

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

PLANNING COMMITTEE

12th JUNE 2012

**Planning Consultation by Worcestershire County Council
Proposed change of use of second floor of existing library to office
accommodation and provision of covered cycle racks
KIDDERMINSTER LIBRARY, MARKET STREET,
KIDDERMINSTER, DY10 1AB
12/0169/WCCR**

OPEN	
DIRECTOR:	Director of Economic Prosperity and Place
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APPENDICES:	None

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To make a decision on the Planning Consultation received from Worcestershire County Council in respect of the proposed change of use of second floor of existing library to office accommodation and provision of covered cycle racks at Kidderminster Library, Market Street, Kidderminster.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **The Committee is asked to resolve to respond to the consultation by offering NO formal OBJECTION to the application currently being considered by Worcestershire County Council.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The District Council has received a planning consultation from Worcestershire County Council in respect of an application to change the use of the second floor of the library, as summarised under paragraph 1.1, above.
- 3.2 The second floor of the library currently provides accommodation in the form of a gallery/exhibition area/piano recital room; meeting rooms; staff room; workspace; and, associated facilities.

- 3.3 It is proposed to change the use of the second floor to form office space to accommodate Worcestershire County Council staff relocating from existing offices (estimated to be 139 staff in total). The existing meeting rooms on the second floor would be replaced by similar sized rooms on the first floor of the library, which with the aid of folding walls provide a degree of flexibility in terms of size of meeting space available. The existing piano and recital space would be accommodated within these meeting rooms also, with the addition of acoustic lining to cater to piano recitals and other music events. The exhibition/gallery space would be accommodated at the ground floor within the current atrium area, along with a new coffee bar facility.

4. COMMENTS ON THE CONSULTATION

- 4.1 It is for Worcestershire County Council, as the relevant decision making body, to consider the appropriateness of the development with reference to all material planning considerations. The consultation process does, however, offer Wyre Forest District Council the opportunity to comment upon the application. In doing so, the starting point must be consideration of the relevant planning policies

Relevant Planning Policy

- 4.2 The site of Kidderminster Library is currently allocated on the Saved Wyre Forest District Local Plan Proposals Map for Community Facilities, although the related Local Plan Policy (CY.2) was excluded in 2010 following the adoption of the Core Strategy. Two further emerging Development Plan Documents are approaching their publication stage. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) specifies that development control decisions may give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans. It is therefore considered that the following adopted and emerging policies hold material weight in the consideration of this application.

- 4.3 **Adopted Core Strategy Policy CP07: Delivering Community Wellbeing** - This Policy seeks to ensure that future development fully considers the needs of local communities and seeks to promote and enhance facilities wherever practicable. It states that the Council will resist the loss of any community services and facilities unless an alternative is provided or evidence is presented that the facility is no longer required and suitable alternative uses have been considered. Any alternative provision should be of equal or better quality and be located in an appropriate and where feasible, sustainable location.

- 4.4 **Adopted Core Strategy Policy CP09: Retail and Commercial Development** - This specifies that new office development will be directed to the strategic centre of Kidderminster in the first instance as allocated through the Kidderminster Central Area Action Plan (KCAAP).

- 4.5 **Draft Pre-Submission Publication Site Allocations and Policies: Policy SAL:DPL1: Community Facilities** - This policy safeguards the community facilities and services as allocated on the Proposals Map unless clear evidence is provided to demonstrate one of the following:
- That it would not be economically viable to retain the buildings for community use;
 - That the community facility could not be provided by an alternative occupier or the local community;
 - That suitable alternative provision can be provided in an appropriate location.

Development proposals involving community facilities should demonstrate that they have consulted with the relevant local community about options for the continued delivery of the community use. If suitable, alternative accommodation can be provided within the locality then the redevelopment of a community facility for other uses would be considered more favourably.

- 4.6 **Draft Pre-Submission Publication Kidderminster Central Area Action Plan: Policy KCA.GPB7** - The KCAAP includes a number of objectives which seek to develop the entertainment and cultural offer of Kidderminster. The District Council will promote and encourage the provision, enhancement and diversification of Kidderminster's leisure and cultural facilities.

- 4.7 **Draft Pre-Submission Publication Kidderminster Central Area Action Plan: Policy KCA.GPB5 – Employment Development** - This policy specifies that subject to site specific policies, the following areas will be the focus for B1(a) office development within the KCAAP area:

- Traditional Town Centre
- Eastern Gateway
- Heritage Processions
- Churchfields

It also recognises that targeting new office development in the KCAAP area will also contribute strongly to the Council's aim to promote and secure the vitality and viability of its town centres. One of the employment objectives for the document is to increase the amount of office floorspace within the KCAAP area.

The principle of the proposed change of use to offices

- 4.8 It is considered that the proposal for office provision generally accords with the Wyre Forest District Council's policy approach towards office provision within Kidderminster town centre. Whilst it is acknowledged that the KCAAP does not contain a site specific policy relating to office uses at Market Street, it does specify that the traditional town centre will be a focus for B1(a) office development. In principle, therefore, the proposed end use would appear to be acceptable in planning policy terms.

The proposed relocation of existing facilities

- 4.9 However, in considering the merits of the proposal it is also relevant, in planning policy terms, to consider the loss/relocation of the community facilities, and principally the gallery/exhibition area and the associated piano recital facilities, all currently housed on the second floor of the library building.
- 4.10 As outlined under paragraph 3.3, above, it is proposed to relocate the existing second floor facilities, insofar as is achievable, on the remaining two floors of the library. The existing meeting rooms would be provided on the first floor along with a conference type room. The use of folding screen walls would provide a degree of flexibility, although one smaller meeting room would be "fixed". In comparing like-for-like in terms of existing meeting rooms and what is proposed, the floorspace proposed compares favourably, with a small net increase in meeting room/conference room facilities.
- 4.11 The proposed conference room is also intended to act as the piano recital/music room, again with the flexibility to extend the space into the adjoining smaller meeting room. Additional acoustic lining is proposed so as to aid and enhance the listening experience within this new area. The existing piano recitals take place within the open gallery/exhibition area. Comparing like-for-like in terms of overall floorspace in respect of the existing space used for piano/music recitals, the proposed area represents a reduction in floorspace compared with the existing area. Officers are aware that some concerns have been raised by objectors due to issues relating to the acoustics of the proposed space for piano recitals when compared to the existing space. Such an issue is not a planning consideration.

- 4.12 As referred to previously, the existing second floor of the library accommodates a publicly accessible gallery/exhibition area. Officers are aware that concerns have been raised regarding the loss of such a space without provision being made for its replacement in a suitable alternative location. Indeed, in planning policy terms, such provision would be required in line with the relevant policies set out above. In this regard, the application proposes to make provision for gallery/exhibition space on the ground floor of the building, within the existing open atrium area. In doing so it is proposed to formalise this current open space with the introduction of a coffee bar and seating area. Whilst the existing gallery/exhibition space is essentially square shaped, the proposed alternative on the ground floor would be more linear and would accommodate the aforementioned additional facilities (i.e. coffee bar and seating). Comparing like-for-like, the actual area proposed would represent a net loss in floorspace. However, balanced against this net loss, the gallery/exhibition area would be immediately accessible at the ground floor. It would be no more than speculation to suggest that footfall to exhibitions may increase as a direct result.
- 4.13 Officers are aware that the proposed change of use has generated a significant level of concern locally with regard to the potential loss, or reduction, in publicly accessible exhibition space and appropriate facilities for piano/music events. That said, the application as submitted does make provision for the relocation of such facilities within the existing building, to a level of provision that is considered to stand up to scrutiny when comparing the like-for-like floorspace provision. In addition, as has already been identified under paragraph 4.8, above, the proposed end use for B1(a) offices would satisfy the current local planning policies.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial implications.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no legal or policy implications.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 There are no risk management issues.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 This report relates to a consultation with Wyre Forest District Council by Worcestershire County Council, as the relevant planning authority. There are no equality impact implications to be considered.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 Having considered the proposal for the change of use of the second floor of Kidderminster Library to B1(a) offices against the relevant local planning policy, it is concluded that a **no objection** response should be returned to Worcestershire County Council.

10. CONSULTEES

- 10.1 None.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Planning Consultation 10/0312/LPAC.
- Worcestershire County Council Planning Application 10/000032.
- Worcestershire County Structure Plan.
- Wyre Forest Core Strategy.
- Wyre Forest District Local Plan.
- National Planning Policy Framework.