

Report to: **Lead Member for Resources**

Date: **25 July 2017**

By: **Chief Operating Officer**

Title of report: **12 Claremont, Hastings**

Purpose of report: **To seek Lead Member approval to declare this property surplus to County Council requirements, and delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer to dispose of the property through a Community Asset Transfer process**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Lead Member for Resources is recommended to:

- 1) declare 12 Claremont, Hastings, surplus to the County Council's requirements;**
 - 2) authorise the marketing of the property under the County Council's Community Asset Transfer Policy; and**
 - 3) delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer to dispose of the property through a Community Asset Transfer process.**
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1 Background

1.1 12 Claremont was originally acquired by the County Council in 2012 for the specific purpose of extending its adjoining library building and incorporating a registrations service.

1.2 Since that time detailed plans were developed for an integrated service across the two buildings and these were evaluated on a value for money basis taking into account both the detailed costs and works to integrate the buildings and the service benefits that would be delivered.

1.3 Alternative options were considered for the registration service and a decision was taken to locate the service in Hastings Town Hall as this both provided a venue that had the appropriate civic status and presence, as well as providing a good quality provision and greater value for money.

1.4 A revised capital programme was approved for the Hastings Library at a significantly lower cost and the main library building is now nearing the completion of its refurbishment.

1.5 Since 2015 a number of options for the re-use of 12 Claremont have been considered, culminating in a soft market exercise with local stakeholders interested in using the building for the wider benefit of the community.

1.6 The property was constructed in 1850, is arranged over four floors (including basement) and adjoins the Grade II listed Hastings Library. Throughout the recent refurbishment of the library, 12 Claremont has been occupied by a building contractor for the provision of welfare facilities but had been stripped out previously and remains in a "shell" condition.

1.7 A straight disposal of the site would not exceed the original purchase price, which had included a premium to reflect the special purchaser status of the authority at that time. Estimated costs to return the building into a fully fitted office or commercial use are suggested in excess of £1 million with very limited potential for achieving significant return on investment.

2 Supporting information

2.1 The property is shown hatched black on the attached plan at Appendix A and comprises approx. 700 sq. metres across four floors (7,500 sq. ft.), occupying one hundred per cent of the site with no yard or car parking area.

2.2 Options for future uses have been considered including a disposal or leasing of the property on the open market, which in its existing condition is likely to generate low returns (capital or rental). Local agents advise that re-letting the property on a commercial basis would meet little demand, notwithstanding the level of investment required to refurbish it to a lettable condition.

2.3 In conjunction with SPACES (Strategic Property Asset Collaboration in East Sussex) ESCC has undertaken soft market engagement with local community organisations that have cited interest in occupying the property. Feedback from this exercise has revealed strong interest in repurposing the property to benefit the wider community and complement the economic development of the immediate locality. Furthermore a number of potential funding streams have been identified as being accessible to community or social enterprise organisations for refurbishment works.

2.4 All County Council departments have been consulted and have confirmed that they have no requirement for the building or the site.

2.5 The Local Member has been informed and has raised no objections.

3 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The Council has no further operational use for the land and buildings.

3.2 It is recommended that this property be declared surplus to County Council requirements and that negotiation for the transfer of a legal interest in the premises under the County Council's Community Asset Transfer policy (including a satisfactory business case being presented by the community organisation), be agreed and otherwise delegated to the Chief Operating Officer.

KEVIN FOSTER
Chief Operating Officer

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LOCAL MEMBERS

Councillor Godfrey Daniel