

**FORMER WITCHBURN ROAD OFFICES SITE
PROGRESS ON DEMOLITION AND SITE MARKETING**

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 On 14 December 2017 the Community Services Committee Meeting agreed that the cost of the demolition of the former Witchburn Road Offices would be met from the Strategic Housing Fund on the basis that clearance of the site would enable future housing development.
- 1.2 On 14 June 2018 the Community Services Committee Meeting were provided with an update that outlined the progress with the contract documentation for the demolition and indicated that a marketing exercise would be undertaken to establish the appropriate offering to the market.
- 1.3 This report will advise on progress with the arrangements for the demolition of the buildings and the marketing that has taken place to date.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1.4 It is recommended that the Committee:
 - Note the current progress with the arrangements for the demolition and that to comply with the requirements of the bat license that the contract for the demolition works needs to be awarded by 21 December 2018 to allow demolition works to be completed by 31 March 2019;
 - Note that an 'All Enquiries' sales board has been displayed on the former Contact Centre building that fronts Witchburn Road and more targeted publicity is proposed to generate interest in the site;
 - Agree that a layout for housing plots and associated infrastructure will be tendered by Property Development and Estates using capital remaining from the Strategic Housing Fund allocation if possible;
 - Agree that a further update will be brought back to the June 2019 committee.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 At the Community Services Committee Meeting held on 14 December 2017 it was agreed that the cost of the demolition of the former Witchburn Road Offices would be met from the Strategic Housing Fund on the basis that clearance of the site would enable future housing development.
- 2.2 As part of the funding agreement there was a requirement to provide an update to the Committee in June 2018. That update outlined the progress with the contract documentation for the demolition and indicated that a marketing exercise would be undertaken to establish the appropriate offering to the market. There was also a requirement to provide an update to the Committee in December 2018. This report will therefore advise on progress with the arrangements for the demolition of the buildings and the marketing that has taken place to date.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Committee:
- Note the current progress with the arrangements for the demolition and that to comply with the requirements of the bat license that the contract for the demolition works needs to be awarded by 21 December 2018 to allow demolition works to be completed by 31 March 2019;
 - Note that an 'All Enquiries' sales board has been displayed on the former Contact Centre building that fronts Witchburn Road and more targeted publicity is proposed to generate interest in the site;
 - Agree that a layout for housing plots and associated infrastructure will be tendered by Property Development and Estates using capital remaining from the Strategic Housing Fund allocation if possible;
 - Agree that a further update will be brought back to the June 2019 committee.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 **Demolition of Former Witchburn Road Offices:** Tenders for the demolition of the former Witchburn Road Offices and the former Contact Centre building were offered to the market and tenders were returned on 19 October 2018. To give the Council flexibility, the tenderers were asked to also provide a tender which excluded the former Contact Centre building. These tenders have been assessed and are capable of being accepted and the appropriate contract will be awarded subject to conclusion of the initial marketing.
- 4.2 There were bats present on site and following appropriate surveys and an application to Scottish Natural Heritage, a bat license has now been received. The conditions of that license mean that all demolition works must be completed by 31 March 2019. There are other conditions in the bat license that are considered to be standard, however there is a requirement that prior to any works taking place that could affect bats or their roosts, purpose-built bat boxes need to be erected on suitable structures within 100m of the site.
- 4.3 To comply with the requirements of the bat license where demolition works need to be completed by 31 March 2019, tenders for the demolition of the offices should be awarded by no later than 21 December 2018.
- 4.4 On completion of demolition, the risk of reputational damage associated with a vacant property which is deteriorating on an ongoing basis will be removed, along with the ongoing financial burden of approximately £2000 per month for non domestic rates and maintenance charges.
- 4.5 **Marketing:** At the June 2018 Community Services Committee it was agreed that:-
- the option that may give both the Council and the community the best opportunity would be 'Option 3' i.e. to offer individually serviced plots to the self-build market. However this would only be confirmed by testing the market. On that basis, the site can be developed in the most cost effective way by an iterative process where services are located centrally, with site services only being extended for individual plots at an additional cost on the basis that there is market appetite for those evidenced by the market test.*
- 4.6 Property Development and Estates Officers have been preparing the site for self build plots and marketing in consultation with Property Services. An 'All Enquiries' Sales Board has been displayed on the sandstone and brick building that was formerly the Contact Centre at the entrance of the site that is adjacent to Witchburn Road. Further targetted marketing will take place on social media, website and email

distribution with local developers. There has already been a small degree of interest in this building as it remains suitable for conversion or redevelopment (subject to obtaining necessary permissions). It is the current intention to try and sell this building in isolation then split the remainder of the site into serviced building plots. Such a sale would deliver a saving on the cost of demolition of the building and would also address concerns this would be an unattractive vacant plot as it is low lying (no view) with close proximity to the road. If there are no credible offers on the sandstone building by 21 December 2018 then this building will form part of the overall demolition.

- 4.7 Property Development and Estates have been looking to design a layout and infrastructure plan for between 4 to 8 residential plots at the site and this service will be tendered. It is anticipated the budget to commission this layout and infrastructure plan will be met from surplus Strategic Housing Fund as per the recommendation. If this proves to be insufficient, then a further report will be brought back to the Committee. Planning permission in principle will also be sought for the residential scheme. To obtain best value It is anticipated that other similar tenders for infrastructure may be issued at the same time for sites such as the former depot at Millpark, Oban and Bishopton Road, Lochgilphead for new business and industry Sites.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Tenders are in place for the demolition of the buildings on the former Witchburn Road offices site, the scope of which will be dependent on the initial marketing. To comply with the requirements of the bat license, the contract for the demolition works needs to awarded by 21 December 2018 to allow demolition works to be completed by 31 March 2019.
- 5.2 The sandstone building at the entrance to the site (the former Contact Centre) is currently being marketed and has generated some interest. A tender for design of a housing plot layout and infrastructure will be issued early in the new year to coincide with the demolition of the other buildings on site.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy: The demolition of the former Witchburn Road offices will enable future housing development.
- 6.2 Finance: The Council is currently having to bear costs of approximately £2000 per month for non domestic rates and maintenance charges. Offering the site to the market should result in a financial return to the Council.
- 6.3 Legal: None
- 6.4 HR: None
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: None
- 6.5.1 Equalities – Protected Characteristics: None
- 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty: None

- 6.5.3 Islands: None
- 6.6 Risk: Until the demolition of the existing buildings has been completed the Council will continue to be exposed to ongoing financial and health and safety liabilities including the risk of vandalism. There will also be increased reputational risk associated with the ongoing deterioration of a significant vacant property.
- 6.7 Customer Service: None

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