
Scrutiny Management Committee

15 September 2008

Proposed Development of New Council Headquarters at Hungate – Feasibility Report

Summary

1. This report asks Members to consider a scrutiny topic registered by Councillor Jenny Brooks to scrutinise the proposed development of the new Council headquarters at Hungate.

Criteria

2. Councillor Brooks believes that this topic fits with the following eligibility criteria as set out in the topic registration form at Annex A:
 - Public Interest – the public have expressed their concern via the local newspaper at the location, design and costs involved with the proposed new council offices. It is highly likely that the ongoing work of the council to develop an alternative office building will continue to be of great interest to the public and therefore, if there are lessons to be learnt at this stage in the process then they need to be identified quickly.
 - Level of Risk – There has already been a significant increase in costs on the accommodation project to date and the risk is that this increase in costs will continue to grow if the reasons for the delays are not identified and addressed.
 - National/Local/Regional Significance – The decision on where to locate the new council office building and the ongoing development costs to the council, is of local significance, as evidenced in the public's comments to date.
3. The Head of Property Services has commented on the identified eligibility criteria as follows:

“I agree with the eligibility criteria, however, would wish to add Corporate Priorities, as the provision of the new accommodation and the consequential improvements in services to our customers will contribute to all of the Council's priorities.”
4. As the Hungate development falls within the remit of the Leader of the Council, Cllr Waller has provided the following comments:

“At this critical time it is essential that the scrutiny review does not delay the progress of the project, as the same officers will be involved in delivering that

scheme as would be engaged with the scrutiny review. It is important that the review remain focused on the specific issues raised and does not become a prolonged catch all re-invention of the project.”

Background

5. In early July 2008, the Council decided to withdraw its planning application for the proposed development of its new office accommodation at Hungate following comments from English Heritage that although the proposed building was a very impressive, sustainable and fit for purpose civic building, it would not fit properly into the proposed location. The Council were disappointed with their views as they had worked closely with English Heritage and other organisations to create the plans for the building.
6. Members of the public commented on this decision and previous decisions taken in regard to the Hungate development and as a result of the concerns expressed, Cllr Brooks submitted this topic for scrutiny review in order to fully understand those decisions and the costs involved to date.

Consultation

13. In order to answer the questions raised within the topic registration form, the Head of Property Services has provided information on the previous decisions taken in regard to:
 - Why the Hungate site was chosen and specifically why that plot on the Hungate site was chosen
 - The selection process that led to the appointment of the design team and the process for developing and selecting the final design submitted for planning approval
 - The initial budget and overspend estimates
 - Which CYC entity acted as the internal client and why
 - The consultation process i.e. how it was carried out and was the feedback used to inform the decisions
14. It is expected that this information (shown at Annex B) will raise a number of further questions in regard to the decisions taken, the procedures followed and the costs incurred to date. If this is the case, a decision should be taken to proceed with this review. In recognising what further information is required, the committee should agree a remit for the review which will help to identify the relevant missing facts.
15. It may be necessary to consult with English Heritage on the feedback they provided throughout the process, in order to better understand their final comments on the unsuitability of the building at the Hungate location.

Conduct of Review

16. If a decision is taken to proceed with this review, members of the project team will need to be involved, therefore their ongoing work would benefit from the review being commenced as soon as possible and completed within a minimum number of meetings. Key members of the project team are on annual leave during late September / early October and therefore they would only be able to provide support to the scrutiny process from mid October onwards. With this in mind and in consideration of the committee commitments in the Council calendar, the following series of meeting dates are suggested:

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| Meeting One (possible ½ day event on 10 October) | Consider a scoping report detailing the required information as identified within the remit for the review. Meet the relevant officers and if necessary representatives from English Heritage and the other organisations involved, to clarify any issues arising from the information provided in the feasibility and scoping reports |
| Meeting Two (30 October) | Consider an interim report which details the findings from the consultation sessions held as part of the first meeting Analyse those findings and agree any recommendations |
| Meeting Three (12 / 18 Nov) | Consider a draft final report which includes the findings, analysis and recommendations. Agree any amendments and/or sign off the final report |

12. Please note, it will only be possible to carry out the review in the minimum number of meetings identified above, if the ad-hoc committee set up to carry out the review, are able to clearly and quickly identify what information they require and if that information is made available in a timely manner.

Implications

13. **Human Resources** – it will be necessary to involve members of the project team in any review of this topic, which in turn will reduce the time they can spend on their ongoing work on the development.
14. **Financial** – There will be some financial implications associated with officer time spent supporting this review but this should be limited due to the small number of meetings required.
15. There are no equalities, legal or other implications associated with the recommendation within this report

Risk Management

16. There is a risk associated with not approving the recommendation made below, in that it is possible that issues around the procedures being followed as part of the development process will not be identified, which in turn may lead to further complications and delays.

Recommendations

17. Having considered the information contained within this report and its associated annexes, it is recommended that an ad-hoc scrutiny committee be set up to carry out a review of the Hungate Development, with a start date around mid October. This will provide officers with sufficient time to pull together any further information required.
18. Having considered all of the information provided by the Head of Property Services in answer to the questions raised within the topic registration form, Cllr Brooks would like to suggest a remit for this review detailing an overall aim and a number of key objectives – see Annex C attached.

Contact Details

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Report Approved**Date**

3 September 2008

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Implications: HR & Financial
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Wards Affected:**All****For further information please contact the author of the report****Background Papers:****Annexes****Annex A** – Topic Registration Form**Annex B** – Information in response to topic registration form**Annex C** – Suggested Remit for Scrutiny Review