

File note: The Manor House and Library – Tuesday 9 February 2016

Informal meeting at Laurence House.

Present: Aileen Buckton, Liz Dart (Lewisham Council)

CLLr Jim Mallory, Paul Lowndes, Peter Richardson, Ralph White
representing Lee Green Assembly Working Party ('WP')

Purpose of the Meeting

Discuss progress towards the re-establishment of Manor House Library as a Community Library, including confirmation of the timetable, a sharing of the WP's ideas and agreement about the WP's role in the process.

Notes

The WP summarised its concern that the survival of the Library is heavily dependent upon the successful commercial exploitation of the Manor House and that it saw this as perhaps an 'order of magnitude' greater than previous conversions within the Borough. AB confirmed that each building is being treated as an individual opportunity, although the underlying framework is the same. It is likely that the Manor House could well attract out-of-Borough interest.

AB/LD confirmed that the 'Lewisham Library Buildings Information and Application Guidance of March 2011', already in the public domain, was being updated and will be circulated to potential bidders. It will reflect the special features of each of the three premises on offer and that includes the Manor House. A pen picture of the opportunity at the Manor House will also be drawn up and will be circulated to the WP in draft form for their comments and suggestions. The WP is encouraged to solicit a wide range of ideas – not to attempt to impose these on potential bidders, but to stimulate their interest into the possibilities and reinforce local community interest.

The documentation is to be circulated end-February 2016. The complexity of the Manor House offer means that there will be a longer time for its consideration, and the elections in May means that it will not be possible for the responses to be considered by Mayor & Cabinet until after the elections are over – probably end-May 2016. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that the established timetable will be as already published and that transfer of ownership will occur end-August 2016. If there is unforeseen delay, then because the library management timetable is also being followed, there may at least be a reduction in opening hours or, at worst, temporary closure.

The WP expressed confusion over what financial responsibilities Lewisham Council will retain, and AB/LD explained that there will be an explicit statement of capital and revenue payments, and that the appropriate proportionality for these payments by the parties involved will be part of the agreement.

AB also said that interest from new bidders is also welcomed. There will be an "open day" for bidders and stakeholders to circulate/meet, and AB said the Council would also encourage bidders to interact with the WP because community engagement would be one of the qualifying elements of a successful bid.

It was agreed that the WP would make information available from this briefing at the Lee Green Local Assembly to be held on Tuesday 23 February 2016.