

Report to: Audit, Best Value and Community Services Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 22 March 2018

By: Chief Property Officer

Title: St. Anne's Rotten Row Lewes

Purpose: To provide an update, review and position statement on the St. Anne's site Lewes

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) The Committee is recommended to note the current context for the site, activities in hand and indicative timelines proposed with regard to future engagement.**
 - 2) The Committee is asked to note that formal proposals will be submitted in due course initially to the Lead Member and then through Cabinet Briefings before any further scrutiny**
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1 Background

- 1.1 The St. Anne's former school site off Rotten Row Lewes has been the subject of extensive debate over many years. Since the school closed in 2003, there has been a range of options considered with regard to future use of the land.
- 1.2 Despite a formal procurement exercise in 2012 seeking to transfer the asset for community uses, a transaction failed to materialise and in April 2016 the Lead Member for Resources revised the decision to pursue the transfer to a community group in order to enable wider development of the site that would both support the County Council priorities, whilst taking into account local considerations. The site is not listed as an asset of community value.
- 1.3 Over the past two years there has been a set of activities on the site, as noted within this report, and an evolving picture on town planning policy that will continue to support future direction and decision making.
- 1.4 This report provides a key summary of recent activities, all undertaken as a precursor to support future decisions for the site. Whilst the County Council is aware of the community's interest in the future of the site, it remains a requirement that best value be pursued and the County Council will be undertaking appropriate consultation with its key stakeholders over coming months, working closely with the South Downs National Park, Lewes District and Town Councils.

2 Supporting Information

- 2.1 The land and buildings, shown hatched black on the attached plan (Appendix 1), comprise approximately 1.8 hectares (4.4 acres) and form the site of the former St. Anne's School.

- 2.2 To support any consultation and delivery programme, it has been necessary to update and refresh core information on elements of the site to ensure it remains robust to support options to be taken forward and for governance approvals. Below is a summary context and position statement

Town Planning

- 2.3 The site falls within the South Downs National Park, where planning matters are primarily dealt with by the National Park Authority. Working with Lewes District Council, the parties have adopted a Joint Core Strategy which is Lewes District Council's central planning policy document. This Document sets out the long term spatial vision for the district and will guide development and change up to 2030. The Core Strategy was adopted by Lewes District Council in May 2016 and by the South Downs National Park Authority in June 2016. This Document will ultimately be replaced by the South Downs Local Plan when adopted by the Park Authority.
- 2.4 In addition, Lewes Town Council have been working on a draft Neighbourhood Plan which will seek to align housing allocations and policies with the core strategy policies.
- 2.5 The St. Anne's site is now identified for housing development within core policy papers, but will still be subject to finalising agreement on development densities and the level of affordable housing provision. The County Council's focus for the site will remain for residential development.

Health and Safety

- 2.6 There remains a considerable concern over the safety of the site arising from various occurrences of trespass, and illegal entry into the extant building.
- 2.7 Despite a regime of site inspections, and security measures, the site boundaries have been regularly damaged with the site often used by local residents as a pathway link between Rotten Row and St. Anne's Crescent, or for general dog walking despite the formal adopted footpaths to the east of the site. In addition, and arising from recent tree surveys undertaken, site security and notices have recently been reinforced given further safety issues noted.

Application for partial demolition

- 2.8 An application was recently submitted to the South Down National Park and Lewes District Council for demolition of the annexe to the main building (only) and a preferred contractor has been procured for this work. Whilst we anticipate works being instigated shortly after Easter, the works and method statements remain subject to ongoing discussion and feedback with the planners.
- 2.9 As part of this work and application, various site surveys have been concluded covering environmental, tree and ecology matters to ensure compliance with any planning conditions attached to consents.

The Flint Wall

- 2.10 The flint wall that runs the length of the Rotten Row frontage has been subject to a recent condition survey, and is monitored on at least a monthly basis. There is no current intent to replace the wall at this stage, as we would anticipate it being part of any wider development scheme arising on St. Anne's. Recent cut back of overgrowth has been concluded, and whilst some significant movement has been noted in a small section of the wall, this may have been caused by the recent frost; alternatively, there have been some earth works in the property opposite, so the wall may have been struck by a vehicle. We have nevertheless instructed some temporary works to prevent any further deterioration.

Site Survey work

- 2.11 To inform any future development it has been necessary to commence a range of site survey activities, and as part of this early stage activity, including the application for demolition, topographical, environmental and tree survey reports have been commissioned. The reports indicate some protected species (slow worms) on site which will be subject to further Natural England guidance, and the tree survey has reported on over 217 trees, of which approximately 40 are recommended for major surgery and/or removal due to condition, squirrel damage etc. Approximately 50 are noted as offering high amenity value, with tree preservation orders already protecting a core of these trees. Over half of the trees on site are otherwise noted as "adequate" in terms of condition. Given the details within the survey, a wider programme of site/tree management will be undertaken over coming months, taking into account any seasonal restrictions.

3 Consultation and Indicative Programme

- 3.1 The County Council acknowledge that timely and regular communication with key stakeholders at all project stages is critical to successful delivery. In fully recognising the importance of engagement, the County Council will pursue a Stakeholder Engagement Plan, which will also allow for wider public consultation throughout the process.

- 3.2 Any development proposals brought forward will need to follow a staged process, and the indicative Programme over the next 12 months suggests:-

June 2018 (Q1 18/19)	Appointment of a team of advisors and consultants.
During Q2 18/19	Stakeholder Engagement plan.
During Q2 18/19	Options appraisals to include feasibility.
During Q3 18/19	Site investigations, planning advice, highway assessment, programme of seasonal and physical site surveys.
By end Q3 18/19	Concept and pre application submissions, stakeholder workshops.
During Q4 18/19	Planning submission and determination.

4. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 4.1 This report provides a high level position statement on current and recent activity across the St. Anne's former school site, and fully acknowledges the need to undertake appropriate consultation with a number of key stakeholders, working alongside Lewes District Council and those parties already expressing an interest in the site.
- 4.2 This Position Statement outlines recent and current management activities and suggests an indicative timeline that would support Stakeholder engagement and consultation on any proposals brought forward. It is emphasised that no decisions have been made, and that whilst a number of parties have approached the Council, the indicative programme would enable all proposals to be reviewed and discussed, with the ultimate decision being for the Lead Member for Resources.
- 4.3 The Committee is invited to note the report and comment on any actions taken.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

Councillor Ruth O'Keeffe

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Adopted Joint Core Strategy 2016 - Lewes DC and South National Park Authority

<http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/planning-policy/lewes-core-strategy-local-plan-part-1/?assetdetb15f5c56-9bf9-4867-b307-cdbef931760d=257159>

Lewes Town Council - Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2033 Pre Submission Draft

<http://www.lewes4all.uk/>