

West Glamorgan Archive Service and the Community Hub Project Progress Report

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 16 August 2022

Community Hub Background

- Following the Council's Cabinet report 'City Centre Marketing of Strategic Site Joint Venture Opportunity and FPR7' and the subsequent approval from Cabinet to include the Civic Centre as a Strategic Development site, the Council have continued to develop proposals for the relocation of Council Services which will be required as a result of the regeneration of the site.
- Whilst the majority of services that provide predominantly back office functions are proposed to relocate to a new Public Sector Hub in the city centre, there are a number of services that are unsuitable for this type of accommodation and alternative options were developed, namely the concept of the Community Hub.
- The remainder of this report will provide an update on the progress of the Community Hub project to date with the ambition to develop a Community Hub that is an exemplar across Wales.

Project Objectives

- The aspirations and vision for the Community Hub used to aid development of the brief are highlighted below:
 - To create an innovative, flexible Community Hub in the heart of the city centre that will promote; community cohesion, opportunities for self-development and growth, support digital inclusion, improve well-being and unite and strengthen our diverse community.
 - Achieve access to all and provide a range of services in a welcoming environment where people can meet and participate in social activities, learning and support groups.
 - Encourage a coordinated approach in supporting the community in finding and delivering solutions to improve quality of life.
- In addition, a specification was provided to the Multi Disciplinary Team ("MDT") to create innovative solutions for a public front facing flexible space that incorporates the following services but is not limited to:
 - To create an inspiring building that reflects the aspirations of the project and the community in which it is located.
 - A modern Library provision, adhering to Welsh public library standards and best practice outlined in the quality framework for libraries.
 - Archive Storage space to accommodate 4,500 linear meters, aiming to work to BS EN 16893:2018 Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Specifications for location, construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collections. Also take into account the requirements of the Archive Service Accreditation Standard, and BS 4971: 2017 Conservation and care of archive and library collections, to ensure the Archive Service remains a Place of Deposit for Public Records, under the Public Records Act 1958.
 - Create a co-working space that is publicly accessible.
 - To provide accommodation format options to deliver the functions of all services proposed for the Community Hub for Swansea Council and other potential partners

- To achieve planning consent with all aspects approved.
- To provide support and guidance in working to the Councils aim of net carbon neutrality sustainability accreditation and Smart building concepts.
- To deliver a scheme that goes beyond the minimum requirements in terms of social sustainability and accessibility.
- Follow the main principles of circular economy in design for the building and raise public awareness of the strategy.
- To achieve high quality in design, place making and sustainability that is consistent with Swansea Councils aspirations for the scheme and compliments other Council projects within the city centre.

Stakeholders

- To date the discussions with stakeholders in the main have been very positive and it's been determined the services they provide would enhance the offering to the public as well as benefiting wider service provision by being in close proximity to partner organisations. The proposed internal Council services have been engaged throughout this process and have had approval via Cabinet to relocate to the Community Hub.
- External stakeholder engagement has also been extremely positive, and partners recognise the benefits of co-locating with Council citizen-led services as well as other external partners. External partners have been included in the design process to date and are interested in having a presence in the Community Hub.
- Discussions are also ongoing with other external partners who although aren't able to commit to a full-time presence in the Community Hub but do want to be involved and see the benefit in collaborating with other services in the building. This membership style involvement will allow external partners use of various elements of the building to meet with the public.

Consultation to Date

- Initial public consultation was conducted in March 2021 which received a positive response of over 500 Submissions.
- Social media has been posted at strategic points in the project to date in order to keep the public updated and determine ongoing public opinion. A video regarding the plans for the community hub was also released on social media in June 2021 which received favourable feedback.
- Throughout the process the project team have also met with a number of other Stakeholders outside of those services proposed for the building to keep them updated on the project and to gauge feedback on progress to date. These stakeholders include but are not limited to; Cabinet, Regeneration Members Steering Group, Neath Port Talbot Archive partnership, West Glamorgan Archive Committee, and Local Property Board.
- In addition the design team has met with the disability liaison group twice to discuss ideas, layout plans and to discuss any accessibility issues that may have been overlooked.

Works Completed

- Following Cabinet approval in December 2020, the Council proceeded with the acquisition of the leasehold interest of 277-278 Oxford Street and completed the purchase in May 2021. A subsequent Cabinet report was approved in December 2021 to acquire the leasehold interest of 279 Oxford Street and this completed in May 2022.

- The MDT were appointed in April 2021, RIBA Stage 1 commenced with the MDT meeting each of the Stakeholders to listen and understand feedback on existing accommodation, operational process, spatial requirements, adjacencies and aspirations for the Community Hub. The RIBA stage 1 report was issued to the Council and signed off in June 2021.
- Following the completion of RIBA 1, RIBA Stage 2 commenced, working with stakeholders to discuss design progress and the development of individual requirements, as well as initial design layouts specific to each service area. The RIBA Stage 2 report was completed and signed off in August 2021.
- As a result of a flooding incident in 277-278 Oxford Street, enabling works to the ground floor were expedited, due to Health and Safety risks. Removal and disposal of all asbestos material on the entire ground floor started in November 2021 and completed in February 2022.
- A pre planning application was submitted in December 2020 for the Community Hub scheme. Since then, the MDT has been in regular discussions with Swansea Council Planning services to ensure refurbishment works are compliant. A change of use application was submitted in late November 21 and was approved by the planning committee January 2022.
- In the latter part of 2022, following continued discussions with Welsh Government on a funding application to the Transforming Towns grant, the question was raised as to what Swansea Archives services would be in scope and proposed to feature within the hub. From the very outset the West Glamorgan Archive Service has been included within the scope of the scheme, however at the request of Welsh Government other collections have also been explored, Following further work to look at the appropriateness of relocating these collections, it was deemed the incorporation of the Miner's Library would be beneficial for all parties.
- Following the outcome of incorporating a Regional Archive within the Community Hub, Welsh Government's Transforming Towns grant was approved by the First Minister in March 2022, however this unforeseen addition to the programme has extended completion date to late autumn 2023.

Work in progress

- RIBA Stage 3 restarted following Welsh Government grant approval in March 2023. Layout plans were frozen in May 2022 and detailed M&E design was undertaken. The RIBA Stage 3 report has been issued to the Council for approval via the project board.
- Creating a Community Hub which will house a range of frontline services, delivering an efficient, effective front of house service is vital. In order to maximise the potential of the building for customers and service teams the Council aims to create a fresh approach to front of house service delivery, this will maximise the new spaces created through the re-purposing of the building. To assist in creating this new approach the Council procured a consultant as part of the design team to assist with this new operational model to ensure the design of the building works to achieve the delivery of the community hub. Following the Consultant's report the Council will set up an Operational Delivery working group to take this work forward.
- Phase 2 of enabling works is ongoing. Work is progressing well and on schedule to complete in mid-August.
- Main contractor procurement was tendered via Sell2Wales and was open for 6 weeks, the evaluation of the tenders have been completed and are being finalised via the Councils internal procedures. The appointment of the Main Contractor should start in August and as a

consequence the development of RIBA Stage 4 design, our current MDT will continue to work with the Council's project team as technical advisors.

West Glamorgan Archive Service Background

- West Glamorgan Archive Service (WGAS) collects documents and related material (photographs, sound recordings etc) relating to the history of the former county of West Glamorgan. In April 1996, following the abolition of West Glamorgan County Council, WGAS became a joint service between Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Councils.
- The formal governance of WGAS is through a joint archives committee consisting of equal numbers of elected representatives from each of its two parent authorities. A number of non-voting representatives of various bodies with an interest in archives and local history also attend the quarterly committee. The role of the Archives Committee is advisory and, to take effect, any of its recommendations have to be taken back to the respective parent authorities for approval by each full Council.
- In 2016, the Archive Service was awarded the Archives Accreditation Standard. Overseen in Wales by Welsh Government, the standard is based on good governance, proper care of the collections and viable models for customer and public engagement. The award lasts for six years and therefore is on the point of expiry. However, given the current situation of the impending move, Welsh Government has agreed to provisionally extend our Accreditation until the new archive facility is opened, at which point a completely fresh application will have to be made.

Scope of the archive collections

- About one quarter of the material WGAS holds is derived from the two councils and includes material mostly of their older predecessor authorities. A second quarter of the whole consists of public records as mentioned above. The remaining half is purchased, donated or deposited by outside bodies such as landed estates, solicitors, churches and chapels, individuals and local businesses. These are historic records that WGAS is empowered to collect under the Local Government (Records) Act 1962.
- The archive collections occupy a total of roughly 2.5 miles of shelving. They contain a number of 'high value' items - medieval borough and abbey charters, finely-drawn and painted estate maps from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and ancient parish registers from across Swansea and Gower. Particularly worthy of note is the Neath Abbey Ironworks collection, which was enrolled on the UK register of the UNESCO Memory of the World programme in 2014 because it is a unique record from the early Industrial Revolution. This accolade is awarded to only five archive pieces in Wales, and this is the only one held in a local authority archive, the rest being in the National Library of Wales.

Service performance 2021/22 and outreach work

- The nature of archives and how they are used means that an archive facility does not have as large a footfall as comparable cultural venues. In contrast the 'dwell time' of visitors to an archive is usually considerably longer than that of visitors to these other venues, visits lasting a full day being a common occurrence. Viewed over the period since the last refurbishment of the facility in 2008, we can see that our user visits peaked in 2010/11 at around 10,000 and then entered a period of decline to just over half that figure in 2019/20. Since the pandemic, the service has struggled to regain its former customer base and had only 679 visitors in 2021/22 with a restricted 'socially-distanced' service for pre-booked customers only.

- Since Covid restrictions were lifted, in particular family historians have been slow to return to the Family History Centre. Family historians are now able to view online on the Ancestry website nearly all the parts of the archive collections that are name-rich, for which the Service receives a royalty payment. It is likely that many of our previous and potential customers have taken out a subscription to Ancestry during lockdown, although with the impending economic situation this may be one of the subscriptions that they choose to give up.
- In 2010, the service introduced a service to schools, initially for primary schools at KS2 level but soon extending to secondary schools at KS3. The service offered includes visits for a class to see and use the archives or else tailored sessions delivered onsite at the school. This work has also been affected by the pandemic, with no school visits taking place since early 2020 and all sessions delivered remotely via Microsoft Teams.
- Further information about the service's activities over the last year is contained in an annual report which is published bilingually online at

<https://www.swansea.gov.uk/article/6226/Annual-Report-of-the-County-Archivist>

<https://www.abertawe.gov.uk/article/6227/Adroddiad-Blynyddol-Archifydd-y-Sir>

West Glamorgan Archive Service progress

- Since November 2021, there have been regular fortnightly consultations with Kim Collis, the County Archivist, supplemented with comments and queries from key members of MALD, The National Archives and the National Conservation Service. Much of the focus from recent discussions has been on the detailed design and spatial planning of the Archive Searchroom.
- In December 2021, MALD wrote "*We are content that the proposals for meeting the requirements of BS EN 16893:2018 Conservation of Cultural Heritage - Specification for location, construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for storage or use of heritage collections in respect of environmental modelling and fire risk assessment are broadly appropriate, but have a number of remaining queries and concerns.*" These remaining concerns have been addressed through RIBA Stage 3 and will continue throughout RIBA Stage 4 to ensure accreditation of the WGAS.
- During RIBA Stage 3 two further visits have been made by the Design Team to the Archive facilities within the Civic Centre to review existing storage systems and the current arrangement of Reception to Searchroom as experienced by the visitor and in terms of the daily operation and security by staff.
- The storage capacity of the Archive Strongroom, including expansion space, has been checked against the totals provided by West Glamorgan Archives Service, and an updated layout has been provided by a storage specialist.
- The Archive Strongroom will be located within a buffered space with an 'airlock' between doors. Thermal modelling has been carried out during RIBA Stages 2 and 3 to aid the Archive Strongroom design, helping to understand the environmental conditions of the constructed strongroom. The thermal modelling process suggests that no HVAC control is required to maintain environmental conditions within the BS4971 tolerances.
- The design will be further developed during RIBA Stage 4 by the appointed Main Contractor team who are to explore conditioning options for the buffer zone surrounding the archive to provide assurance that stable environmental conditions during unforeseen periods of excess heat can readily be achieved.

- A Fire Engineer was appointed to help advise the design team regarding the fire strategy for both the WGAS and the Community Hub building as a whole. The RIBA Stage 3 Fire Strategy has been developed but still includes the key elements that have been throughout the project in relation to the Archives, namely:
 - Structure to the Community Hub is to be upgraded to 2 hour fire resistance.
 - To ensure fire spread will be minimised, in the low probability of a fire starting it has been proposed to include an automatic fire suppression system in accordance with BS EN 12845 throughout the building (but not within the Archive Store itself).
 - The Archive Strongroom will be an independent fire compartment allowing for 2 hours Fire resistance that has the capability of electrical supply isolation and the capability to prevent water ingress in the event of a sprinkler system activating in close proximity.
 - The whole building will be covered with a fire alarm system designed in accordance with BS 5839: 1.
 - Early intervention from the Fire Service has been determined based on the proximity of the local Fire Service stations and response time directives set out by the Welsh Government.
- Similarly the security strategy retains the key elements that were discussed previously, namely:
 - New intruder alarm system and CCTV provision to be installed.
 - Security staff will be present within the building during hours of operation
 - Movement sensors to be installed to the Archive Strongroom approach.
 - Door activated sensor contacts with a pin code panel or similar to be included for staff to use when disabling the alarm when the Archive Strongroom door is unlocked.
 - Archive Strongroom is located within its own compartment with no external walls
 - Doors, frames, mountings and hardware to the Archive Strongroom are to be constructed to resist unauthorised entry.
 - Only Archive staff to have access rights to the Archive Strongroom.
- The Design Team are now coming to the completion of Stage 3 and the production of Archive requirements, and believe that the Archive design is in a good place for the appointed Main Contractor and their Design Team to inherit the Technical Design work required of RIBA Stage 4.

Next Steps

- The Main Contractor will be appointed in early August. Development of RIBA stage 4 design will start in earnest in August 2022, with the current MDT as technical advisors to the Council. The indicative completion date for this project in late October 2023, but this will be established once the Main Contractor is appointed.