

Executive**4 July 2006**Report Title: **Proposed Developments to Muswell Hill and Coombes Croft Libraries**

Forward Plan reference number (if applicable): []

Report of: **Assistant Chief Executive (Access)**Wards(s) affected: **Muswell Hill &
Northumberland Park**Report for: **Key Decision****1. Purpose**

1.1 To seek authorisation for consultations on building developments to Coombes Croft and Muswell Hill Libraries, in line with the Library Strategy agreed by the Council in June 2005, noting and agreeing in principal the funding routes proposed for these developments.

2. Introduction by Executive Member

2.1 In 2003, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport published *Framework for the Future*, which set out a strategy to support the development of public libraries over the next ten years. Our own library strategy, agreed by the Council last year, aims to address the key elements of *Framework for the Future*: promoting books, learning and reading; facilitating digital citizenship; and fostering community and civic values.

2.2 Access to good library facilities is fundamental to the achievement of the priorities set out in our Community Strategy. Our libraries are important as a social space, as well as a source of reading and information. *Framework for the Future* urges libraries to incorporate cafes, learning centres and performance spaces where possible to deliver a wide range of services and to make creative use of space.

2.3 Coombes Croft and Muswell Hill are well used and well loved local libraries. Coombes Croft serves a deprived area in North Tottenham where the crucial role it plays in encouraging learning, especially amongst children and young people, is undermined by cramped premises. Muswell Hill library is a listed building in poor condition with significant access limitations for disabled people. Like Coombes Croft the building is too small for the needs of the local population. Both libraries need major investment.

2.4 In approving this report the Executive is agreeing to public consultation on development options for both libraries and, in the case of Muswell Hill, to ring fencing any capital receipts to funding the library works.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 To authorise consultation with local communities in relation to the development proposals to Coombes Croft and Muswell Hill Libraries, in the case of Coombes Croft after a source of funding is identified.
- 3.2 To authorise the submission of a bid to DCMS to fund the Coombes Croft development and any other source of relevant funding which becomes apparent, noting that this development can only proceed if an external funding source is found.
- 3.3 To note that Muswell Hill development is predicated on realising value from the Council's assets and, therefore, to agree that, subject to the consultation, sufficient capital receipts arising from the proposals are ring fenced to the library developments.

Report Authorised by: **Justin Holliday Assistant Chief Executive (Access)**

Contact Officer: **Diana Edmonds Head of Libraries, Archives and Museum Service**

4. Executive Summary

Feasibility studies have been undertaken to ascertain how Coombes Croft and Muswell Hill Libraries might be improved and developed. Three designs options were created for the library at Muswell Hill and one for Coombes Croft Library. This report describes the development proposals at each library.

This report seeks authority to undertake a consultation exercise with local communities and with other stakeholders in the area and agreement to the ring fencing of any capital receipts arising from the proposals to the library developments.

5. Reasons for any change in policy or for new policy development (if applicable)

- 5.1 The feasibility studies were commissioned pursuant to a previous decision of the Executive. The ring fencing of any capital receipts is a departure from the Council's existing policy on capital receipts (albeit heralded in the agreed strategy) and requires a specific decision.

6. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

The two feasibility studies relating to the development of Coombes Croft and Muswell Hill Libraries prepared by John Miller and Partners.

For background information, please contact Diana Edmonds, Head of Libraries, Archives & Museum Services on 020 8489 2759

7. Background

The Library Strategy agreed by the Executive in June 2005 set out, *inter alia*, the need to invest in four of our library facilities. Two of these were Muswell Hill and Coombes Croft Libraries which are both heavily used and which need development in order to have sufficient capacity to deliver the services which are required by local communities.

The Executive agreed to undertake Feasibility Studies to identify the potential to develop each of these libraries. This report sets out the results of these feasibility studies for decision.

8. Description

Two Feasibility Studies were undertaken by John Miller and Partners, an architectural practice with experience in the sympathetic development of historic library buildings.

Coombes Croft

The scheme proposed for Coombes Croft Library, subject to the consultation, aims to open up the existing library spaces, maximising the potential of the available space without extension. The existing staff workroom and kitchen would be removed to create a more open plan layout. A new glazed screen would increase the sense of space and light in the library, by opening up views to the very pleasant existing courtyard. In summer, this arrangement would make it possible for children and parents using the library to spill outside, using the playground or participating in outdoor activities. In order to minimise the cost of the redevelopment, it is proposed that the existing block containing WCs and boiler room should remain. This would be refitted to provide an accessible WC including baby changing facility, and a new staff kitchen. Two further WCs and storage would be accommodating in a corresponding block in the adult lending library. Staff desks would be positioned at either side of the main entrance, to enable staff to supervise and support the use of both the children's and adult libraries. A self issue kiosk would also be installed, to enable customers to issues library material. To the front of the building, it is proposed that the existing planting bed and ramp handrails could be remodelled to refresh the external appearance of the library.

The costs of the development are estimated to be in the region of £275,000. It is anticipated that the proposed development could be funded by a new DCMS funding stream for community libraries which will be formally announced in July. Authority to put in relevant bids is sought.

The scope of the consultation is set out in section 9.

Muswell Hill

The feasibility study explored three options for Muswell Hill:

1. Minimum work to improve accessibility and resolve condition issues
2. Development with ground floor restaurant and housing development to the rear
3. Development with housing development to the rear

The Executive, in approving the feasibility studies, was careful to specify that the studies should be constrained by the likely availability of funding. We have not been able to identify a funding source other than the site value, which means that neither option one (with a cost of £500,000 and an estimated capital receipt of £nil) nor option three (with a cost of £1,800,000 and an indicative capital receipt of substantially less) are viable.

Option two is, therefore, the only viable option. This option provides, at ground floor level, a new entrance which is both dramatic and accessible. The adult lending library would be relocated to a ground floor extension. A lift and new staircase would be provided on the site of the existing IT suite, in a space which could also be used for exhibitions.

The ground floor of the existing library would be released for use as a restaurant, releasing a capital sum to fund work to the library.

The first floor of the existing building would be returned to its original function as a reading room, with power and data provision to allow for lap tops to be used at any study desk. The children's and teen library would be accommodated in the extension, with a flexible partition to allow the space to be used together or separately at different times. WCs for library use would be located between the children's library and reading room, acting as an acoustic buffer.

The cost of this development has been estimated at £1,800,000. An assessment by Corporate Property Services in relation to the development of the site incorporating a restaurant facility and via a sympathetic housing development to the rear of the library has indicated that a value of £1,800,000 could be realised subject to appropriate building and planning consent for change of use, listed building consent and other statutory requirements. The estimated capital receipt of £1,800,000 makes this option financially viable if, as heralded in the June 2005 report, the Executive decides to ring fence a sufficient amount of the capital receipt to library developments.

The scope of the consultation is set out in section 9.

9. Consultation

It is proposed to conduct the consultation in July and August. Two primary forms of consultation will be used:

- displaying design boards in each of the two libraries concerned and providing a semi structured comments form to allow customers to make comments and suggestions; and
- a number of open meetings will be held.

The primary aim of the consultations is to gain feedback from library users and the community generally on the detailed designs and, in particular, the internal arrangements in each facility. Clearly the consultation will elicit feedback, for members to consider, on the overall nature of the proposals.

10. Financial implications and justification for departure from the policy on capital receipts

The financial consequences of the proposals are clearly set out above: a cost of around £275,000 for the Coombes Croft scheme and £1.8 million for the Muswell Hill scheme. As the Executive's agreed library strategy makes clear, these schemes have been developed to address the condition of these buildings and their suitability for the volume of activity, which has, as members are aware, dramatically increased. Members will also be aware that the condition issues in the Muswell Hill library have been a matter of some public note, firmly demonstrated by the cost of the 'do minimum' option (option one) of £0.5 million

The availability of capital funding to the Council is such that mainstream funding is not prioritised to library buildings. The feasibility studies set out to identify funding sources. It is likely, as set out above, that an external funding source will be found for Coombes Croft. For Muswell Hill this is unlikely so we have investigated realising value from the library building itself and Council owned land to the rear of the building. The capital receipt has two elements: the sale of land and leasing part of the redeveloped building. The first is justified by the palpable need, set out in the report, to resolve the condition issues in this facility. The second is arguably not a capital receipt, within the sense of the policy, because it is conceptually a rental in advance which, if it were a rental, would as a matter of course be used to fund the maintenance and upkeep, of the facility and the library service generally.

The running costs of the new facilities will be contained within existing budgets.

11. Comments of the Head of Property Services

A brief assessment has been undertaken by Corporate Property Services in relation to the development of the site incorporating a restaurant facility and a small housing development to the rear of the library on land currently used as a car park.

It is considered that a value of £1,800,000 could be realised subject to appropriate building and planning consent for change of use, listed building consent and other statutory requirements.

12. Comments of the Head of Legal Services

There are no specific legal implications at this stage of the project.

13. Comments of the Acting Director of Finance

The Council's current policy on the use of capital receipts is that they are resources to be considered corporately as part of the review of the capital programme each year and allocated according to agreed priorities. Members are asked to consider in principal an exception to that policy. I support the recommendation to agree this exception on the basis outlined the report.

The development proposals are for consultation purposes and the detailed assessment of costs and values will need to be completed before any scheme could commence in order to ensure value for money is achieved and that all risks are quantified and mitigation actions identified.

14. Equalities implications

The purpose of the developments proposed for these libraries is to make them fit for purpose for the communities they serve, taking account of the diverse needs of the respective communities.

15. Comments from Planning Development Control

No comments on Coombes Croft development.

Regarding Muswell hill, it would be essential to gain planning permission for the restaurant (as it is change of use); the building of the ramp; and the car park development. The need for careful and thorough public consultation is also noted.