

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	29 JUNE 2022		
TITLE:	LIBRARIES IMPROVEMENT FUND : CAPITAL SCHEME APPROVAL		
LEAD COUNCILLORS:	CLLR BARNETT-WARD	PORTFOLIO:	LEISURE AND CULTURE
SERVICE:	CULTURE	WARDS:	ALL
LEAD OFFICER:	SIMON SMITH	TEL:	07894 600 498
JOB TITLE:	READING LIBRARIES AND MUSEUM MANAGER	E-MAIL:	Simon.smith@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Committee of the award of an Arts Council England (ACE) Libraries Improvement Fund grant of £62,000 for Tilehurst Library and to request scheme approval in order to proceed with the project.
- 1.2 In 2021, Arts Council England announced a £5m Libraries Improvement Fund, requesting bids focused on capital investment into library buildings, using a two stage bidding process. The final bid was submitted in September 2021. In February 2022 the Council was notified that it had been successful with its bid for works at Tilehurst Library, and awarded £62,000.
- 1.3 Arts Council England provided the Council with a limited window within which to accept the grant, and the Council accepted the grant within the grant offer acceptance period.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Tilehurst Library Project be approved and that the scheme would be funded by Arts Council England Improvement Fund grant of £62,000 be noted;
- 2.2 That it be noted that the Director of Finance would be exercising his delegated authority to accept the external funding of £62,000 from the Arts Council England Improvement Fund and allocate the funding to the Tilehurst Library Project.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 External funding is an important source of income to the Council, but funding

conditions need to be carefully considered prior to entering into funding agreements, to ensure that: (i) They are compatible with the aims and objectives of the Council; (ii) The necessary procedures are in place to meet funding conditions and reporting requirements; and (iii) Appropriate budget provision is available if 'match funding' is required. A bid was submitted to the ACE Libraries Improvement Fund and was approved at phase 1, allowing a phase 2 bid to be submitted. This bid was submitted in September 2021.

- 3.2 One of the aims of the Libraries Improvement Fund was to invest in buildings to support wider use and support digital inclusion.
- 3.3 The bid, therefore, focused on Tilehurst library to:
- improve the ability of the building to be hired
 - investigate facilitating use of the building outside of staffed hours by investing in door controls, CCTV and associated equipment
 - provide digital device lending on site
 - facilitate digital device lending to homes
- 3.4 These aims fit in with the Library Strategic Principles, which were consulted on and adopted at Committee in November 2021. These principles themselves align with the Council's Corporate Plan and other relevant strategies.
- 3.5 This package of works represents a significant investment into Tilehurst library. The work includes:
- Upgrade of the building to be able to operate in a self-service way ('open+').
 - Upgrade of the building to remove keys and provide digital access to facilitate innovative hire and safe locking down of space
 - Provision of self service IT lockers for the community to loan devices, to be used on site or remotely, based on the system available at Southcote Library.
- 3.6 By enabling opening at a wider range of times than at present, we can accommodate more people locally using the library. The open+ operation is not suitable for unaccompanied children, but would be suitable for adults and older teenagers who need a space to work or study.
- 3.7 The outcomes we would be looking to achieve include:
- Greater use of the library building as a library and as a venue for hire through open+
 - The library to become the key community space in Tilehurst, used by a variety of partners
 - A more connected community, with a high level of digital device lending and associated support through partner organisations in an area of identified digital exclusion.
 - A better quality environment, that provides more services and is open for longer for people to use.
- 3.8 Current Position:**
- 3.9 The conditions of the ACE grant required the Council to accept the respective grant funding agreements within two weeks of them being awarded to it. These conditions were reviewed and accepted by the Council. The funding needs to be

spent by 31 March 2023.

- 3.10 The timeline for delivery of the project includes:
- engagement with library users and local residents during Summer 2022
 - works anticipated to start in Autumn 2022
 - works completed in early 2023.
- 3.11 In order to draw down the ACE grant funding, the Council has submitted a claim form, and confirm its participation in a programme evaluation. The Council also needs an activity report and income and expenditure account for the final payment.
- 3.12 Other Options Considered**
- 3.13 The Council could have chosen not to accept the grant. This would mean that the improvements to the building outlined in the bid would not be delivered.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 4.1 The acceptance of the grant supports the following Corporate Plan priorities:

1. Healthy Environment
2. Thriving Communities
3. Inclusive Economy

The Council is committed to investing in the culture and heritage of the town, including helping cultural venues recover after the pandemic.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report. The works do not have an environmental or carbon impact and are about reconfiguring how some spaces work.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 No public consultation has been carried out on the proposal to apply for or accept the Arts Council England funding. However, the proposed changes will be available to library users and feedback sought prior to installation.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

7.2 There are no equality implications as a result of this decision.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 ACE's offer of funding is made available to all recipients, pursuant to ACE's standard terms and conditions for grant

8.2 These terms and conditions have been reviewed by RBC Legal and considered acceptable.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no match funding requirements. The service will invest some additional money into furniture and fittings as well as a cost effective space refresh to be introduced at the same time and this will be funded from existing budgets. Any ongoing revenue costs of the improvements will be small (<£1k) and be met by existing service budgets. Acceptance of Capital grants and scheme approval under the constitution is devolved to the Director of Finance and this was given.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 There are none