6. **PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE OF REDDITCH LIBRARY TO A MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT INCLUDING A LIBRARY, OFFICES, CHILDREN’S SERVICE AREA AND PARTNERSHIP AGENCY OFFICE ACCOMMODATION, 15 MARKET PLACE, REDDITCH, WORCESTERSHIRE**

**Applicant**
Worcestershire County Council

**Local Councillor**
Mr A Fry and Ms P A Hill

**Purpose of Report**
1. To consider an application under Regulation 3 of the Town and County Planning General Regulations 1992 for planning permission for the change of use of Redditch Library to a Mixed Use Development including a Library, offices, a Children's Service Area and Partnership Agency Office accommodation at 15 Market Place, Redditch, Worcestershire.

**Background**
2. Worcestershire County Council Libraries and Learning Service has to make significant savings as a result of the financial pressures on the County Council between 2011/12 and 2014/15. The approach it has chosen to take to meet those savings is to work more closely with partners and local communities to identify innovative ways to reduce costs without reducing services.

**The Proposal**
3. Worcestershire County Council is seeking planning permission for the change of use to Redditch Library to a Mixed Use Development including a Library, offices, a Children's Service Area and Partnership Agency Office accommodation at 15 Market Place, Redditch, Worcestershire.

4. The proposed development consists of internal alterations to convert the current caretaker's flat to space suitable for Children Services service delivery; to reconfigure the internal areas to create self-contained office accommodation to be occupied by Worcestershire County Council staff and their partnership agencies, this may include the Citizens Advice Bureau; and to alter the internal layout of the library, including shelving and public computers, to make better use of the space and improve accessibility for customers.

5. The breakdown of the uses on each floor includes, storage and meeting rooms on the lower ground floor; Library including Children's Library on the ground floor;
further Library space, office accommodation and training rooms on the first floor and further office accommodation and children's services on the second floor.

6. The only external works proposed as part of this development include the modification of the external signage. The details of the proposed signage would be agreed at a later date under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007.

7. The approximate proposed floor space for the public library is 858m² from 1456m² as existing; the approximate proposed floor space for the offices is 292m² and the approximate proposed floor space for the partnership agency accommodation is 200m².

8. There is currently 12 staff working within the Library. As a result of the changes there would be a maximum of 7 library staff working at any one time. The applicant states that the proposed staff numbers accommodating the remainder of the building would vary depending on the tenant's requirements and use of the space. On the basis of the Citizens Advice Bureau being successful tenants, there would be approximately 13 staff employed and approximately a further 50 staff would be employed in the remaining office accommodation.

9. The existing access into the building from Market Walk would remain unchanged.

10. The proposed parking provision at the site would increase from one disabled parking space to two spaces. The works include marking out the additional car parking space on the existing hard standing area.

11. The proposed opening hours vary between the uses within the building: the proposed Public Library’s opening hours would be Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, 09:00 hours to 19:00 hours; Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, 09:00 hours to 17:00 hours. It is envisaged that the opening hours for the proposed offices would be Monday – Friday, 07:30 hours to 19:30 hours. The Family Contact Suite would be open Monday – Friday, 09:00 hours to 19:00 hours.

12. A public consultation took place over 24 - 26 June 2014 where members of Worcestershire County Council were available to answer any questions from members of the public and to discuss the proposals. The plans have continued to be displayed at the Library during the planning process and the Library staff have been available to discuss the proposals and answer any questions. A list of frequently asked questions has been compiled and is available to view at the Library. A press release was issued and published in the Redditch and Alcester Advertiser and the Redditch Standard.

13. The applicant has stated that many members of the
public shared their views to the members of staff and were supportive of the scheme and some left written comments.

**The Site**

14. Redditch Library is sited in Redditch town centre. The building is bound by Market Place to the north; Alcester Walk to the east; Market Walk to the south and west. The application site abuts the Redditch Conservation Area.

15. Redditch Library is located less than 5 minutes walk from numerous car parks including a large multi-storey car park at the main shopping area (Kingfisher Centre) in addition to the bus and railway station.

16. There is currently one disabled parking space available at Redditch Library.

17. There is cycle storage provision at the entrance to the Library for staff and visitors to use with the capacity to accommodate up to 12 bicycles.

18. The neighbouring uses to the application site consist of Redditch market place to the north; Kingfisher Shopping Centre to the south; small convenience shops to the west and government offices to the east.

19. The Library building is a three storey structure which was completed in 1976. The building has a reinforced concrete frame and feature exposed waffle slab ceilings and both interior and exterior elevations clad in handmade facing brick.

20. The total existing floor space of the Library is 1456 m².

**Summary of Issues**

21. The main issues in the determination of this application are the impact of the proposal on:

- Provision of Mixed Use
- Internal Layout
- Amenity
- Character and Appearance of the local area
- Ecology, and
- Traffic and Highways Safety.

**Policy**

**National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**

22. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published and came into effect on 27 March 2012. The NPPF sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. It constitutes guidance for local planning authorities and decision takers and is a material planning consideration in determining planning applications. Annex 3 of the NPPF lists the documents revoked and replaced by the NPPF. At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through plan-making and decision-taking.

23. Sustainable Development is defined by five principles set
out in the UK Sustainable Development Strategy:

- "living within the planet's environmental limits;
- ensuring a strong, healthy and just society;
- achieving a sustainable economy;
- promoting good governance; and
- using sound science responsibly".

24. The Government believes that sustainable development can play three critical roles in England:

- an economic role, contributing to a strong, responsive, competitive economy;
- a social role, supporting vibrant and healthy communities; and
- an environmental role, protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment.

25. The following guidance contained in the NPPF, is considered to be of specific relevance to the determination of this planning application:

- Section 2: Ensuring the vitality of town centres
- Section 7: Requiring good design
- Section 8: Promoting healthy communities

The Development Plan
26. The Development Plan is the strategic framework that guides land use planning for the area. In this respect the current Development Plan consists of the Borough of Redditch Local Plan.

27. Planning applications should be determined in accordance with the provisions of the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions.

28. Annex 1 of the NPPF states that for the purposes of decision-taking, the policies in the Local Plan should not be considered out-of-date simply because they were adopted prior to the publication of the NPPF. However, the policies contained within the NPPF are material considerations. For 12 months from the day of publication, decision-takers may continue to give full weight to relevant policies adopted since 2004 even if there is a limited degree of conflict with the NPPF. In other cases and following this 12-month period, due weight should be given to relevant policies in existing plans according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

29. Borough of Redditch Local Plan
Policy B(BE).13 Qualities of Good Design
Policy B(BE).14 Alterations and Extensions
Policy C(CF).1 Community Facilities
Draft Planning Policy

Draft Bromsgrove District Plan (formerly Core Strategy)

30. The Bromsgrove District Plan will outline the strategic planning policy framework for guiding development in Bromsgrove District up to 2030. It will contain a long-term vision and strategic objectives, a development strategy, key policies, strategic site allocations and a monitoring and implementation statement. The Plan will also include a copy of the Redditch Cross Boundary Development Policy (Policy RCBD1), which appears in the Draft Borough of Redditch Local Plan No.4.

31. On 12 March 2014 Bromsgrove District Council submitted the Bromsgrove District Plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination. The Secretary of State has appointed an independent Inspector (Mr Michael J Hetherington) to undertake an independent examination into the soundness of the Bromsgrove District Plan. The Bromsgrove District Plan and the Borough of Redditch Local Plan No.4 examinations are being held concurrently and will include several joint hearing sessions as well as separate hearing sessions relating to each Local Plan. The Inspector has raised some queries about the Local Plans' housing evidence base in a written exchange with the Councils. As a result, the Inspector will hold two initial hearing sessions on 16-17 June 2014, which will address objective assessment of housing needs; duty to co-operate; and the approach to meeting anticipated housing needs from the major urban areas. The dates for the remainder of the hearings will be finalised in due course, but are unlikely to take place before September 2014. Bromsgrove District Council is anticipating adoption in early 2015.

32. The Bromsgrove District Plan has not, therefore, been tested at examination or adopted by Bromsgrove District Council. Having regard to the advice in the NPPF, Annex 1, it is the view of the Head of Economic Development and Planning, that little weight will be attached to the Bromsgrove District Plan in the determination of this application. The Bromsgrove District Plan policies that are relevant to this planning application are listed below:

Policy BDP 1 Sustainable Development Principles
Policy BDP 19 High Quality Design

Consultations

33. County Councillor Ms P A Hill is delighted to see new ideas and information and looks forward to seeing the building on completion.

34. The County Highways Officer has no objections to the proposed development.

35. The County Landscape Officer considers that there are no issues of landscape concern due to the nature of the proposed development.

36. The County Ecologist considers that there is no significant ecology implications with this scheme and have
37. **North Worcestershire Water Management** has no objections or further comments at this stage.

38. **Redditch Borough Council** has no objections to the proposal.

39. **Worcestershire Wildlife Trust** does not wish to make any comments on this application and is happy to defer to the County Ecologist for all on-site ecological matters.

### Other Representations

40. In accordance with the Development Management Procedure Order 2010, the application has been advertised on site and in the press. Two letters of representation have been received objecting to the proposal. The letters of representation are available in the Members Support Unit. The concerns raised relate to the provision of free quiet study areas; provision of toilets; provision of display facilities and reduction in the Library service.

### The Head of Economic Development and Planning's comments

41. As with any planning application, this application should be determined in accordance with the provisions of the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The relevant policies and key issues have been set out earlier.

42. Worcestershire County Council is seeking planning permission for the change of use to Redditch Library to a Mixed Use Development including a Library, offices, a Children's Service Area and Partnership Agency Office accommodation at 15 Market Place, Redditch, Worcestershire.

### Provision of Mixed Use

43. There have been concerns raised from members of the public regarding the lack of provision of free quiet study areas; the lack of provision of toilets; the lack of provision of display facilities and the lack of provision of library services.

44. In response to these concerns, the applicant stated that the library service recognise the importance of quiet study areas and would endeavour to create such areas within the Library as in other Worcestershire County Council Libraries.

45. The applicant has stated that there would be 3 publicly accessible WCs, including a disabled WC and baby change unit within the Library for Library users; whilst this would be a reduction on the original provision of 6 WCs within the existing Library, it mirrors the best provision of similar size libraries elsewhere in the County and it is considered that the proposed 3 WCs are adequate for the occasional need of Library users. There are also public toilets within a short distance in the Kingfisher Centre.

46. The applicant has stated that the Library would continue to offer display facilities.
47. The scheme retains an existing building and provides for community use in conjunction with other uses including Children’s Services; Worcestershire County Council staff and their partnership agencies which may include the Citizens Advice Bureau.

48. The Head of Economic Development and Planning is satisfied that the proposed uses are acceptable in accordance with Policy C(CF).1 of the Borough of Redditch Local Plan.

Internal Layout
49. Concerns have been raised from members of the public regarding the reduction in Library floor space and services.

50. In response to these concerns the applicant stated that although the current proposals would reduce the physical space of the Library to accommodate the changes from 1456m² to 858m², the number of stock items such as PCs, children activities and adult learning would not reduce and the shelving would only reduce marginally from 227 units to 214 units.

51. The Head of Economic Development and Planning acknowledges the concerns raised by members of the public regarding the proposed floor space allocated for the Library, however, the proposed configuration of the internal space within the Library is not a specific material planning consideration relevant to the determination of this application. Nevertheless, in view of the comments received from the applicant, the Head of Economic Development and Planning is satisfied that the space allocated for the Library would be adequate and acceptable in accordance with Policy C(CF).1 of the Borough of Redditch Local Plan.

Amenity
52. Public notices were erected around the site to advertise the proposal. There have been no objections to the scheme on amenity grounds.

53. Given the nature of the uses proposed within the building, the Head of Economic Development and Planning considers that there would be no adverse impact on the amenity of the surrounding area.

Character and Appearance of the local area
54. The majority of the works would be internal and would, therefore, not have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the local area.

55. The only external works proposed as part of this development include the modification of the external signage. The details of the proposed signage would be approved at a later date under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007.
56. In view of this, the Head of Economic Development and Planning does not consider that the proposal would have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area.

Other Matters

Ecology

57. The County Ecologist considers that there are no significant ecology implications with this scheme and have no objections or further comments at this stage.

58. In view of this, the Head of Economic Development and Planning is satisfied that the proposed development would not have any adverse impact on any protected species or biodiversity in accordance with Policy B(BE).14 of the Borough of Redditch Local Plan.

Traffic and Highway Safety

59. Redditch Library is located less than 5 minutes’ walk from numerous public car parks including a large multi-storey car park at the main shopping area (Kingfisher Centre) in addition to the bus and railway station.

60. There is currently one disabled parking space available at Redditch Library. An additional space would be provided as part of the proposal.

61. There is cycle storage provision at the entrance to the Library for staff and visitors to use with the capacity to accommodate up to 12 bicycles.

62. The County Highways Officer has no objections to the proposed development.

63. In view of this, the Head of Economic Development and Planning considers that this town centre location enables good accessibility via public transport to the proposed public services. In view of the above comments from the County Highways Officer, the Head of Economic Development and Planning is satisfied that the proposed development would not have a detrimental impact on highway safety.

Conclusion

64. The Head of Economic Development and Planning considers that the proposed uses are acceptable in this proposed location and the facilities provided are adequate in accordance with Policy C(CF).1 of the Borough of Redditch Local Plan.

65. The Head of Economic Development and Planning is satisfied that the space allocated for the Library would be adequate in accordance with Policy C(CF).1 of the Borough of Redditch Local Plan.

66. The Head of Economic Development and Planning considers that there would be no adverse impact on the amenities of the surrounding area.

67. The Head of Economic Development and Planning is
satisfied that the proposed development would not have a detrimental impact on ecology and biodiversity at the site or on the surrounding area in accordance with Policy B(BE).14 of the Borough of Redditch Local Plan.

68. The Head of Economic Development and Planning is satisfied that the proposed development would not have a detrimental impact on highway safety.

69. On balance, taking into account the comments received from statutory consultees; members of the public and the provisions of the development plan in particular Policy B(BE).13; Policy B(BE).14; Policy C(CF).1 of the Borough of Redditch Local Plan and Policy BDP 1; Policy BDP 19 of the Draft Bromsgrove District Plan (formerly Core Strategy), it is considered that the proposal would not cause demonstrable harm to the interests intended to be protected by these policies or highway safety.

**Recommendation**

70. The Head of Economic Development and Planning recommends that planning permission be granted for the change of use to Redditch Library to a Mixed Use Development including a Library, offices, a Children's Service Area and Partnership Agency Office accommodation, 15 Market Place, Redditch, Worcestershire, subject to the following conditions:

a) The permission enures for the benefit of Worcestershire County Council only;

b) The development must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission;

c) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the details shown on submitted Drawing Numbers: AD-01A; A-01; A-02; AD-10 A; AD-11 C; AD-12; AD-13; AD-14 and AD-15, except where otherwise stipulated by conditions attached to this permission; and

d) In the unlikely event that any protected species are found on the site during the works then all works must cease immediately and the advice of a suitably qualified ecologist must be sought and followed prior to works re-commencing on the site.

**Contacts**

County Council Contact Points
Worcester (01905) 763763, Kidderminster (01562) 822511

Specific Contact Points for this Report
Emma Johnston, Planning Assistant:
01905 766711, ejohnston@worcestershire.gov.uk

Mark Bishop, Development Control Manager:
01905 766709, mbishop@worcestershire.gov.uk
In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Head of Economic Development and Planning) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this item:

The application, plans and consultation replies in file reference 14/000031/REG3.