

INTRODUCTION

Additional work has been carried out, based on a number of risks identified in Section 5 of the Draft Feasibility Report dated 14th February 2009, examining the feasibility of building a combined Community Centre and Theatre on the Bank Car Park in Alton.

The draft report concluded a combined facility was feasible for the site but that there were several risks that needed further investigation. Further consultations have identified larger tree protection zones are required making it impossible to provide a combined facility on this site of the scale required in the original brief. Alternative options have been discussed and outlined below.

DISCUSSIONS AND WORK ON REFINING RISKS

The draft report was discussed on 20th February 2009.

A number of questions were raised. Officers and Pottinger Architects have carried out more research to refine the report. In particular the following items have been considered:

1. Loss of car parking spaces and the resulting loss of income.
2. Possible extra car parking on the present Community Centre site
3. Quality of trees and whether or not they are worth keeping.
4. Environment Agency 'No development Zone'.
5. Other possible locations on the site for the building.
6. Funding shortfall implications in respect of the theatre element.
7. Given the site restrictions is the site big enough for the two uses?

Advice received is as follows and is shown on drawings 101 & 102.

- 1) Loss of car parking spaces and the resulting loss of income.
Jon Sanders (EHDC) estimates loss of income at:
Build year – car park closed for a year – total loss of income £139,400.
Operational year – car park reduced by 50% - Year on year loss of income £68,700.

Bank Street Car Park has been identified as one of the Authority's most profitable car parks in Alton. Any reduction in parking provision will have a significant impact on revenue.
- 2) Possible extra car parking spaces on the Community Centre site.
Development of the present Community Centre site for car parking would be difficult. The Environment Agency (EA) has major concerns about the effect on the river running under the site. Previous schemes have looked at this, the EA wish to remove the cover to the culvert and open up the river. In addition they require an 8m 'No development zone' on the bank of the river.

This leaves a very narrow strip available for just 12 parking spaces. Income £13,800.

- 3) Quality of trees and whether or not they are worth keeping.
The tree officer has been consulted. He advises:

All trees on the site are healthy and add significantly to the local conservation area landscape. They are all protected, not as TPO's but because they fall in a Conservation Area. If any of the trees were to be removed this would contravene Policy C6 of the Local Plan.

All effort should be made to retain them, Some are very significant trees eg. Willow, Copper Beech etc.

The tree officer has subsequently suggested the Western Red Cedar to the east of the large Copper Beach tree could be removed for arboricultural reasons. However, this would not significantly alter the remaining space available for development.

Root protection zones around the trees are required. These are significantly larger than originally envisaged reducing the available development footprint. The effect of this is shown on drawings 101 and 102. Root protection measures will add to the sub-structure build cost in comparison to a clear site.

- 4) Environment Agency 'No Development Zone'.
The restrictions imposed by the Environment Agency on development close to the river may limit the space available. The restrictions are based on practical reasons:
To avoid flood risk to the public and buildings.
To reduce pollution risk to the river.
To maintain a green corridor for plants and animals through the centre of town.

There is a small possibility that the 'No Development zone' to the lagoon could be eased allowing a larger development in Area A indicated on drawing 102. This potential needs clarification from the Environment Agency.
- 5) Other possible locations on the site for the building.
The area at the south west corner of the car park has been investigated. There are a number of rights of way and service accesses to neighbouring properties in this part of the car park. As a result this area is not suitable for development.
- 6) Funding shortfall implications in respect of the Theatre element.
The cost plan for the Theatre has been re-examined by Harris & Porter Quantity Surveyors. For a scheme with a level of finish equal to an Arts Centre Theatre a guide cost of £1,970/sq.m is suggested, with a build cost in the order of £1.40m excluding VAT and fitting out.
For a scheme with a level of finish equal to a secondary school a guide cost of £1,600/sq.m is suggested, with a build cost in the order of £1.16m excluding VAT and fitting out.
The Holybourne Theatre Group propose to fund the theatre building by selling their present site for housing. The site value has been estimated at £0.80m although this valuation was at the top end of the market. In the current market it is uncertain whether this figure can be achieved with land values falling by as much as 25% or more. Even at the original valuation this still leaves a funding gap of £0.36m or more to resolve.

7) Given the site restrictions is the site big enough for the two uses?
It can be seen from drawings 101 & 102 that the tree protection zones make it impossible to fit a combined Community Centre and Theatre on the car park site of the scale in the original brief.

If the buildings cannot be linked then the benefits of shared reception, WC's, circulation space, etc. are lost. For example both buildings will now require a lift to meet accessibility rules, an extra lift will add in the region of £30k to building costs.

CONCLUSION

A combined Community Centre and Theatre built to the present Brief will not fit on this site as a shared building given the restrictions of tree protection zones and the Environment Agency requirements.

Even if space were available there is a significant funding shortfall for the theatre building.

The buildings would reduce car parking by up to 50% with a significant loss of revenue.

A significant reduction in the size and omission of some activities from the Brief is required to make a joint building feasible. Stakeholders would need to consider whether this reduction would compromise the overall vision and operations of their organisations.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

In respect of the Community Centre part of the project there are 3 potential areas for the Centre:

Area A.

This is a riverside location and would work well in civic terms, but is quite small and fraught with EA issues.

A reduced size centre would need to be considered.

Loss of approx 26 car parking spaces.

Area B.

Away from the river, reducing EA problems.

Does not impinge on tree zones.

Probably large enough to accommodate Briefed community areas only.

Reasonable civic space potential.

Loss of approx 30 car parking spaces.

Existing Centre.

A mixture of refurbishment and new building on the present community centre site.

A difficult site to develop.

Many EA issues to resolve.

No tree zones.

Loss of approx 6 car parking spaces.

In respect of the Theatre:

Build a new community centre on Area B.

Investigate the practicalities of the theatre refurbishing the old community buildings.

All parties have expressed a strong desire for the two organisations to be linked. To enable this Officers have suggested that alternative sites could be investigated which could deliver a joint building, which is less compromised.

A less constrained site where an equivalent building can be sited with less complicated sub-structure and simpler layout could result in construction cost savings of up to 5%.

If an alternative car park site in Alton is utilized this would help maintain the income generated at the Bank Street Car Park site and could also improve revenues at the alternative by locating a significant new user group to the site.