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The Library of Birmingham – Hub of the Knowledge Economy

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Part 1: Background - The Urban Context

Birmingham is a city of a million people at the centre of the country and of a conurbation of two and a half million. Birmingham is Britain's second city and is big on the European scale. It has a young, diverse and growing population. In the face of massive economic change the city has achieved great regeneration success and has attracted large amounts of inward investment, with more to come. It has new high technology manufacturing, a rapidly growing business and professional services sector, a strong university and research sector, and world-class business conference and exhibition facilities. It wants to attract more high value international investment, and register much more strongly on the international scale. It wants to be an exciting place where individuals and families choose to live and stay. It wants to be a place renowned for great public spaces.

Birmingham is, I believe, unique among major European cities. It has no coastline, no major river, and no natural resources to justify its existence. It derives its strength and position as England's second city entirely from its people, their skills, talents ingenuity and industry. In short, from what they have learned. As a result, Birmingham has acquired the sobriquet "City of a Thousand Trades", alas, no longer as true as it was a century ago.

You may not know that Birmingham has more trees than Paris, and more miles of canal than Venice, though in other respects even I will not claim it is as attractive a city as they are! But Birmingham is a city of creativity too, listen to what the composer Dvorak had to say "I'm here in this immense industrial city where they make knives, scissors, springs, files...and music too. Its terrifying how much the people here manage to achieve"

And more recently Bill Clinton found much to praise in Birmingham and the diversity of its communities and cultural life when he visited a few years ago. "I was astonished at the G8 [summit] when I saw how beautiful it was, the buildings, the art, the use of water. It's an extraordinary jewel of a city"

Birmingham the city is going through a generation of extraordinary change, driven by the collapse of the traditional manufacturing sector which has sustained its growth since the eighteenth century. We are seeking to rebuild the city's economy on a much more diverse base, investing in the knowledge sector, creative industries and small and medium size businesses. The constant influx of new population to the city helps this process of reinvention, bringing new ideas and new attitudes to economic and cultural life. But it is a population which needs to be constantly learning new skills, both to take on the challenge of business growth and to become employable in new labour markets. And there are real challenges. And this is where the library becomes important. We can and do change lives, and we can help to change the direction of a major European city.

Birmingham has a plan. A Big City Plan. And the Library of Birmingham is at its heart.

Part 2: Rebuilding the city: The Big City Plan

This is the vehicle for delivering a global economic and cultural role for Birmingham whilst nurturing the potential of everyone in the city and promoting a productive, welcoming and innovative environment for residents, visitors and investment. The Big City Plan addresses five drivers of competitiveness:-

- Innovation and skills: there needs to be better working between the universities, local government and the private sector
- Economic and cultural diversity, in its architecture, public realm, cultural facilities, heritage, retail offer and services
- Connectivity, including accessibility, internal mobility, digital connectivity
- Strategic capacity: leadership, vision and partnerships
- Quality of place, delivering a more diverse, more authentic, gritty and multicultural experience, especially to young people.

There are success stories in the recent shift from reliance on manufacturing industry to higher value added service industries: health and education, finance, business services and creative industries all demonstrate growth, also predicted in software, radio, television and live music. But there are significant challenges too: Birmingham is still under-represented in high value and high wage sectors, such as finance and business services; it has fewer jobs in R&D and knowledge-intensive business services, and the working age population has lower skills than the national average. Unemployment is above and economic activity rates below the national averages; newly created jobs do not match the skills sets of those formerly employed in manufacturing. Greatest growth potential is seen as lying within the creative industries, which currently account for 6% of employment in the city but is poorly connected to university-related Research and development. Spin-off here has potential for growth. The city is investing in ICT, Research and Development, under-represented businesses such as those run by women and ethnic minorities, and in social enterprise.

And Birmingham will have a new Library of Birmingham.

Part 3: The Library in the City

In the next few years the city must tackle issues of community cohesion, skills deficit and a shift to a knowledge-based economy, as well as forging a global identity based on a rejuvenated cultural offer. This paper explores one dimension of the concept of the library as a place for knowledge sharing, that of the library as an engine for the delivery of a knowledge-based economy within a major European city. How do the arguments and partnerships evolve in territory which is new to all parties, and how could the implications of the narrative development be realised through the design solution. The importance of the work lies in its articulation of a new direction and role for a major library in delivering economic outputs.

There are research and investigative findings to support our arguments. A recent study for the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) concluded that "in a post-industrial economy, the management and exploitation of knowledge will rely greatly on finding new ways of using libraries and archives". The Leitch Review of "Skills in the UK: the long-term challenge" (2006) recommended that libraries play a key strategic and operational role in the delivery of adult education.

The library is viewed as a generator of positive externalities through its enabling of knowledge sharing. Individuals and businesses gain knowledge and this in turn creates economic and social value as residents of the city develop their knowledge and skills in supporting growth of the knowledge sector. A challenge in developing an underpinning argument to support economic investment in the library is that these positive externalities cannot be fully captured and internalised on library balance sheets. This does not make them any less real.

Part 4: The Library of Birmingham – a library like no other.

The city of Birmingham, UK, has committed £193m to deliver a new library by June 2013. Architects Mecanoo (NL) have been appointed to lead the Design Team and Carillion Construction to deliver the building. Construction on site will commence in February 2010.

Our mission, simply stated, is to deliver a library like no other. By integrating it with The REP Theatre, we will create a centre for learning, information and culture without parallel. This is a unique opportunity to change the cultural, social, economic and physical face of Birmingham – forever.

Part 5: Library of Birmingham - Powerhouse for the Knowledge Economy

The Library of Birmingham (LoB) will be the Hub of the Knowledge Economy for the city and the region. The offer will be distinctive and inclusive. LoB will provide a major cultural centre for the arts, creativity, enterprise, learning and leisure that will develop knowledge for businesses and citizens. How will this be realised, and how will the design solution respond to this challenge? How will we help build the knowledge economy?

- Drive economic and social regeneration, enabling citizens to realise their full potential
- Promote networking and knowledge exchange, enabling people to come together and learn from one another, in a community space that is open and inclusive to all
- Be a hub for learning, skills development, business and enterprise through the exploitation of information and communications technology
- Support academic research, scholarship and study
- Be a model of sustainable design, responsive to technological, social and behavioural change in the information age.

The Library of Birmingham must deliver improved, more accessible facilities, enabling learning, business and enterprise service areas to maximise its potential and have a wider impact. We will adopt radical and innovative service designs which combine the best of traditional library and archival resource discovery with an outcomes-driven approach. Significant resources of the library – staff, online and printed materials, spatial design, ICT facilities, and partnership arrangements – will be deliberately aligned to support entrepreneurship, business start-up and the creative industries.

Part 6: A Transformed Service Model

The Library of Birmingham aspires to seed and galvanise a community of imagination and action, democratising knowledge as earlier generations of public library democratised access to information. We aim to connect the intellectual elite of the city, with the marginalised in our society — the workless, the poor, the poorly educated — thereby universalising rather than polarising debate in challenging economic times.

I propose to focus on the concept of the Knowledge Hub and the extent to which design can help to realise a vision in which the library of the future provides a social space in which knowledge is democratised. It can be an enabling infrastructure for social interaction, knowledge acquisition and transfer, co-creation, creativity and personal and community development. Diversity of people, perspective and information should be encouraged, so that new knowledge, new networks of people and knowledge, new understanding and innovation is more likely to occur.

How, ultimately, will a transformed library service transfer the powers of engagement, connectivity and creativity to its users?

The Library of Birmingham will be

- A place to meet and dwell, to think, to make connections, share, explore, create, discover, generate, incubate and exchange ideas, become, want to be, develop, absorb, debate, find surprise and inspiration, develop relations, interact, teach, learn . . . a place for free minds and to free minds, for thinkers and thoughts.
- It will be a socially inclusive place for us all, and a space within which people will develop and nurture groups of shared interests, and diversely different interests.

The Library of Birmingham, in physically representing the ultimate democratic space for knowledge, will

- empower people to engage
- enable people to join networks that will be greater than the sum of its individual members
- stimulate the elements of knowledge — people, resources, activities
- offer new ways of learning, new ways of thinking, new ways of working, and new ways of relating
- facilitate planned and unplanned gatherings of small and large groups of shared interest, both temporary and enduring
- stimulate peer to peer, intergenerational, cross cultural, multi disciplinary interaction
- unlock the door to creative reading for all

The LoB will ensure that all communities benefit from the economic success derived from knowledge. Primarily it will achieve this goal by focussing uniquely on both ends of the digital prosperity spectrum.

The LoB will be a model for the **encouragement of digital literacy and adoption of digital technologies**, offering formal and informal learning opportunities and a wide range of subject and interest-oriented motivations for digital adoption.

The LoB will encourage digital innovation, supporting early stage research by offering **showcasing and dissemination opportunities**, bringing together the city's enterprise and innovation sectors at the cutting edge.

Part 7: New Partnerships

The LoB will operate at the heart of the learning agenda for the city-region, working in **partnership with the Further and Higher Education sectors** to encourage learning and promote graduate retention, especially in the fields of science and technology. To do this we will connect the research and development work of Birmingham's five universities with the wider public, helping citizens to understand cutting edge research in, for example, energy efficiency by showcasing and facilitating communication, and promoting a new cultural learning partnership to exploit the cultural assets of the library. We will engineer a partnership with all colleges operating in the Further Education sector, creating a connected virtual learning environment (VLE) which integrates with college resources. And we will work with 400+ schools in the city to lever the unique cultural assets into a Birmingham Grid for Learning.

The LoB will develop facilities as a business centre and a centre for small and micro business incubation. We will actively encourage business to be transacted from the library premises and provide necessary support facilities, ranging from ICT, appropriate spaces to catering and coffee. We will encourage the business community to colonise the library adopting it as their "third place" away from home and office, and operating as drop-in centre to meet colleagues, clients and business partners. Support services will be available at reasonable prices.

The LoB will link into the vision of a 'Global City with a Local Heart'. In practice we will aim to position LoB as a **'virtual gateway'** to the world, recognising that our diverse local heritage will provide a strong foundation. The potential economic benefits to be derived from such positioning in relation to the diverse communities of the city and their countries of origin are considerable.

The LoB must make a bold statement. It should lever in investment from a **major IT partner**, developing as powerful a digital presence as in the real world economy.

This level of ambition requires transformational change, a step change fundamentally away from a transactional model to a transformational model of service. The transformational model of the library is very different. It provides a bond with community, a social contract, a space in which knowledge is democratised. It becomes an enabling infrastructure for social interaction, knowledge acquisition, and personal and community development, a participative model of service delivery, in line with shifts in democracy and governance. This model fundamentally alters the traditional balance between "give" and "get" in the delivery and receipt of public services, and fits with national and local aspirations to empower individual volunteering and community groups. Thus the library moves from a place in which products (books and information) are "got" to one in which learning and knowledge are both given and obtained. This is at the root of a new social contract between the institutions of society, such as a major library, and individuals and communities of interest.

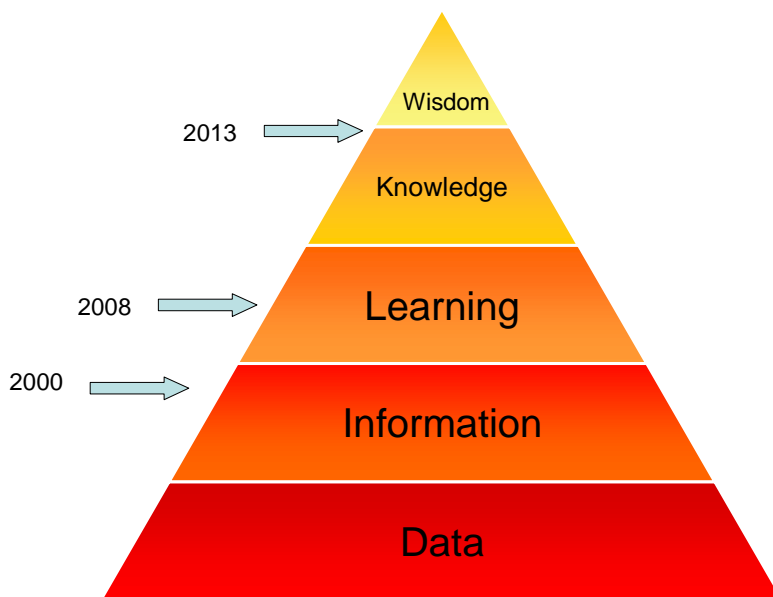


Figure 1: the foundations of wisdom

Part 8: The Logic Model

This transformational model applies to the wide range of library activities, and equally to services to adults, children and young people. It focuses on making a difference to strategic outcomes, and to seeking a clear connection between interventions and results.

- Reading and the encouragement of early literacy
- Skills acquisition for success in a knowledge-driven economy
- Understanding of individual and community heritage and history
- Adult learning
- Community meeting place in which to develop a contribution to the community
- Business support
- Cultural activity (music, dance, art, poetry, theatre...)
- Health and well-being
- Knowledge Hub for creativity and innovation
- Knowledge and skills for citizenship – consumer information, the interpretation of information, and life skills
- The digital and virtual environments

Part 9: Role of Library Staff

Our expectations of staff are changing. In areas of the service the designation of staff as Librarians or Library Assistants has changed. They may be Business Advisors, or Learning Support Officers, in either case with appropriate qualifications to match The Future Library Staff Member will be many things: -

- A facilitator of people-centred knowledge exchange networks
- A knowledge host
- An enabler of connection and collaboration for communities of interest

- An interventionist
- A deliverer of results and outcomes
- A coach
- A facilitator of learning
- An encourager and motivator
- A creative reading enthusiast
- A creator of content
- A specialist

Part 10: Delivery of the new model service

This will focus around 5 hubs:

1. **Arts and Creativity** – using the library’s rich resources and facilities tied to creative business support services that will not only serve individual citizens but generate cultural activity and develop the city’s creative industries through organic growth. Space for performance, exhibition, conferencing, networking and showcasing is essential to a flourishing creative industry sector. Our intention is to allow the creative and cultural industries to colonise the library as their own territory, with the minimum extent of light-touch moderation and quality assurance, so that their activity can achieve maximum exposure and generate maximum economic benefit.

In any one year the library develops over 3000 writers, creates 695 new creative businesses, deals with 24,000 creative industry enquiries, and showcases 210 musicians including sales and emerging artists.

2. **Citizenship and Community** –develop the diverse economic base within the city, supporting community initiatives via a network of working relationships that invests in strategies to ensure the whole community experiences the benefits of knowledge, improves quality of life and raises aspirations. We will create “the informed citizen” through imaginative access to free legal information, government and politics, the economy, health information, environmental issues and building Birmingham's place in the world.

We work with “Enterprising Communities”, provide a range of advice services from the Health Exchange to Legal advice and reinforce this with resources to inform and empower our citizens.

3. **Enterprise and Innovation** is our ability to gather, harness, exploit and apply ideas to the development of commercially viable products and services through a vibrant creative industries sector and enterprise culture. Lob can be a world leader in this role, based on our existing success as a UK leader in intellectual property and knowledge transfer.

The Enterprise Centre and Innovation Hub will incorporate a dedicated area for groups to facilitate creativity, planning and problem solving, an Ideas Shop, Intellectual Property Service, and Creative Pathways with creative artists

Detailed user requirements specify a flexible technology rich space equipped with electronic meeting and collaborative software where groups can meet, generate ideas, scenario plan, problem solve, evaluate options and make decisions. This should be a bright and stimulating environment. The Intellectual Property Service requires access to interview/seminar/meeting spaces

Each year we aim to start 500 new businesses, typically generating c£40m in the local economy with a 75% sustainability rate and helping 2500 unemployed people into work.

4. **Learning & Skills** needs embedded in the community and economy, harnessing the skills of the population for economic growth by focusing on lifelong learning and dealing with social issues. LOB can help build the productivity ladder through high-quality jobs and highly skilled people by enabling a wider development of learning and skills services with open access 24/7 that delivers a better skills base for the city. Birmingham suffers stark polarisation in educational outcomes from different communities that **LoB** can assist as a “first steps” service, sign-poster and a wider mission on non-accredited learning and tie-ins with educational programmes throughout the city across all bodies.

People over the age of 16 will be using the area to pursue self tutored study or to receive assistance from a Learning Support Officer Each user will have access to a desk and individual computer or Wifi enabled seat. This area must cater for people with disabilities. Learning may take place in groups. Some customers will need a space where they will not be using computers shoulder to shoulder with young people, who may make them feel embarrassed about their relative lack of IT skills.

This needs to be a comfortable study/working environment for people spending several hours at a time

The Learning Centre deals with over 50,000 students per annum, while initiatives like E-mail College will have 23,000 course completions this year.

5. **Information technology** facilitates the development and exchange of information - the essential component of knowledge with connectivity for all, providing access for all communities to resources, cultural and creative opportunities, business services, and learning. This tackles the “digital divide” through a common offer delivered 24/7 as a UK Online centre. In parallel with this openness of access must be a leading edge role in, for example, showcasing the output of the region’s entrepreneurial economy in serious gaming, digital film, wi-fi and so on.

A study area adjacent to main area will provide for long term study facilities. This area will contain individual workstations/wifi enabled seats. The workstations will be able to accommodate a pc/laptop and reference books/ papers. These clusters will allow individual or group work.

Detailed user requirements are that people will be using the area to pursue business related research using the assistance from a Business Support Officer as required. There will be access to dedicated online databases as well as book-stock. This area must cater for people with disabilities. This needs to be a comfortable study/working environment for people spending several hours at a time

Enterprise work (Business Insight activities with ID service which needs its own office presence) and Business Information service with individual zones supplemented by linking areas such as “Start a Business” , “Self Employment”, Business Planning, - services that combine resources, advice and learning.

Space totally shared / integrated between the functions Business Information Library / Creativity/ Employment / Enterprise / Learning / Learning Library and new services by then such as “Lifestyle”.

We visualise the Service Area rather like a wagon wheel with:

- Single Enquiry point – signposting desk for all services
- Dedicated controlled Learning Zone
- Dedicated Enterprise Zone
- Shared Library service – books / databases / loans area
- Shared Facilities – Seminars, Interviews, IT training
- Dedicated Creativity area
- Dedicated Employment Zone
- Flexibility of space for new service / project zones
- Interview and meeting rooms

Business and Learning Services

Underpinning these functional areas is a range of specific services provided by our Business Insight team

Start a Business service

- Free one to one advice sessions with accredited Business advisers. We are a member of the National Federation of Enterprise Agencies
- Comprehensive help with Business Plans
- Company formation – 24 hr inclusive service for £50
- Directory service – help with finding suppliers
- Grants and contracts – advice and specialist databases on locating grants and researching contracts
- Intellectual property – protect and develop your creativity and business innovation
- Market Research and statistics to look at market trends, sector reports and industry profiles
- Information resources to help with all aspects of running a business
- “How to Guides” on locating premises, finding suppliers etc
- Access to subscription databases – these are password controlled for access in the library only

Workshops and Seminars

- Sponsored business seminars – a workbook led seminar to work through a business idea
- Externally-led workshops on becoming self employed
- Intellectual Property workshops

Advice clinics

- Birmingham Legal Advice Clinic – impartial legal advice delivered by local reputable law firms
- Patent clinics – delivered by local patent attorneys
- Image consultant one to one sessions

- Music business one to one sessions

Information direct

- Customised research and specialised business resources on a pay-as-you-go basis
- Company formation service

Creative Insight

- Protecting creativity
- Copyright
- Patents
- Trade Marks
- Designs

Business Library services

- Business skills
- Company analysis & reports
- Company information
- Credit & director checks
- Directory enquiries
- Doing business in other countries
- Grants & tenders
- International business information
- International trade
- Market research
- Marketing & supplier lists
- Outsourcing and research services
- Patents, trade marks and copyright
- Statistics

Part 11: Realising the vision

The challenge for the design team is to create a series of ambiances within which all will feel comfortable. Our target audiences for the Knowledge Hub range from newly arrived refugees to the city seeking basic skills of language, literacy and numeracy, through would-be entrepreneurs within the creative industries, students, on to the established business community networks. In turn these again will contain varying degrees of formality and consequently have different expectations of style, elegance and presentation. All will share a common wish for an environment which is comfortable yet not untidy, functional, social yet with opportunities for privacy, enriched by the various experiential offers that the Library can provide and lubricated by coffee and cake! Within the 1,000 square metres of the Library dedicated to the Business and Learning environment we will feature a range of stylish environments for social learning, dedicated spaces for seminars, workshops and master-class activities, business incubation opportunities, and an innovation hub. This innovation hub will allow leading edge digital media companies from Birmingham to showcase their developments, work in progress and achievements, but it will also be available to the local business and development communities as a “white-room” intensive environment to stimulate the evolution of ideas. At the conference I will present further images of the design in progress. These will demonstrate how the concept of a city driving towards a knowledge-based economy can be realised through a library which places most weight on ideas, knowledge and the concepts of exchange, discovery and knowledge transfer. In this way the Library of Birmingham will dominate the city’s landscape in both a physical sense but also as a towering presence in the changing knowledge landscape of the city.

