

SUBJECT:	<i>Proposal for the former St John Ambulance site, Amersham.</i>
RELEVANT MEMBER:	<i>Councillor Liz Walsh - Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities</i>
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	<i>Martin Holt, Head of Healthy Communities</i>
REPORT AUTHOR	<i>Joe Nethercoat, Project Manager</i>
WARD/S AFFECTED	<i>All</i>

1. Purpose of Report

This report advises members of progress around the possible future uses of the former St Johns Ambulance building and seeks their support to progress the recommendations made below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **To progress to a formal planning application for the demolition of the existing building and its replacement with a ground floor place of worship/community facility with Social Housing over.**
2. **To formalise working with stakeholders via a Project Board with agreed terms of reference, objectives and funding structure to create a place of worship/ground floor community facility with social housing over.**
3. **To agree with key stakeholders that as part of the formal project board objectives, we ensure that the Chiltern Youth Centre operator and the Gateway Club are provided with future bases of operation at the new place of worship/community facility.**
4. **To progress to Heads of Terms the occupancy arrangements of the place of worship/community facility and other parties.**
5. **To bring forward a further report following the conclusion of the planning application**
6. **To draw down £50,000 from the General Reserves for the necessary pre planning application surveys**
7. **To draw down funding from the current Capital programme to support the planning application**

2. Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 To progress the development of the St Johns Ambulance Station to provide affordable housing above a place of worship/community facility is seen to satisfy a number of key Council objectives. These include addressing social housing demands, developing a more sustainable community facility for a local faith community and providing bases for key services supporting our local young people and those with disabilities.

3. Content of Report

- 3.1. The former St John Ambulance training centre was purchased by the Council in June 2018. Bought principally as a development site to provide Social Housing, it was understood at the time that our own planning guidelines would require the ongoing provision of a "community use" on some of the site.
- 3.2. At the time of purchase, the Council was coincidentally approached by a local faith community which has for many years, been seeking a suitable permanent site for a fixed place of worship. Currently, they operate from a variety of locations in the area.
- 3.3. Officers held a number of meetings with the faith community representatives to understand their requirements and proposals as well as reviewing potential funding, leasing arrangements and the wider community use of a place of worship.
- 3.4. The St John site seemed suitable for the faith community needs and has led to a number of visits to the building with their representatives.
- 3.5. These visits and associated discussions have proved fruitful - and potentially beneficial - to the main parties as well as the Youth Club and Gateway Club who are seeking new accommodation when their current arrangement in the Chiltern Youth Centre ends.
- 3.6. Consequently, it is proposed that we progress the informal discussions onto a more formal project footing by establishing a formal project board from the Stakeholders with a set of agreed terms of reference and outcomes, including funding arrangements, property tenure and progression of a formal planning application.
- 3.7. Outline designs have already been produced for the site as part of a larger Master-planning exercise for phase 2 of the Chiltern Pools site and we would seek to expand on this work in order to progress the planning application.
- 3.8. A fee proposal from the Master-planning consultant and the associated Architect has been received to progress the planning application to the St John site in detail. The amount quoted is £8995 and £8000 respectively.

3.9. If planning permission is achieved, then further detailed design work will be required to secure building regulations approval and this has been estimated at £42,000

3.10. In developing the planning application officers will work with Paradigm Housing or similar to develop the build and housing management proposals for the St Johns Ambulance site.

3.11. Subject to any unitary decision making process the high level project timeline would be;

- Project proposals to be discussed with Paradigm – December
- One Public Estate Bid for wider site - January
- Design proposals for St Johns Ambulance site - January
- Notification of OPE bid by -March
- Business case submitted to Buckinghamshire Council as part of the wider development - April
- Planning Application for St Johns Ambulance site - May

4. Consultation

4.1 Stakeholder consultation has been extensive as the recommendations have developed, with multiple meetings with the faith community representatives, Youth Club representatives and the Gateway Club.

4.2 The scheme in principle has been shared with members at Leisure Members Working Group as well as at the Project Board for the Lifestyle Centre itself.

4.3 Wider public consultation will occur as we seek planning approval for the final design and business case, which will of course be subject to internal review and examination across the Governance structure of the Authority.

5. Options (if any)

5.1 A number of options have been considered. However, these are all shaped by the Council's intention to use the site for Social Housing as well as satisfy our own planning conditions in relation to a community use.

1. We explore another Community Use – including occupation solely by the Youth Club. However, the prospect of attracting a community use which can also fund the development of their facility is very small and we are still left with the Faith Community who approached us searching for a permanent base.
2. We seek to over-ride our own planning guidelines and seek to provide Social Housing to the entire site. This sets a poor precedent and would not be advocated.
3. We dispose of the site to a developer who will seek permission for development and we then take advantage of an overage clause within the sale. This is

unlikely however, to generate the Housing for which the site was procured, or a community use which our planning policy supports.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Financial Implications – the approved Capital Programme for St Johns Ambulance Site currently has a balance of £1,185,600 to redevelop the site, it is recommended that funding is drawn down to support the planning application.

6.1.1 The General fund has a balance of £441,168 allocated for the Chiltern Pools phase 2 survey and design works. It is recommended that this funding is made available to undertake the pre-application design and survey expenditure required for the St Johns Ambulance site.

6.1.2 It is then proposed that £50,000 is drawn down from the Chiltern Pools phase 2 and St Johns Ambulance reserve to undertake the surveys necessary to develop the St Johns Ambulance site.

6.2 Legal implications - the Unitary spending protocol requires that expenditure of £100,000 on any one item should be referred to the S151 officer.

7. Unitary Implications (if applicable)

7.1 None

8. Links to Council Policy Objectives

The progression of the recommendations will see us working towards the following Council objectives in the provision of a valuable multi-use community facility as well as Social Housing:

- Working towards safe and healthier local communities
- Striving to conserve the environment and promote sustainability

Next Steps

The longer term place of worship/community and housing project will be formalised using the CDC PID process and a Project Board including Stakeholders and Technical Advisors will be established based upon the agreed objectives of the PID.

Designs will then be formalised and progress towards a formal planning application will be made and if successful a move towards legal agreement across the parties shall be established.

Background	None
Papers:	