

**Report to:** Lead Member for Resources

**Date of meeting:** 15 September 2016

**By:** Chief Operating Officer

**Title:** Future use and development of the former St Anne's school site, Lewes

**Purpose:** To seek delegated authority to the Chief Operating Officer to develop options for the future use and development of the former St Anne's school site, and to report back to Lead Member for Resources with a business case on the options explored.

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

*The Lead Member for Resources is recommended to:*

- 1) Delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer to develop options for the future use and development of the former St Anne's school site (site as outlined in Appendix 1); and**
  - 2) Request that the Chief Operating Officer report back to Lead Member for Resources with a business case on the options explored for the site.**
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### **1 Background**

1.1 St Anne's is a former school for children with special needs that was closed by the County Council in 2005 following a change in policy that sought to integrate the education of these children within main stream schools. The site was declared surplus to the requirements of Education and Libraries in 2005.

1.2 It was later proposed that the Council should no longer retain this property for further strategic purposes and to declare this property surplus to all operational requirements. Following consultation with the community, the following recommendations were agreed at the Lead Member for Resources meeting on 23 October 2012:

- (1) Declare the former St Anne's School surplus to the County Council's requirements; and
- (2) Authorise the marketing of the property for community uses in order to achieve best value for this purpose.

1.3 In line with the authorisation given to market the property for community uses, the Council ran a two stage bidding process. The following recommendations were agreed at the Lead Member for Resources meeting on 29 October 2013:

- (1) Approve the disposal of the former St Anne's School site at an undervalue to the preferred bidder SUBUD, to secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, onmental well-being of its area, in accordance with the General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 (Circular 06/03), subject to any necessary consent being given by the Secretary of State under section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 ('s77 consent'), and in accordance with schedule 1 of the Academies Act 2010 ('schedule 1 consent');
- (2) Delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer to negotiate and agree terms for the sale of the site to the Council's preferred bidder SUBUD;

(3) Delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer to take all necessary steps and actions in connection with applying to the Secretary of State for any necessary s77 consent and schedule 1 consent to dispose of the former St Anne's School site; and

(4) Delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer to approve the use of the sale proceeds from the disposal of school playing fields forming part of the site, having regard to the criteria set out in 'Advice on the protection of School Playing Fields and Public Land' published by the Department for Education (November 2012).

1.4 Negotiations to transfer the site as a community asset to a preferred bidder were ended in April 2016, as announced in a joint statement from the Council and SUBUD Britain. It was always recognised that the community asset transfer was an ambitious and complex project and that complications could emerge during the process. Both parties came to the conclusion that was not possible to transfer the site for community use in a way that meets the original aims and aspirations of both parties and is both viable and sustainable. The Council is currently considering options for the future use and development of the former St Anne's school site.

1.5 The Council is aware of the local priorities for the Lewes area and is liaising with Lewes District Council and Town Council officers in respect of the demands for housing and community facilities. This will inform the considerations about future use of the site.

1.6 In January 2015 the County Council's Audit, Best Value and Community Services Scrutiny Committee (ABVCSSC) completed a scrutiny review of the process involved in selecting the preferred bidder. More information including the conclusions and recommendations of the review can be found on the Council's website:  
<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/yourcouncil/about/improving/measuringperformance/scrutiny/reviews/2014>

1.7 On 15 July 2016, ABVCSSC considered the outstanding issues arising from the scrutiny review and looked at whether any further scrutiny was required. The Committee's conclusions and recommendations can be found on item 11 of the 15 July ABVCSSC on the Council's website.

## **2 Supporting information**

2.1 The site is situated just to the south of the main County Hall campus, with its main access point from Rotten Row. The site comprises 1.8 hectares (4.45 acres) sloping down from north to south with embankments dividing the site into a number of level areas. The former school buildings remain on the site but are dilapidated with the remainder of the grounds being largely overgrown. At the north east corner of the site is a former hard play area which is currently used as a car park and compound with construction access to the north through to St Anne's Crescent. A map of the site is attached at Appendix 1.

2.2 Following the decision to end community asset transfer negotiations, the Council is seeking delegated authority to the Chief Operating Officer to develop options for the future use and development of the former St Anne's school site. It is proposed that the Council would lead this activity, and liaise with local partners about local priorities (including demands for housing and community facilities) where appropriate, and report back to Lead Member for Resources with a business case on the options explored.

2.3 Procurement of a consultancy to support work on developing proposals has begun with the remaining process subject to the recommended delegation being approved by Lead Member for Resources.

2.4 The Consultant sought will be tasked to deliver an initial report (Stage 1) which will include an assessment of the site, development options (including indicative layouts, massing, density, cost and valuation summaries) all based on a detailed desk top and study of the site and surrounding

area/wider context. This report will be used as the early decision making tool to aid the Council in selecting a preferred option before confirming progress to a second stage which would comprise the detailed design and appraisal of the preferred option(s). The initial Report will thus consider:

- i. Constraints and Opportunities of the site and its surroundings, including sustainability, environmental and physical constraints.
- ii. The Planning Context: setting out a comprehensive review and appraisal of the planning policy issues; pre application discussions with Lewes District Council and the South Downs National Park Authority to ascertain the principle of redevelopment; permissible land uses; on site requirements (e.g. access points, sustainability measures); any off site requirements (e.g. highway works and Section 106 Contributions/Community Infrastructure Levy implications).
- iii. Context of local economy and growth; local provision; market demand; and overview of local market.
- iv. A number of site development options with a summary of their cost and value implications.
- v. Need for specialist instruction on technical issues. At this initial stage there is no expectation of comprehensive on site surveys or specialist investigations being undertaken as it is anticipated that such detail and site specific surveys would be carried out as a Stage 2, after a review of the Options report has been undertaken. This will need to remain under review as the project evolves as some issues may be time or season bound such as ecology surveys, or specific site issues identified where greater clarity required to support recommendations.
- vi. A summary of the costs anticipated and needed at 'Stage 2' to take any preferred scheme forward to planning submission stage, to include local stakeholder consultation processes.

2.5 Whilst the costs of a detailed and full planning application for any preferred option could run to and be above £100,000, the Stage 1 report is anticipated to be between £20,000 and £30,000. The bids for Stage 1 (received by the 31 August deadline) are now subject to evaluation.

### **3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

- 3.1 It is recommended that approval be given to develop options for the future use of the site on the bases noted in this report
- 3.2 It is recommended that the Chief Operating Officer be asked to report back with the outcome of the Option appraisal

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