

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods</b>
2.	<b>Date:</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> February 2013</b>
3.	<b>Title:</b>	<b>March Flatts Community Building, Thrybergh</b>
4.	<b>Directorate:</b>	<b>Neighbourhoods and Adult Services</b>

### 5. Summary

March Flatts Community Building has recently been vacated and handed back to the Council by the previous lessees as it is no longer sustainable.

This report details options for future use of the building/land.

### 5. Recommendations

**That Cabinet Member:**

- **Declares the building/land surplus to enable it to be considered for sale as identified in Option 3**

## **7. Proposals and Details**

March Flatts Community Centre is a one storey wooden building located within Thrybergh as identified in Appendix 1.

The building is situated on an area of Council owned land within the administration of Housing and Neighbourhood Services.

The land was formerly leased to the Trustees of March Flatts Community Centre on a leasehold basis at an annual rent of £50 per annum.

The tenancy commenced in 1989 on an initial 10 year lease to enable them to erect a community building. The lease was renewed in 2005 on a 125 year basis.

However, the Trustees named on the lease agreement have no involvement with the building and the community group that have since assumed responsibility have now disbanded as the building is no longer viable due to lack of demand and usage.

A representative of the former community group has recently contacted the Council to advise that they have vacated the building and are handing the land back with the building in situ as they do not have sufficient funds to facilitate demolition and clearance works.

The lease agreement states that the building and contents must be removed upon termination of the lease however legal services have confirmed that this condition cannot be enforced as the group is no longer operational.

The Council own the freehold interest in the land and have therefore taken possession of the building as it is now classified as abandoned and the lessee's leasehold interest is regarded as surrendered by operation of the law.

The building is in a reasonable condition with the following facilities:

- Large Communal Room
- Kitchen
- Male and Female WC's

### **7.1 Option Appraisal**

The building is currently vacant awaiting consideration for future use. It has recently been vandalised and the Council is now responsible for the ongoing associated maintenance and security of the premises.

The Strategic Housing and Investment Service have confirmed that the site is not required for affordable housing purposes.

Therefore, the following options have been considered:

### **7.1.1 Option 1- Continued use as a community building**

The unit would continue to operate as a community building subject to demand for asset transfer from community groups within the locality.

There are five community buildings within the Thrybergh locality as follows:

- Thrybergh Parish Hall
- Thrybergh Church Hall
- 3 Neighbourhood Centres

The building has not been used for over a year due to a lack of demand for such provision by the local community.

We have approached local ward members and the area partnership team and they are not aware of any community groups within the area who are currently interested in utilising the building.

This option is not recommended due to lack of demand. The building condition may deteriorate further and the Council will be responsible for the associated costs whilst it remains vacant.

### **7.1.2 Option 2- Conversion to a commercial unit**

The building could be marketed as a commercial unit. However the Council own and manage a parade of shop units nearby which are in low demand with a high turnover of tenancies.

The building would require significant investment by the lessee to convert to commercial use and make it fit for purpose.

We would also need to obtain planning permission for a change of use.

Based on the above issues, it is not anticipated that there will be any demand for this purpose. Therefore, this option is not recommended.

### **7.1.3 Option 3- Declare the building/land surplus to enable it to be considered for sale**

Disposal on the open market would generate a capital receipt to the Council which would support the Medium Term Capital Programme.

The purchaser would be responsible for organising the demolition of the building.

This option would also reduce ongoing business rates and maintenance liabilities of a vacant building.

The land is allocated for residential purposes in the UDP however we would need to obtain planning approval to change the use.

We have been liaising with planning colleagues in relation to the potential re-development of the site. They have recommended that we include an additional area of the council owned land to the rear of the site (identified in blue on Appendix 1) which is currently utilised as informal green space to enable development of a further residential dwelling.

The marginal reduction in the green space area will significantly increase the site value, create the potential for an additional housing unit and reduce the associated ongoing maintenance costs.

The properties are within Ward 14 Silverwood. The Ward Members have been consulted about the options and are all supportive of the option of residential development. Ward 17 Valley Members have also been consulted as the property is located near to the ward boundary. All are supportive of this option.

Residents who directly adjoin the site have also been consulted in relation to the proposal outlined in Option 3. One resident responded to highlight their support for residential re-development due to the noise nuisance they experienced whilst the building was operational for community purposes and ongoing vandalism and youth nuisance issues which are currently ongoing whilst it is empty.

### **7.3 Recommendation**

Having considered the options detailed above, Option 3 is recommended. This option will generate a capital receipt, reduce ongoing maintenance and liability costs and support the provision of new homes within this locality.

## **8. Finance**

The receipt received will be set aside for regeneration activities identified in the HRA medium term capital programme

The building will be subject to ongoing maintenance costs, business rates etc whilst it remains vacant.

Option Appraisal:

- Option 1-Asset Transfer- The lessee would be responsible for the costs associated with the building if sufficient interest is generated however we would be responsible for the ongoing maintenance and business rates etc in the interim period
- Option 2- The lessee would be responsible for the costs associated with the building if sufficient interest is generated however we would be responsible for the ongoing maintenance and business rates etc in the interim period
- Option 3- This option would generate a capital receipt however we would be responsible for the ongoing maintenance costs etc until the building is sold

Inclusion of the additional land identified will increase the site value by approximately £10k.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

The property may require demolition if the building condition deteriorates.

Empty properties often attract anti social behaviour and vandalism which produces a negative perception of neighbourhoods.

If the site is put forward for disposal, due to the stagnant market we are unable to determine how long it will take for it to be sold.

The future use of the site will be subject to planning permission, if this is not obtained then it will remain vacant.

The building may be subject to the Register of Community Assets policy which may delay any sale proposals.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

This proposal is making effective use of acquired assets and managing them to best effect.

The proposals support the following 'Plan on a page' corporate priorities and achievements:

- Helping to create safe and healthy communities
  - People feel safe where they live
  - Anti social behaviour and crime is reduced
- Improving the environment
  - Clean streets

## **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

Colleagues within the Land and Property Team have been consulted and are supportive of the recommended option.

Councillors A Russell, P Russell and Stone are supportive of the re-development of the land for residential purposes.

Councillors Lakin, Pickering and Currie are also supportive of the development of the land for housing purposes.

- Cabinet- 20<sup>th</sup> July 2011, Minute No 43. Adoption of an Asset Transfer Policy
- Localism Bill- Register of Assets of Community Value

### **Contact Names:**

Lynsey Skidmore, Housing Services Officer, Housing and Communities Service, Neighbourhoods and Adult Services Directorate.

Telephone: 01709 334950 or email [lynsey.skidmore@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:lynsey.skidmore@rotherham.gov.uk)

# March Flatts Community Centre



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