

Report for Resolution

Report to Executive
9 June 2010
Report of Head of strategic housing services
Subject Dibden Road development proposal

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Purpose

To advise members of the two options for development of the former garage site at Dibden Road:

1. That the site be transferred to Broadland Housing Association (BHA) to enable the reprovision of the St Edmund's Society supported housing scheme.
2. That the site be transferred to BHA to enable a general needs housing scheme.

To advise members of the outcome of a recent series of consultation events

To seek a decision in the above and approval to proceed with that option.

Financial consequences

The financial consequences of this report are minimal to the council. A delay in the development of this site could result in an increased need for site management including clearance of fly tipping or damage to fencing.

Risk assessment

The reprovision of the St Edmund's Society hostel is a priority according to the Greater Norwich Housing Strategy 2008-11.

If the Dibden Road site is not developed for the reprovision of St Edmund's, the council risks not being able to deliver on this priority. Non delivery could also result in limited partnership opportunities for the council in the future.

If the Dibden Road site is not developed for the reprovision of St Edmund's, it will be transferred to BHA for the provision of a general needs housing scheme, via the Delivering Affordable Housing Partnership.

Strategic priority and outcome/service priorities

The report helps to meet the strategic priority 'Safe and healthy neighbourhoods – working in partnership with residents to create neighbourhoods where people feel secure, where the streets are clean and well maintained, where there is good quality housing and local amenities and where there are active local communities'.

As well as the service plan priority to enable new affordable homes, which achieve the highest standards in energy efficiency in places where people want to live.

Recommendations

That this council owned site at Dibden Road be transferred to BHA for the purpose of building the new St Edmund's Society supported housing scheme, as described in this report.

Executive member: Councillor Morrey - Sustainable city development

Ward: Sewell

Contact officers

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Background documents

Executive report of 13 December 2006: disposal of council owned land for affordable housing development- available on request.

Report

Background

1. This council owned site at Dibden Road is a former garage site which housed 62 garages for affordable rent. Following a catalogue of antisocial behaviour incidents and high void rates, executive approval to transfer the site to a housing association for affordable housing development was made on 13 December 2006. The garages were demolished in 2008, since when the site has been vacant.
2. The site lies in a mixed use area in the north of the city.
3. The Dibden Road former garage site was then allocated to Orbit housing association via the Delivering Affordable Housing Partnership (DAHP) to enable housing delivery.
4. Following discussions with council officers, a need was identified for improved accommodation for St Edmund's hostel, currently based on Earlham Road, and the Broadland/Orbit development partnership have subsequently been working up plans for an improved scheme.

St Edmund's Society

5. The St Edmund's Society is a registered charity providing much needed emergency and short-term accommodation for young, vulnerable men at risk of homelessness, and ex-offenders. They admit men from the ages of 16 to 30 years in the hostel provision and up to 49 years in their move-on accommodation. They have a drop-in centre, which is open from 11am to 2pm Monday to Friday, offering young, homeless men the opportunity to have a hot shower, a hot meal and use of laundry facilities, as well as offering help, advice, training and support. St Edmund's operates a zero-tolerance policy on drugs on the premises and anyone caught with drugs in their possession is immediately dealt with via a warning system which can then lead to eviction.
6. St Edmund's does not take in any high-risk offenders. Some of their tenants may be on probation or tagged – these people are fully supported and rehabilitated, and preventative work is also carried out.
7. The scheme proposal is for 16 single occupancy rooms with associated communal spaces and five move-on flats which will encourage independent living. The hostel is staffed 24 hours a day, every day of the year. St Edmund's also rent a property from the council on Bull Close Road where tenants are able to sign up for computer courses and are supported through job applications.
8. Their current hostel facility, on Earlham Road is no longer fit for purpose, with mostly shared, cramped bedrooms and shared bathroom facilities. The re-provision of St Edmund's is a council priority, as per our housing strategy and has the full support of Norfolk Supporting People.

Funding

9. The project team for St Edmund's initially looked into the possibility of a refurbishment project at the existing premises on Earlham Road and a bid was worked up and submitted to the Places for Change Programme, which was unsuccessful. A refurbishment project was also discussed with the HCA but the costs involved became prohibitive as the HCA felt the scheme did not represent value for money, suggesting that a new build, re-provision scheme would be more attractive to investment managers.
10. A subsequent bid to the HCA for 16 single occupancy en-suite rooms and five move-on flats has been successful.
11. Revenue funding is also in place from Supporting People.
12. Funding for this scheme is currently on hold pending further announcements on 22 June from central government.

Site selection

13. The site required to re-provide St Edmund's had to meet three criteria: the size of the site had to allow for the service requirements of 16 en-suite bed rooms, meeting HCA standards, communal facilities, five move-on flats with associated amenity space and parking. The site also had to be available and be in a suitable location in which St Edmund's could continue to provide their service.
14. The housing development and enabling team considered the details of all the sites with development potential in the city. No other site met all of the criteria required by St Edmund's.
15. The council has been working with its housing association partners since 2005 on an extensive programme of affordable housing developments via the DAHP and the largest sites the council owned were developed first. The sites left to develop after five years of this programme are predominantly small garage sites, many of which are highly constrained and with the potential for only a few affordable units.
16. Supporting People, the police and the council's neighbourhood teams are in support of the Dibden Road site as the location for the re-provision of St Edmund's.

Initial consultation

17. The council's decommissioning policy was adopted in April 2009 and was based on the experience of the housing development team's knowledge of the redevelopment of council owned garage and housing sites. Although this policy was formally adopted after demolition at Dibden Road, the principles of this policy have been adhered to and consultation with garage occupiers did take place prior to demolition works. At the time of demolition, only eight of the 62 garages were occupied. The five garage occupiers that lived nearby were offered garages on nearby Gertrude Road. The remaining three were rented by individuals living outside of the area and free to rent at an alternative, council-owned garage site.

18. Broadland/Orbit housing has been working with council officers and St Edmund's to draw up designs for the reprovion. Once its architects had prepared an initial scheme, a consultation event was held, to which all households in direct view or which would be directly impacted by the development were invited. The event, held on 17 February 2010 was well attended and the design of the building was discussed. Many of the residents raised issues over parking in the area and how the scheme would be managed. Representatives from St Edmund's were on hand at the consultation to answer questions specific to the service provision.
19. The architects, BHA and council officers were invited to give a presentation at a meeting of the Sewell community group on 11 March and further explained the service and scheme proposals. The majority of the attendees were very supportive of the scheme proposal but objected to its location. Concerns were also raised about the drop in centre.
20. An open day was held at St Edmund's current site on 9 April, to which all who attended the Sewell community group meeting were invited. Police officers were also available to discuss any concerns that Sewell ward residents may have had, but the event was not well attended.
21. Neighbours of St Edmund's current premises on Earlham Road have written letters of endorsement which can be made available to the executive.
22. The only statutory consultation the council is required to hold is the planning consultation, which will take place once a planning application has been submitted.

Further consultation

23. Following concerns raised via a ward councillor and individuals within the community, four widely advertised consultation events have now taken place.
24. The first of these two events were held on Monday 17 May and the second on Thursday 20 May at the Mary Magdalen Church on Silver Road.
25. Leaflets were distributed by the Sewell Community Action Group (SCAG) to approximately 1,500 local households.
26. The events were very well attended, with 135 individuals attending on Monday 17, representing 9 per cent of the households leafleted, and approximately 120 on Thursday 20, representing 8 per cent of the total households leafleted.
27. The final two events were held on Tuesday 25 May, at Don Pratt Court Sheltered Housing Scheme and Thursday 27 May at the Mary Magdalen Church on Silver Road.
28. Over 3,000 local households were invited to the events by the council.
29. These two events were less well attended, with 12 individuals attending on Tuesday 25, representing 0.4 per cent of the households written to, and approximately 30 attending on Thursday 27, representing 1 per cent of the households written to.

30. Over the course of the four events, the numbers attending totals 297, although many people came to more than one event, with a small number attending all four.
31. There were a number of officers present to answer questions and discuss issues with local residents including officers from the council's strategic housing department, BHA, St Edmund's Society, Ingleton Wood Architects, Norfolk Supporting People, Norfolk Probation Service and Norfolk Constabulary. The council's assistant director for Neighbourhood development was also in attendance for several hours during the first two events.

Consultation feedback- verbal comments

32. Please note, with regards to the main concerns raised, more information can be given to the executive committee at the time this report is presented.
33. Most of the attendees had concerns about the service St Edmund's provides, the category of offender that St Edmund's accommodates, and the potential impact of this service on the area. The service was explained to attendees and leaflets were available to take away. St Edmund's only take referrals of low-level, low-risk offenders, all of which are fully risk-assessed by trained staff before being accepted.
34. The other main concerns raised were about the effect the centre would have on schools in the area.

Consultation feedback- written comments

35. Those who attended were asked to fill in council feedback forms with their contact details and comments on the scheme. The information in the forms was then collated by council officers. Copies have been given to BHA and St Edmund's for their information and all forms are available to view if required.
36. In total, 85 feedback forms have been received. Of these, 72 (85%) have been broadly against the proposals and 13 (15%) have been broadly in support. It should be noted that many of the forms contained more than one comment.
37. Of those who were against the proposals, 71 (83% of those who responded) raised objections about the location of the site chosen for the reprovion of St Edmund's. It should be noted that there have been no issues related to the concerns of consultation attendees regarding the siting of the current provision during the 43 years it has been at its Earlham Road address – an area not dissimilar to Dibden Road.
38. 20 respondents (23% of those who responded) raised concerns about the amount of supported schemes in the area and argued that there were already too many nearby. Planning policy HOU19 states that when proposing residential institutions or group homes, no more than 20 per cent of the buildings in the continuous street frontage should be in such institutional or other non-residential use. The area in which Dibden Road is located is classed as mixed use due to the amount of industrial development in the vicinity and planners have advised that this policy would therefore not apply.

39. 19 respondents (22% of those who responded) supported the work that the St Edmund's Society does but felt that an alternative location should be found or that their existing premises should be refurbished. Points 9-11 and 45 of this report refer to refurbishment and relocation.
40. 16 of the respondents (19% of those who responded) were concerned that the development would lead to drug crime in the area. As previously stated, St Edmund's has a zero policy on drugs and will call the police and begin the eviction process if drugs are found on the premises. The organisation has a strong working relationship with the police, who visit the scheme weekly.
41. 15 respondents (19% of those who responded) said they were concerned about ex-offenders moving into the area. St Edmund's is well managed and has staff on site 24 hours a day, every day of the year. All residents must sign up to the scheme's rules and regulations and be willing to change their behaviour. St Edmund's has an excellent track record in supporting these people in turning their lives around.
42. 15 respondents (19% of those who responded) raised concerns over the effect on house prices and the ability to sell their homes. This has not been an issue in the area the facility is currently situated in.
43. 7 respondents (8% of those who responded) thought that placing St Edmund's on Dibden Road would result in problems with the traffic in the area worsening. Whilst there will be increased traffic flow of heavy plant machinery during the build period, which is expected to be approximately eighteen months, there will not be any long term increase in traffic flow.
44. 6 respondents (7% of those who responded) raised their concerns over the impact of the scheme on elderly local residents. The current Earlham Road site has a similar demographic make up around it, and this has not been reported as a problem, and no incidents involving those using the facility have been reported.

Planning

45. No planning application has been submitted yet for this scheme. BHA expects to submit an application in June. The application will be treated as any other and determined based on planning considerations of amenity, use and design. As the proposal will be classed as a 'major' scheme it will be advertised in the press and on site, in addition to neighbours adjoining and opposite being written to directly, in accordance with statutory requirements.
46. The sketch proposal was considered by internal staff at Development Team on 10 March, 2010, at which some minor changes to the scheme were suggested. It is expected that recommendations about design will be incorporated where possible by the architect, prior to submission.

Issues and options

47. The site at Dibden Road currently remains in the ownership of Norwich City Council and solicitors will be instructed in the sale of the land to BHA if and when planning consent has been achieved. As per DAHP standard practice, the land will be valued on a per plot basis of £15,000.00, totalling £315,000.00. Once the development has been completed, the council will then re-invest this amount, in its entirety back into the scheme as capital grant.
48. The executive committee could decide to delay or caveat the sale of this land to BHA if they felt that the reprovision of St Edmund's at Dibden Road was inappropriate. The executive has agreed to transfer this land to BHA for the development of affordable housing (executive decision in December 2006) but not specifically supported housing, so it could negotiate with Broadland and ask them to develop general needs, affordable housing only on the site instead. This would leave BHA and St Edmund's without a suitable site in the city. Without a site the HCA would withdraw funding from this scheme.
49. Alternatively, once a planning application has been submitted, objections could be raised during the planning consultation and again at planning committee. Members of the public would be welcome to speak at planning committee and/or ward councillors could represent commonly held views, in order for the committee to make a decision based on any relevant planning consideration(s).
50. If there are no objections to the land sale prior to an application being submitted and the scheme proposal progresses to planning committee, the application will be judged on its merits and determined accordingly.