but in due course if the application progresses there will be a need for the Council to sign up and support the overall proposal.
19. At this juncture it is not easy to state categorically the exact financial implications of this project to the Council or to directly compare them with the indicative costs of the Options for the Red House Cone site previously disclosed.
20. Some outline costings of the project and potential funding options have been provided by L & R Consulting but these require significant additional work to both confirm the accuracy of the costs and the potential means by which a funding strategy could be put together.
21. In summary L & R Consulting assessment of this option in comparison with the previous assessment of the Red House Cone option is as follows:-

Combining the Red House and White House sites has a number of advantages:

- The nature of the White House buildings is such that they have spaces better suited (by virtue of their size and shape)
- The White House site has a number of interesting heritage features such as tunnel areas that could add to the interpretive offer overall.
- The combined site might stand a better chance of attracting external funding from HLF, though this is an untested supposition at this stage and opens up the possibility of ERDF grant support that would probably not be available for the Red House Cone options.
- The availability of additional space at White House Cone means that there would be space at Red House cone freed up for other uses.
- The nature of the accommodation at White House Cone would make a phased scheme possible.

Equally there are a number of issues and implications arising from this option:

- In L & R's view it is only feasible if the two sites can be connected by a fully accessible under-road pedestrian tunnel so that the combined site can be managed within one visitor perimeter.
- The existing craft etc., workspaces at Red House Cone would need to be relocated either to part of the White House site or to an alternative location within the Red House Cone site.
- The combined site scheme would still have a substantial and challenging funding requirement.
- The Council would need to enter into a development and funding partnership with the White House Cone site owner.

22. The purpose of this exercise has been to provide an alternative Glass Museum development option for consideration by the Council over and above that presented to Cabinet on 9 December 2009 and to consider which option to proceed on to Stage 2 of the feasibility study with.
23. For present purposes it is suggested that the Council works with the owners of the White House Cone site to take that option forward given that this approach does not prevent the Council from reverting to the Red House cone only development option should circumstances dictate that the White House option no longer be a viable proposition.

Finance

24. The costs of the Glass Museum Feasibility study are to be found from resources held by the Directorate of the Urban Environment.
25. As detailed in paragraph 20 above, there is significant further work required in order to confirm both the costs and potential funding sources for the White House Cone project. Therefore, at this stage it is not possible to quantify with any certainty the potential financial implications to the Council of the proposed scheme.

Law

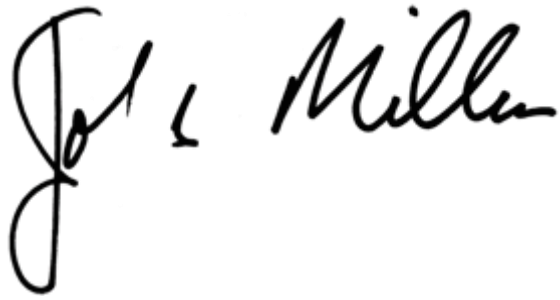
26. Section 2 of the Local government act 1980 enables the Council to do anything which is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social and environmental well being of the area.
27. The Council provides museums under the provisions of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

Equality Impact

28. The proposals within this report comply with the council's policy on equality and diversity.

Recommendations

29. That Cabinet notes the content of this report.
30. That Cabinet authorises officers to continue detailed feasibility and business planning work with regards to the White House Cone option.
31. That Cabinet requests that a further report be submitted to Cabinet on completion of this work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J.B. Millar". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J" and "M".

J.B. MILLAR
Director of the Urban Environment

Contact Officer: Duncan Lowndes,
Assistance Director Culture & Leisure
duncan.lowndes@dudley.gov.uk

List of Background Papers