


Report of: Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager.


To: Executive Board




Date: 3rd December 2007

Item No: 11

Title of Report : Community Asset Transfer

 **Summary and Recommendations**



 **Purpose of report:** To inform the Board of bids made  the  et transfer of two community centres

Key decision: No


Portfolio Holder: Councillor D. Rundle

Scrutiny Responsibility: Community Scrutiny

Ward(s) affected: Hinksey Park and St Clements

Report Approved by
Portfolio Holder: Councillor David Rundle
Legal: Jeremy Thomas
Finance: Sarah Fogden
Strategic Director: Michael Lawrence

Policy Framework: To be an effective and responsive organisation providing value for money services and to reduce inequality through social inclusion – Oxford Plan 2007-2010

 **Recommendations:**

1. That the Board note and endorse the bids made in respect of the asset transfer of South Oxford Community Centre and the Asian Cultural Centre.
2. That a further report be made to the Board if the bid is successful setting out the proposals and seeking approval for the capital projects.

Background:

1. In September 2007 the Office of the Third Sector announced its Community Assets Programme. The Big Lottery is managing this programme on behalf of the Office of the Third Sector. The funding of this programme is £30 Million and it is open to Local Authorities and Third Sector organisations working in partnership.
2. The aim of the programme is to deliver in partnership Local Authority Assets into the ownership and management of Third Sector organisations
3. This aim has been based upon the Local Government White Paper (Oct 2006). It also draws on The Quirk Review of community ownership and management of public assets (May 2007)

White Paper

- “We (Government) are determined to ensure that existing powers and polices that support community management and ownership are effective and that practical ways are found to overcome any unnecessary barriers...”
- “We will take immediate steps to make it easier for communities and community groups to take on the management or ownership of Local Authority assets...”

Quirk

The vision is

- Council-led partnerships are revitalising communities and managing assets jointly
 - A new vanguard of social entrepreneurs
 - Sustained investment
 - Community “calls for action” are bringing under used assets back into public use
 - Transferring assets to communities must result in social or community benefits without becoming outweighed by operational considerations
4. To help achieve the aims of the White Paper and of Quirk, funding has been made available through an open bidding process to the Big Lottery. The programme has 3 key outcomes
 - Local Third Sector organisations have greater security and independence and are better able to meet the needs of the communities they serve
 - Communities have more access to better facilities that respond to their needs

- There is more effective partnership working between Local authorities and the Third Sector
5. The programme has £30 Million available. The big Lottery will consider bids between £150,000 to £1 Million for a single asset. A local Authority may bid for a maximum of two projects that is two transfers each to a separate Third Sector organisation. One bid can transfer more than one asset, if all assets are transferred to a single Third Sector organisation. However as individual associations individually manage all of the Authorities Centres, this is not possible for this Council.
 6. Only a Local Authority or Third Sector Organisation may apply. Both organisations must be working in partnership and the Local Authority before the award of any funding must hold the asset. The Third Sector organisation must be in good financial health. Both parties must enter into a partnership agreement (service level agreement) before any application is made.
 7. The programme will fund the refurbishment of a Local Authority Asset to facilitate the transfer to the Third Sector partner. The scope of refurbishment also covers new build extensions; however it precludes direct new build. land not associated with any refurbishment, housing or open space. So we are not able to bid for new build on empty or vacant land, we can not bid for open space or play grounds and we cannot bid for the refurbishment of housing
 8. The time line for bidding is tight; the period for bidding was only two months (programme announced early September 2007). Applications were required by the 15th of November 2007. There will be an initial assessment and by the 18th of January 2008 we will be informed of whether the bids are going to go to full assessment. We will then be notified by the 31st of March whether the bids are successful.
 9. If we are successful a grant offer will be made, and if accepted, we will have six months to complete a full Capital Delivery plan. The big Lottery on receipt of our Capital Delivery Plans will take another four months to inform us of their approval and then the project can move forward. The grant is likely to be available from December 2008.

Report.

10. Officers from Neighbourhood Renewal and Building Design and Construction (Built Environment Business Unit) worked together to draw up a possible list of Centres and Associations which fitted with the criteria as laid out by the Big Lottery and the Office of the Third Sector (see appendix 1). Community Matters also gave information of the programme to all its members (all Oxford Community Associations). Only 4 Associations made representations to the Council expressing an interest in the programme.

11. The criteria for bids required that the building was not presently leased from the Council and was in need of major capital work to bring it into full community use. This criteria immediately reduced the candidates to ten. These ten were further reduced by applying other factors/requirements

- Robust and clear financial position
- Clear demonstration of partnership working
- Community need for access and facility
- Need for expansion/development
- Clear management arrangements
- Meeting local need

Application of these factors reduced the number of possible suitable centres to two.

12. The two centres were South Oxford and the Asian Cultural Centre. The selection of these was through elimination using the bidding criteria. Officers met with the management of both Centres. They fully supported the ethos of asset transfer as laid out in the guidance notes and application form from the Big Lottery. Officers and the two Community Associations were confident that the two assets proposed were the most likely to succeed and more importantly the most likely to provide greater community access and benefit.

13. Both Centres afford great opportunity for both the Council and the Associations in providing much needed quality provision for their respective communities.

14. The key opportunities for South Oxford lie in refurbishing a Victorian building and opening under-used space; leading to greater provision in high standard accommodation. A key interest for the Association is the establishment of a community café.

15. The opportunities for the Asian Cultural Centre lie in a new extension to the existing building for the provision of a community hall and meeting spaces for training and educational activity. The hall would afford the community a space for weddings, funerals and other events. This is a high community priority for the community the Centre serves.

16. Both Associations required extra resource in developing the bids and to that end Officers from both Neighbourhood Renewal and Built Environment assisted. For both Centres Officers from Built Environment drew up a Capital works programme based upon the needs expressed by each Association. Neighbourhood Renewal assisted with the needs analysis and the writing of both bids.

17. At this stage both bids are likely to be at the top end of the funding available (£1 Million each). The final figure will be based upon the Capital required to meet the identified needs.
18. There is a requirement for a partnership agreement and the grant of a lease both of which will require negotiations with the community associations. A further report will be made to the Board.
19. The bids were submitted within the deadline. It is hoped that the bids will be successful. This will have the effect of reducing the Capital costs for Community Centres by some £500,000 and provide the City with two high quality community facilities.

Recommendations:

1. That the Board note and endorse the bids made in respect of the asset transfer of South Oxford Community Centre and the Asian Cultural Centre.
2. That a further report be made to the Board if the bid is successful setting out the proposals and seeking approval for the capital projects.

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Background papers:

None.

