

Executive

Banbury Cultural Quarter

7 June 2010

Report of Strategic Director Environment & Community

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider progress of the Banbury Cultural Quarter and the Council's contribution to it.

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended:

- (1) To continue to offer its full support to delivering a Banbury Cultural Quarter in conjunction with Oxfordshire County Council and the Mill Management Committee;
- (2) To agree in principle, subject to a funding agreement, to enhance the County Council's new library/Mill project with up to £2m of capital funding; and
- (3) To authorise the Strategic Director Environment and Community in consultation with the Head of Finance and the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Recreation and Health to negotiate and conclude the final terms of the funding agreement.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1 Good progress has been made with Oxfordshire County Council and the Mill Management Committee in developing plans for a Banbury Cultural Quarter. Further consideration has been given to and progress made with each component of the concept.
- 1.2 Oxfordshire County Council have confirmed their capital funding of £5.675m but from the feasibility options considered, it is clear that only a limited new library/Mill development can be progressed with this.

Proposals

- 1.3 It is proposed that this Council supplements the County Council's investment by up to £2m. This will be specifically for an enhanced performance venue with appropriate front and back stage facilities, a flexible rehearsal room and a visual arts facility.

- 1.4 The purpose of this additional District Council investment is to enhance the user experience of the new venue and improve the operational viability of the whole new library/Mill development.

Conclusion

- 1.5 The opening of the new Spiceball Leisure Centre, the ongoing success of the Banbury Museum and the County Council's intention to create a new and vibrant arts and library centre at The Mill will create sufficient collective recreational and cultural activity to form a basis of a Cultural Quarter for the town. Further developments of a complementary nature such as improved car parking and adjacent commercial developments will enhance the Cultural Quarter accessibility and attractiveness. Additional funding for the new library/Mill development is required if it is to achieve its full potential and meet more fully the future needs of local people.

Background Information

- 2.1 For many months representatives of the District Council, the County Council and The Mill have been discussing how a new integrated and refurbished Mill and new library can be developed on or near the existing site of The Mill. Several technical options have been considered which take into account the various constraints of the site regarding utilities, flooding frequency, funding and access to the new Spiceball Leisure Centre.
 - 2.2 The County Council has earmarked £5.675m for this development which is planned from 2012/13 onwards. The precise timing of its proposed development is not yet established but for the purposes of this report can be assumed to be from mid 2012.
 - 2.3 The District Council has approached the development of an integrated Mill and new library in a positive way with a willingness to consider permitting its development on some District Council owned land. This will necessitate a transfer of some of the Council's land to the County Council assumed at nil consideration. However, it has also been made clear that in whatever form the Cultural Quarter takes, there must be no net loss of car parking spaces and where possible, numbers of spaces should be increased.
 - 2.4 In parallel with this, the District Council has opened the new Spiceball Leisure Centre and as a consequence has demolished the old sports centre and converted this site to a temporary car park pending consideration of a permanent development.
 - 2.5 The opportunity to redevelop the former Spiceball Park Sports Centre site for permanent car parking plus complementary commercial development has been advertised and Expressions of Interest requested. These are currently being assessed and will be the subject of a separate report in due course.
-

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

- 3.1 The feasibility options for the new library/Mill development have concluded that in addition to a new library, the County Council funding can provide a performance venue of approximately 300 but no rehearsal or visual arts spaces. From further local research associated with the Mill's catchment and local arts clubs plus an assessment of operational matters, it is clear that if the development were to include these facilities, then, as a whole, the Cultural Quarter would more closely match local needs, and viability would be improved.
- 3.2 By providing additional capital, the rehearsal and visual arts spaces can be provided to a high quality of environment and standard of finish which will enhance the user experience and assist with the operational viability of the whole development. Particular attention should be paid to the finishes, seating and acoustic qualities of the auditorium and the technical facilities of the performance venue in terms of lighting, sound, stage and backstage facilities. These principles should also apply as appropriate to the rehearsal and visual arts spaces. As a consequence, it is expected that there should be specialist theatre designer input at the next stage in the design development process to address these matters and the important relationship, nature and scale of the supporting back stage and front of house facilities. Additional funding of up to £2m from the District Council is therefore proposed for this purpose.
- 3.3 The other key issue for consideration is how best to secure the District Council's support to the new library/Mill part of the Cultural Quarter development. The first element of this is the transfer of District Council owned land to permit an extended footprint of the new development and its access. The Council has agreed this previously at nil consideration.
- 3.4 The second element is how to secure the value of its additional investment proposed in this report. In this respect, a more conventional call on the title is inappropriate due to the specific facilities proposed for investment rather than the whole development. Therefore, it is proposed that a 10 year period be applied to a funding agreement during which, if the facility were to close, repayment in full would apply.

The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| Option One | Not to invest in the new library/Mill development. |
| Option Two | Invest up to £2 m in the new library/Mill development. |
| Option Three | Invest a higher sum in the new library/Mill development. |

Consultations

None

Implications

Financial: There are two significant financial implications for the Council in supporting a Cultural Quarter development. Firstly, the potential significant capital costs in the order of £2m+ for the new decked car park of up to 200 spaces on the site of the existing Spiceball Park Sports Centre, the new pedestrian link to Spiceball Leisure Centre and associated landscaping works in the immediate vicinity of these developments. It is hoped that there would be an additional significant revenue stream from the increased car parking capacity which would support the spending of such capital sums and the potential for some enabling commercial development. Further detail is required on the extent of these capital costs prior to undertaking any cost benefit analysis in relation to the revenue stream arising. It is also intended that the possibility of the car park and bridge being built at no cost to the Council be explored through this process. The second proposal to offer up to £2m as a contribution to improve the new library/Mill development will increase the Council's capital costs by the sum finally agreed.

Comments checked by Joanne Kay, Service Accountant, 01295 221545.

Legal: The most significant legal implications arising from this report relate to the requirement by the County Council for some additional land immediately surrounding the current building footprint of The Mill which is in District Council ownership. Again, further detailed design work is required to determine the precise nature of an extended Mill footprint and the extent of any land transference or legal issue arising. In addition, a formal funding agreement to establish the basis of the Councils' investment in the new library/Mill and a Memorandum of Understanding are also proposed.

Comments checked by Liz Howlett, Head of Legal & Democratic, 01295 221686.

Risk Management: The most notable risks arising from the proposals contained in this report are to ensure that there is adequate access within the Cultural Quarter and in particular to the Spiceball Leisure Centre which is generating additional usage beyond that currently catered for by the existing Spiceball Park Sports Centre. In addition, there is almost certainly going to be a need for additional car parking to cater for more intensive use in this locality. Failure to undertake either of these could result in an adverse public reaction and could affect the overall usage of the new Spiceball Leisure Centre. The results of the flood risk assessments could restrict or alter design proposals for the site.

Comments checked by Rosemary Watts, Risk Management Insurance Officer, 01295 221566.

Wards Affected

All Northern District Wards.

Corporate Plan Themes

Safe and Healthy
District of Opportunity

Executive Portfolio

Councillor George Reynolds
Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health & Recreation

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
None	
Background Papers	
None	
Report Author	Ian Davies, Strategic Director, Environment & Community
Contact Information	01295 221581 Ian.Davies@Cherwell-dc.gov.uk