



CABINET - 10TH DECEMBER 2014

SUBJECT: DISPOSAL OF LAND OFF WOODBINE ROAD, BLACKWOOD

REPORT BY: ACTING DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES AND S.151 OFFICER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval for the disposal of land off Woodbine Road, Blackwood (edged blue and red on the attached plan) to the Seren Group ("Seren") for the development of affordable housing.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The site edged blue (former Blackwood Youth Centre) has been declared surplus to operational requirements and is currently held by Property Services, pending disposal.
- 2.2 The adjoining land, edged red, is currently used for garage plots. The site is under-utilised and, currently, only two plots are leased to a local resident; one has a garage erected on it, and the other is a hard standing. There is other, unauthorised, parking on the site, but there is no operational requirement for the land, other than for affordable housing, as envisioned by this report.
- 2.3 Approval of the recommendation will allow Seren to prepare a scheme in consultation with relevant officers to identify a mix of properties that addresses the needs identified within the Council's Housing Register.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The contents of this report link to the following key strategic objectives:-

"Ensure an adequate and appropriate range of housing sites are available across the County Borough in the most suitable locations to meet the housing requirements of all sections of the population" (Objective 9 of the Local Development Plan)

"To meet housing requirements through the provision of a range of good quality, affordable housing options." (Aim 5: Affordable Housing – CCBC Local Housing Strategy 2008 - 2013)

"To promote sustainable and mixed communities that are located in safe and attractive environments." (Aim 11: Community Regeneration - CCBC Local Housing Strategy 2008 - 2013)

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The site edged blue (former Blackwood Youth Centre) has been declared surplus to operational requirements and is currently held by Property Services, pending disposal.

4.2 The Council also owns the adjoining land edged red, which is currently used for garage plots. The site is under-utilised and, currently, only two plots are leased to a local resident; one has a garage erected on it, and the other is a hard standing. There is other, unauthorised, parking on the site.

Under the terms of the standard garage lease, the council is able to terminate an agreement by serving one month's written notice on the tenant.

4.3 An operational housing use for the site has been identified, for the provision of affordable housing as there is strong evidence of housing need in the Blackwood area. The Local Housing Market Assessment demonstrates a shortfall of affordable homes within the County Borough and a requirement to deliver 530 units per annum throughout the County Borough. There are in excess of 400 applicants requiring social rented accommodation in this area.

4.4 As there is a housing need in this area of the County Borough, Policy CW 11 (Affordable Housing) of the Council's Local Development Plan will apply to this site, as it is capable of being developed for 5 or more dwellings. Subject to viability of the development, any developer will be under an obligation to provide an element of affordable housing as part of its development. However, if the land is sold to Seren, 100% affordable housing will be achieved.

There is no alternative operational requirement for the land edged red, and officers have no objection to its sale.

4.5 Under the Welsh Government's Social Housing Grant funding programme, Housing Associations are zoned to operate in specific local authority areas for affordable housing development. There are four zoned housing associations within Caerphilly. These are:

- United Welsh Housing Association,
- Seren Group,
- Linc Cymru, and
- Wales and West Housing Association.

4.6 Wales and West Housing Association and Linc Cymru have chosen not to work in partnership with the Council on the Council's affordable housing development programmes. As such, the Council's currently zoned housing association partners are United Welsh, operating in the western valley and Seren, operating in the eastern valleys. As this site falls within the area zoned for Seren, it is the Council's partner for this scheme.

4.7 Seren will prepare a scheme in consultation with relevant officers to identify a mix of properties that addresses the needs identified within the Council's Housing register. Other benefits that Seren can bring are the emphasis on sustainable construction including Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3+ and Targeted Recruitment and Training (TR&T).

4.8 The Protocol for Disposal of Property states, at paragraph 8.1(iv), that in those cases where it is possible to market a property but the Head of Property is of the opinion that this course of action may not be in the best financial or service interests of the Authority, Cabinet approval will be obtained before direct negotiations are opened with a single party, and the views of ward members will be taken into consideration.

4.9 In the event that Seren is unable to proceed at market value (because its total cost of development, including land acquisition and build cost, is limited by Welsh Government regulations), a further report will be brought forward setting out options for members' consideration.

4.10 **Planning Issues**

1. Under Policy CW8 the LDP protects existing community uses unless alternative provision could be provided (the site does not lend itself to this) or it is demonstrated that the

building is not required for any community use, not just the use for which it was previously used. Planning objections would be raised on the grounds of policy CW8 if it is not demonstrated that the site is not required for a community use.

In this context, members will recall that the Youth Centre building was destroyed by fire in 2009, and the site subsequently declared surplus to the requirements of the Education and Leisure directorate in early 2011 when the Education and Leisure division advised that there is no evidence that additional community facilities are required in this area:

“One good example of the overprovision in the area is the Plas mawr community centre which is used for only approx 10% of its total possible opening times. We have Blackwood Library, Pontllanfraith school and leisure centre, Blackwood school and community college...Cefn Forest community centre, Penybryn community centre and Blackwood miners institute all closely located.”

Additionally, a replacement Youth Centre has since been constructed within Blackwood comprehensive School.

Officers consider this is sufficient evidence to overcome any objection in respect of LDP policy CW8.

2. In 2011, Planning advice was that the land edged red “is a developed area and does not form part of the open space to the north... There would be no objections raised to the redevelopment of the site, subject to alternative parking provision being made for those whose car parking would be removed. As with the Former Youth Centre, residential use would be the most suitable alternative use”.

Since then, use of the site has declined such that only two plots are leased to one local resident, who has the option to park within his own curtilage, if and when the council terminates the garage lease.

Other parking on this land is unauthorised and officers do not consider it necessary to make specific provision for unauthorised use of council-owned land.

3. Highways officers have indicated that the lane to the rear of 18-40 Woodbine Road is adopted, and that improvements would be required at either possible access to accommodate redevelopment.
4. Drainage officers have also advised that if the land is to be sold for development the applicant would be required to submit comprehensive proposals showing how surface water and land drainage flows from the site would be dealt with and development of the site should not proceed until these have been agreed by the authority in liaison with Welsh Water.

- 4.11 Seren will submit a planning application, the outcome of which will be determined in accordance with the relevant policies contained within the adopted Local Development Plan.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An EqlA screening has been completed in accordance with the Council’s Equalities Consultation and Monitoring Guidance and no potential for unlawful discrimination and for low level or minor negative impact have been identified, therefore a full EqlA has not been carried out.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The disposal will produce a capital receipt.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no personnel issues arising out of this report.

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 There are no views expressed as a result of consultation that differ from the recommendation.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 That land off Woodbine Road, Blackwood be sold to the Seren Group for the development of affordable housing, on terms to be negotiated.

9.2 Approval of the detailed terms of the disposal be delegated to the Head of Performance and Property Services, for the purposes identified in the report.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 The asset is surplus to the operational requirements of Caerphilly CBC.

10.2 Paragraph 8.1(iv) of the Disposal Procedure in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution states that Cabinet approval will be obtained before direct negotiations are opened with a single party where it is possible to market a property but where the Head of Performance and Property Services is of the opinion that this course of action may not be in the best financial or service interests of the Authority.

10.3 To deliver an affordable housing scheme that meets with the needs identified within the Council's Local Housing Market Assessment and Housing register.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government Acts 1972 and 2000, and The Local Government Act 1972: General Disposal Consent (Wales) 2003. This is a Cabinet Function.

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Cllr D Hardacre - Cabinet Member for Performance and Asset Management and Ward Member

Cllr G Jones - Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing
Cllr Patricia Cooke - Ward Member
Cllr Nigel Dix - Ward Member
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Background Papers:
Local Development Plan

Appendices:
Appendix 1 Plan of Former Youth Centre (outlined in blue) and adjoining land (outlined in red)