

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY INFORMATION AND PROTECTION
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY, 15 JANUARY 2002 AT 10.30 A.M.

**HERTFORDSHIRE ARCHIVES AND LOCAL STUDIES (HALS)
ACCOMMODATION - UPDATE**

Report of the Director of Community Information

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Executive Member: Derrick Ashley

1. Purpose of the Report

To update the Community Information and Protection Select Committee on work undertaken to address the accommodation issues reported on to the Committee for its meeting on 4th July 2001 and subsequently referred to the County Council meeting on the 27th November 2001.

2. Background

2.1 The Committee on 4 July 2001 considered the present HALS accommodation and the problems highlighted by the Public Records Office (and subsequently by the Historical Manuscripts Commission) which may lead to a loss of 'place of deposit' status.

2.2 The Executive member responsible, Derrick Ashley, was requested to draw the Cabinet's attention to the matter whilst the Directors of Community Information and People and Property were to obtain costings for a range of possible solutions.

3. Action To Date

The following actions have been taken:

3.1 Expenditure of £10,000 taken from Community Information's capital maintenance provision has been committed to address some of the priority issues highlighted in the report. These include measures designed to improve the level of filtration on windows in the Archive and Library reading rooms and strong rooms, to improve security and fire prevention and to prevent further water seepage in the strong rooms.

3.2 These works will be completed within this financial year. It is hoped that both the Public Records Office and Historical Manuscripts Commission will respond to the completion of these measures by granting a temporary extension to our status as a place of deposit for archives.

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- 3.3** A member visit to the new purpose-built Essex facility took place on 20 December 2001.
- 3.4** W S Atkins were commissioned to provide a specification and to report on the practical alternatives available to the County Council in re-housing the service. The new build option could cost in the region of £8 million: less expensive options are also considered and evaluated.

Options identified in the report include:

- Relocation to a new purpose built building funded by HCC
- Relocation to a purpose built facility funded as a Private Finance Initiative (PFI)
- Redevelopment of a suitably-located, existing HCC-owned building
- A split site location comprising a lower-cost repository for archive storage and separate public search rooms
- Redevelopment of the existing location to the specification for archival use

- 3.5** A copy of the complete report* can be provided to members on request.

4. Future Actions

- 4.1** Further costings will be obtained (particularly with regard to site acquisition costs) to allow a detailed business case to be developed for the Atkins proposals.
- 4.2** Additional space for accruals and the storage of vulnerable archives from the Undercroft is being negotiated with the Magistrates Office and with Essex Record Office in order that the Historical Manuscripts Commission, in particular, will grant us a temporary extension of approval to hold Manorial and Tithe records.
- 4.3** Talks are being initiated with potential partners about the possibility of PFI finance. In addition, other potential private public partnerships are being explored.

Background papers used by the author when compiling this report

* HALS - scoping and design analysis study. W S Atkins, 2001.