

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Strategic Lead – Communications, Culture & Communities Cultural Committee: 25 February 2019**

Subject: Alexandria Library Museum and improvement works**1. Purpose**

- 1.1. This report presents to Committee for approval the proposal to install a lift at Alexandria Library, create a museum celebrating Alexandria and the Vale's history and heritage, and fit out a new multi-use space for the benefit of the local community.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Committee is invited to:
- note the contents of this report, including the internal options appraisal undertaken regarding the use of space on the first floor of the Alexandria Library building;
 - approve the proposal to install a lift to enable level access to the first floor of Alexandria Library;
 - approve the proposal to create a permanent museum about the Vale of Leven in the Committee Room on the first floor of Alexandria Library;
 - approve the proposal to create a multi-use space on the first-floor;
 - approve an allocation of £0.331m from the Cultural Capital Fund for these purposes

3. Background

- 3.1 Alexandria Library is located on Gilmour Street, Alexandria, in the Vale of Leven. The building was gifted to the community and first opened its doors in 1884 as the Ewing Gilmour Institute for Men. Its construction was paid for by William Ewing Gilmour (a partner at Messrs John Orr Ewing & Co, Turkey Red dyers) in memory of his uncle, John Orr Ewing. A reading room formed a key element of the original institute, the overall purpose of which was to 'provide a place for mental recreation and moral improvement'.
- 3.2 From the late 1920s onwards the building housed various facets of local government administration, alongside a public lending library, before being handed over for the sole use of the library service at the end of the 1980s. There is no lift to the first floor of the building and this creates accessibility issues, meaning Alexandria Library is one of the lowest scoring public buildings operated by the Council.

The Library attracts more than 60,000 visitors per year making it one of the most popular branch in West Dunbartonshire. It is regularly used by a host of community groups such as the Leven Litts Writers and is currently working with the Rag and Bone Project on establishing a tool lending service.

- 3.3** The main lending areas of the public library are now housed on the ground floor of the original building, comprising adult and junior lending areas and a non-fiction lending area in the Reading Room. There is also a Learning Centre Computer Suite where public access PCs are available and computer courses take place. In addition, the Livingstone Suite provides a separate, bookable space where various community/special interest groups meet, and where additional library activities take place. There is no charge associated with booking the Livingstone Suite.
- 3.4** Also housed within the Alexandria Library building on the ground floor is a WDC One Stop Shop where Council Information Officers deliver a wide range of services, including assisting members of the public with making payments, applying for grants, and assisting with queries regarding various other Council services.
- 3.5** The first floor of Alexandria Library is accessed via a main staircase. From the landing, doors open into a large open plan space, beyond which is a smaller room that was previously used as a Council Chamber. This combined area is currently described as 'The Upstairs Training and Activity Zone'. In practice, however, the occupancy of these rooms is limited due to the accessibility issues. It is also impossible to use both spaces concurrently as access to the old Council Chamber room is through the larger activity space room. This means the old Council Chamber is rarely used. The main activity space is used as a meeting space by some community groups; as a drop-down and training space for Working 4 U; and by the West Dunbartonshire Youth Theatre as a meeting and practice space one night per week. Elsewhere on the first floor there is a meeting room for use by Council staff and the library staff room.
- 3.6** As previously stated there is no level access to 'The Upstairs Training and Activity Zone'. Level access to the ground floor of the Alexandria Library building is via a rear entrance.
- 3.7** Council officers were asked to consider ways in which the first floor area of the library building could be better utilised to build capacity within the building and to support increased community use and access. Following consultation with library staff, WDC Youth Theatre leaders, and the Council's Arts and Heritage team a number of suggestions were made, including creating a permanent museum to host heritage displays in the old Council Chamber, and erecting partition walls to sub-divide the main activity space and make for a more coherent layout. Foremost, however, was acknowledgement of the need to ensure level access to the first floor of the building through the installation of a lift.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1.** Alexandria Library is a well-used and much valued community resource in an area rich in heritage. The library building itself is an example of the exceptional built heritage, and tells its own story of industry, philanthropy and social history. At present, however, there is no formal museum or exhibition space within Alexandria that tells the story of the area, despite some of West Dunbartonshire's major heritage narratives being rooted in the Vale of Leven. This includes the globally important Turkey Red dye works; the story of the Argyll Motor Works; and the Vale's substantiated claim to being an early powerhouse of Scottish football. The opportunity to create a permanent heritage display in the old Council Chamber on the first floor of the Alexandria Library building will enable the Council's Arts and Heritage team to tell these stories, and make accessible objects and ephemera from the Council's heritage collections to new and different audiences.
- 4.2.** Available to go on display in Alexandria are some key objects that describe the process of Turkey Red printing, including tools associated with factories in the area and two printing blocks that provide insight to the intricate, labour-intensive process of historic textile printing. West Dunbartonshire Council currently holds the Scottish Motor Museum Trust archive on behalf of the trust, providing access to a range of materials and ephemera that illustrate the story of Argyll Motor Works. This particular archive is further augmented by the Council's own Local History photographic collection, which is rich in images associated with the Vale's car manufacturing past. Already the Scottish Football Museum has intimated its willingness to support the celebration of the Vale's footballing heritage via the short-term loan of its replica Scottish Cup, and has intimated its willingness to discuss potential additional loans of other objects and ephemera that relate to Renton and the Vale of Leven FC.
- 4.3.** The old Council Chamber lends itself to the proposed purpose of a heritage space and any displays will seek to augment the room and not detract from the aesthetic of the existing wood panelled walls. To this end, the possibility of restoring to their previous location the two Ewing Gilmour portraits from the Council's fine art collection that once hung in the old Council Chamber will be explored. Furthermore, in the design and delivery of the heritage room particular consideration will be given to including elements that engage and entertain younger audiences. This will encourage repeat visits, particularly with families already using the library service, and develop an early interest in the history of the area among younger visitors. Cumulatively, the proposed museum within Alexandria Library will seek to be a meaningful and valued extension of West Dunbartonshire's Museum Service going forward.
- 4.4.** The proposed nature of any museum displays within the heritage room will ensure the safety and integrity of all collection objects. Objects or artefacts will be housed in lockable, museum-standard cases. Any AV elements will be available via secured devices. Any artwork will be fixed to the wall using mirror plates and security screws and glazed, as appropriate. Lastly, the inclusion of CCTV within the heritage room and on the first floor of the

library building mean that there is no further requirement for constant invigilation within the space, so these proposals do not represent a need for additional staffing.

- 4.5. The success of any such heritage space is, however, contingent on the physical accessibility of its location. In consideration of this, and the wider issues raised with regards the first floor layout in Alexandria Library, outline plans have been developed that include the installation of a lift connecting the ground and first floors of the building.
- 4.6. The proposal also includes partition walls to sub-divide the main activity space, from a connecting corridor between the first floor landing, lift and the old Council Chamber heritage display. Off this corridor would be doors to give access to the large room. This room can be further divided by a temporary partition wall to allow two bookable spaces if required.
- 4.7. Considering potential uses for this main activity space, and with a view to ensuring maximum flexibility for a variety of users/groups, it is further proposed that an area of permanent tiered seating be installed within the space. This would provide a focal point within the room that could variously be used as an audience area; a development space for performances; a reading group area; a crafting area, etc. Outline costs for these proposals are estimated to be £0.331m. Appendix 1 illustrates the amended floorplan.
- 4.8. By enacting these key changes in a currently underused area of an otherwise vibrant and well-used library long-term benefit is brought to the community of Alexandria, not only in terms of access to additional community space and celebration of their heritage, but also in terms of raising the profile of Alexandria both within West Dunbartonshire and further afield. Installing a lift within the building future-proofs use of the space, and dramatically improves access. This also brings Alexandria Library into line with Clydebank Library where level access is now possible to all public areas of the building. These works also contribute to WDC's suitability and accessibility ratings across all Council buildings accessed by the public within the authority area.
- 4.9. The Strategic Lead for CCC and the Asset Management team led an internal options appraisal, with participation from Libraries and Culture, Communications, Finance, and Procurement to consider the option of doing nothing versus undertaking the improvement works as described above. These were judged against the following criteria:
 - Impact/benefits (particularly with regard to regeneration)
 - Commercial and financial sustainability (particularly with regard to the revenue budget)
 - Physical fit in space
 - Likely demand
 - Level of risk (inverse)
 - Potential for displacement (inverse)
 - Public Access
 - Attraction of additional visitors to West Dunbartonshire
 - Restoration of a cultural asset

- Likelihood of attracting external funding

4.10 The exercise illustrated the following:

Option	Overall points score
Undertake improvement works to provide a lift, heritage area, and bookable space	130
Do nothing	67

In the interests of the service and the future usability of Alexandria Library, the option to pursue improvement works was clearly preferable and scored particularly highly on financial sustainability, likely demand and the restoration of a cultural asset.

5 People Implications

5.1 There are no direct people implications arising from this report. As previously stated officers do not believe there will be any requirement for additional staffing with this proposal.

6 Financial & Procurement Implications

6.1 The anticipated cost of this proposal is £0.331m. If this was repaid over a 40- year period the cost per year of the interest charges would be an average of £0.0013m per annum. In March 2018 the Council created a £4m Cultural Capital Fund and it is the recommendation of officers that this Fund should support the costs of this project in entirety. If this was approved by Committee then there would be no additional cost to the Council beyond what is already agreed within the Council's Capital Plan.

6.2 Since the new museum space would be unstaffed then there is no additional revenue cost to the Council for this proposal beyond the initial capital investment.

6.3 Officers would also seek to maximise this investment by leveraging additional external funding. This would augment the final heritage offer through a programme of events and activities to further engage the community of Alexandria with the stories being told as part of this new heritage space.

6.4 All procurement activity carried out by the Council in excess of £0.050m is subject to a contract strategy. If approval is given, and before the tender is published, the contract strategy for Alexandria Library will include, but not be limited to: Service Strategy/Forward Plan, Supply Market Status: Social Benefits, Procurement Model and Contract Management.

7 Risk Analysis

7.1 Should the improvement works as described not go ahead a number of risks have been identified:

- Public areas of the Alexandria Library building will continue to be inaccessible to those with mobility issues
- The rich history of Alexandria and the Vale will not be maximised and celebrated by this Council
- Alexandria Library will be unable to maximise its assets and serve the local community and visitors to its full potential

7.2 Should the improvement works as described go ahead, the following further risks have been identified:

- New issues with the historic building will emerge that will require additional investment. This is mitigated by the fact that Alexandria Library has benefitted from extensive investment and the lift aside, the work will mostly be low-risk.
- Visitor numbers will be low for what could be perceived to be a niche offer. This is mitigated by the fact the museum will be unstaffed and that an interactive area is planned that will attract traditional library visitors to use the space.

8 Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment identified positive impacts for users of the Alexandria Library building. The EIA will be kept under review and updated as works progress.

9 Consultation

9.1 This proposal to undertake improvement works at Alexandria Library has been developed by the Team Lead Arts & Heritage, with specialist input from officers across Libraries and Cultural Services, and Asset Management.

9.2 In September 2017 Libraries and Cultural Services undertook a consultation with more than 500 service users. Overwhelmingly 76% of respondents confirmed a desire to see investment in both libraries and museums, with over half of respondents rating improved accessibility as either 'very important' or 'important'. Similarly, over half of respondents identified gallery/exhibition spaces, local history archives, and museum exhibitions respectively as either 'very important' or 'important'. This proposal would fit in with those wishes from residents.

10 Strategic Assessment

10.1 The proposals within this report support the following strategic priorities:

- Efficient and effective frontline services that improve the everyday lives of residents.
- Meaningful community engagement with active empowered and informed citizens who feel safe and engaged

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Appendix:	Alexandria Library 1st floor floorplan
Background Papers:	N/A
Wards Affected:	All