



**Policy, Finance and
Development
Committee**

**Tuesday 25th
March 2014**

**Matter for
Information and
Decision**

Title: Progress with Development Opportunities in the Borough

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an update in terms of the involvement and progress of the Council in relation to a number of different development opportunities in the Borough, including in relation to the Council's own assets, the provision of market and affordable housing and the provision of land for burials and cremations.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Members:

- i) note the position with regard to the potential development opportunities in the Borough
- ii) approve the establishment of a delegated system to enable the Chief Executive and/or the Director of Services in consultation with the Chief Financial Officer and the Leader of the Council and/or the Chair of the Policy, Finance and Development Committee to approve the spending of money to undertake valuations, initial studies and any other necessary work in support of potential regeneration opportunities without the need to report to Committee.
- iii) note the position with regard to the the provision of land for burials and cremations and that further consideration of the opportunity to consider the purchase of new land in the Borough for use as a cemetery is referred to Place Shaping Working Group
- iiii) Note the potential risks of building Council Homes in current climate

3. Information

Potential Development Opportunities

- 3.1 Officers are currently investigating a number of different options whereby the Council can play a role in enabling development in the Borough, especially with a view to delivering a range of housing opportunities, and particularly where this will result in an increase in the amount of affordable housing provision.

Strategic Review of Council's Asset Register

- 3.2 A strategic review of the Council's Asset Register is currently taking place. This review is looking to identify and map all of the Council's land and building assets and to consider the current use and potential options for the future use of the land and buildings if there is an opportunity, and it is appropriate, to deviate from

the current use. The outcomes of this review will be reported to Place Shaping Working Group and it is intended that in the longer term an action plan will arise out of this work.

Opportunities to bring forward land to develop affordable housing

- 3.3 Opportunities relating to non Council owned land are being explored. For example, officers have considered options relating to the **Europa site** on Newton Lane in Wigston which is currently for sale. The site consists of a large vacant factory building dating back to the early 1900s that fronts onto Newton Lane (and which features on the Council's list of Significant Local Buildings) as well as land situated between Newton Lane and Wistow Road.
- 3.4 Officers explored whether the site could provide an opportunity for the Council to refurbish and convert the factory building into offices (eg an Enterprise Centre) in a location that is close to Wigston town centre and to redevelop the rest of the site for affordable housing. Unfortunately the main limitation to this is that the Council does not have the capital funding available to purchase the site. However, the site remains on the market and as such it is available to a developer to purchase and bring forward for development and this could include the provision of affordable and market housing.
- 3.5 The Council continues to investigate opportunities to deliver new affordable housing on a small plot of land in Council ownership at **Bennett Way**, South Wigston in conjunction with any development that may come forward on the vacant 'Shoefayre' site at Kirkdale Road, South Wigston.
- 3.6 The Council has received correspondence from a developer with an appraisal of how our land can be best put to use for the overall betterment of the current site. The options and details will need expert advice before entering in to any discussions.
- 3.7 In addition, the Council would continue to look favourably on the redevelopment for residential purposes of the adjacent land bounded by Station Street, the 'Shoefayre' site, properties on Bennett Way and the car park as indicated in Employment Policy 11 of the Saved Local Plan and the South Wigston Regeneration Masterplan. It would be advantageous if all of these opportunities were to come forward together as indicated in the South Wigston Regeneration Masterplan. Any residential development of these sites would result in the provision of either a mix of market and affordable housing or, purely affordable housing.
- 3.8 Affordable housing is the favoured approach by the Government Agency, the Homes and Communities Agency and would mean that any new housing projects will be subject to affordable housing tenure and not social rents.
- 3.9 Affordable Housing rent is subject to rent controls that require a rent no more than 80% of the local rent. Rents for new build homes are likely to be higher than within the existing stock and many will be in excess of the current local rents.
- 3.10 The above principle of Affordable Tenure would apply to Council built homes which needs managing both from the point of affordability as well as the major risk of loss of stock through Right to Buy Act.

- 3.11 Any partnership with developers or Registered Providers for building of Council Housing will have to have a detailed feasibility and professional financial appraisal together with a risk managed approach particularly building risks around contaminated land and planning constraints which would see the costs rise.

Oadby and Wigston Town Centres Area Action Plan

- 3.12 The Council has an adopted Town Centres Area Action Plan which includes a number of sites that have been allocated for future development. The allocated sites include a mix of Council and privately owned land. In addition, the implementation of the public realm schemes during 2014 will significantly improve the quality and appearance of the town centres.
- 3.13 Place Shaping Working Group has supported the preparation of an Investor Prospectus which will promote a number of development opportunities in the Borough, but in particular will be able to promote the allocated sites in the town centres as an excellent place to invest. This will also provide a basis on which officers can enter more detailed conversations with developers in relation to the allocated sites. Any such conversations would be in the context of the decisions and commitments already made by the Council in relation to the implementation of the Town Centres Area Action Plan.
- 3.14 It is important that progress is made towards bringing forward the sites that have been allocated in the Town Centres Area Action Plan because these housing allocations constitute planned growth and as such contribute towards the Council's five year housing supply. It is imperative that the Council maintains a 5 year housing land supply to ensure that the future growth of the Borough remains 'plan led' and based upon the Council's agreed strategy, as opposed to being dictated by developers.

Other development opportunities

- 3.15 The Council is currently investigating opportunities for the improvement of ***Horsewell Lane Park*** including the potential renewal of the pavilion and young peoples' club buildings and improvements to the existing sports and play facilities. A Playing Pitch Strategy is currently in preparation that will evidence the extent of any proposed improvements. The outcome of the Playing Pitch Strategy is scheduled to be reported to Place Shaping Working Group at its meeting on 8 May 2014.
- 3.16 The Council is continuing to investigate opportunities to bring the vacant factory building at ***41 Canal Street, South Wigston*** back into use. Expressions of Interest are currently being invited from potential developer who would be willing to fund and work in partnership with the Council to enable the compulsory purchase and subsequent refurbishment or redevelopment of the building. In addition, a proposal has been submitted to the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) to secure funding through the Strategic Economic Plan in 2015/16 to establish an Enterprise and Innovation Centre in the building. The LLEP has invited the Council to submit a business plan in relation to this proposal which is currently being prepared. It is envisaged that the Council will be in a position to know which of these options would present the best way forward in April 2014.

Oadby and Wigston Local Plan

- 3.17 Sites continue to come forward through the development management process that deliver the policies set out in the Council's adopted Core Strategy. Examples include the former South Leicestershire College Site on Station Road, Wigston; land at Pochins Bridge in Wigston; and, the Direction for Growth on land to the south east of Wigston, for which the Council is currently considering a planning application.

Enabling the Council to react quickly to regeneration opportunities

- 3.18 It has become apparent from the work that the Council has been involved in over the last 12-18 months that when regeneration opportunities arise it is critical that the Council is in a position to move forward quickly so as not to miss out on the potential opportunity, particularly when land and building are on the market. The need to seek Committee approval currently does not allow this.
- 3.19 Therefore, it is proposed that a delegated system is established to enable the Chief Executive and/or the Director of Services in consultation with the Chief Financial Officer and the Leader of the Council and/or the Chair of the Policy, Finance and Development Committee to approve the spending of money to undertake valuations, initial studies and any other necessary work in support of potential regeneration opportunities without the need to report to Committee. Should such work indicate a positive response then a committee meeting would be organised at short notice to enable agreement of a way forward, so as not to risk missing out on the potential regeneration opportunity. In any case, should this course of delegated action be required, a report will be provided to the next available Committee to update Members on the process and outcome.

Cemetery Provision in the Borough

- 3.20 The following provides an update on the current capacity that exists within the Council's cemeteries at the request of the last meeting of the Committee.
- 3.21 At **Wigston Cemetery** there are approximately 918 new **burial plots** available which gives a lifespan of approximately 15 years. The reason this is approximate is because only 'Q Section' is currently measured out (the section where burials are currently taking place) and as such the capacity of the two remaining 'R' and 'S' sections is an estimate.
- 3.22 There are currently 40 remaining **Ash (Casket) plots** already laid out giving a lifespan of approximately 10 - 12 months. However money has been allocated within the 2014-15 capital programme to extend the current Garden of Remembrance provision and this will increase the number of plots available by approximately 120 giving about a further 3 years worth of plots. This will fill the area that has currently been set aside as a Garden of Remembrance but it may be possible to create further areas in another area of the cemetery (or start using an area of 'S' section currently set aside for burials, although this would reduce the life of the burial area).
- 3.23 There is the potential to create some **additional space** at Wigston Cemetery by bringing into use an area of land (the 'old allotment road') that runs the length of the cemetery but is outside of the current cemetery fence (runs between the cemetery and the backs of houses on Homestead Drive). This is owned by the Council and could be taken into use as part of the cemetery to increase the

lifespan by an estimated 5 years. However, there would be a cost to this of moving and re-instating the fence, removing the tarmac that is currently laid as a 'road' and preparing the area for burials) which would require further investigating an scoping if there was an intention to pursue this option further.

- 3.24 In addition, the life of Wigston Cemetery could be increased by introducing a policy that prevents 'purchase in advance' such as exists at Oadby Cemetery.
- 3.25 At **Oadby Cemetery** there are 36 **burial plots** remaining giving a lifespan of approximately 3 years.
- 3.26 The Council has recently brought an unused area of the cemetery into use as a **casket area** giving 60 casket plots - a lifespan of approx 18 months. Money has been allocated within the 2014-15 capital programme to extend this area giving a further 120 plots which will increase the lifespan by a further 3 years.
- 3.27 There is the potential to create some **additional space** at Oadby Cemetery by bringing into use the adjacent former scout hut land as a burial area. It is difficult to estimate how many plots could be accommodated here as the area would need to be cleared, measured and an allowance made for roads/paths within. A 'guesstimate' would be that 60 - 80 plots could be created giving an additional lifespan of around 6 to 8 years.
- 3.28 There is also the opportunity to consider the purchase of new land in the Borough for use as a cemetery, for example, the land adjacent to Gartree Road in Oadby which is identified in Service Policy 6 of the Council's Saved Local Plan. This land is in the ownership of the Co-Op and it is of note that recent news coverage indicates that the organisation may be selling off land in the future. It is proposed that further discussion on this matter takes place at a future meeting of Place Shaping Working Group.
- 3.29 It should be noted that there is no obligation for local authorities to provide cemeteries, but once they have been provided then there is a legal duty to maintain them.

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| Implications | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Legal | No specific implications as this is an overview report, however, there will be implications relating to each of the opportunities/matters referred to in this report. |
| Financial | No specific implications as this is an overview report, however, there will be implications associated with the value or purchase of land and the provision of affordable housing |
| Equalities | An Equalities Assessment will be undertaken where necessary in relation to the opportunities/matters referred to in this report |
| Risk | A risk assessment will be undertaken where necessary in relation to the opportunities/matters referred to in this report |