

AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT

PLACE – Plymouth and West Devon Record Office



BACKGROUND TO ISSUES

In 2005, the National Archives wrote to Plymouth City Council to explain that the storage conditions for the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office were not fit for purpose and a new site meeting the then standard BS5454 needed to be found by summer 2013. If this was not to be the case, then the Place of Deposit status for Public Records (such as Coroners' records, Magistrates Records, Prison Records, etc) would be removed and the records with them.

Since that point, various sites and opportunities have been put forward, with the most significant of these being:

- Windsor House in 2008/9 – HLF turned down the Stage 1 submission.
- Parkside School in 2010 – decision was made to provide a UTC instead.
- Factory Cooperage Building, Royal William Yard 2011 – total project costs approximately £30m; outside the projected external funding capability.

All of these projects had their strengths and opportunities but for a variety of reasons were unsuccessful.

PROGRESS SINCE MOVE TO PLACE

Since PWDRO moved to Economic Development / PLACE in 2012 and given the variety but lack of successful solutions for this problem, a decision was made to take a step back and review what options there were. A designated officer from Strategic Capital was assigned to take it forward, and a piece of work was commissioned to investigate a variety of options and to identify those that were deliverable. This piece of work was undertaken by Stride Treglown, an Architect's firm in the locality who had been involved in the most recent Royal William Yard scheme and who therefore understood the background to the project and already had a lot of the space requirements, which saved time and money. They were also very well briefed in the new PD5454 standard (which replaces BS5454) which was only published last summer.

UPDATE SINCE LAST MEETING

Significant ground has been covered since the last board on the 12th February 2013 with the key elements of the programme being achieved within the required time frame.

The Options Study for all seven options has been completed and the city has moved towards a preferred option. Given the commercial sensitivities around the preferred option, we are not yet in a position to disclose it, but will do so as soon as we are able to.

A second piece of work is also underway that will set out the strategic vision for this project and describe how it relates to the wider city context and ambition. This is expected to be completed by the 21st March.

Conversations have also happened in this period with Highways and Planning, regarding the benefits of the different options around public realm and overall feel, together with Land and

Property about site assembly around the preferred option as well as some potential commercial opportunities that this site offers.

We have also met with the National Archives on the 18th December, and they have since confirmed that they are happy with our progress. They will continue to keep in touch, and our next scheduled meeting is in July 2013.

Discussions were also held with the Heritage Lottery Fund on the 22nd January on our progress to date, and they too have indicated their support for our progress and our plans.

NEXT STEPS

The key deadline and the focus for much of the work over the next months is the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for approximately £10m. As they are the key funders and the application to them forms part of TNA's prerequisites for progress, their deadline of 29 November 2013 (for a Stage I submission) is defining the timescale. Therefore, we are now working towards:

- An outline vision for the project. This will give an overview of what the project aims to achieve over and above fixing the problem of PWDRO and how this fits into a wider picture for the heritage and culture of the city. The notes from the visioning workshop are currently being turned into a document by the 21st March which can be used for various purposes: the application itself but also advocating the project to stakeholders.
- Formalising a response from the National Archives. Although they have clearly stated that they are impressed with our progress to date, they are aware that there is a need for a public statement from them to address the impending deadline. They want to make sure this is handled sensitively on both sides and also want to formalise a reporting framework over the forthcoming months, including a site visit in the summer.
- Outline agreements with owners and lease holders around the site assembly for the preferred option. Again this has to be handled very sensitively because there are financial and political issues around some of the freeholds and leaseholds on the preferred site that do not belong to Plymouth City Council.
- An appropriate communications and engagement plan. With the negative press that this project has received in the past – and the above concerns – we need to be sure that communications and engagement with stakeholders are robust and do not put the project at risk. HLF will also be looking at the impact of this project, so will require detailed information on what 'need' there is in the city for this scheme and how the building and collections will be used to engage people throughout the development phase (after Stage I submission) and beyond.