

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET – 13 JULY 2021
REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND CORPORATE DIRECTOR (HOUSING
AND COMMUNITIES)

POSSIBLE REDEVELOPMENT FRIENDSHIP HOUSE, HATFIELD

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Cabinet with an update on the potential redevelopment opportunities at Friendship House, Hatfield, following a previous report in February 2021. The building is currently leased by the trustees of the charity Hatfield and District Age Concern who provided a day centre at the site.
- 1.2 The trustees have closed the centre; however they do still hold the lease for the site. Negotiations continue regarding the existing lease.
- 1.3 It was agreed that a review of this site would take place in order that options could be presented to Cabinet for the future use. This report provides an update on the current position.
- 1.4 Negotiations are ongoing with the existing tenants about potential options and in addition an initial feasibility study has been completed, which provides two potential options for redevelopment, which, subject to further viability work, could be considered alongside the option to keep the facility as is and seek to relet it.
- 1.5 The next stage is for more detailed viability work to be done, which will provide more information to enable a recommendation to be made.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That Cabinet note the content of this report and the potential for development of this site to provide a new community centre and residential dwellings.
- 2.2 That Cabinet note that more detailed viability work on the identified options will now be undertaken, including pre-planning advice, a comprehensive transport survey and financial appraisals, to determine if a redevelopment of this site to provide additional homes is possible and if so, what the costs and benefits would be.
- 2.3 That Cabinet approve the principle of enabling the existing Friendship House building to be used for community or charitable use as outlined in paragraph 3.13 and that delegated authority is granted for the Head of Resources in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment, Planning, Estates and Development to agree the final details.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 Friendship House, Hatfield, is a building owned by the council which is leased to the Hatfield and District Age Concern who provided a day centre at the site.
- 3.2 Further to the report to Cabinet in February 2021, negotiation has been taking place with the tenants to consider options available. The building is still leased out and is currently unused.
- 3.3 As was explained previously, the site has quite a large footprint, approximately 675 sq./m, which presents opportunities for redevelopment of the site. Any proposal for redeveloping the site will include reprovision of the community facility, which is a priority for the council.
- 3.4 Initial feasibility has been undertaken by an architect from the council's framework, Rock Townsend.
- 3.5 They have suggested two potential options, both of which include taking in an adjacent block of four council owned garages.
- 3.6 **Option One**
- 3.7 Utilise the existing site of Friendship House and a small garage block and parking area. This would include provision of a new community facility and the addition of 13 flats above across four storeys.
- 3.8 **Option Two**
- 3.9 Utilise the existing site of Friendship House and a small garage block and parking area as for Option One. This would include provision of a new community facility and the addition of eleven flats. This Option would be a three-storey development.
- 3.10 The next step is to carry out more detailed viability works, including seeking pre-planning advice, conducting searches, and completing financial appraisals. It is anticipated these works would take a couple of months, after which firmer recommendations could be made.
- 3.11 In the interim, consideration is also being given to whether a short-term use could be agreed for the building, to ensure it does not remain unused for extended periods. These will be subject to further negotiations with the current tenant. Based on the redevelopment options proposed, it would be deemed appropriate that any short-term use of the building would not exceed three years.
- 3.12 **Short-term use of the building**
- 3.13 There are a few ways that the council could seek to enable a short-term use of the building, and these will be subject to the negotiations with the existing tenant. On this basis it is recommended that Cabinet agree to the principle of the continued use of the building for community or charitable use for up to five years with a three year rolling break to enable development option to be exercised, and delegate authority is granted to the Head of Resources in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment, Planning, Estates and Development to agree the best approach for this dependant on the outcome of the negotiations.

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 A full title report of the site will need to be produced to ensure that the council is fully appraised of any legal implications before developing detailed redevelopment options.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 Subject to approval of this report, the Housing Development team will commission a full title report.
- 5.2 A detailed viability study of the options will be commissioned via the council's architect's framework. The costs of this work will come from the affordable housing programme general budget.
- 5.3 The council has a duty to obtain best value, and this will be part of the decision-making process for the short term use of the building.
- 5.4 The detailed financial implications of proceeding with a redevelopment or maintaining the current facility will be covered in a future Cabinet report.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 There is a risk that the council will come under pressure to re-let the property to another community group. This option has not been ruled out and will be considered as part of the options appraisal. However, this will be mitigated, should any future proposal include the reprovision of a community facility. The Council have received a number of approaches regarding the use of this site.
- 6.2 There is a risk that another organisation will effectively take over the existing tenant and at this point they would be able to require the existing lease to be assigned to them. At this point the Council would be unable to progress the redevelopment of this site.

7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 There are no security and terrorism implications with the recommendation in this report.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 Subject to agreement the detailed viability work will be carried out by an architect from the council's framework.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 There are no climate implications with the recommendation in this report. However, any future redevelopment proposal will include consideration of how to maximise efficiency and minimise any environmental impact.

10 Human Resources Implication(s)

- 10.1 There are no Human Resources implications with the recommendation in this report.

11 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

- 11.1 There is an opportunity to provide additional affordable homes to meet local housing need, whilst retaining a local community facility. Good quality housing is a determinant of positive health and wellbeing. Good quality community facilities help to enable people to connect and tackles social isolation, which is detrimental to health.

12 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

- 12.1 The council is likely to be approached by various groups and press regarding the future of this site, and the team will work with Communications to ensure information and responses are available to explain the position.

13 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 13.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Strategic Priorities: Quality Homes through managed growth and Sense of community where people feel safe.

14 Equality and Diversity

- 14.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) will be carried out alongside the detailed viability work and will be included within the next Cabinet report.

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