

Cllrs Conor Wileman, Arshad Afsar & Syed Hussain
Burton Tower, Town and Trent Divisions

Staffordshire County Council

24 November 2021

Dear Cabinet colleagues,

Proposed move of Burton Library into Burton Market Hall

As you are probably aware, the proposed move of Burton Library into Burton Market Hall will be on your Cabinet agenda in December. We the undersigned respectfully request that you consider this letter alongside the business case and consultation results which we assume you will receive prior to the Cabinet meeting as part of the decision-making process.

For avoidance of doubt, as a cross-party group of local Staffordshire County Councillors signing this letter - and whose Divisions are most affected by this proposal - we are all opposed to the move. We estimate that we represent over 50,000 Burton residents and geographically we represent those areas of Burton closest to the town centre and therefore to the library and market hall. Our view is not based on some political or ideological position but on what we think is best for our town.

History and Burton upon Trent Regeneration Strategy

In 2017/18, as part of a drive for closer partnership working, Staffordshire County Council and East Staffordshire Borough Council jointly commissioned Cushman and Wakefield to produce a new "Burton upon Trent Regeneration Strategy". This partnership working was spearheaded by Cllr Julia Jessel, then ESBC Cabinet member for Regeneration and Cllr Philip White, SCC Cabinet Member for Education. Cushman and Wakefield are well respected real estate and regeneration consultants and charged £50,000 for their services.

In the published Burton Regeneration Strategy, it states:

*"The Market Hall has recently been refurbished to a high standard. **Introducing food traders and the concept of a food hall (TC7) could prove very successful...** we see this as a huge opportunity for Burton to enhance its daytime independent retail offer. This would also give the opportunity to enhance Burton's night time economy and encourage more independent traders into the town.*

...the Market Hall is undersold and the view is that its potential is untapped. The opportunity to develop the Market Hall into a food court should therefore be investigated further"

There is no mention in this strategy about converting Burton Market Hall into a library.

Burton Town Board and the Stronger Towns Fund

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After the publication of the new Burton Regeneration Strategy, Central Government announced that Burton upon Trent would have the opportunity to bid for up to £25 million as part of the Stronger Towns Fund.

The fund's rules meant that the lead Council (ESBC) was required to appoint a Board, which was then tasked with coming up with various proposals for regenerating Burton. The Board consisted of members from both ESBC and SCC and it would be fair to assume that the starting point for the Board should have been the regeneration strategy and the various recommendations made within it.

One such recommendation as we know was introducing the concept of a food hall into Burton Market Hall. This recommendation however was not considered by the Board. The only idea ever considered appears to be moving the library into the market hall. Conor Wileman has recently spoken to the Leader of ESBC, Duncan Goodfellow who is a member of the Board, and he asked him whether the idea of a food hall was ever considered or investigated by the Board as per the Cushman & Wakefield recommendation. His answer to Mr Wileman was no.

Our criticism is that the Board and ESBC did not consider an option proposed by regeneration specialists (which must have been known to them) and chose to pursue the library move option alone. We find it extremely difficult to understand how the Board and ESBC are now so sure that moving the library into Burton Market Hall is the best option for regenerating that specific area of Burton when: (1) Burton's regeneration strategy, written by professionals, states that introducing the concept of a food hall could prove very successful and (2) no other options except the library move into Burton Market Hall have been considered to date.

SCC Cabinet Decision

We understand that this decision is not simply about the location of the library, but about the broader regeneration of the town, and with that in mind, our strongly held view as local members is that whilst:

1. other more imaginative options for Burton Market Hall (which might have more potential for driving regeneration and growth) have not been properly investigated;
2. there are strong arguments (including on costs/liability/affordability) for keeping the current library where it is in its current prominent location by the Washlands/River Trent (as set out in previous correspondence); and
3. the SCC public consultation in relation to the library move produced results which were overwhelmingly negative;

we do not see how SCC Cabinet on consideration of the issues in their entirety, can decide at its meeting in December that moving the library into the Market Hall at this stage is the best option for our town.



We request that the Cabinet put on hold any decision in relation to Burton Library until further options for Burton Market Hall are properly considered by the Board/ESBC.

Yours sincerely



Conor Wileman, Arshad Afsar and Syed Hussain

(we have agreed the contents of this letter together)

Cc SLT

