

Report of: Head of Service, Community Housing and Community Development.

To: Executive Board

Date: 17th March 2008

Item No:

Title of Report: Cowley Community Centre - Interim Options

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To notify Executive Board of the next steps in moving forward with the interim options for the Cowley Community Centre site and community facilities in the Cowley area. To request permission to demolish present building at the Barns Road site as part of that process.

Key decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Councillor David Rundle

Scrutiny Responsibility: Community Scrutiny

Ward(s) affected: Cowley

Report Approved by:

Portfolio Holder Councillor David Rundle

Finance Sarah Fogden

Legal Jeremy Thomas

Executive Director Michael Crofton-Briggs

Policy Framework: n/a

Recommendations: Executive Board is recommended to:

1. Approve option ii) and authorise the demolition of Cowley Community Centre, Barns Road
2. Endorse the proposed time line and actions in this report.

Background.

1. The Cowley Community Centre was subject to a report to Executive Board in August 2007. This report laid out the condition and usage of the centre. It also covered the situation facing the Cowley Community Association. The report's recommendation was to close the centre by the 1st of April 2008. The report was called in by Community Scrutiny who made recommendations, and this was returned to Executive Board and the closure agreed.

2. The building is in a poor state of repair and in need of high levels of maintenance. The issue is further complicated by an enforcement notice placed on the centre by the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. The Fire Officer gave the Council notice to comply with regulations on the 18th of July 2007; the work was required to be completed by the 18th of January 2008. Oxford City Council applied for an extension to the order that was granted until the 30th of April 2008. The following table outlines the cost of complying with the fire notice and the costs associated with keeping the centre open for any period beyond April 2008.

Action Required	Costs
Fire Notice and Insurance requirements	£46,615 (Revenue)
Running Costs for Oxford City Council to Manage the Centre	£56,000 (Revenue)
Capital requirement to bring the Centre to a suitable standard (inc DDA and maintenance)	£1.5 Million (Capital)

Interim Options for the site

3. As agreed by the Executive Board in August 2007, a comprehensive consultation exercise will be carried out to assess local requirements for community facilities and to gather opinion on the future use of the Community Centre site (indeed, some initial work has already taken place). However, given the requirements of the Fire Officer, and the current condition of the building, officers are requesting the Executive to take a decision on the immediate future of the site. There are essentially three viable options for the short term:
 - i). Secure the building and surrounding perimeter whilst a full options appraisal and consultation exercise is carried out. The requirement from the Council's insurers if this option is pursued is to board up all accessible windows, doors and means of access, remove all but

fixtures from the building and secure the grounds. Estimated costs for security in this case include £10,000 for boarding up, £5,000 for regular site security checks and £5,000 for ongoing maintenance of existing fire and alarm systems. These costs would cover a period of 9 months, any extension to this period would lead to increased expenditure. Officers believe this course of action is problematic for several reasons – the building would most likely become a focus for vandalism, the overall condition of the site would continue to decline, and the site will present an impression of inactivity and neglect to members of the community.

- ii). Remove asbestos, demolish the building and secure the perimeter. The building has high levels of asbestos which needs to be removed prior to full demolition taking place, leaving a cleared site for development. The estimated cost of asbestos removal and demolition is £100K; this sum would be taken from the Community Centres capital budget, and recovered from any receipt generated by development of the site, either by the council or by other developers. Officers believe that this option offers the clearest way forward for the site, in that it increases the value of the land significantly, offering the prospect of a higher return for the council and thus increasing the possibility of providing enhanced facilities (of whatever kind) on a future development. Demolition also removes much of the physical and public health risk from the site in the interim period, and sends a clear message to the community that the council intends to rejuvenate the area.
 - iii). Refurbish the existing building to a standard that meets both the statutory regulations governing publicly accessible spaces, and the requirements of a modern community facility. This option brings with it the need for a sizeable capital investment, with a low return spread over many years. The cost would be greater than that estimated in the original Executive Board report, in part because of revisions to the Building Regulations relating to environmental performance. Part L of the Regulations set maximum carbon dioxide emissions for whole buildings. The regulations will apply both to the construction of new buildings and renovation of existing buildings. Coupled with the other requirements for the building such as DDA compliance, asbestos removal, fire safety, etc., officers estimate that the total cost of refurbishment would be in the order of £1.5M. Officers also believe that this option would limit potential use of the site, and would not offer any of the potential additional benefits arising from a comprehensive redevelopment scheme.
4. Officers therefore recommend option two, the demolition of the existing Cowley Community Centre as an initial step in bringing about a comprehensive, community led redevelopment programme for the site.

Next Steps

5. Many of the organisations that used the Centre have found alternative accommodation; a couple needs some extra time to move from their present location to new premises. To help them in this process the deadline for closure has been delayed from the 31st of March to the 25th of April 2008. Officers will continue to work with the remaining groups past the 25th of April to provide as much help as possible.
6. Two pieces of consultation have been carried out so far; a facilities mapping of all community facilities either private or public, and a 400-person survey of residents of the Cowley area. A third stage of the consultation will involve focus groups made up of the stakeholders in the area. This is scheduled to take place on the 20th of March. The results of these consultations will help formulate the long/short list of options for the long term future of the site to be presented to Cowley Area Committee and Executive Board.
7. The building is known to have asbestos in it (survey carried out Dec 2006) which will have to be removed whichever interim option is decided upon, and therefore Officers of the Built Environment Service have laid out the following process to enable the work to be carried out.
 - Appoint a consultant to organise Asbestos removal and deal with all required approvals and Health and Safety plans (25th Feb – 17th March)
 - Appoint asbestos removal contractors to carry out further tests and removal all asbestos (Start 28th April)

The officers have also produced an integrated time-line combining asbestos removal and demolition works, should the board give approval for that course of action.

- Appoint a consultant to organise Asbestos removal (25th Feb – 17th March)
- Appoint consultant to organise demolition process and deal with all required approvals and Health and Safety plans (25th Feb – 17th March)
- Appoint asbestos removal contractors to carry out further tests and removal all asbestos (Start 28th April)
- Appoint demolition contractor to commence work immediately after asbestos has been removed (16th May)
- Erect Temporary perimeter fence for the whole site on completion of demolition

8. The overall time line for the closure and future plan for the centre is laid out in the following table; this includes a number of consultation dates and report and decision dates.

DATE	ISSUE/ACTION
MAR 17	EB decision on report seeking approval for interim option
MAR 17	Long list of future options for the site produced
MAR 20	Consultation with focus groups
ARIL 4	Cowley Area Committee recommendations on long list of options and consultation results
APRIL 21	EB decision on short list of options to be taken forward
APRIL 25	Closure of Centre
APRIL 25	Consultation on chosen options
JUNE	EB decision on final option (no other EB decision required beyond this point)
JUNE/JULY	Work up final option
JUNE/JULY	Final scheme out for tender/competition/other

9. Officers will consult widely on the chosen options with a presence in the Templar Square Shopping Centre and throughout community venues across the Cowley area. Each of the chosen options will be displayed for public comment. Views will be gathered from individuals and stakeholders through public meetings and presentations. Although the focus of the consultation will be with residents of Cowley, the views of people who work, visit or worship in the area will also be taken into account. The results of this work will then be reported to both Cowley Area Committee and the Executive Board in June. The previous Executive Board report of August 2007 allocated £20,000 for the options appraisal, this will be used for the consultation and options appraisal as laid out above.

Recommendations

- Approve option ii) and authorise the demolition of Cowley Community Centre, Barns Road.
- Endorse the proposed time line and actions in this report.

Name and contact details of author_[x1]: Craig Buckby
cbuckby@oxford.gov.uk

Background papers_[x2]: None

