

**Cabinet - 12<sup>th</sup> September 2007**

**Report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services**

**Dudley Archives and Local History Service relocation**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To propose to Cabinet plans for the relocation of Dudley Archives and Local History Service on or near the Black Country Living Museum (BCLM) through the development of a partnership with Sandwell and the BCLM. This will fulfil a longstanding ambition for an archive located at an historic Black Country site, which celebrates the Heritage of the Black Country.

**Background**

2. Archives hold the printed and written history including council, commercial, public service and family records for an area which bring history to life for everyone. The Dudley Archives holds records including an 1182 papal bull, a 1559 Parish Register containing a fine pen and ink drawing of Elizabeth I, the order book for the Titanic anchor made by Noah Hingley's works, Capability Brown landscape designs for Himley Hall, and the glass pattern archives of the firms of Richardson and Webb at Wordsley and Stourbridge. Future arrangements will need to manage the collection better and accommodate the high level of interest in personal, family and local history.
3. Dudley Archives and Local History Service has to move from its present location at Mount Pleasant School in Coseley. Mount Pleasant is too small for the required future expansion of the storage capacity of the service and can provide safe storage for the conservation of records for only a limited time.
4. In response to increasing pressures to identify a better site, with more space, the decision to relocate the Archives and Local History Service was initially made by the Lead Member for Education and Lifelong Learning acting under his delegated powers on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2004: *'to confirm that negotiations can be undertaken by the DGfL Contracts Manager to acquire 'C' block at Summerhill School on behalf of the Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning with the intention of relocating the Archive and Local History Service from its current site at Coseley to 'C' Block.'*
5. The decision was called in by the Select Committee on Culture and Recreation. Their report was submitted to the Council Executive on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2004 who resolved: *'that the relocation of the archives and local history service to 'C' block at the Summerhill School, Kingswinford, be approved , subject to the conditions referred to in Section 1 of the report submitted to the meeting'.*

Section 1 of the report states that the relocation is subject to *'satisfactory financial negotiations, (and) technical investigations'*.

## Initial feasibility Study

6. Children's Services (then the Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning [DELL]) commissioned an initial feasibility study for the relocation of the Borough Archive to Block C Summerhill School in March 2005. This was a preliminary study with a brief to refurbish Block C at minimal cost. The study indicated that minimal refurbishment would cost in the order of £700,000 as at March 2005, exclusive of fees. At current prices this inflates to around £1m (including fees) but excluding any removal costs from the existing archive. The study demonstrated that C Block at Summerhill would only provide the same amount of space for the archives as is available at the current site.

## The standards required for licensed Archives Services

7. Since the original decision to move the archives was made, the monitoring processes for the standards it is expected to meet have been tightened by The National Archives who licence the service. This is to help ensure nationally historic documents are preserved for years to come. The National Archives were consulted on the results of the first feasibility study which was that they *'have reservations about the current plans for the conversion of the former drama block at Summerhill School, since we are doubtful that it can be adapted to produce BS 5454 compliant storage. We believe that it would be more appropriate to add a purpose-built storage block onto the present building'*.
8. This has resulted in a change in the specification for the new location to ensure that Dudley Council develops an archives and local history service fit for the 21st century. This will include the new location for the archive service the following requirements:

### *BS5454:2000 'Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents'*

- Constant temperature of 16-19<sup>0</sup>C and 45-60% humidity
- Environmental control should be achieved by a building of robust building construction that gives high thermal inertia and high hygroscopic buffering.
- Free standing building or capable of being isolated.
- Should have 4 hour fire resistance.
- Should provide 15 to 20 years accrual.

### *The National Archives: Standard for Record Repositories, 2004*

- Temperature and humidity outside the recommended ranges and with adverse effects to the records is not acceptable.
- Repositories whose governing bodies have adopted The National Archives Standard and meets its requirements in all essential elements will be eligible for full TNA approval
- Those repositories that do not meet the requirements may not be authorised to hold classes of records with statutory requirements.

### *The National Archives: Planning a new record repository, 2004*

- The safety and well-being of the records are of the first importance
- The convenience of the location of staff and public should also be a priority

## 2006 Feasibility Study

9. Following the Council's re-structure in 2006 Libraries and Archive Services was relocated within the newly formed Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services (DACHS). The responsibility for relocation of the Archive from Coseley to Summerhill therefore transferred to DACHS. During this transitional period Children's Services/DELL commissioned a further feasibility study due to the change in the specification for the relocation.
10. DACHS specified various build options for the archive and the revised feasibility study in October 2006 provided sketch proposals for these various build options together with provisional costs. This demonstrated that the C Block site would need to include the addition of a storage block to meet BS5454. This second feasibility study also included proposals and costs for a new build on the same site.

Comparisons of the costs for refurbishment with additional storage at C block, against the demolition and rebuild option demonstrated that demolition and rebuild has significant benefits over a refurbishment over the lifetime of the building.
11. The Senior Planning Officer has been consulted on the plans for the Summerhill C block site. From a planning policy perspective an extension to C block to provide a new Dudley Archives Centre at this location would be resisted as it contrary to both Green Belt policy and Policy CR9 Edge-of Centre and Out-of-Centre Development in the Adopted Dudley Unitary Development Plan which seeks to ensure that uses such as an Archives Centre are developed in locations accessible by a choice of travel modes.

#### Revised plans for the provision of a modern archive service for Dudley

12. The partners have been working to develop feasible alternative options for the provision of modern archive services for Dudley, Sandwell and the Black Country Living Museum.
13. As a result of this work there has been agreement in principle with Sandwell MBC and the Black Country Living Museum to develop a project that will:
  - Provide an archive service for Dudley fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
  - Provide a joint facility with Sandwell MBC to compliment the provision of their proposed new archives office in West Bromwich
  - Allow the development of and improve access to the Black Country Living Museum archives.
  - Ensure partnership working to translate the Strategic vision in the Black Country Study into a nationally acclaimed archive service rooted within the Black Country.
  - Continue to develop the existing partnership work of the Black Country Archives Services in providing joint access to archives resources online and the sharing of expertise. (Wolverhampton and Walsall are currently exploring their own building solutions).
  - Provide conservation facilities for the partners, which do not currently exist.
  - Meet the requirements of The National Archives for all three services

14. The proposed partners have had initial meetings to discuss the potential location for this service and have identified potential sites on and around the Black Country Living Museum site which is in close proximity to Dudley Town Centre.
15. An initial assessment has been undertaken of those alternative sites and the Planning Policy team have identified a number of the alternatives that would, in principle, be acceptable for the relocation of the Archives centre.
16. A site close to Dudley Town Centre will complement the vision for the town as a heritage and tourism attraction in accordance with the Adopted Dudley Unitary Development Plan and Dudley Area Development Framework (adopted by the Council as supplementary planning guidance in December 2005).
17. The National Archive will have to be consulted throughout the development of the plans for the new service. Next Steps
18. The partnership will need to be formally established but initially it has been agreed that Dudley would be the lead authority for the project. Next steps are to:
  - Develop a revised detailed project plan specification to meet the needs of all partners
  - Identify funding to update the second feasibility study for the alternative sites
  - Develop a funding package for the project
  - Commission and undertake an updated feasibility study for the preferred locations.
  - Develop an agreement between the partners.

## **Finance**

19. The feasibility study of October 2006 indicated that the cost of providing a modern archives service for Dudley MBC would have been in the order of £5 m. A joint facility would be required to be larger than this to deal with archives from Sandwell and the BCLM, and an updated feasibility study would seek to establish the costs for this.
20. The purpose of the updated feasibility study would be to establish the cost of a combined archives building on the potential sites. It is envisaged that all partners will contribute to the cost of the study which will cost in the order of £25,000.
21. A capital receipt of around £700,000 (2005 prices) from the sale of the existing site in Mount Pleasant but this would not be sufficient. There is likely to be financial contributions from Dudley's potential partners, but the extent of this is yet to be established. A full funding package will need to be identified to enable the project to be completed.

## **Law**

22. *'Public records, as defined by the Public Records Act 1958 and subsequent amendments to the schedules of such records attached to it, are subject to statutory controls and are placed under the supervision of the Keeper of Public Records (the Chief Executive of The National Archives), and the Lord Chancellor (the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs).'* (Taken from the Standard for Record Repositories)
23. Dudley and Sandwell Archives are places of deposit as defined by the Act which has to be approved by the Keeper.

24. Consultation with the partners legal representatives will be required to develop the necessary legal framework to permit the partnership with Sandwell MBC and/ or the Black Country Museum Trust Ltd, and to deal with any land and property related issues related to securing an appropriate site following the outcome of the feasibility study.

### **Equality Impact**

25. This report complies with the Council's policies on equal opportunities and diversity. The issues raised do not have a direct impact on children and young people. The new archives building will lead to improved access to education and learning opportunities using the archival resources for children and young people.

### **Recommendation**

26. It is recommended that Cabinet:-

- Approve the relocation of the archives service to a site in or near the Black Country Living Museum.
- Approve the commissioning of an updated feasibility study.
- Authorise the Director of DACHS to develop partnership proposals with Sandwell MBC and the Black Country Living Museum subject to agreement by Sandwell MBC Cabinet and the board of the Black Country Museum Trust Ltd.
- Authorise the Director of Law and Property to undertake legal agreements pertinent to securing an appropriate site for the location of the archive.



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### **List of Background Papers**

Decision Sheet 'C' block at Summerhill School and the Archives and Local History Service  
14<sup>th</sup> July 2004  
Report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning on the Archives and Local  
History Service to The Executive 8<sup>th</sup> September 2004  
Minutes of The Executive meeting 8<sup>th</sup> September 2004  
The National Archives: Standard for Record Repositories, 2004  
The National Archives: Planning a new record repository, 2004  
BS5454 Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents