

Part A

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 21 January 2019

Report author: Head of Community & Environmental Services

Title: Redevelopment of land, community centre and shop at 32 Raphael Drive and Centrepoint Community Centre.

1.0 Summary

1.1 On 10 September 2018 Cabinet resolved the following:

a) Approves a joint proposal by Watford Borough Council (WBC) and Watford Community Housing (WCH) to provide 50+ socially rented properties in the Borough to be delivered over a 3 year period by WCH subject to agreeable nomination rights and subsidy being received from WCH on an equal basis with WBC and,

b) Subject to the approval of (e) below confirmation from an independent valuer that the Council is achieving best consideration for the transfer of land as identified in 4.6 in the report from WBC to WCH at nil consideration and,

c) Approves the commencement of consultation on redevelopment of the WBC sites where required (as identified in the Part B appendix to the report) followed by the submission of a planning application this financial year and,

d) Agrees that any amendments on the sites to be brought forward for socially rented homes including the scheme design (relating to overall numbers and mix of units) is delegated to the Deputy Managing Director in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Property and Housing.

And to recommend to Council:

e) That £2.65 million from the funds currently earmarked for the provision of new temporary accommodation are reallocated to support this project, the money being split between 2018/19 and 2019/20 financial years.

1.2 This report is to confirm that the land, community centre and shop at 32 Raphael Drive and Centrepoint Community Centre is one of these sites and that a grant has been secured from Homes England to help fund this much needed development of social rented properties in Watford.

- 1.3 The Council, with their partners, WCH have been undertaking consultation and engagement with local residents and users of the Community Centre and the feedback from that is shown at Appendix 1. There was a further consultation and engagement event on 10 January 2019 and the feedback from this event will be provided to Cabinet at the meeting.
- 1.4 This report provides Cabinet with the results of the consultation and engagement and seeks approval having had regard to that consultation and engagement to proceed with the disposal of the land to WCH on the terms as set out in the Cabinet report of the 10 September.

2.0 Risks

2.1

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate or transfer)	Risk Rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
Planning permission is refused	The development will not go ahead	Comprehensive community consultation and engagement to inform appropriate design	Treat	3 X 3 = 9
Development costs increase	The amount of subsidy will increase and WBC and WCH will have to reconsider the proposal and the way forward based on the revised costs	Development costs will be closely monitored during the project and where possible cost increases will be considered and absorbed within the scheme.	Treat	3 X 3 = 9
There is a legal challenge to the decision to dispose of the site to WCH	The disposal may not take place, reputational damage to both	Detailed consideration of the consultation with users of the	Treat	2 x 3 = 6

	the Council and WCH	shop and community centre and reprovision of a community facility in the local area		
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3.0 Recommendations

- 3.1.1 Having had full regard to the content of this report, including comments and views expressed by members of the public and users of the current community centre and shop and having regard to the attached equality impact analysis in Appendix 2, and the implications for crime and disorder, that the land, community centre and shop at 32 Raphael Drive and Centrepoint Community Centre be approved for disposal to WCH for redevelopment for social rented housing, appropriate community space and retail space on the terms previously approved by Cabinet on 10 September 2018, subject to the due planning process, and that the site be deemed to be surplus to requirements.
- 3.1.2 That the Council ceases any and all activities operating from the Community Centre on 31 March 2019
- 3.1.3 That the Council works with all existing user groups of the Community Centre to support them in finding appropriate alternative facilities whilst the community facility is unavailable.
- 3.1.4 That the new community space be large enough to accommodate a meeting of 50 people, and/or the playing of table tennis, and/or a community coffee morning, and/or the running of a fitness class. That this space be able to be readily subdivided to create 2 separate community spaces and that it have an appropriate kitchen facility.
- 3.1.5 That the new retail space be of appropriate size for the retail needs it will service.
- 3.1.6 That the community space and retail space be constructed in such a manner and such a size and layout that should either or both no longer be required they can be converted into additional social rented accommodation.
- 3.1.7 That the Council enter into a nomination agreement with WCH to ensure it obtains 100% nomination rights for each of the residential units to be built on the site.

- 3.1.8 That the Council enters into appropriate agreements with WCH to ensure that in the event that any units or the site is subsequently disposed of by WCH any sums received are either used to provide further social housing with suitable nomination rights to the Council or the Council receives a share of the proceeds of sale equal to the share that it contributed to the development.
- 3.1.9 That the Transfer includes a restrictive covenant preventing the site being used for any purpose other than social rented housing, community space and a local shop.

Further information:

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Report approved by: Manny Lewis, Managing Director

4 Detailed proposal

- 4.1 As set out in the report to Cabinet on 10 September 2018 the Elected Mayor of Watford is committed to the provision of 16-18 new social housing units per year over the next three years which is now embedded into the Council's Corporate Plan.
- 4.2 Cabinet agreed that the Council should undertake consultation with users of the Community Centre and the shop to gauge their views on the proposals.
- 4.3 This engagement took place between 29 October and 9 December 2018 and was organised jointly with WCH. The engagement took the form of i) a survey, which was available online and in paper format and was promoted extensively through social media and in Centrepont itself where people could pick up a paper copy; and ii) two engagement sessions on 15 November 2018, one in the morning and one in the late afternoon / early evening.
- 4.4 The full results of this engagement are shown in Appendix 1. The following responses are specifically brought to the attention of Cabinet:
- 4.4.1 96% of respondents agreed that it was important for the area to have a community space for local residents with 71% of respondents stating that they would attend an activity session in the new community space if it were of interest. As can be seen in the above Recommendations the Council agrees with, and supports, this position.
- 4.4.2 94% of respondents agreed that it was important for the area to have a local shop for residents with 79% stating that they currently use the shop. It was also noted that whilst the shop provides for food, drink, newspapers / magazines and tobacco, it was also noted that people can pay bills (gas / electricity) and use the cashpoint at the shop. Again, as can be seen in the above Recommendations the Council agrees

with, and supports, this position.

4.4.3 Other issues were raised in the engagement under the ‘Additional Comments’ section, which are listed below along with an Officer response:

Comment Made	Officer Response
Concern for the vulnerable members of the local community if the community facility and shop are not replaced	The Council supports the re-provision of the community facility and shop
Overall concern about additional homes proposed for the site – adding to numbers on the estate, potentially additional vulnerable households, which can bring further challenges for the local area	It is appropriate for this to be given due consideration as part of the due planning process
General comment on the upkeep of the Radlett Road estate – roads, open spaces, lighting (Reeds Walk was raised as there were 5 lamp posts out of service, large trees are obscuring lighting) and overgrown trees (again on Reeds Walk)	This comment is not relevant to this particular development however Officers will look to address these concerns as appropriate.
Concerns raised re ASB on the estate	Officers will look to address these concerns as appropriate.
Road safety is seen as an issue – could speed be reduced on Radlett Road and a barrier / handrail be provided on the single file pavement under the railway bridge on Radlett Road	This comment is not relevant to this particular development however Officers will look to address these concerns as appropriate.
Parking is an issue on the estate – particularly commuter parking	Officers will look to address these concerns as appropriate.
Estate needs better access to public transport	This comment is not relevant to this particular development however Officers will look to address these concerns as appropriate.
Need for temporary facilities during build – particularly for the elderly and more vulnerable	The Council will work with all existing user groups to support them in finding appropriate alternative facilities whilst the community facility is unavailable. There is no intention to provide a temporary facility (such as a portacabin) for either community use or retail use.

- 4.5 In addition to the above, the Council received a petition signed by approximately 200 people (copy of 'front page' of the petition shown in Appendix 3 – no signatories are shown), which raised several concerns in relation to the shop, the community centre and the new homes, fundamentally asking for the Council to reconsider the redevelopment of Centrepont Community Centre and shop. However this petition did not contain the addresses of those that had signed it so the Council could not confirm if those who had signed were residents of the borough so unfortunately the petition could not be taken into account. As can be seen above residents have had the opportunity to raise their concerns during the consultation and the results from that do not support the main thrust of the petition, with responders seeking to have the facilities replaced in any new development, which the Council is accommodating.
- 4.6 Given all of the above this development opportunity of the land, community centre and shop at 32 Raphael Drive and Centrepont Community Centre for social rented dwellings is recommended to Cabinet. The proposal is also supported by WCH and has recently also been awarded grant funding from Homes England.
- 4.7 The development will be subject to the due planning process and the recommendations in this report reflect the Council's commitment to secure the best outcomes for the local community with this proposal.
- 4.8 It is clear from the consultation and engagement information that there is clear support for both a community facility and a local shop to be part of this development.

5 Implications

5.1 Financial

- 5.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there is no additional budget pressures arising from this report.

5.2 Legal Issues

- 5.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the Council will need to be satisfied that providing the land at nil consideration is necessary as the Council is under a duty to get best consideration on any land disposal. It will also need to enter into an agreement with WCH to ensure it gets full nomination rights to any units built and that in any subsequent sale the money is used to re-provide further social rented units which the Council will have full nomination rights to or the Council gets back the same percentage of the proceeds of sale that it contributed

toward the development. In addition it will require a restrictive covenant to prevent the land being used for anything other than housing, a community facility and local shop,

State Aid has been considered in respect of the provision of the subsidy the Council is giving to WCH to enable this development to proceed. The Council has previously taken counsels advice and the provision of subsidy to support social housing is permitted under the State Aid regime.

Members need to have regard to the views of the consultees and of the Equality Impact Assessment in making their decision to proceed with this disposal

5.3 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

5.3.1 Under s149 (1) of the Equality Act the council must have due regard, in the exercise of its functions, to the need to –

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them
- foster good relations between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them.

5.3.2 An Equality Impact Analysis (EIA) has been undertaken and this is attached at Appendix 2 and the overall conclusion of the EIA is that the positive impacts of the proposals outweigh the negative impacts, given the positive impact this will have on those families who will be able to access affordable housing and the proposal to explore the inclusion of a community facility and shop within the scheme. Whilst it is noted the loss of the current amenity could have negative impacts mitigation has been identified that reduces the negative impact overall, although it is noted that consulting and engaging with current users, the community and staff are critical to this mitigation being effective.

5.4 Staffing

5.4.1 The closure of the community centre will result in the deletion of 2 permanent posts and so 2 members of staff will be at risk of redundancy. The Council will follow its redundancy process.

5.5 Accommodation

5.5.1 There will be loss of a community facility until the new site is redeveloped.

5.6 **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

5.6.1 The Community Safety Manager has confirmed that the closure of the community centre, and activities undertaken there, will not adversely affect the crime and disorder in that locality.

5.7 **Sustainability**

5.7.1 The proposals in this report accord with the Council's position in relation to social rented dwellings.

Appendices

1. Feedback from consultation engagement: 29 October - 9 December 2018
2. Equalities Impact Analysis
3. Copy of the petition 'front page' (does not contain signatories)

Background Papers

- None