

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO COMMISSIONERS

1.	Meeting:	Commissioner Kenny
2.	Date:	3 rd August 2015
3.	Title:	Site for a town centre HE Campus
4.	Directorate:	Environment & Development Services
5.	Advisory Cabinet Member	Councillor Lelliott

6. Summary

6.1 The purpose of this report is to seek in principle approval for the disposal of the Doncaster Gate site to Rotherham College for the construction of a Higher Education (H.E.) Campus.

7. Recommendations

7.1 That Commissioner Kenny agrees:-

7.2 The in principle disposal of the Doncaster Gate site, or part of, to Rotherham College on terms to be agreed.

7.3 That the disposal and the terms for disposal is delegated to the Director of Housing, Asset Management and Neighbourhood Services.

8. Background

8.1 Rotherham is the only town, of significant size, within the Sheffield City Region without a Higher Education Centre, which partially contributes to **level 4 and above attainment in Rotherham being 12.7 percentage points below the national average and 4.8 percentage points below the regional average**. This level of underachievement needs to be addressed to provide the skilled workforce necessary to attract inward investors and grow existing businesses.

8.2 Rotherham College currently has 335 students studying on higher education programmes including Computing and Systems Development, Applied Computing, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Graphic Design, Production – Specialist Make Up. The College has proactively driven the development of Higher Education within the confines of HEFCE's funding constraints and the significant increase in student numbers has led to a 53% increase in funding over a 3 year period. For the 2015/16 academic year the HEFCE constraints have been removed and the College has developed further Higher Education programmes

to continue its programme of developing high quality local provision. The College has ambitious plans to double the size of the HE population in 3 years and the HE Campus is needed to facilitate this.

- 8.3 In June 2014 the College underwent its QAA Higher Education Review and received an excellent report on the quality of its management and delivery of the provision. The College plans to build on this excellent reputation to further extend its range of qualifications from level 4 through to level 6.
- 8.4 Local businesses will be at the heart of the campus, with provision being industry led rather than academic. They will be involved in establishing, informing and delivering the project for Rotherham.

Building and site requirements

- 8.5 As there will be crossover of staff delivering current FE provision and some sharing of existing vocational equipment and facilities; the HE Campus needs to be in close proximity to the College's existing buildings. Five minute's walk is the figure quoted.
- 8.6 Assuming that the Campus could eventually house 1,000 students, and that certain specialist activities can be delivered within the existing College buildings, then the Campus will require a gross internal floor area of around 4,100 m².
- 8.7 The preference is for the building to be open by September 2017 for the 2017/18 academic year, although there is flexibility to put back to 2018/19 if it is essential. The requirement of the Capital Skills funding is that work must start on site by no later than September 2016.
- 8.8 With these requirements, plus a preference for an RMBC owned site to keep the process as simple as possible, there are 3 potential sites:-
- The upper part of the Drummond Street car park
 - As part of a redevelopment of the Markets Complex
 - Doncaster Gate
- 8.9 All the sites have pros and cons, which are set out in the table below.

Site	Pros	Cons
Drummond Street	<p>Only requires 40% of car park with current <u>average</u> usage is about 60%.</p> <p>Cleared site.</p> <p>Can be delivered within £12m budget.</p> <p>Prominent position for a landmark building.</p>	<p>Perception that RMBC are cutting back on car parking with impact on local business.</p> <p>Whole of car park would need shutting for construction period.</p> <p>No room for grow-on development.</p> <p>Potential planning issue of multi storey development in close proximity to housing.</p>
Markets Complex	<p>Closest to College and to rest of town centre retail offer.</p> <p>Would assist case for major regeneration of the Complex.</p> <p>Will drive footfall to Market.</p>	<p>Major physical and engineering works, giving higher costs and making it extremely challenging to meet funder's timescales.</p> <p>Would require removal of some tenants from existing locations.</p>

		<p>No room for grow-on developments.</p> <p>Likelihood that some or all of the lower level parking (57 spaces) and storage facilities for traders would be lost.</p>
Doncaster Gate	<p>Cleared site.</p> <p>Can be delivered within £12m budget.</p> <p>Good profile for the development, with a “campus feel.”</p> <p>Space for a future, or complementary development.</p> <p>Been taken to market previously for residential development and was unsuccessful.</p> <p>Preferred choice of the College.</p>	<p>Has been identified as a prime residential site.</p> <p>Medical Centre has a 50+ year lease and the right to 151 parking spaces.</p> <p>Less visible in town centre than other sites.</p> <p>The site has been considered for specialist housing provision with links to the medical services on site. The concept has been positively received by health providers, Adult Services and developers.</p>

- 8.10 Taking the above into account it is not feasible for the Campus to be delivered on the Markets site within the timescales required. Both the other sites are deliverable, although there is likely to be concerns from local businesses if car parking is lost from Drummond Street. This together with a college preference for Doncaster Gate, which they feel has a more “campus feel” to it, points towards this being the preferred site.
- 8.11 Dependent on the location of the development within the site and its size, then it may not require all of the remaining land at Doncaster Gate. This would allow RMBC to retain it for future development or for the College to purchase the additional land for future expansion. Clearly any of the sites considered would require planning permission for an educational establishment.
- 8.12 As is noted in 8.9 above, the site was previously identified as a possible location for specialist housing provision. Dependant on the scale of the HE campus development, a further option is that any remainder land is built out for this type of use, possibly for older people. Further consideration will be given to the potential for additional future development on the site once the requirements for the HE Campus are known. Details will be reported for consideration as appropriate.
- 8.13 For the avoidance of doubt it should be noted that this development will not impact on the adjacent Matrix medical campus currently occupying the remainder of the Doncaster Gate site.

9. Finance

- 9.1 The RMBC Corporate Property team will negotiate the details of the scope of the disposal once the principle of disposal to the College is agreed; including the level of the receipt RMBC will receive for the site.
- 9.2 The costs to the Council of the disposal, and how they will be funded, are still to be determined.

10. Risks and Uncertainties

- 10.1 Rotherham College are applying to the SCR Skills Capital Fund for a grant of £4million towards the cost of the project. Failure to secure this funding could mean it is not possible to deliver the project.
- 10.2 To be eligible for Skills Capital funding a site must be identified and it demonstrated that it can be secured, by the time the bid is submitted within 2 months. Work on site must also commence within 12 months of the approval date.

11. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

- 11.1 The provision of an HE Campus within the town centre has been highlighted within the Rotherham Economic Growth Plan as a priority project for the borough.
- 11.2 It also identifies the need to increase the number of Rotherham residents who have higher level skills, through the provision of localised HE delivery.

12. Background Papers and Consultation

- 12.1 Colleagues from the Housing, Finance, Legal and Corporate Property Team were consulted in the production of this report.
- 12.2 The Campus and its potential locations has been discussed at Advisory Cabinet, Labour Group and Opposition Group meetings.
- 12.3 The College currently works with over 150 employers whose staff access Higher Education Programmes and is consulting them on the development of the HE Centre. Rotherham and Barnsley Chamber of Commerce are highly supportive of the proposal.
- 12.4 Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Hull are supportive of the development. It is planned that other providers will be able to use the centre to ensure that the full range of provision is available to meet local needs.

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