

**REPORT TO:** Cabinet

4<sup>th</sup> March 2020

**LEAD CABINET MEMBER:** Cllr Hazel Smith

**LEAD OFFICER:** Kate Swan – Leasehold Services Team Leader

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## **Communal Room Review Project -**

# **Decision Required Regarding the Future use of The Limes/Limes Close Sheltered Communal Room**

### **Executive Summary**

The purpose of this report is to decide the future use of the Sheltered Communal Building at The Limes/Limes Close, Bassingbourn presented by way of the Communal Room Review project. Extensive consultation carried out with sheltered residents here has shown that the current building is under used with lack of desire to start using the room. Communal Laundry facilities within the communal room are used by just under 50% of sheltered residents. Unlike most sheltered communal rooms in the district which are purpose built, this communal room is in an old schoolhouse. The building also has a clock tower which has a preservation order.

Bassingbourn Parish Council approached the project group to discuss the option of transferring the building to them on a long 99yr, full repairing lease for use as a village hall. The location of the room sits on the main road through Bassingbourn on the edge of the sheltered scheme, centrally within the village, which doesn't yet benefit from a community village hall. The building is used by the following external groups each week:

- Community Library and Café (3 times per week)
- Local village band
- Local Free Church
- Over 60's group

Bassingbourn benefits from a second sheltered scheme at Knutsford Road, which is located opposite The Limes/Limes Close, with the sheltered communal room for this scheme being a 5-minute walk from The Limes. The Knutsford Road communal room is extremely well attended with a variety of activities on offer. Residents at Knutsford Road are very inclusive and welcome residents from the wider community to join their daily activities.

The alternatives to this decision would be:

- Sell the building to a private developer.
- Sell the building to the Parish Council at a reduced cost.

## Key Decision

No. This is not a key decision because:

- (a) The Authority will incur negligible expenditure in making the transfer.
- (b) The significance of a change of use for the building will only impact the ward of Bassingbourn in terms of its effects on the local community.

## Recommendations

- A) It is recommended that Cabinet approves the decision to transfer the building to Bassingbourn Parish Council on a long 99-yr full repairing lease with a peppercorn rent for use as a village community hall, with the costs of transfer to be split 50:50 between the district and parish councils, up to a maximum value in total of £18,000.

## Reasons for Recommendations

The Parish Council is very keen for the village of Bassingbourn to benefit from a village hall and have clear ambition and sensible plans to deliver the project.

## Details

The sheltered communal room generates a yearly income from the four external groups which hire the room. For 2017/18 the actual income generated was £1,982 and the estimated income for 2019/20 is £2,050. This is without advertising or promoting the use of the room; income generated will be considerably more when it is actively marketed and opened for whole community use. The current groups will continue to use the room providing the Parish Council with a small confirmed annual income immediately.

A meeting has taken place with the Parish Council where terms were discussed, and they have committed to the following:

- A 99-year peppercorn lease with no break clause
- The provision of a written guarantee that any future subsidy will be fully funded by the parish.
- A written commitment that they will take our residents' needs into account when programming events (worries include noise and parking issues)
- They agree to match our costs 50:50 meaning each party will pay no more than £9,000, though this figure is likely to be less.

## Options

Four options have been considered:

- 1) a 99-year full repairing lease for a peppercorn rent with a cost to the Council of no more than £9,000.
- 2) Sell the building to the Parish Council. The Parish Council have indicated this would not be a consideration as they already have a capital project and are not able to take on another one at this time.
- 3) Sell to a private developer and raise funds for the HRA.
- 4) Develop the site ourselves for social/affordable/market sale housing.

## Implications

1. In the writing of this report, considering financial, legal, staffing, risk, equality and diversity, climate change, and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

### Financial

2. £9,000 cost to the Authority in total.

### Legal

3. Legal Deeds of Variation will need to be drafted for the existing residents of the scheme.

### Staffing

4. A cleaner employed by the authority carries out 4 hours cleaning per week at this scheme. The cleaner has been consulted and other cleaning duties can be carried out to cover these hours.

### Risks/Opportunities

5. The risk to the Authority should the parish Council take on the lease of this building would be the risk of setting a precedent that other parish councils could request the use of Council owned buildings at a peppercorn rent for community use. However, the project scope is not currently considering changing the use of other sheltered communal buildings except for Hollmans Close/St Vigors Rd, Fulbourn which may be converted back into residential use.

There is a risk that a leaseholder would not sign the deed of variation allowing the alternative use of the building, however this is negligible due to the extensive consultation and communication which has taken place with all sheltered scheme residents.

## **Equality and Diversity**

6. The building, if transferred to the parish council to use as a village hall, will be made available to all residents within the parish of Bassingbourn, regardless of age, gender or disability. The room is currently wheelchair friendly and accessible to all.

## **Consultation responses**

7. Extensive consultation has taken place with the sheltered residents at The Limes/Limes Close sheltered scheme, involving 3 drop in events, regular postal updates together with door knocking on two occasions to ensure every resident is contacted and can express their opinion on a one to one basis. The Parish Council has been consulted together with local councillors and external groups who use the room.

## **Effect on Council Priority Areas**

### **A modern and caring Council**

8. The Council has listened to local sheltered residents who feel the negative effects of having to pay for the upkeep of a large building they don't use. We have recognised the need within the village of Bassingbourn for a village hall and have listened to the parish council who are keen to take on the running of a village hall and wish to promote its use within the wider community. The parish have demonstrated they have clear ambition for the building and are committed to making it work for the whole village. This shows modern and progressive thinking to look for a solution which will benefit our residents and the wider community.

## **Background Papers**

Building photos and maps

## **Appendices**

Appendix: Attachments as above.

## **Report Author:**

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