

ADLINGTON WALK FUTURE HIGH STREETS FUND (STOCKROOM)

Report of the Director of Strategy

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The report sets out the progress with the construction of Stockroom and details how the Council is preparing to deliver this transformational project.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 We are an ambitious borough. We have already been named one of the best places to live in the North-West, the best place for first time buyers and best place to retire.
- 2.2 In this context, we received £14.5m of Government money to create a new Culture, Learning and Discovery centre to encourage more people to visit the heart of the town centre and inspire a lifelong love of culture in children, young people, and adults of all ages.
- 2.3 The Government announced the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) in the Autumn Budget of 2018 with the aim of renewing and reshaping town centres and High Streets in a way that improves experience, drives growth, and ensures the future sustainability of our town centres. Stockport submitted a proposal was successful in a competitive process, securing its full request of £14.5 million FHSF capital funding.
- 2.4 Provisionally titled 'Stockroom', the new development will repurpose vacant retail space in the heart of Stockport's High Street and encourage more families back into the town.
- 2.5 A report to Corporate, Resource Management & Governance Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in March 2023 set out progress on the project, including the proposed revised floorplans, and detailed the inflationary cost pressures that had impacted on the scope and delivery of Stockroom. The Cabinet approved a request for additional Council funding for the project, and delegated authority to the Director of Development and Regeneration and the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economy and Regeneration to enter into contract with the main contractor to build Stockroom.

3. STOCKROOM OVERVIEW

- 3.1 Stockroom will be an exciting Culture, Learning and Discovery centre that will encourage more people to visit the town and inspire a lifelong love of culture and literature in children, young people, and adults of all ages.
- 3.2 Stockroom will provide opportunities to learn new skills, participate in arts and cultural activities, alongside access to learning and IT facilities. It will provide a place for local people to access literature, through a new library, and history, with greatly improved access to archives, heritage and family history. The space will include studio space and a food and beverage offer.
- 3.3 It is envisaged that Stockroom will have a strong digital art focus. Stockport Council in partnership with MadLab, Future Everything and Manchester Metropolitan University has secured investment through Arts Council England's Cultural Development Fund to create a Creative Campus in the town centre and building the skills capability needed to grow the next generation of digital and creative business. Our ambition is for Stockroom to pick up the digital arts mantle and ensure a legacy when CDF funding finishes in 2025, which will have regional and national significance.
- 3.4 Although it will be run by the Council, Stockroom will have its own identity, designed for and with the people of Stockport. It will align and work closely with our local cultural sector and have a set of values and operating model that places creativity, community and inclusion at its heart. An enterprise where boundaries between services are blurred and a collaborative building-wide approach is adopted.
- 3.5 The heart of Stockroom will be Stockport Stories – celebrating the past, embracing the present and looking to the future, through interactive digital displays of objects in our Museums collection. This will be a new way of providing access to our collection and our archives in a town centre location as well as a route to promote our museums across the borough. It will be an opportunity to tell new stories about our collections, and encourage visitors to share their own stories, their memories of and hopes for Stockport.
- 3.6 Stockroom has to be much more than just a beautiful building. It has to be warm and welcoming for all our communities. This means thinking carefully and engaging with local people about the kinds of activities that take place in Stockroom.
- 3.7 We are working with cultural partners to develop Stockroom. We recognise that it is important that Stockroom works in a complementary way to rest of the cultural offer throughout Stockport. The launch of Stockroom will help build on the momentum gained through Town of Culture.

- 3.8 It is vital to ensure the right leadership for Stockroom and recruitment of a Creative Programme Manager to curate, plan and produce the cultural programme for Stockroom is underway. This has generated lots of interest in the cultural sector, with candidates excited by the opportunity to develop a special space within an ambitious borough. This post will be covered by the operational costs already agreed in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

4. CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

- 4.1 The Council have entered into a contract with a main contractor to build Stockroom for an agreed price that is within the target cost approved by Cabinet in March 2023 and works have started on site. As set out to Cabinet in March 2023, significant revisions were required to the scope of the project to ensure it could be delivered within the approved cost envelope. Work has been ongoing with the design team to include the agreed revisions in the construction drawings and provide the level of detail required by the contractor to provide a fixed price for the works.
- 4.2 This design work required to achieve this have been substantial and combined with the time required by the contractors' supply chain to return prices for key packages, the contractors' programme is now showing a project completion date of Autumn 2024 rather than the April 2024 as previously reported.
- 4.3 Appendix 1 to this report shows the floor plans for Stockroom which form the main contracted works.
- 4.4 A site compound has been established to the rear of the site on Great Underbanks/ Chestergate. Liaison with all businesses close to the site is taking place on a regular basis to mitigate against the disruption the works are likely to cause in the local area. Weekly meetings between the site team and the Merseyway Management Team are taking place to ensure that those tenants adjacent to the site are managed sensitively.
- 4.5 Over the coming months, a range of demolition works will take place. This will include work within Adlington Walk to remove the suspended ceiling and expose the void that will create the double height in mall. Whilst these works take place, customers of the Post Office will be signposted along Deanery Way South for access and the business will be open as usual throughout the works.
- 4.6 Given the nature and age of the building, contingency sums are in place to mitigate against unforeseen costs related to the building structure.

5. PREPARING FOR STOCKROOM

- 5.1 The Council's Heritage Library contains a large number of books, maps, plans, illustrations, photographs, ephemera and other materials relating to Stockport's history. It is also the access point for the Town's archives. These records date back over five hundred years and provide invaluable first-hand information relating to Stockport's cultural history.
- 5.2 Stockport currently has only temporary 'Heritage Accreditation' from the national accrediting body, The National Archives. This provisional accreditation is a result of the poor storage conditions at Central Library where the collection is currently stored.
- 5.3 Stockroom provides an exciting opportunity to relocate the Heritage Library and ensure quality storage and ensure we are able to meet the national accreditation for the collections. The move to Stockroom will also hugely improve access to local people .
- 5.4 We need to carefully prepare the heritage and archives collections for relocation and accreditation. The volume of these is considerable and the condition of some of them fragile. Whilst work to prepare the collection for the move is ongoing, it will not be possible to provide the usual service delivery model to the public.
- 5.5 The National Archives recommend that a good lead in time should occur before the move and recommended the Council speak to other authorities who to understand logistics and best practice. Many of the authorities we contacted had employed additional staff to help with the move and also closed or reduced services for significant periods of time ranging from 1 year to 2 years.
- 5.6 Therefore a temporary service model is required so staff can focus on getting the collections ready. The proposed model will be in place for c.9-12 months to complete these more in-depth tasks. Work has already begun as the service reduced its opening hours, meaning a reduced period of time compared to other Local Authorities who took up to 2 years.
- 5.7 The temporary service model would include:
- Access to the archives by appointment
 - Continuing to provide a dedicated area within Central Library which will give access to secondary sources such as copies of photographs and other local studies materials, with some display items.
 - Continuing to provide private area for viewing of public records

- Providing additional support for branch libraries. This will be provided via FAQ sheets with suggested sources of information and agencies to signpost to
- Working with our key partners to support residents with face-to-face enquiries during this period.
- Working in close partnership with the cultural service partners to support residents in provide answers to enquiries where possible.
- Continuing to provide access to free online family history resources and information leaflets.

5.8 As more and more collections and artefacts are packaged for the move, fewer materials may be available to the public.

5.9 Heritage staff will remain committed to answering certain classes of enquiries. These include (but are not limited to) enquiries about rights of way, planning, public inquiries, criminal and inquest investigations and time specific deadlines relating to academic research.

6. CENTRAL LIBRARY UPDATE

6.1 The proposal to maintain a library in the Central Library Building alongside an Adult Education Service was announced at Full Council on 14 July 2022. This proposal responds to the views expressed by some members of the public to see a library service maintained in the Central Library building.

6.2 Increased demand for the Adult Education Service has created the need for additional space to deliver lessons. The service currently serves around 1,200 learners per year doing around 2,240 learning aims in English, Maths and digital skills – all core support for employability for residents experiencing significant disadvantage and from areas of deprivation.

6.3 The proposal would see both the Adult Education Service and Library Services running complementary offers within the building, sharing running costs and optimising the operation of this key heritage asset.

6.4 In addition, the dual purpose of the building presents an opportunity to increase the awareness of adult learners of the facilities and benefits of Stockport's library service as a whole and to encourage adult learners to take out library membership.

6.5 Full details of the proposed offer were set out to Cabinet in September 2022. Work to accommodate Adult Education Services will begin once Stockroom

is complete. This will ensure continuity of service for users of both Adult Education Services and the general Library Service.

- 6.6 A professional team has been appointed and a detailed design brief is being developed through engagement with a range of stakeholders. Indicative designs will be produced that will enable further costing of the project. Following this, a more comprehensive report on Central library will come back with the funding implications.
- 6.7 An application is being prepared that would include the project in a GM wide decarbonisation proposal through the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Council has entered into contract at an agreed price to build Stockroom. This is within the target cost approved by Cabinet in March 2023.
- 7.2 A full operational business plan is being developed for Stockroom. Initial costings were included within the Council's MTFP. It is anticipated that the occupational costs for Stockroom will be within those forecast for the MTFP.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 As part of the delivery of the Stockroom project, it is likely that the Council will need to enter into a number of agreements with third parties to deliver part of the service offer proposed. These agreements will be procured through appropriate and compliant routes to market as and when they become necessary.
- 8.2 Approval to enter into such agreements will be sought in line with the Council's constitution.

9. HR IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 As noted in section 4.3, recruitment is underway for a Creative Programme Manager to curate, plan and produce the cultural programme for Stockroom. This post will be covered by the operational costs set out in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

10. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 An EIA has been established for Stockroom and considerations around equality have been addressed as part of the service design process. This

document will continue to be updated as the offer is further developed and will be published once an agreed service mix has been assessed.

- 10.2 Stockroom is an opportunity to improve the Council's service provision, offering modern, holistic services in a fully accessible building, conveniently located to public transport hubs. It is anticipated that Stockroom will have a positive impact on residents' outcomes through improved facilities.
- 10.3 Consultation was undertaken in Summer 2021 with representatives of service user groups on the proposed fixtures, finishing and furniture regarding diversity, inclusivity and accessibility measures. Further public engagement is planned, seeking feedback on the proposed services and activities to be offered within Stockroom.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCRUTINY

- 11.1 The Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of the report and provide comments to Cabinet.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CABINET

- 12.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
- Note the progress with Stockroom and the benefits to the people of Stockport this will bring.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Stockroom Floor Plan

Anyone requiring further information on the above please contact Kathryn Rees by email on kathryn.rees@stockport.gov.uk