

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 22 JULY 2021

**Question to Cllr Wilson
Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture**

By Cllr Hussain

Question

According to Councillor Wilson, the relocation of the library to the Market Hall is "very essential for the rehabilitation and preservation of the market hall, which is such an ancient structure." The county council plans to invest £8.3 million for this purpose. HOWEVER, according to freedom of information statistics, just £345,000 is required to maintain the ancient market hall over the next ten years (£1.4 million was spent on it in 2014). According to Councillor Wilson, relocating the library would save taxpayers £84,000 per year in maintenance and operating expenses. That sounds admirable until one considers that it would take the council 100 years to spend the £8.3 million that it plans to spend on the library relocation. **HOW ON EARTH CAN THIS BE CONSIDERED VALUE FOR MONEY?** Would this council consider such a proposal if it was going to be funded by the council rather than the government? Is this the wisest use of the town's windfall funds?

Reply

The £8.3 million estimated project cost caters for much more than relocating the library. Investment in the fabric of the Market Hall will go way beyond the recommendations contained within the latest condition survey (£343,000 in September 2017) to preserve this locally important building for decades to come. High cost interventions include replacement of the existing roof, new heating system, new electrical systems along with construction of new internal and external meeting rooms and extension of the existing balcony to create modern office accommodation.

Calculations on whether this provides value for money for Staffordshire tax payers should relate to this Council's £1.3 million investment, which at a saving of £87,000 per annum when compared against the "do nothing" scenario, will be recouped in just under 15 years. This investment should also be offset against increasing footfall in the town centre and furthering the regeneration ambitions of the town.

The Town Fund is one of the Government's national funding interventions aimed at "levelling up" the country and is an acknowledgement that Burton needs additional funding for projects of this nature. Ultimately, it is for East Staffordshire Borough Council, the Burton Town Board and Government to determine whether they believe this investment provides value for money within the constraints of the funding criteria. At a contribution rate of around 15% of the overall project costs, this Council believes the project delivers value for money for the Staffordshire tax payer.