
REPORT TO: The Cabinet

DATE: 24 August 2005

REPORTING OFFICER: Head of Parks & Open Spaces
(*Patrick Kilburn*)

SUBJECT: Library Gardens – North Yorkshire County Council –
Family History/Discovery Centre

WARDS AFFECTED: Low Harrogate

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to bring to the attention of the Cabinet a proposal that is being considered by North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) for the development of the existing library site on Victoria Avenue, Harrogate.
- 1.2 It is also looking to seek approval in principal for the concept proposals so that NYCC can appoint architectural consultants to develop the scheme in considerable detail in the knowledge that Harrogate Borough Council (HBC) supports it. The actual detailed scheme will be agreed at a later date.
- 1.3 Officers of the Council and the Corporate Management Team (CMT) have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are included within.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet approve in principal to progress the scheme for the provision of the proposed NYCC Family History/Discovery Centre subject to planning approval.
- 2.2 That once all conditions have been met and the scheme developed in more detail a further report be brought to Cabinet for a final decision.

- 2.3 That Cabinet agree to officers working with NYCC to develop the scheme and, to negotiate terms and conditions with regards to the development of the land to the west of Library Gardens.
- 2.4 That Cabinet agree to officers working with NYCC to explore new ways of working in partnership to address the issue of customer resource services.
- 2.5 That Cabinet agree to officers negotiating with all interested parties as necessary to resolve issues such as the electric sub station, toilets etc.
- 2.6 That Cabinet agree to officers advertising the proposed disposal of the public open space needed for the extension in accordance with S123 (2A) of the Local Government Act 1972 and consider any representations made.

3.0 RECOMMENDED REASONS FOR THE DECISION

- 3.1 Investment in the library site is urgently required and this scheme not only manages to secure that investment but also allows further development to provide in a town centre environment a family history/discovery centre that will not only service the residents of the Harrogate District but also the whole of the North Yorkshire Sub Region.
- 3.2 It will enable the Council to meet a planning objective HD11I by encouraging development of a site that has been identified in need of improvement.
- 3.3 It will also help to resolve several community safety problems, greatly improve the toilet facilities and encourage people to use the gardens more.

4.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDED FOR REJECTION

- 4.1 Not to agree to the recommendations. This is recommended for rejection as it would mean that the reasons identified for making the decision would not be realised which is considered to be a negative aspect when considering the benefits of the scheme as a whole.

THE REPORT

5.0 INTRODUCTION

- 5.1 NYCC is keen to develop the current site into a more modern and purposeful building than is currently on site. They wish to develop a family history/discovery centre, which will serve the whole of North Yorkshire Sub Region, bringing archives and local studies materials to a new and broader audience through easy accessibility in a welcoming environment, in a town

centre location. They advise that the facility created will attract residents and visitors alike and will incorporate public viewing facilities for family records in copy format, as well as a shop, café, toilets, lecture theatre and exhibition/learning space and a refurbished Library and Information Centre.

- 5.2 To develop this facility will require the development of part of the land adjacent to the existing site. The area of land in question is identified in the local plan under Policy HD11I, which quotes "*The development of this small site to the east of the library in the style and character of the library is encouraged*". It is identified in these terms as it is considered to be a site "*which presents very little merit in townscape terms or, indeed, detracts from the general quality of the local environment*". The land is currently owned and managed by Harrogate Borough Council and forms the western end of Library Gardens.
- 5.3 NYCC advise that the design and build will be to a high standard, in view of the site's prominence and setting, and in line with the requirements of the Heritage Lottery Fund as prospective funding body.
- 5.4 An outline plan showing the proposals and their impact on the land to the West of Library Gardens is attached as Appendix 1.
- 5.5 Discussions have taken place between officers of HBC and NYCC and the issue of whether or not the new facility could assist HBC in the delivery of its Customer Relations project have been discussed. Further comments on this matter are addressed later in the report. What is clear is that there are opportunities for closer working between HBC and NYCC and an opportunity to enter into some form of agreement to utilise the centre as an information point for HBC services.
- 5.6 Clearly there are many interested parties in this proposal and their comments are reported below.

6.0. NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILS COMMENTS

6.1 Harrogate's Contribution

- 6.1.1 Construction of the proposed extension will require some form of agreement with regards to the area of ground between the present Library building and the formal landscaped Library Gardens area. An air quality monitoring station, a toilet block and an electricity sub-station currently occupy this ground. The proposed new build footprint extends 14 metres in depth from the largest unbroken wall to the East of the library facing the gardens, and 34 metres across the width of the Garden. (See Appendix 1)
- 6.1.2 In-kind support in terms of partnership working will be important to the success of the Project, and sharing of relevant resource materials in the long term, for example the Harrogate Cemeteries' records, will provide added value.

6.2 Impact Of Proposal and Effect on Current Facilities

- 6.2.1 As can be seen from the attached drawing and plan, there is barely any encroachment or impact on the ornamental part of the Rose Garden. Through provision of a facility, which can link to the Garden through a foyer area, public use and enjoyment of the Garden area could be enhanced. It will be possible to plan a catering facility, which might serve the Garden area indoors and out, according to weather conditions.
- 6.2.2 Issues surrounding the potential loss of current toilet facilities and the electricity sub-station can be overcome through a creative approach to the design of the new Centre.

6.3 Benefits to Harrogate

- 6.3.1 The area of ground next to the Library will be tidied up and put to better use, and the amenity value of the Rose Garden itself will be increased.
- 6.3.2 Through hosting this new sub-Regional resource, and the associated twenty-first century library service, Harrogate's status as a cultural gateway to the North Yorkshire sub-Region will be enhanced.
- 6.3.3 Family History tourism is currently under-exploited in the Yorkshire Region, and development of this centre in Harrogate will add a new dimension to Harrogate's tourism offer. It is planned to develop web-based outreach and publicity, which will link access to family history resources in Harrogate to opportunities to visit communities across the sub-Region. Harrogate's status as the County's largest population centre makes it a natural entry point for this activity. The Family History Centre will attract thousands of physical visitors each year, coming to Harrogate from throughout the English-speaking world, creating direct tourism and economic benefits for the town, as well as enhancing Harrogate's status as a sub-Regional hub.

7.0 COMMENTS FROM CMT

- 7.1 CMT support this proposal and feel that it is an excellent facility which resolves several problems in the area of library gardens whilst realising a much improved library with a new family history/discovery centre which could be a potential visitor attraction.
- 7.2 CMT also commented that this scheme shows excellent joint working and meets several of the Corporate Objectives and should be encouraged.

8.0 COMMENTS FROM HEAD OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (Nigel Avison)

- 8.1 I am strongly in favour of the project, which I believe will benefit Harrogate in a number of ways. It will reinforce Harrogate's position as the "Hub" of the

North Yorkshire Library and Information/Archives network and will provide an enhanced resource for local residents. It will also provide a resource for visitors becoming a tourist destination in its own right. It has the potential to pilot joint working arrangements around access to services and the development could result in a significant improvement to the appearance of one of Harrogate's more prominent buildings.

9.0 COMMENTS FROM PLANNING TEAM LEADER – MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS (Anne Smith)

- 9.1 The site comes within the scope of Harrogate District Local Plan (HDLP) Proposals Map – Inset No. 2 Harrogate Town Centre. As noted above it is referred to in a specific policy - HD11I “Townscape and Environmental Improvement Area”. It is adjacent to Library Gardens, which is protected as “Amenity Open Space” under Policy HD12. This policy seeks to protect spaces, which are important to the character of a settlement, from development. This forms a significant constraint on the extent of development at the side of the current library premises.
- 9.2 The site also lies within the Harrogate Conservation Area and is subject to Policy HD3 “Control of Development in Conservation Areas”. Inter alia, this policy requires sufficient detail to be provided with any application to allow a proper assessment of the impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area to be made. In addition Policy HG20 “Design of New Development” and Redevelopment would also be applicable and the design principles, which it lists must be taken into account.
- 9.3 Other policies which are considered relevant are HDLP policies A1 – “Impact on the Amenity and Environment”; T15a – “Area of Commuter Parking Restraint”; T16 – “Disabled Parking”; T17 – “Cycle Parking”; TR6 – “Tourist Attractions”; CF9 – “Other New Community Facilities”; IMP2 – “Provision of Infrastructure Needs Generated by Development”; and NYCC policies E4; I13; R1. The Regional Spatial Strategy does not appear to have any policies, which are directly relevant.
- 9.4 The policy framework encourages development on the identified site in the HDLP, providing other policies of the adopted Local Plan are complied with. The final assessment, from a planning point of view, has to be based on scheme drawings, which have been out to consultation and statutory advertisement so that all relevant comments and considerations can be weighed before making a recommendation.
- 9.5 The Library is listed so it will be necessary to consider its setting when developing any scheme.

10.0 COMMENTS FROM HEAD OF MUSEUMS (Ceryl Evans)

- 10.1 The development at the library will allow Harrogate Borough Council's Museum & Arts section to work more closely with NYCC's Libraries and Archives sections as required by DCMS. DCMS and the regional Yorkshire Museums Libraries and Archives Council have pushed partnership working between the three disciplines strongly over the past few years. External grant aid is being geared towards encouraging such partnerships and services are being measured against this.
- 10.2 Partnership working has been significantly harder to achieve within the 'two tier' council structure in North Yorkshire than in the unitary and metropolitan council areas. Harrogate Museums & Arts have good working relations with the County Records Office and the Harrogate Libraries team and would welcome any developments which would enable closer working and the chance to develop future projects which could well attract significant external funding under the various learning targets central government is introducing for all three sectors.
- 10.3 The exploration of family history is in a period of boom and if managed well the museum service could benefit significantly from the increase in interested individuals and groups attracted to the town by the family history/discovery centre. There has been a significant number of MLA partnership working initiatives in the Yorkshire region where interest in family and community history has triggered significant outside investment and an increase in visitor and user figures to sites and areas. Museums & Arts see this development as a very positive move and welcome the opportunities it brings.

11.0 COMMENTS FROM PRINCIPAL ESTATES SURVEYOR (David Baren)

- 11.1 The outline of the four-storey extension as shown on the plan provided by North Yorkshire County Council will be on land in Harrogate Borough Council's ownership.
- 11.2 Part of this area is currently used by Northern Electric as an open sub station. They occupy the land under a document dated 15th September 1953, which gives them users rights only. Northern Electric are aware of the proposals and the need to either reduce their accommodation or relocate. They are currently looking at their options.
- 11.3 The remainder of the land is public open space and any disposal is subject to satisfactorily advertising the proposed sale of the land to North Yorkshire County Council under the Local Government Act.
- 11.4 The value of the Council's interest can either be valued as its open market use or valued in terms of services and benefits the Council could receive should the project proceed. Following recent changes we do not have to receive the highest bid for the land. Our land ownership does however hold the key to this development.

12.0 COMMENTS FROM HEAD OF PUBLIC PROTECTION (Nicky Garside)

- 12.1 The air quality monitoring station on the site is no longer in use and will be removed from the site during 2005/6.
- 12.2 The gardens and associated public toilets and shelter are often the subject of complaints to Community Safety. The majority are in the summer months and relate to the anti social behaviour of people engaged in public drinking. This activity centres around the shelter, but can spread to other benches when others join the main group. During this summer a trend of younger drinkers using the area has been observed. There are no increased reports of criminal activity, but reports of anti social behaviour, littering and needle finds have increased.
- 12.3 The shelter is the main attraction and a redevelopment of the site will not, on its own encourage this group to go elsewhere (they may decide that the new café, toilets and services offered by the library are just what they need!!). Consequently, this matter is currently being dealt with through the Safer Community Partnership Multi Agency Problem Solving Group and both Harrogate Alcohol and Drugs Agency (HADA) and the local neighbourhood police team are working together to address this issue. This work will continue to try to resolve the problem irrespective of the library scheme.
- 12.4 There is clearly an opportunity to incorporate into the scheme a well-planned public space to compliment the alterations to the Library and Information facilities. The Police Architectural Liaison should be involved in the design process of both elements and it should be an agreed objective to design out both crime and the opportunity for anti social behaviour and provide a public environment that is safe and functional.
- 12.5 The shelter has historic connections but is apparently not listed. Its design is based on Victorian requirements when people came to Harrogate to take the "cure". It is an almost perfect location for people to engage in public drinking and we will find it very difficult to stop this use. Unlike other similar structures it is not well used by the public.
- 12.6 Finally most of the people involved in public drinking in Library Gardens will admit to having a "problem" and work is ongoing to provide treatment and support as required.

13.0 COMMENTS FROM PRINCIPAL SURVEYOR (Paul Leonard)

- 13.1 The footprint of the new extension will occupy the site currently occupied by the Library Gardens Public Toilets. The Property Management Division would therefore be seeking to incorporate a new public toilet facility on the ground floor of the new building, which provides full modern facilities.
- 13.2 The new public toilets will require a floor area of approximately 50m² and be directly accessible from the outside of the building, in order that they can operate independently, irrespective of the opening hours of the library. Should it be a requirement that the toilets will also be accessible from inside the

building, provision will have to be made for securing the internal means of access when the library is closed.

- 13.3 The new toilets will require separate facilities for men, women, baby changing, and the disabled, which will be available during the standard opening hours of the service. In addition, a separate single cubicle overnight toilet must be incorporated, which will provide 24-hour access, in order to meet the demand for late night toilet facilities in the centre of the town.
- 13.4 The Property Management Division will provide a more detailed specification for the new public toilets during the course of developing the detailed design for the building.

14.0 COMMENTS FROM CORPORATE PROJECTS OFFICER (Paula Newson Smith)

- 14.1 The Customer Service Project currently underway is part of the Council's Access to Services Strategy. The project includes the setting up of a corporate Customer Service Unit (CSU) & acquisition of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system plus associated supporting technology to deliver first point of contact resolution of customer enquiries in the majority of cases. Phase 1 of the project will provide telephone contact for a group of services plus face-to-face delivery in Harrogate and at least one remote site.
- 14.2 NYCC is currently introducing an approach to face-to-face customer contact using libraries. Ripon library is one that has been selected as part of the pilot to become a Customer Resource Centre and officers have already held discussions on how services delivered by HBC can be handled in this scenario. There are a number of ways that services can be addressed – varying from NYCC staff helping customers to access HBC services using the web site (and vice versa) to staff of both organisations being trained to assist customers in each others services. The new CRM technology will assist in supporting this way of working if required.
- 14.3 I have met with NYCC's Assistant Director (Information) at the County Council's Library and Information Centre at Harrogate and there is scope within the proposed development for this Council to provide a customer service access point. This would have some benefits for the council as follows:
- Joining up of face to face customer service with NYCC & other agencies
 - A convenient town centre access point for HBC services
 - Sharing good practice with NYCC staff
 - Staffed on a rota basis to give Customer Service staff variety & opportunity to build upon their experience of customer contact
- 14.4 Harrogate Borough Council Services could be provided from a specific area of the counter or a "Customer Service Desk" in the new facility. This would be clearly identifiable as Harrogate Borough Council and provide a service

consistent with that provided by the central CSU. The counter could be staffed by a Customer Service Advisor on a permanent basis, although the library is likely to be open for longer hours than the current office hours operated by the Council so some out of hours arrangements would need to be made. Telephone calls and email communications could also be routed to this member of staff to cover any less busy periods in the library and also to give back up for the central team.

- 14.5 There are many issues to be considered if this proposal is agreed and it is suggested that officers work with NYCC staff to develop a more detailed working protocol so that the service and cost implications of the proposal can be put forward for future agreement.

15.0 IMPACT ON GARDENS

- 15.1 When this proposal was first mooted I was extremely concerned about the impact it would have on Library Gardens. I was also concerned about the loss of open space in an area that clearly has very little and which is popular to visitors and residents alike.
- 15.2 However having seen the concept plans and been advised that the proposal is to develop the area to the west of the gardens on a footprint of 14 metres by 34 metres along with all of the facilities proposed I believe this will be a great asset to the gardens, increase their use and greatly diminish some of the antisocial behaviour issues that the gardens and surrounding area suffer at the moment.
- 15.3 The fact that it is proposed to build the new entrance off the gardens will mean that more people will walk through the gardens to access the library and the new facility. Not only that it will tidy up and greatly improve an area off the gardens that is in much need of some attention.
- 15.4 It is also worth emphasising that the area that the building would occupy is not a high ornamental area but is a site where there are several structures and some rather poor shrub beds. This scheme will greatly 'refresh' this area.

16.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 16.1 It is not totally clear at the present time what the financial implications are on the Council with regards to this project as it is in the early stages of development. However what is clear is that in developing the scheme the only costs that Harrogate Borough Council is going to incur are internal costs i.e. officer time. This would have to be accommodated within existing budgets.

- 16.2 No request has been made by North Yorkshire County Council for a contribution towards costs but that could change if Harrogate Borough Council were looking for an interest in the building i.e. Customer Relations.
- 16.3 There is also the issue of the value of the land and how that is dealt with but this can be addressed at a later date when the scheme has been developed and all the facts are known.
- 16.4 It is unlikely that the scheme will have any revenue implications for HBC unless the Council adds any of its own services into the proposed Centre.

17.0 TIMESCALES

- 17.1 NYCC need to move this project on rapidly if they are to have any chance of securing Heritage Lottery Funding to enable this project to be developed. The NYCC timetable for the proposed development is as shown below.

June 2005	Formation of Project Management Group
	Consultative and development work begins
Aug 2005	Appointment of Architectural Consultants
Oct 2005	Agreement in relation to site (subject to planning consent)
Dec 2005	Submission of Phase One bid to Heritage Lottery Fund
June 2006	Phase One bid decision (If successful at Phase One, one-year Phase Two development process begins)
June 2007	Phase Two bid decision
	Construction phase begins
Oct 2008	Construction complete, opening of new Centre.

- 17.2 The programme is slightly due to the need to get the necessary approvals but it is anticipated that this will not delay the scheme in the long term.

18.0 SUMMARY

- 18.1 An outline proposal has been received from North Yorkshire County Council to upgrade the library and information centre on Victoria Avenue, Harrogate and redevelop part of the land to the West of Library Gardens as part of this development to house a history/discovery centre, café and new toilet facilities.
- 18.2 The land is owned by HBC and for the NYCC to progress this scheme approval is required from Cabinet.

18.3 The scheme will bring many benefits to Harrogate and will also go some way to resolving several issues in the area.

Officer: Patrick Kilburn, Head of Parks and Open Spaces– if you require further information on the contents of this report.
 The Officer can be contacted at Springfield House, Kings Road, Harrogate, HG1 5NX or by telephone on 01423 556704 or Email Patrick.Kilburn@harrogate.gov.uk

SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

		Implications are		
		Positive	Neutral	Negative
A.	Economy	✓		
B.	Environment	✓		
C.	Social Equity			
(i)	General	✓		
(ii)	Customer Care/People with Disabilities	✓		
(iii)	Health Implications	✓		
D.	Crime and Disorder	✓		