

Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 12 November 2019

Central Library Future Development Report

Executive/routine	Routine
Wards	All
Council Commitments	2, 15, 35, 46

1. Recommendations

1.1 The Culture and Communities Committee is asked to:

- 1.1.1 Notes the challenges of the present Central Library building;
- 1.1.2 Approve the establishment of a Project Team, led by the senior officer responsible for Libraries, to explore the viability of developing an imaginative, accessible and engaging future vision for the city's Central Library.

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Central Library Future Development Report

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides an overview of a future development option for the city's Central Library, based upon the Bennetts Architects Design Feasibility Study [2014](#) and proposes next steps to explore the viability of creating an inspiring and inclusive learning and cultural destination.
- 2.2 It follows the [Central Library Update Report](#) presented to Culture and Sport Committee 8 March 2016. That report described the successful transformation of the Children's and Music libraries, the resulting increase in use and benefits for customers.
- 2.3 This report explores the potential to build on that success by considering how this important, iconic building and its facilities, services and collections could be transformed to meet 21st Century needs and expectations for both present and future generations.

3. Background

- 3.1 Built in 1890, Edinburgh Central Library has served the City of Edinburgh for well over a century. During its life, the original George Washington Browne (GWB) design has been adapted and augmented in response to changes in customer need. The current building comprises the original GWB library and the Henderson building adjacent (usually referred to as the Bank building).
- 3.2 Time has left its mark on the buildings and today they are struggling to meet 21st Century requirements and expectations. Change is necessary to secure the future of the buildings and ensure they are fit for purpose for the next generation.
- 3.3 A major challenge is the poor level of accessibility. Not all floors are accessible by lift and the lift itself is restrictive in size, therefore, for example, wheelchair access is confined to those using smaller wheelchairs.
- 3.4 Other challenges include limited public space (approximately 35% of the total available space), restricting the scope to feature and promote the exceptional collections and hidden treasures, and to provide more engaging library experiences for customers, to welcome wider audience engagement and participation in this exceptional city asset.

- 3.5 Two major reports have looked in depth at potential development options for the library:
- Edinburgh Central Library Privilege or Purgatory: A Conservation Plan (2002) by LDN Architects
 - Strategic Options Study (2008) by LDN Architects which concluded that the best option for Central Library is to remain in its historic home.
- 3.6 The most recent design feasibility study by Bennetts Associates Architects [2014](#) explores the feasibility of a reimagined Central Library, improving vertical and horizontal circulation by connecting all of the buildings, improving access to all areas while opening up current public space from 35% to around 95%.

4. Main report

Success to date

- 4.1 Central Library is a place of inspiration for the citizens of Edinburgh, as well as those who visit, work and study here. The beautiful George Washington Browne designed space combines with staff knowledge and expertise to bring to life it's fascinating collections: it sparks discovery, creativity and imagination.
- 4.2 Musicians, artists and crafters draw inspiration from the music, art and design collections. For those wishing to start on their creative and crafting journey the library holds art workshops and musical events for all ages.
- 4.3 The Edinburgh Collection is an outstanding world class collection of printed material, images and photographs depicting Edinburgh's story and its people from ancient times to the present day. It is internationally significant, including rare early photographs and a wonderful collection of playbills tracing the history of entertainment in Edinburgh and embracing the current festival scene.
- 4.4 The Children's Library, Music Library, Edinburgh and Scottish Collection were refurbished in 2014. These spaces are now modern, bright and welcoming and in the case of the Children's library, much larger. This led to an increase in footfall, doubling of Book Bug activity for younger children, and a book group for children with Dyslexia.

5. Challenges & Opportunities

The Challenge

- 5.1 The investment in 2013 - 2014 demonstrates tangible benefits for customers with increased levels of participation and point to the possibilities of a full refurbishment. Unfortunately, the present building design and facilities inhibit the realisation of a fully inclusive, accessible library for citizens and visitors. Asset Management Works funding (£586 000.00 in the past five years), while sufficient to address condition

issues, does not address suitability or accessibility. In other comparable cities such as Liverpool and Manchester, historic building transformation projects have created a more inclusive, modernised central library, extending the library role as a fully accessible community and cultural destination.

The Opportunity

5.2 In February 2013 Bennetts Associates Architects was commissioned to undertake a design feasibility study, based on a future vision for the library. This vision is of a reinvigorated Central Library which would become an enduring beacon for the City, bringing the world to Edinburgh and showcasing Edinburgh to the world.

Their proposal would develop the library and adjacent bank building within the current building's footprint. They suggest two development options.

- The first would double public space to around 75% (currently 35%) but exclude any Vaults development and cost circa £21m.
- The second option would triple public space to around 95%, including the Vaults, and cost circa £29m. (These estimates would need to be adjusted for inflation and any changes in construction costs).

The Bennetts' proposals, which would achieve easier circulation and access for customers to all of the spaces and collections, include the extension of the main stair down to Cowgate level and have the support of Historic Environment Scotland and Listed Buildings. Additional space would allow improved exhibition and events; greater ability to showcase collections. It would create exhibition space for individuals, partners, groups and organisations to co-design exhibitions and events.

5.3 The ability to hold prestigious events, with high quality sound and lighting, would enable the letting of space to organisations and for example live streaming of events to and from library and cultural services UK wide. Edinburgh is a founder member of the British Library [Living Knowledge Network](#), which offers live streaming of partner events with interactive audience participation from across the UK.

5.4 Increasing public space in the library is an opportunity to develop the delivery of Council, statutory and third sector services, complementing the customer Hub in the High Street.

5.5 The library will offer many different customer journeys, all equally inspirational. It will be Edinburgh's literary equivalent of the Pompidou Centre (Paris) in its accessible, holistic approach to literature and culture, the Seven Stories Centre (Newcastle) in bringing to life children's and young people's literature and writing while having the populist edge and accessible celebration of culture of Liverpool and Manchester Central Libraries.

5.6 The vision is influenced by [Ambition and Opportunity](#), the strategy for public libraries in Scotland 2015-20, which defines a vision of 'Scotland's public libraries are trusted

guides connecting all of our people to the world's possibilities and opportunities' with a mission: 'Scotland's public libraries are part of a civic ambition to fulfil the potential of individuals and communities'. Edinburgh's library and information services strategy will be informed by the five strategic themes in the Council's ambition to be an Empowering Council (Programme for the Capital 2017).

- 5.7 The Vaults could become a cultural and community hub, with some potential income streams. This development and the creation of a new Cowgate entrance (as an alternative to using the main entrance on George IV Bridge) could support wider improvements in the street architecture for the Cowgate, in line with the successful public realm upgrading of the Grassmarket.
- 5.8 The success of the Birmingham Central Library private donor approach to raise some of the required funding (circa £12m raised in this way for Birmingham), could be a model worth exploring. The transformation is likely to attract Heritage Lottery funding.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 The suggested next step is setting up an internal Council Project Team, led by the senior officer responsible for Libraries, to explore the viability of developing an imaginative, accessible and engaging future vision for the city's Central Library. This team could include officers from Lifelong Learning (Libraries), Culture, Finance, Estates, Investments and Strategic Asset Management.
- 6.2 The feasibility of commercial and income generation would be one of the strands included in the work of the Project Team. This would include whether the building could develop important income streams and if, for example, a potential element of borrowing for the capital project could be met through new income. Income generation ideas suggested in the Bennetts Architects Design Feasibility Study are a café on the ground floor of the Bank building; a Rooftop restaurant with stunning panoramic views for diners; letting and hire of spaces in the Cultural Hub, George Washington Browne and Bank buildings.
- 6.3 Of course, raising funds in support of the library development will be challenging. Identifying possible funding sources and realistic options for how it could be funded will be a key factor in determining the viability of any development. This would include examining how other similar developments have approached their funding and their funding strategies

7. Financial impact

- 7.1 There would be costs associated with the production of a project viability report where specialist input is required. The value would need to be estimated and associated revenue funding identified.

8. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 8.1 A full Integrated Impact Assessment will be carried out for the proposal. Equalities impacts include improved access and circulation within the library. All areas apart from the Boardroom (due to its location on the landing) would be wheelchair accessible. Freedom of expression will be promoted through potential group and community publishing and improved exhibition space. Reduction in income inequalities will be supported through free access to cultural, information and advice services for people on reduced and low incomes.
- 8.2 A Library upgrade and refurbishment would support energy efficiency through more efficient heating systems and insulation to reduce carbon emissions. However, this would be balanced by a potential increase in carbon emissions through trapped carbon release in refurbishing a Victorian building and in developing more public space. In addition, the larger public space would require increased energy consumption although this may be offset to some degree by more efficient energy systems and better building insulation.
- 8.3 The Project Team would at the appropriate stages have conversations with current and potential customers, local communities, citizens across the City of Edinburgh, cultural partners, national and local groups and organisations in examining the viability of the project.

9. Background reading/external references

Three major previous studies are:

- 9.1 Edinburgh Central Library Privilege or Purgatory: A Conservation Plan (2002) by LDN Architects
- 9.2 Strategic Options Study by LDN Architects in 2008 which concluded that best option for Central Library is to remain in its historic home. (These are not available in electronic format but will be made available in the Members Room on the day for Committee members to consult).
- 9.3 Bennetts Associated Architects Central Library Design Feasibility Study [2014](#)

10. Appendices

None