

Future Use of the Wells Site

Head of Service/Contact:	Mark Shephard, Head of Property and Regeneration
Urgent Decision?(yes/no)	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	N/A
Annexes/Appendices (attached):	Annex 1 – Proposed Development Scheme Annex 2 – Financial Business Case (exempt from publication for reasons set out on the Agenda) Annex 3 – Engagement Exercise
Other available papers (not attached):	Report to Council dated 8 December 2015 Report to S & R dated 1 February 2018 & dated 25 September 2018

Report summary

This report updates Committee on the outcome of the consultation with local residents (held on 18 October 2018) on the proposed site configuration and proposal for the development of the Site.

Recommendation (s)

That Committee approves the:

- (1) Proposed development scheme, attached at Annex 1;
 - (2) Financial Business Case, attached at Annex 2;
 - (3) Submission of a planning application for the proposed development scheme;
- and is asked to note:
- (4) The setting up of a working group to consider the options for the internal design and operation of the community facility and play area.

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1 Implications for the Council's Key Priorities, Service Plans and Sustainable Community Strategy

- 1.1 This proposal supports the Council's four year Corporate Plan specifically focusing on two Key Priorities; 'Supporting our Community', through the delivery of affordable homes and 'Managing our Resources', by optimising returns from properties

2 Background

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3 Background

- 3.1 Council previously agreed (8 December 2015) to consolidate EEBC's social centre provision to one site at the Longmead Centre in Sefton Road, thereby releasing the Wells site from future operational use.
- 3.2 At its February 2018 meeting, Committee approved the residential redevelopment of the site and the provision of a community facility of up to 1,500 sq. ft. (to be operated and managed by the community).
- 3.3 Following a formal planning assessment of the site, three layout options came forward as meeting the key requirements for a scheme in light of the sites constraints. Namely:
- A residential building with integral community facility and
 - Two options with a standalone community facility.
- 3.4 Each option maintains vehicular access from Spa Drive and retains Wicker's Way, the public footpath connecting Spa Way with Wells Way to the south. All options also locate the buildings close to the centre of the site.
- 3.5 In September 2018, Committee considered site configuration options for a proposed development scheme. The recommended Option C was approved which locates the community facility close to the children's public play area and public footpath.
- 3.6 The Committee also approved the commencement of the community consultation and engagement exercise on the approved Option C.

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4 Wells Residents Consultation Exercise

- 4.1 The consultation took the form of a public exhibition of Option C at the Wells Centre held on Thursday 18 October. The exhibition was then displayed at the Town Hall, from Monday 22 October to Friday 2 November. The consultation process closed on Friday 2 November.
- 4.2 The public exhibition provided residents with the opportunity to engage with the project team leading the development proposals for residents along with schematics for Option C.
- 4.3 The information provided as part of the consultation and engagement exercise included the following:
- Site layout masterplan and height comparison cross section (page 16 of **Annex 1**)
 - Residential floor plans and community facility / playground detail (pages 17-18 of **Annex 1**)
 - Indicative building materials (page 19 of **Annex 1**) and 3D sketch images (pages 20 – 21 **Annex 1**)
- 4.4 Invitations were sent to all residents and businesses within the Wells neighbourhood (approximately 525 addresses).
- 4.5 Over 80 local residents attended the exhibition at the Wells. In total, the Council received 40 feedback forms, which represents a 7.6% return rate. The breakdown of feedback responses was:
- 24 forms received at the event.
 - 16 forms received by the end of the consultation period.
- 4.6 In summary, the main themes raised fall under several heads:
- Design including height of building;
 - Parking and traffic;
 - Play area

5 Outcome of consultation exercise

- 5.1 Although the response rate was low, all responses have been carefully considered. For easy assistance, **Annex 3** contains a Table that summarises the feedback and Council response to each item. The concerns raised are consistent with the nature of what is expected when a new housing development is proposed.

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6 Design

- 6.1 Locating the building at the centre of the site maintains acceptable distances from existing buildings, minimises the impact on neighbours (overlooking), the existing landscape and protects the mature tree boundary.
- 6.2 Design is a subjective issue for any development proposal, and although a modern scheme design has been proposed, the palette of materials selected take some of their design cues from the neighbouring Wells House (Karibu Children's Home) which is tile hung to the upper story.
- 6.3 The overall height of the proposed development is lower than the Karibu Children's Home. In line with the Council's policy 'Making Efficient Use of Land - Optimising Housing Delivery (2018)' the developments seeks to provide increased housing provision, which could not be achieved within a two-storey development. However, the design is a matter for the Local Planning Authority to consider as part of a planning application.
- 6.4 A particular concern has been raised around the type of cladding being proposed. The fear has been expressed of a 'Grenfell' style and it is important to reassure both the Committee and the residents that this is not the case here.
- 6.5 The metal cladding being proposed is not a retrofitted panel with insulation as in the case with Grenfell. The proposed wall construction is a part of the wall build. The wall is to be constructed with structural framing and insulation behind a weathering membrane onto which the metal cladding is fixed. There will be fire stops and breaks behind the panels to close off any cavities in line with good building practice.

7 Parking

- 7.1 The parking provision proposed for both the residential development and community hall is in line with planning policy.
- 7.2 Following the public engagement exercise, the car park has been reconfigured to provide an additional two parking spaces for the community facility. It is also proposed to reorganise the Blue Badge disabled bays to place two together at the end of the car park closest to the community facility. This would allow the occasional use by three cars, if disabled access is not required at that time.
- 7.3 The proposed development scheme is attached at **Annex 1** and will be updated to reflect the reconfigured car park. **Annex 1** is the Design and Access Statement that is a key document accompanying a planning application. It explains how a proposed development is a suitable response to the site and its setting, and able to demonstrate that it can be adequately accessed by all prospective users.

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- 7.4 A suggestion of electric charging points has also been put forward and the Council will consider whether this can be provided.

8 Size of Community Facility, Storage and level of activity

- 8.1 The proposed new hall has been designed as a local walk-to community hall for residents of the Wells estate. The hall will be 1,700 sq. ft. and following the deduction of the kitchenette area and toilets, the usable space will be approximately 1,500 sq. ft. As a guideline, this compares with the 1,050 sq. ft. basement hall of the existing building in which the pre-school was formerly hosted.
- 8.2 Following the public engagement exercise, a working group will be set up to work with the local community to ensure the internal layout utilises design solutions to maximum the provision available and to address storage issues. It will also address concerns raised around hours of use and noise levels to address any issues of nuisance to neighbours as well as looking at costs and potential income.

9 Play Area

- 9.1 The proposed play area includes the same type and number of pieces of play equipment as is currently in place. The play equipment at the existing playground is nearing the end of its useful life and the redevelopment thereby offers the opportunity to renew the equipment.
- 9.2 The new location of the play area also offers improvements in terms of accessibility, being located next to the public right of way. By locating the play area within the line of site of the new residential units also affords the playground with natural surveillance. However, following the public engagement exercise, it is felt best that the working group also looks at the setup of the play area to address the concerns around the nature of play equipment to be provided.

10 Financial Business Case

- 10.1 The business case is attached at **Annex 2 (considered exempt from publication for the reason set out on the Agenda)** for Option C.
- 10.2 The business case demonstrates that Option C is financially viable.
- 10.3 External financial advice was taken to consider, if the Council wanted to develop the site, whether it would be best for the Council or for the Council's wholly owned company, EEPIC, to develop. The advice was it would be best for the Council rather than EEPIC. A decision still need to be made as to whether the Council develops the site or whether it disposes of the site. This decision can only be considered once planning permission has been granted.

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11 Next Steps

- 11.1 Approval of the attached business case supporting the proposed development scheme will allow the submission of a planning application.
- 11.2 The Local Planning Authority would class this as a “major application” requiring a minimum 12 week determination period.
- 11.3 To respond to engagement feedback, and also to assist the local community groups wishing to run the community facility, it is suggested that an officer working group be set up to consider the:
 - Internal design, layout, operation and management of the community facility and
 - The layout of the play area.
- 11.4 As stated in paragraph 10.3, a future report will be presented to this Committee following the outcome of the planning application.

12 Financial and Manpower Implications

- 12.1 In July 2018, Strategy and Resources Committee approved an amended £160k budget for the development brief to be produced and a planning application prepared.
- 12.2 The proposed planning application can be undertaken within this budget.
- 12.3 **Chief Finance Officer’s comments:** *The financial implications are set out in the business case (Annex 2 considered exempt from publication for reasons set out in the Agenda).*

13 Legal Implications (including implications for matters relating to equality)

- 13.1 There are no legal implications arising from the contents of this report. The Community Centre effectively closed some years ago, with previous uses having been successfully reconfigured and re-provided elsewhere.
- 13.2 The site forms part of land the Council bought and the well, which was gifted to the Council. The well does not form part of the proposed development scheme. There are no restrictions on site preventing or hindering the site to be developed in accordance with the proposed development scheme and the scheme takes careful note of the utilities running under the site.
- 13.3 The Council will be treated as an ordinary developer in terms of any planning application and will be required to comply with any requirements the Local Planning Authority deems necessary and in accordance with the planning code of conduct.

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13.4 Monitoring *Officer's comments: none arising from the contents of this report.*

14 Sustainability Policy and Community Safety Implications

14.1 None for the purposes of this report.

15 Partnerships

15.1 None for the purposes of this report.

16 Risk Assessment

16.1 A series of comprehensive externally commissioned surveys have been undertaken to establish the site constraints and opportunities. These include topographical, ecological, arboricultural, hydrogeological, contamination, drainage, transport and others. The proposed development scheme overcomes the difficulties caused by the site constraints.

16.1 The proposed development scheme has been developed in accordance with Local Plan policies to ensure it is policy compliant.

17 Conclusion and Recommendations

17.1 The proposed scheme presents a viable development for the Wells site and offers the ability to provide much needed housing within the Borough.

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);