

RENEWAL, RECREATION & HOUSING PDS COMMITTEE
5th November 2019 - Draft minutes

45A BECKENHAM LIBRARY AND CULTURAL VENUE – AUTHORITY TO PROCEED TO PROCUREMENT
Report DRR19/051

Members were requested to consider a proposal to move Beckenham Library from its current site into Beckenham Public Hall - a Grade II listed building with significant potential for community use and situated in a more central town location.

Members were also requested to consider the option of making the existing Beckenham Library site available for housing.

The Assistant Director, Culture and Regeneration informed Members that as part of the Regeneration Strategy in development, opportunities were being sought to improve and enhance the borough's libraries. In addition, Council owned sites were being assessed for housing and current results suggested there was not enough to meet the target of 1000 homes. This report was, therefore, a good news story in that the scheme had the potential to address both those needs.

Having been assessed for housing, the existing library site could accommodate 46 homes (50% affordable) as shown in the appendix. Cushman and Wakefield had provided a professional view that the site value was £2.12m.

High level feasibility work had been undertaken by officers to assess the potential of transforming Beckenham Public Hall into a new modern library and cultural venue.

The work undertaken suggested that the site had potential, however further information was required to understand the true viability of the scheme.

Therefore this report merely sought initial approval to proceed to procurement for an architect led team to undertake surveys and develop costed concept designs. If shown to be viable, full community consultation would take place prior to a report coming back to Members to request to proceed to the next stage of development.

Visiting Ward Member for Clock House, Councillor Ian Dunn, addressed the Committee on behalf of the local community. The West Beckenham Residents' Association had written to him raising concerns in regard to:-

- the impact of the development on the vitality of the area;
- the impact of the development on the Elm Road Conservation Area; and
- the availability of public transport.

The existing library was one of three focal points in the area. Relocation would inconvenience visitors to both the spa and library. The building itself was located opposite the Grade II listed building Venue 28 and situated within a Conservation Area. Councillor Dunn suggested that the views of the Assistant Director of Planning be sought prior to proceeding further.

The site was readily accessible from Beckenham with four bus routes along Beckenham Road and Clock House railway station nearby.

It was clear there were a number of previous options for the proposals and Councillor Dunn urged the Committee to ask officers to evaluate these before proceeding further.

The Assistant Director Culture and Regeneration assured Councillor Dunn that the proposals for the scheme did take the Conservation Area into account and discussions with the Planning Department had been undertaken. Public transport had also been addressed in the Equality Impact Assessment.

Visiting Ward Member for Copers Cope, Councillor Michael Tickner, acknowledged that a feasibility study for the proposals would be undertaken. In regard to inconvenience/convenience of the library relocation for local residents, this obviously depended on how close they lived to either the existing library site or the proposed relocation site.

Councillor Tickner accepted there was a pressing need to provide housing however, it was important to ensure that, if feasible, the development was very sympathetic to the surrounding area and in particular the Grade II listed Venue 28 building.

Part of the basement of Beckenham Public Hall was currently leased to a private members' club and Councillor Tickner queried whether the club would be able to remain in situ during redevelopment of the building. The Assistant Director, Culture and Regeneration saw no reason why they would need to move out as the area was separated from the main building.

Councillor Tickner supported the proposals and welcomed the upgrading of libraries within the Borough.

In opening the debate, Ward Member and Committee Member Councillor King, commented on the proposals for the Beckenham Library building.

While supporting the proposal for housing including 50% affordable, he did have reservations about how the plans had been presented in the report. Massing of the development was questionable as it was located within the Elm Road Conservation Area and close to Venue 28, a Grade II listed building. The report stated that the number of units proposed may result in a value of £2m however, he questioned whether this was actually realistic. He understood there could be a number of issues with the plans and accepted that they were not final but he was apprehensive that the actual number of homes built would fall short of the proposed number and asked what would happen if this was the case. The figure appeared to conveniently match the cost of the hall renovations and adaptations.

Sale of the land to a developer would ultimately result in the Council losing control over what was built. With this in mind, Councillor King would prefer the scheme to be carried out in collaboration with a housing association.

Moving the library to Beckenham Public Hall would result in the loss of two out of three libraries in Wards north west of the Borough. GLL would likely take on

responsibility for the management of any remaining hall space which, given their current industrial relations profile, was not acceptable.

Members were being asked to approve a plan at a very early stage without much detail. There was no mention in the report as to why Beckenham Public Hall was underutilised or, indeed, what criteria this had been assessed on. There was no sign of the Lambert Smith Hampton review and no details of what the enhanced facilities would offer.

As no alternative had been presented to Members, Councillor King suggested the following options be considered:-

- redevelopment with housing above a new library;
- extending the Spa and using car parking space at the side or rear of the site.
- shared facilities which had proved popular at Biggin Hill and was being proposed at West Wickham.

Councillor King moved that the recommendations in the report be deleted and replaced with the following recommendation:-

‘Agree that officers bring a report with costed alternative redevelopment proposals for the Beckenham Library site which include, amongst other options, redevelopment with library facilities on the site, back to a future Renewal Recreation and Housing PDS Committee for consideration.’

In response to Councillor King, the Assistant Director Culture and Regeneration confirmed that the site value of £2.12m was the professional evaluation submitted by Cushman and Wakefield. All monies gained from the existing library site would be reinvested in the scheme to restore Beckenham Public Hall and for fitting out the new library. The visual in the report appendix was designed to take the Conservation Area into account and the approach to deliver the housing scheme would be informed by the Lambert Smith Hampton review which was due to be presented to member later in the year. The primary reason for underutilisation of the Public Hall was due to its current state of disrepair. MyTime had been asked to provide usage figures.

Contrary to any rumour, there were no plans to close Shortlands Library.

Relocating the library and transferring management of the service to GLL would result in the provision of a more modern and improved library service.

Councillor Benington was greatly involved in the relocation of Biggin Hill Library to the town centre. Following the move, usage of the library had increased. Doing the same with Beckenham Library would make it more accessible for the local community and should increase footfall to the town centre. Whilst acknowledging that further detail would need to be worked out, Councillor Benington fully

supported the proposals which would enhance Beckenham Town Centre and not detract from the Grade II Listed Venue 28 building. He congratulated officers on producing an excellent report.

Councillor Michael supported the scheme. There were excellent public transport links to and from the new library site. There was however, a need to be sensitive in regard to the housing scheme. A traditional design would be preferable and the development should be in keeping with the surrounding area. Members were informed that although the concept design made best use of the land available, there would be no loss of green space.

Councillor King considered the scheme would result in the loss of business in Clock House Parade.

Councillor Morgan acknowledged that the Public Hall building was seriously in need of repair and refurbishment. He considered the site value of £2.12m to be a conservative figure and believed it may be higher than anticipated. The housing scheme, consisting of traditional buildings, would be considered by way of planning applications in the usual manner. Relocating the library would be convenient for both library users and retail visitors to the town centre.

Councillor Tickner questioned the lengthy timeframe allocated up to the award of contract (para. 3.23). The Assistant Director, Culture and Regeneration advised that the Christmas holiday period contributed to the delay and approval must be sought in regard to the procurement framework. However, it may be possible to publish the design team tender earlier than anticipated.

RESOLVED that:-

- 1 the report be noted and the Committee's comments be provided to Members of the Executive;**
- 2 two further recommendations be added as set out at 3.3 and 3.4 below.**
- 3 the Executive be recommended to:-**
 - 3.1 agree to proceed to procurement for the appointment of a multi-disciplinary team, to develop a scheme for Beckenham Public Hall up to RIBA Stage 2 in the first instance, at an estimated cost of £70k;**
 - 3.2 agree in principle to use the existing Beckenham Library site for housing. The approach taken to deliver the housing will depend on the outcome of the review being undertaken by Lambert Smith Hampton and any subsequent agreement of a housing delivery vehicle. This will be subject to a further report;**
 - 3.3 the housing scheme comprise units of traditional build; and**
 - 3.4 the timeframe allocated for publishing the design team tender up to the award of contract be brought forward.**

Councillor King's vote against supporting the recommendations was noted.