

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: prevention of crime and disorder, equality of opportunity; and legal, financial, environmental, health, respect for human rights, personnel and property considerations.

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES
IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

28 June 2006

Report of the Chair of the Review Working Group

Review of the Derbyshire Records Office – Outcome Report

1. Purpose of the Report

To inform the Committee of the outcome of the review of the Derbyshire Record Office.

2. Information and Analysis

Members will be aware, from previous progress reports to this committee, of the work undertaken during the review of the Derbyshire Record Office. Initially, the working group visited the Record Office which is based in the Ernest Bailey Building in Matlock. The services and facilities provided by the Record Office were viewed and discussed with the County Archivist, Dr Margaret O'Sullivan.

A visit was also made to the Nottinghamshire Record Office when a tour of their new accommodation was provided by Mark Dorrington, the Nottinghamshire County Archivist. It was noted that the Nottinghamshire Record Office had very strong links with the Local Studies library. The advantages of this arrangement were apparent for both service users and providers alike.

Following the Nottinghamshire visit, the working group subsequently visited the main Derbyshire Local Studies library at County Hall to view their facilities. It was again evident that the information and records stored and maintained by both services complemented and overlapped each other and many service users sought information from both facilities.

A meeting was also held with Dr Tim Hobbs, the Chief Executive of Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) East Midlands to discuss the current Record Office/Local Studies service and to explore potential future improvements.

Dr Hobbs referred to the increasing public interest in public records and archives, generated not least by recent television programmes on tracing family ancestries. A modern, vibrant and easily accessible records and local studies facility was becoming more and more important in the eyes of service users and access to a coordinated service for both Record Office archives and local studies material was much preferable to a fragmented service.

On considering the amalgamation of the two services, it was evident that larger premises would be necessary to accommodate the collections and research material of both facilities. This would also provide additional storage space which would become more important over time as collections grew. It was agreed that the services need not be housed in Matlock, in fact, other areas may be considered more accessible to people wishing to use the facilities. It should be noted, however, that there are specific security and environmental control requirements for the storage of archives which would have to be adhered to if the record office were to be relocated.

When thought was given to potential sites for a joint record office/local studies library the Derwent valley corridor was considered the ideal location. Its historical importance as a World Heritage site attracted many visitors and complemented the service provision of the record office and local studies library. Perhaps there was scope for re-siting the services in some of the vacant mill properties situated along the Derwent corridor, thereby giving access to hundreds of historical documents and information sources on the very doorstep of the county's industrial heritage. If the Council decided to move the services to such premises, there was scope for including many other facilities on the same site. These could include;

- Provision of exhibition space for Museum/Art Gallery use, both by the County Council and the independent sector
- Computer access points for public use, as is currently available in libraries and other County Council outlets
- Learning/educational resources and space to allow school, colleges and individual students to access research materials. This would particularly complement the County Council's contribution to the Emsource project, which is a regional archive

education initiative. An independent survey of teachers and pupils, including those from Derbyshire schools, who have used the system found a great deal of enthusiasm for the resources it provides

- Education use of the service could be enhanced by providing INSET training events for teachers
- Conference/meeting facilities
- Work space for use County Council employees whilst “remote working”. Potentially this facility could be provided in partnership with local District Councils and other partnership agencies
- Facilities for refreshments (the average visit to the Record office was for 5 hours – visitors would certainly appreciate the opportunity to purchase refreshments during such a time)
- Space for cultural festivals and other events
- Areas to properly showcase some of the initiatives pertaining to the Council’s archives and collections, for example, the region’s “Picture the Past” collection and the national Access2Archives (A2A) database
- Space for traveling exhibitions

Other advantages could be that

- The siting of record office and local studied library resources in an area such as the Derwent valley corridor would complement the services *and* the local tourist industry. For example, those visitors wishing to undertake research using the County Council’s resources are more likely to visit the area for a longer period if they also have easy access to the County’s industrial heritage trail.
- Conversely, tourists already visiting the Derwent valley are likely to be attracted to the record office/local studies facilities as “passing visitors” who drop in to the centre on a whim
- By starting with “blank canvas” accommodation, the services can be provided in a bright, modern facility and provision could be made for additional storage space as the need arises over future years

Without a doubt, as well as the benefits of such a move, so there would be cost implications. However, Dr. Hobbs advised that by choosing such a site, the County Council could attract external funding. Specialist officers who worked for MLA East Midlands could advise and assist the Council to tap such funding opportunities and the Cultural and Community Services

department also has staff with considerable expertise in accessing external funding opportunities.

A relocation scheme which incorporates some or all of the ideas listed above could be prohibitively expensive, although it should not be discounted without exploring full costs and external funding opportunities. However, a less ambitious relocation project may be more realistic and should also be considered as part of a project plan.

If the County Council decided to implement a scheme which would re-house the record office and local studies library, and develop the scheme to include some or all of the above proposals, a project team would have to be established to produce a plan to include all aspects of costs, potential savings and sources of funding. Partners who may contribute to the project would have to be identified and included in the project development. Considerable research would have to be undertaken to determine the cost of the project and it would be necessary for officers of the Property Services Division and the Cultural and Community Services Department to work together to develop detailed costs for the different options which are detailed below;

Options

The review working group wishes to submit a number of options for consideration;

- 1 Both the Record Office and Local Studies Library be jointly relocated in suitable premises which allow for some expansion of service and storage provision, but with minimal cost (if any)
- 2 The two services be jointly relocated in accommodation in an area of local historical importance (for example the Derwent valley corridor) again allowing space for some expansion
- 3 The two services be jointly relocated in accommodation in an area of local historical importance but as part of a larger, comprehensive arts and cultural provision project

These options should be the basis of a business plan to be developed by the appropriate County Council staff with assistance from outside agencies and partners.

Acknowledgments

The working group would like to acknowledge the valuable assistance of the following people in conducting this review;

The County Archivist and staff of the Record Office

The Local Studies Librarian and staff of the Local Studies Library

Dr Tim Hobbs – Chief Executive of MLA East Midlands

Mark Dorrington – Principal Archivist, Nottinghamshire Record Office

Other Considerations

The impact of the review on the Council's financial, property and personnel resources have been taken into account.

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the work currently undertaken, and the services provided by the Derbyshire Record Office be noted, however, it also be understood that the current capacity of both services, and the present accessibility for the people of Derbyshire and service users from other areas, needs addressing for future years,
2. That officers of both the Property Services Division and the Cultural and Community Services work to produce a business plan for the options detailed in the report and
3. A report on the business plan produced by the officers be submitted back to this committee and Cabinet for further consideration.

KATH LAURO
Chair of the Review Working Group