

## **Cabinet – 28 February 2007**

### **Library modernisation plan – BIG Lottery bid for Bloxwich Library**

**Portfolio:** Councillor Louise Harrison. Leisure and Culture

**Service:** Libraries and Heritage

**Ward:** Bloxwich West and Bloxwich East

**Key decision:** Yes

**Forward plan:** Yes

#### **Summary of report**

Bloxwich Library currently occupies a 1950s building which incorporates an underused but popular theatre with stage and raked seating for 130 and refreshment /bar facility. Both facilities are in poor condition and currently operate independently of the library service; although the theatre is programmed by the Council.

£120,000 has been identified through Library Modernisation Plan to refresh the appearance of the building and to modernize the presentation of its stock and facilities. It will also improve the entrance area and disabled facilities and present a unified community resource.

The opportunity has arisen to bid for funding through the BIG Lottery Community Libraries Programme for additional funding to offer more than traditional library services and work with local communities to:

- invigorate libraries as centres of wider community learning and development, and learning based activities
- create improve and develop library spaces to meet the needs of the whole community
- be innovative and promote good practice in the ways libraries are designed and run

If this application is successful it would enable the delivery of a far more ambitious development than currently envisaged in the Library Modernisation Plan, which would not only physically improve and enhance both the library and theatre spaces, but physically link them to improve access, increase flexibility and offer spaces to deliver a wide variety of activities and events.

This report seeks Cabinet agreement to apply for BIG Lottery funding under the Community Libraries Programme to transform Bloxwich Library and Bloxwich Library Theatre, remodelling these spaces to create a flexible community facility which will offer exciting opportunities for cultural and learning activities, responding to the needs of the local community identified through ongoing community engagement. The bid to the BIG Lottery will mean that the current refurbishment scheduled for Year One of the Library Modernisation Plan will be delayed into Year Two while the outcome of the bid, due by September 2007, is awaited.

## **Recommendations**

- (1) That an application be made to the BIG Lottery Community Libraries Programme for funding to remodel Bloxwich Library and Library Theatre to deliver a flexible facility for community use and to enhance cultural and learning opportunities for all residents of Bloxwich
- (2) That Cabinet agree to delay the delivery of the refurbishment of Bloxwich Library from Year 1 to Year 3 of the Library Modernisation Plan

## **Resource and legal considerations**

£120,000 has been allocated through the Library Modernisation Plan to refurbish Bloxwich Library. This would count as matched funding for a bid to the BIG Lottery to remodel both the library and theatre areas to form flexible spaces which would reflect community needs and offer enhanced cultural and learning activities. The BIG Lottery Community Library Programme funding can only be spent on library buildings and must be developed with full and ongoing community engagement. The bid will present a number of options to the Lottery which may exceed £1 million.

## **Citizen impact**

The enhanced facilities at Bloxwich Library would not only improve the physical appearance of the building to offer a welcoming and friendly service in a building that is attractive, comfortable and easy to access. The development of the plan will depend on the engagement with the local community and commit to continue that engagement in the further development of services and facilities.

The BIG Lottery requires that all projects must ensure that all communities are actively engaged in the development, delivery and management of library services.

In addition, activity space will offer local groups, communities and individuals opportunities to enjoy new and exciting activities and experiences not traditionally offered by library services; including:

- Learning opportunities including: independent adult learning, basic skills training, family learning, language courses,
- Opportunities to enhance children's life chances: cradle clubs, children's storytelling and parent and toddler groups, homework clubs, out of school groups, holiday activities

- An opportunity for people to meet and share an interest: book clubs and creative writing groups, local history workshops, family reading groups, healthy living, including well being and fitness groups
- Enhance community cohesion and local democracy: community meetings, surgery facilities for elected members and other council services such as housing and consumer services
- Live entertainment, including drama, dance, comedy and live music and children's performances
- Exhibitions
- Cinema
- Private hire

### **Community safety**

The remodelling and refurbishment of the building will have community safety at the heart of its development. The ease of access, comfort and safety of our customers will underpin planning at all stages of the development of the project.

The building will be designed to be accessible to everyone offering a venue that is safe and respected at all times.

### **Environmental impact**

The BIG Lottery requires that projects must deliver library buildings that “use less energy, pollute less, create less waste and have a reduced contribution to climate change.”

This project will enhance the current library building to improve energy efficiency and reduce its carbon footprint. Its environs will include the development of an outside garden space for appropriate activities in fine weather or quiet reflection at other times

### **Performance and risk management issues**

The proposed developments will improve performance by increasing the number of visits the library currently receives, improving customer satisfaction by improving and enhancing services and opportunities, attract new library members and improve community engagement and responsiveness to local communities

Should the BIG Lottery bid be unsuccessful, some funding has been identified through the Library Modernisation Plan to enable the refurbishment of the library area only. No improvements could be made to the Library Theatre and it would remain in its current unacceptable condition until other funding became available.

### **Equality implications**

All changes would be made to ensure the equality of access to all parts of the building and new facilities developed within.

The BIG Lottery requires that projects must achieve two or more of the following criteria:

- increased capacity of libraries to act as centres of wider community learning and development
- disadvantaged and disengaged groups use libraries more
- local libraries are better designed, more accessible and more available to meet the needs of their community
- libraries have stronger long term partnerships with the VCS and with other community service providers

## **Consultation**

Ongoing community engagement is at the heart of the Community Libraries Programme.

- The views of the residents and stakeholders of Bloxwich have been gathered through a programme of surveys and focus groups
- Community groups have been involved
- Consultation has been held with the Local Neighbourhood Partnership
- Library customer feedback has been analysed
- Reports in the local press have invited feedback from residents
- Ongoing user involvement with the use of the community spaces will be enabled

Following a presentation of the proposals to the Blakenall and Bloxwich Local Neighbourhood Partnership, they agreed the resolution: "*That the LNP welcomes and wholeheartedly supports the Big Lottery application bid which endeavours to bring about real investment into the community in the form of community cohesion and education which the LNP believes will have a positive effect on the surrounding community of Blakenall and Bloxwich and that this support be communicated to heads of department and the Big Lottery Fund*"

## **Vision 2008**

The remodelling of Bloxwich will contribute directly to the council's Vision 2008:

- Making our schools great – through homework and learning support for children and independent learners
- Make Walsall a healthy and caring place – providing a venue for activities promoting both physical and mental well-being
- Encourage everyone to feel proud of Walsall - the refurbished library and its new facilities will be an icon for the local area
- Make it easier to access local services – plans contain a local access point within the new library which will offer access to all council services
- Listen to what local people want – ongoing local community engagement will continue to inform the development of the service and the use of the community spaces
- Transform Walsall into an excellent local authority – the changes will encourage greater use of the library and improve performance against Public Library Standards and Comprehensive Performance Assessment targets

## Background papers

Library Modernisation Plan – report to Cabinet 1 March 2006

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19 February 2007



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19 February 2007