

**To:** City Executive Board

**Date:** 9<sup>th</sup> September 2009 **Item No:** 9

**Report of:** Interim Head of Property & Facilities Management

**Title of Report:** Cowley Community Centre Site - Future Development

### Summary and Recommendations

**Purpose of report:** To advise Members of proposals in relation to the former Cowley Community Centre Site, as shown edged on the attached drawing and to obtain approval to next steps.

**Key decision?** Yes

**Executive lead member:** Councillor Oscar van Nooijen - Service Transformation  
Councillor Antonia Bance, Social Inclusion and Young People

**Report approved by:** Mel Barrett, Executive Director, City Regeneration

**Finance:** Sarah Fogden/Penny Gardner  
**Legal:** Jeremy Thomas

**Policy Framework:** Stronger and More Inclusive Communities.  
Transform Oxford City Council by Improving Value for Money and Service Performance.

**Recommendation(s):** The Board is asked to:

1. Note the current position with regards to the status of the site.
2. Agree the potential options for next steps with a view to the site now being brought forward for development/disposal as quickly as possible.

3. Agree the intention to consult with appropriate community and other local groups regarding the specification of the "Community" element subject to a report back on the terms of any disposal.

### Background

1. The former Cowley Community Centre was closed 25<sup>th</sup> April 2008. The demolition of the premises was completed on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2009 and the site is currently vacant. Over recent months discussions have been ongoing with relevant officer colleagues, with a view to establishing permitted and acceptable uses on the site, and also with Lead and Local Members regarding what might be required in terms of replacement community facilities. In broad terms, it is proposed that a small community centre is incorporated within any redevelopment of the site.
2. This report sets out proposed next steps, particularly how the provision of that community element might be provided.

### Report

3. Informal discussions have been taking place with Planning colleagues and in broad terms the site is suitable for mixed use development comprising commercial, residential etc. More detail is given in the planning implications section below.
4. Whilst it is not considered appropriate or necessary to re-provide a community centre in the form of the facility that was previously situated on the site, it is intended that any redevelopment will include a small community centre provision. A review of local facilities was carried out last year to ascertain the availability of other community space as well as telephone surveys to establish leisure patterns amongst Cowley residents. Also, initial discussions with my colleague the Head of Community Housing and Community Development suggests that the headline requirement could be in the order of 200 sq m of floor space comprising meeting and multi use rooms, a kitchen area and the like. Any detailed proposal here will be subject to full consultation and involvement with OCVA, appropriate community, residents and local groups, and subject to affordability considerations.
5. Whereas any facility could be directly provided and managed by the City Council, in the alternative it may well be cost effective for consideration to it being managed by the developer/operator of the site, particularly if this was to be one of the City Council's nominated registered social landlord partners. Again, any arrangement whereby a

developer/operator assumes responsibility and the risks associated would be subject to affordability and viability considerations.

6. As stated above the site is considered suitable for mixed use development and at this stage two principal options have/are being explored:
  - The site is offered to the market in isolation as a mixed use opportunity. Within that prospective developers would be requested to set out their proposals for the commercial element, the provision of additional affordable housing over that normally required by Planning obligations (up to 100%), their proposals for assisting the Council in specifying and owning and managing the community facility, and finally setting out their proposed financial offer to acquire the site.
  - As above, but linking to broader regeneration/site development opportunities elsewhere in the City, eg at Northway. This potentially offers benefits in terms of economies of scale and cross subsidisation, and in making the proposals more attractive to the market.
7. Some soft testing has been done with RLS partners and there would appear to be an appetite to become involved in either of the above suggested options.
8. Officers are now proposing to quickly conclude their deliberations and to confirm the preferred way forward in consultation with appropriate Lead Members.

#### Environmental Implications

9. There are no direct environmental implications arising out of this report. Any new development on the site will be constructed in accordance with Planning and Building Regulation requirements.

#### Planning Implications

10. Planning colleagues have been consulted on an informal basis and have confirmed that the site is situated at an accessible location and within a designated district centre. On that basis a variety of uses can be appropriate in such a location, including retail, office, residential, leisure and community facilities preferably as part of a mixed use development, but not necessarily. Local Plan Policy SR15, which seeks to protect community facilities, is relevant.

#### Financial Implications

## CEB Report Risk Register – COWLEY COMMUNITY CENTRE - FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

**Risk Score**    **Impact Score:** 1 = Insignificant; 2 = Minor; 3 = Moderate; 4 = Major; 5 = Catastrophic  
**Probability Score:** 1 = Rare; 2 = Unlikely; 3 = Possible; 4 = Likely; 5 = Almost Certain

No.	Risk Description Link to Corporate Objectives	Gross Risk		Cause of Risk	Mitigation	Net Risk		Further Management of Risk: Transfer/Accept/Reduce/Avoid		Monitoring Effectiveness				Current Risk	
		I	P			I	P	Q	Q	Q	Q	I	P		
1.	Agreement on specification for 'small community centre'.	1 2	3 3	Failure to agree specification with stakeholders.	Mitigating Control: Level of Effectiveness: (HML)  Ensure full engagement in community groups detailed in CEB report. (M)	1 2	2 2	Action: Encourage regular dialogue. Action Owner: Steve Sprason  Mitigating Control: Regular monitoring of progress. Control Owner: Steve Sprason	Outcome Required: Agreement for specification.  Milestone Date: December 09.	Q 1 ⊗ ⊕ ⊗	Q 2 ⊗ ⊕ ⊗	Q 3 ⊗ ⊕ ⊗	Q 4 ⊗ ⊕ ⊗	I	P
2.	Scheme viability.	3	3	Proposed scheme content proves not viable.	Undertake full appraisal, soft market testing etc. (M)			Action: Consider need to revise development brief. Action Owner: Steve Sprason  Mitigating control: Regular monitoring.  Control Owner: Steve Sprason	Outcome Required: Scheme delivery.  Milestone Date: Summer 2010						

9-6

11. The disposal of the site will potentially result in a capital receipt to the Council. In the event of increased levels of affordable housing being provided and/or ownership and responsibility for management of any community facility being the responsibility of the developer then this will potentially reduce the quantum of any capital receipt to be received.

#### Legal Implications

12. The Council's powers to dispose of land comprised within the general fund are contained within Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 for best consideration.

#### Equality Implications

13. There are no direct implications arising from the contents of this report at the present time.

#### Risk Implications

14. A risk assessment has been undertaken and the risk register is attached as Appendix 2 (to follow).

#### Recommendations

15. Note the current position with regards to the status of the site.
16. Agree the potential options for next steps with a view to the site now being brought forward for development/disposal as quickly as possible.
17. Agree the intention to consult with appropriate community and other local groups regarding the specification of the "Community" element subject to a report back on the terms of any disposal.

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**List of background papers:**

**Version number:** 1



Title; Cowley Community Centre-site of

Scale: 1:2,500

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9-5

