



Report to Cabinet

Date:	2 March 2021
Title:	Collins House & 30 Oxford Road, High Wycombe
Relevant councillor(s):	Cllr John Chilver-Cabinet Member of Property and Assets
Local members:	Cllr Lesley Clarke; Cllr Mark Flys; Cllr Alan Hill; Cllr Mahboob Hussain; Cllr Alan Hill; Cllr David Johncock; Cllr Caroline Jones; Cllr Martin Tett; Cllr David Watson.
Author and/or contact officer:	Charles Brocklehurst
Ward(s) affected:	Abbey, Flackwell Heath, Little Chalfont and Amersham Common.
Recommendations:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Dispose of the freehold of Collins House, Wycombe for redevelopment as affordable housing.2. Facilitate the development of a new town centre building by Bucks Colleges, by way of the disposal of the freehold of 30 -34 Oxford Road, Wycombe to them.3. The Director of Property and Assets in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Property and Assets and the S151 Officer is authorised to finalise detailed heads of terms for the disposal agree the sale contracts, exchange and complete the disposal based on the heads of terms set out in the Confidential annex considered in Part 2 of this agenda.
Reason for decision:	Collins House was previously under offer to a housing association, but that deal did not complete. It is derelict and needing re development. A new deal is now on the table on the terms set out in this report and the report considered at Part 2 of this agenda.

30 – 34 Oxford Road is an end of life property asset (with five short term first floor temporary accommodation units and a proposed temporary letting for a ‘meanwhile use’ of its ground floor). An opportunity is now available to dispose of the asset on the terms set out in the report considered at part 2 of this agenda. Displaced temporary residential accommodation will be provided at the Councils new development at Desborough Road.

Redevelopment of both properties for the proposed uses will have regeneration benefits.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 Collins House and 30-34 Oxford Road are prominent vacant sites in Wycombe town centre, requiring redevelopment. We have an offer from a housing association to purchase Collins House, to develop affordable housing. We also have an offer from Bucks Colleges in 30-34 Oxford Road, to purchase for redevelopment as their proposed new building. Both sites are shown edged red on the attached plan (the blue triangle is highways land that is the subject of an old road improvement line). Confirmation is being sort from Highways that it is surplus to requirements. Detailed terms of the offers are set out in the Confidential Annex considered at Part 2 of this agenda.

2. Content of report

- 2.1 Collins House and 30-34 Oxford Road are prominent vacant sites in Wycombe town centre, requiring redevelopment. We have an offer from a housing association to purchase Collins House, to develop affordable housing. We also have interest from Bucks Colleges in 30-34 Oxford Road, to purchase for redevelopment as their proposed new building.
- 2.2 Both properties are suitable for redevelopment. Property & Assets’ Special Projects team has worked with HTA (Architects) to undertake a ‘capacity study’ on both sites. The square shape of the Collins House site, relative to its overall dimensions, makes it difficult to optimise for residential development, given planning requirements for ‘dual aspect’ apartments; onsite parking; an active frontage and their concerns about a tall building. However, the prospective purchasers have themselves undertaken a design study and are confident that they can produce a scheme that will provide more units than the previous (lapsed) consented scheme’s 52 units.
- 2.3 The capacity study on 30-34 Oxford Road demonstrates that the property could be redeveloped in conjunction with adjacent third party owned vacant buildings

fronting Oxford Road and Brook Street. However, negotiations to purchase these adjacent properties have not materialised (unwillingness to sell). The prospective purchaser's advisers have confirmed they can accommodate their requirement on just the Council's landholding, if we include a nearby Council owned buildings in Bridge Street, currently let as a motor workshops/storage.

2.4 The Council has generated interest in both properties from two potential purchasers:

- Collins House – an offer to purchase the freehold, conditional upon planning, for Places for People (Housing Association) for redevelopment as affordable housing – potentially 60 units, part affordable rented (with Council nomination rights), part shared ownership.
- 30 -34 Oxford Road – an offer to purchase the freehold, contingent upon planning for a circa 6,000 sq m building for Bucks Colleges, to consolidate their Amersham campus and Flackwell Heath campus in Wycombe town centre. The offer includes the land coloured blue on the site plan. It relates to an old road improvement line, dating back to when the existing building was constructed in the 1960s. We will need to gain agreement from Highways that it is not required and the land is surplus. The College have also offered to lease the Council's Brook Street properties for redevelopment as vehicle training workshops (shown edged red/hatched black on the attached plan).

2.5 The recommendation is to proceed with both disposals (subject to confirming with Highways that the 'blue triangle' is surplus to any future highways plans). The detailed terms of the offers are set out in the confidential annex to this report.

3. Other options considered

3.1 The Council is not in a position to undertake the proposed redevelopment of Collins House itself (its scale and funding requirement, relative to its return, does not make this feasible).

3.2 In terms of regeneration, the College redeveloping 30-34 Oxford Road looks preferable to residential redevelopment as it's a gateway site and is suited to a large 'institutional' building, which will bring a much needed 'animator' into the town.

4. Legal and financial implications

4.1 The proposed disposals will bring empty property rates savings of approx. £30,000pa for Collins House and approx. £45,000pa for 30-34 Oxford Road, which will be included in future revenue forecasts.

4.2 The Council has the legal powers to dispose of property.

- 4.3 Both proposals are subject to planning. Places for People are also acquiring the Councils Bellfield Site.
- 4.4 The College proposals are dependent upon them 'cross financing' from disposal of their Amersham and Flackwell Heath campuses and accordingly, their offer is conditional not only on planning permission for the site but also for residential redevelopment of these campuses. The College are also dependent upon obtaining Government grant (a previous similar proposal, in 2008, for the College to develop a new building founded on funding grounds). Both the Amersham and Flackwell Heath campuses are in the green belt and therefore their development would be subject to the Councils Green Belt policies.

5. Corporate implications

- 5.1 Property – Collins House incurs empty property rates, so its disposal/demolition as soon as possible is desirable. A temporary letting of 30-34 Oxford Road has been secured, mitigating its empty rates liability. The temporary accommodation use of its first floor was a planned temporary use, pending completion of the new Desborough Temporary Accommodation scheme. The Councils housing services team have confirmed that they do not require it, once Desborough Road is completed.

Climate change and sustainability – any redevelopment will be subject to planning and Building Regulation requirements

Equality - as disposals, equality impact assessment upon redevelopment will be the proposed purchaser's responsibility

Value for money – an external valuer's opinion has been sought which confirms that both the Collins House and 30-34 Oxford Road offers represent 'best consideration reasonably obtainable'.

6. Consultation with local councillors & community boards

- 6.1 Ward Councillors have been briefed on a confidential basis ahead of the Cabinet making a decision. The only response was from Cllr Lesley Clarke was as follows:
"Very happy to support. I understand that 2000 students will eventually be located in High Wycombe - so yes good news". Her support extends to Collins House disposal.

Other Ward Councillors had no observations on the briefing given.

Councillors whose Wards may be affected by Bucks Colleges' proposed relocation have been notified and have raised a number of detailed questions that are considered in the Part 2 report.

6.2 Public consultation will be the purchaser's responsibility after contacts have been exchanged. An earlier version of this report has been to Property Board, who are supportive.

7. Communication, engagement & further consultation

7.1 No publicity can or will take place until contracts are exchanged.

8. Next steps and review

8.1 Exchange contacts with Places for People for Collins House using external solicitors (approved by Legal Services).

8.2 Exchange contracts with Bucks Colleges of both 30-34 Oxford Road and potentially Brook Street, using external solicitors.

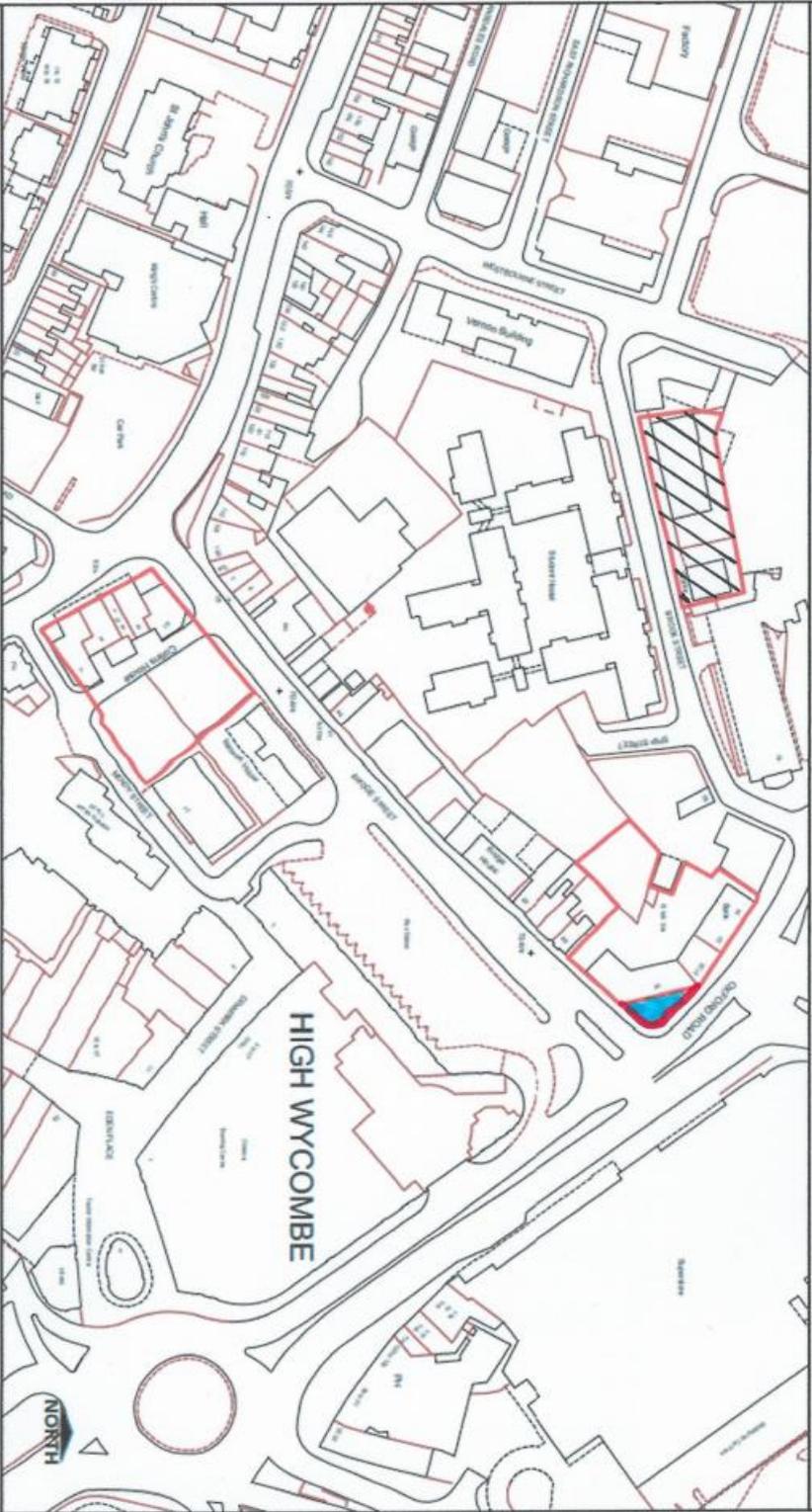
9. Background papers

9.1 Previous WDC Cabinet papers and other more recent background papers held by Property and Assets Interim Head of Special Projects (commercially confidential).

10. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

10.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report, please get in touch with the report author email: Charles.brocklehurst@buckinghamshire.gov.uk. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by emailing democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk or telephone 01296 382343.

Collins House, 30-34 Oxford Road and Brook Street



Statement of Purpose:
 Site Plan for Council Business Use Only

Map produced in by:	Scale:	Date:
wjpdjlls	1:1600	04/01/2021

Saved as Layout in Workspace Path/ Name:

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