

FRIENDS OF BATH PODIUM LIBRARY (REGISTERED ASSET OF COMMUNITY VALUE)

BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL

Modern Libraries Programme - Scrutiny Panel 17/09/18

Questions and observations on current design proposals for Bath Podium Library

The Friends of Bath Podium Library welcome this opportunity to question the Council on its current plans to upgrade the Podium space for continuing future use as the city's main library.

Having been involved in the consultation process to date the Friends of Bath Podium Library are supportive of the library being upgraded but not supportive of OSS integration.

Our reasoning

These are two complex public services with diametrically opposing requirements. Sharing the same open-plan layout, entrance, reception and exits will court failure. Combining the main city library with the 'One Stop Shop' in a catch-all space, is a supply driven solution and in all likelihood will fail its objective. There is no convincing explanation as to how this combined facility would be run and managed. What will it look like five years on? What kind of library space will be left when more Council operations are allowed to occupy the Podium? We do not want a change of use to the Podium. Bath deserves a World Heritage library in the centre of the city. It also deserves a fully functioning Council front-line service supporting citizens and visitors. But the space requirements and HR skill-sets of these two essential services are entirely different. Could it be made to work in a new building with creative separation of these Council operations, employing professional librarians and investing in a fully trained Facilities Management team? Possibly. But that isn't what we're being asked to support.

What we have seen to date are early design and layout proposals. Unfortunately the design proposals embody unrealistic operational expectations. Forcing together two quite different but key public services risks serious operational failure. Conflicting requirements for reception, enquiries, queue management, confidentiality, way finding and movement, quiet reading and study, dealing with emergencies, moving furniture and signage, among other things are set to clash. Moreover, its funding will not deliver a value-for-money solution and de-skilling the library service through reducing the number of qualified staff will not add value to Bath's reputation as an important UK destination.

We would like to know what progress has been made on this project since the last consultation in May of this year, please. Specifically:

1. How far has the design been resolved?
2. What news on the latest cost check?
3. What landlord and statutory approvals have been obtained?
4. How many professionally qualified librarians will be employed?
5. How far has any organisational design including Facilities Management planning been developed?

We would be happy to meet and discuss with the Council team any points arising from this submission.

Thank you

Paul Stansall - Chair

Mary English - Secretary

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