

Report for Resolution

Report to Executive
23 June 2010

Report of Assistant Director - Neighbourhood Development

Subject Dibden Road development proposal

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Purpose

- To seek approval to transfer, on terms as set out in the report, the former garage site at Dibden Road to Broadland Housing Association (BHA) to enable the reprovion of the St Edmund's Society supported housing scheme.
- To advise members and Broadland Housing Association of the outcome of a recent series of consultation events.

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.

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 reprovion 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 reprovion 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 reprovion 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 and as per the Executive decision of 13 December 2006.

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.

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 given 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 (containing residential, commercial and community use properties) 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 supported scheme

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. It is a long standing city based organisation with strong community links and a good track record. The council has worked with St Edmunds over many years. We are advised that St Edmunds:
 - provide supported accommodation for men from the ages of 16 to 30 years and for individuals up to 49 years in their move-on accommodation;
 - ensure that before moving in, residents will have been through an assessment process by trained staff to make sure they do not present any risks to other service users, staff or the local community: St Edmund's will not accept people who are considered a significant risk by the police or probation service;
 - has a provision of support written in its constitution and that this sets out that its object is: "to assist young people in need of accommodation and the necessities of life": this is an integral part of the service the charity provides and high success rate it holds;
 - a 'drop-in' service is available Monday to Friday from 10am to 1pm at the current location in Earlham Road: this is where referrals are either taken from other services or a limited number (approximately two people a week or a total of 89 individuals in the past 12 months) approach the service for help directly. Plans to provide this 'drop-in' at the proposed new facility on Dibden Road have been reviewed and dropped from the scheme;
 - has an excellent track record of rehabilitating offenders; only 2 per cent of those supported reoffend, compared with a national average of 60% per

cent. St Edmunds is looking to continue improving the position through providing a structured day service which offers skills development;

- also operates a training centre at Bull Close Road;
- will have the new facility staffed 24 hours a day, every day of the year;
- operates a zero-tolerance policy on drugs on the premises and anyone caught with drugs in their possession is immediately dealt;
- does not take in any high-risk offenders: some of their tenants may be on probation or tagged – with appropriate support and supervision in place
- the reprovision proposal is for 16 single occupancy rooms with associated communal spaces and five move-on flats which will encourage independent living;
- current site on Earlham Road is no longer fit for purpose, with mostly cramped shared bedroom and bathroom facilities: the reprovision of St Edmund's is a council priority, as per our housing strategy and has the full support of Norfolk Supporting People.

Funding

- 6 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 Communities and Local Government's Places for Change Programme. This bid was not successful. The site at Earlham Road is no longer considered as suitable as a result.
- 7 A subsequent bid to the Homes and Communities Agency for 16 single occupancy en-suite rooms and five move-on flats has been successful.
- 8 The Norfolk Supporting People programme (NSP) funds St Edmunds Society under formal contract arrangements for the delivery of housing related support at their accommodation based service and NSP supports the move of the service to more appropriate accommodation. The revenue funding will transfer to the new premises.

Norfolk Supporting People (NSP)

- 9 Norfolk Supporting People (NSP) is an inter-agency partnership made up of Norfolk County Council, each district council in Norfolk and other agencies including the police, probation service and the youth offender team. NSP regulates the support service St Edmund's provides. This includes annual visits to the scheme to talk to staff and service users and an evaluation of the tools St Edmunds uses to deliver support. NSP works closely with all organisations funded under the programme to ensure that the support delivered is of good quality and meets the needs of residents. NSP will take all reasonable steps to ensure agreed standards are met. In addition, St Edmund's sends information to NSP every three months to report on the performance of the service and the outcomes for the people who are supported by the service.
- 10 NSP recognises the need to reprovide the current unsuitable hostel accommodation used by St Edmunds Society.

Site selection

- 12 The site required to re-provide St Edmund's had to meet the following criteria: the size of the site had to allow for the service requirements of 16 en-suite bed rooms, meet HCA standards, have communal facilities and five move-on flats with associated amenity space and parking. The site also had to be available and in a location in which St Edmund's could continue to provide their service.
- 13 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.
- 14 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 remaining sites in the programme are predominantly small garage sites, many of which are highly constrained and with the potential for only a few affordable units.
- 15 Supporting People, the police and the council's neighbourhood teams are in support of the Dibden Road site as the location for the reprovision of St Edmund's.

Decommissioning policy

- 16 The council's Decommissioning policy was adopted in April 2009 and was based on the housing development team's knowledge and experience 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.

Initial consultation

- 17 A public consultation was held on 17 February 2010 so that the local community could view sketched proposals for the site.
- 18 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.
- 19 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.
- 20 Neighbours of St Edmund's current premises on Earlham Road have written letters of endorsement which can be made available to the executive.

Further consultation

- 21 Following concerns raised via a ward councillor and individuals within the community, four widely advertised consultation events have now taken place.
- 22 The findings of these events can be found in appendix 1

Planning

- 23 No planning application has been submitted yet for this scheme. BHA expects to submit an application in late 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.
- 24 The planning committee operates as a quasi judicial body and follows processes independent to those of the executive. If the executive approves the recommendations in this report, it does not compromise the role of the planning committee or influence its decision. Decisions by the planning committee are based on planning rules and law and require the public to be consulted on the terms of the planning application within that context.
- 25 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 the submission of the planning application.

Site development

- 26 Broadland Housing Association has agreed in principle to conclude this land transfer under a long leasehold basis of 125 years and to pay an annual peppercorn rent. This option will be explored with the council's legal and asset and city management departments. If this method is not deemed appropriate then the land transfer will be concluded as per the terms of the Delivering Affordable Housing Partnership
- 27 If the Dibden Road site is not used for the reprovision of St Edmund's, 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.

Concluding recommendation

- 28 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.

Appendix 1: consultation findings

Consultation details

1. The first two events were held on Monday 17 May and the second on Thursday 20 May at the Mary Magdalen Church on Silver Road.
2. Leaflets were distributed by the Sewell Community Action Group (SCAG) to approximately 1,500 local households.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Over 3,000 local households were invited to the events by the council.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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

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.

In total, 85 feedback forms have been received. Of these, 72 (85 per cent) have been broadly against the proposals and 13 (15 per cent) have been broadly in support. It should be noted that many of the forms contained more than one comment.

Concerns were raised about the risk offenders would pose to the area.

15 respondents (19 per cent of those who responded) said they were concerned about ex-offenders moving into the area.

St Edmund's has an excellent track record. It only takes referrals of low-level, low-risk offenders, all of whom are fully risk-assessed by trained staff before being accepted.

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 St Edmunds carefully monitors their behaviour. . At its existing location in Earlham Road, St Edmunds has a very good long term relationship with the local community and welcomes and encourages local views and support.

Is the site suitable for this type of scheme?

Of those who were against the proposals, 71 (83 per cent of those who responded) raised objections about the location of the site chosen for the re-provision of St Edmund's.

St Edmunds has been located in Earlham Road for 43 years – a similar type of community with nearby schools and community facilities and there have been no adverse issues relating to its location in this time.

19 respondents (22 per cent 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.

The housing development and enabling team considered the details of all the sites with development potential in the city. No other site, including the scheme's existing location, met all of the criteria in terms of size, availability and location required by St Edmund's.

Concerns were raised about the number of other supported schemes in the area.

20 respondents (23 per cent of those who responded) raised concerns about the amount of supported schemes in the area and argued that there were already too many nearby.

For this scheme to go ahead it must go through the planning process and there are strict guidelines about the concentration of supported accommodation schemes there can be in one area that will need to be followed.

The planning committee makes its decisions as a quasi judicial body and will act independently of the decision of the executive. The executive's role is to decide whether to transfer the land for the purposes proposed. It cannot make planning decisions and must not interfere with the independent processes of the planning committee.

Once a planning application is submitted, residents have the opportunity to make representations to the planning committee

There was concern that the development would lead to drug crime in the area.

16 of the respondents (19 per cent of those who responded) were concerned that the development would lead to drug crime in the area.

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.

There have been suggestions that the presence of the centre might lead to increased drug activity outside the centre itself but in the vicinity. Although there is little risk of this based on experience at the existing site, once opened, nearby areas will be monitored by the council's neighbourhood team.

Would the scheme have an effect on house prices and the ability to sell homes?

15 respondents (19 per cent 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.

Would the scheme cause traffic problems in the area?

7 respondents (8 per cent of those who responded) thought that placing St Edmund's on Dibden Road would result in problems with the traffic in the area.

While 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.

Concerns were raised as to whether the scheme would have an impact on elderly residents in the area.

6 respondents (7 per cent 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. There have been no known incidents involving those using the facility and no concerns reported in the Earlham Road area.

Concerns raised about the 'drop-in centre'

Currently the drop in facilities in Earlham Road are used by an average of two former residents a week. This has been under review and while it was part of the original proposal will now not be provided in the new facility.

St Edmunds is now looking in more detail at how to provide skills and training for residents and ex residents as part of a properly structured programme.