

Cabinet – 15 July 2009

Bloxwich Library Theatre

Portfolio: Councillor Sanders, Leisure and Culture

Service: Leisure, Culture and Lifelong Learning

Wards: Bloxwich West

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1. Summary of report

Following the successful award of £1.2m by the BIG Lottery Community Libraries Fund in July 2008 for improvements and refurbishment work at Bloxwich Library Theatre, the project has reached the point where competitive tenders are being invited for the construction work.

2. Recommendations

That Cabinet grant delegated authority to the Executive Director for Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Lifelong Learning, to accept tenders and award a contract of value in excess of £500,000.

3. Background information

- 3.1 Bloxwich Library is the third busiest in Walsall. The Library Modernisation Plan, approved by Walsall Council in March 2006, included provision for some improvements to the Library, but financial constraints meant that these would be limited to basic refurbishment and minor alterations.

A successful bid to support a more fundamental transformation was made in 2008 to the Big Lottery Community Libraries Fund to enable the remodelling of the whole building. This would transform the aging and dilapidated accommodation at Bloxwich Library into a vibrant, flexible and inclusive facility for learning and culture in the heart of Bloxwich. The building will be remodelled to provide community space which will reflect and respond to the needs of local people, offer new experiences and a chance to shape individual life chances. The current layout and condition of Bloxwich Library and Theatre make it impossible to develop the service and respond to the needs of local people, however, this award offers the opportunity to develop of a truly modern library service.

While the external character of the 1950's "Festival of Britain" building will be protected the Big Lottery award will enable the interior to be changed into a dynamic, flexible arena enabling the provision of modern library facilities linked to informal community learning and information needs, as well as offering a venue for theatre, music and dance performances, meetings and community activities.

A cabinet report was submitted and approved in January 2008 which outlined expenditure proposals on the library modernisation plan including the planned capital contribution towards this project.

4. Resource considerations

- 4.1 **Financial:** The sum of £1,269,900 has been awarded by the BIG Lottery Fund Community Libraries Fund and an additional contribution of £120,000 has been allocated from the library modernisation plan.
- 4.2 **Legal:** Relevant legal assistance has been obtained where necessary.
- 4.3 **Staffing:** Any necessary re-structuring of staffing arrangements will be undertaken from within existing budgets.

5. Citizen impact

The project will transform Bloxwich Library into a vibrant, flexible and inclusive facility for learning and culture in Bloxwich. It will see the creation of a genuine community space which will reflect and respond to the needs of local people, challenge the low aspirations and the perceived lack of opportunity, offer new experiences and a chance to shape individual life chances.

The building will need to be remodelled both internally and externally. The interior will be transformed into a dynamic, flexible arena, enabling the provision of modern library facilities linked to informal community learning and information needs. The new facility will include a local access point for council information; exhibition, display and performance areas; a café, meeting rooms and children's reading garden.

6. Community safety

Community safety and accessibility will be at the heart of the project.

7. Environmental impact

The energy performance of the building will be significantly enhanced as a result of the planned improvements.

8. Performance and risk management issues

- 8.1 **Risk:** The project is monitored through the corporate risk management action plan via the Walsall Project Approach.
- 8.2 **Performance management:** A project group has been established which comprises representatives from all relevant service areas, meets monthly to review progress and is chaired by the Head of Libraries & Heritage.

9. Equality implications

The service from the refurbished & modernised facility will continue to be accessible to all members of the community and be able to offer enhanced access and facilities as a result.

10. Consultation

The following officers have been consulted on the purpose & contents of this report; Sue Grainger - Head of Library Services, Vicky Buckley – Head of Financial Services, Tracy Giles – Legal Services & Richard Bolton – Communications Unit.

Background papers

Report to Cabinet 16 January 2008 “Funding of the Libraries Modernisation Plan”

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6 July 2009



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6 July 2009