

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

*Report of the Director of Community Information*

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**1. Purpose of the report**

To provide a brief update for the Community Information and Protection Scrutiny Committee on actions taken to address the accommodation problems faced by HALS since the meeting in January 2002.

**2. Summary**

The Committee, at its meeting on the 15 January 2002, requested that the issue of HALS accommodation become a standing item at subsequent committee meetings. This was so that members could be kept closely informed of progress in narrowing down the various options contained in the W S Atkins specification commissioned during 2001.

**3. Actions to date**

3.1 A meeting took place with the Cambridgeshire Head of Heritage and County Archivist to consider the possibility of joint working as part of the PFI proposal Cambridgeshire has put to the DCMS to build a new Heritage and Cultural Centre. The rationale behind the meeting was that if a joint facility of sufficient size could be built on or near the Hertfordshire/Cambridgeshire border, that this might be a possible solution to HALS accommodation problems.

3.2 While Cambridgeshire would consider any request to join their PFI consortium favourably, officers consider that Hertfordshire should not progress this option. The Cambridgeshire PFI proposal is in its early stages and the timescale for the completion of the proposed new centre may well prove unrealistic. There is, as yet, no decision as to location and while the new centre may be located in south Cambridgeshire it equally may be built north of Cambridge. This would be entirely unsuitable for Hertfordshire residents.

- 3.3 Furthermore, there are considerable costs involved to complete all of the project stages that the DCMS requires and we are not convinced that there will be sufficient revenue opportunities to make this a profitable venture for a consortium made up of private sector partners.
- 3.4 In the short-term, it has not proved possible to gain additional storage space in Magistrates so, we will have to re-visit the solution to place some vulnerable material in the Essex Record Office to gain a temporary extension of approval from the Historical Manuscripts Commission.
- 3.5 On a more positive note, a property search carried out by Hertfordshire Property staff has indicated that a new extension to HALS could be built on the county hall site. The vision is to provide new storage facilities built to the required standards together with improved public search facilities in one combined area.

#### **4. Future actions**

- 4.1 Extending on the county hall site, if possible, would involve the least disruption to the service and existing HALS users. It is likely that this option would also be favourable from a cost point of view.
- 4.2 Among the obvious advantages of this option is that there would be no land acquisition costs. The overall ideal floor area recommended in the Atkins study could also be reduced by retaining parts of the Register Office block, suitably re-furnished, for those elements of HALS' service that do not require specialised environmental conditions.
- 4.3 Further work is now being carried out to confirm that the space available would be adequate for HALS' present and future requirements. This will take the form of a simplified plan and an outline costing. The next step would be to involve English Heritage to obtain initial planning views and comments, as the Register Office Block is a Grade 2 listed building. We would also consult the East Herts District Council.
- 4.4 If planning permission can be obtained, we will be bidding to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a substantial contribution to the building costs. The development could be looked upon favourably as there are examples elsewhere that demonstrate that the HLF will fund re-furbishments as well as new builds.

#### **5. Financial Implications**

Once all of the options have been firmed up a full option appraisal and costed business case will be prepared.

*Background papers used by the author when compiling this report*

None.