

Report to:	Scrutiny and Overview Committee 15 November 2022
Lead Cabinet Member:	Cllr Brian Milnes – Deputy Leader and Lead Cabinet Member for Environment
Lead Officer:	Jeff Membery – Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services

Future use of South Cambridgeshire Hall, Cambourne

Executive Summary

1. This briefing note explains the current thinking by officers on the best use of space within South Cambs Hall. The appended floorplans show an early stage proposal to have most SCDC officers working on the first floor to allow more space for renting out and the provision of potential community facilities.

Key Decision

2. No

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that Scrutiny and Overview Committee:
 - a) Review the proposals for the best use of space at South Cambs Hall, make any appropriate recommendations or raise any concerns identified.
 - b) Set an appropriate date for an update report to come back to the committee to enable it to continue to review progress.

Reasons for Recommendation

4. These recommendations are required to enable officers to progress with the remodelling of the floorspace whilst looking to accommodate the views of members.

Details

5. Background

Over the last few years advances of technology has lead to an increase in the potential for a previously mainly office based workforce to operate flexibly using a laptop and/or mobile phone. At South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) this was exemplified by the “Council Anywhere” project which was successfully rolled out by early 2020.

The move to less “office based” working was given additional impetus by the need to work from home where possible due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Many SCDC staff were able to work from home as productively as they would have in the office and this - combined with the ecological advantages of a reduced need to travel – resulted in SCDC formally adopting a Hybrid Working Policy in early 2022.

The impact of the changes in technology and the resulting change to working arrangements means that there was a requirement to revisit how we use South Cambs Hall (SCH) to its best advantage in light of an internal reduced demand for office space. A space survey had been commissioned and undertaken to suggest options in late 2019/ early 2020. This provided some useful information, but the timing of this report was unfortunate, being produced as it was just days before the Country went into lockdown due to the Covid pandemic. Post pandemic information from teams across the Council suggests that on any one given day significantly less people will be working from SCH than was the case when the report was drafted. (The working assumption now is that on any given day a maximum attendance at SCH will be 65% or less of pre-pandemic levels).

Some parts of SCH are already rented out to other organisations such as the National Health Service (NHS) and the County Council. Space is also provided for shared services colleagues and, on an ad-hoc basis, to people from partner organisations (such as the City Council) who are able to “touch down” at SCH if they happen to be working nearby. These are features that it would be beneficial to keep or expand in any future arrangements along with investigating the potential for introducing community-based facilities and/or space for use by start up businesses as referenced by members of this committee in its meeting in October.

Alongside the changing demands identified above, there is also a need to continue the renovation of what is now a 20-year-old building where some areas are in need of maintenance and refurbishment to secure both its structural integrity and improve the technical infrastructure. Work is already underway to secure the curtain walling at both the front and back of the building, and it is likely that the inflatable roof will need some work next year. There is also a need to update and replace the current “floor boxes” that provide access to power and IT systems.

Current Proposals

An outline of the current proposals are shown on the floor plans appended to this briefing note, although more work is ongoing in respect of the detail. At this stage, these floor plans are intended only to give the committee an impression of how the space may be used and are not intended to be specific detailed proposals. The current thinking by officers is as follows; -

1st Floor

It is expected that reduced frequency of attendance at SCH by staff means that going forward the vast majority of our people will be housed on the first floor which releases space for other uses, and both facilitates collaborative working and also helps engender a sense of community.

It is proposed that, although any officer will be able to sit at any of the desks on this floor, it is divided into zones, each connected to the different service area. Any specialist equipment, documentation or reference material relating to that service area will be stored in that zone, and teams belonging to that service area will normally – but not exclusively – sit in those zones when they are in the office. It is also being considered whether the zones could be colour coded for ease of identification.

Desking arrangements and facilities provided will be inspired by the model trialled in the “collaboration area” and feedback received from staff who used those facilities will inform the final proposed layout. The infrastructure improvements covered earlier in this report -such as the provision of new floor boxes – will be undertaken once the new arrangements are finalised to minimise disruption.

2nd Floor

Currently this floor is a “mixed” space and officers’ thoughts for the second floor is that it will continue to provide space for our colleagues from 3C ICT and Legal as well as enabling more space to be available for tenants such as the NHS or Trading standards. Over the past year we have had a few organisations approach us about the potential to rent out space in our offices and the proposal allows us to explore those options.

Ground Floor

Currently the ground floor houses the reception area, some rented out space, workspaces for SCDC staff, space for 3C staff and meeting rooms. The proposal to move most SCDC staff to the first floor and use the second floor for 3C colleagues and rental space frees up much of the ground floor to create space for the provision of cost-effective office space for start-up companies and third sector organisations within South Cambridgeshire. We will need to retain a reception presence with some meeting rooms retained, however we believe there will also be the opportunity to include community facilities.

Timescales

The initial focus is on the changes to be made to the first floor and it is these that will free up the space on the other floors for alternative use.

It is anticipated that the remodelling of the first floor will be undertaken in Q4 of the 22/23 financial year with work on the 2nd and ground floors being completed in Q1 and Q2 of the 23/24 financial year.

Implications

Financial

6. It is expected that the costs of enabling the changes required will mainly be delivered from within existing budgets or existing reserves. However, a capital bid of £50,000 has been put in for the 23/24 financial year to fund the work that will be needed on the ground floor to facilitate the provision of the office space for start-up businesses/third sector bodies and the potential community facilities.

Equality and Diversity

7. Once a proposed layout for each floor has been determined an equalities impact assessment will be undertaken to ensure compliance.

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

Growing local businesses and economies

8. The proposals allow for cost effective office space to be provided for start up businesses within South Cambridgeshire.

Background Papers

None

Appendices

Appendix A: Office Floorplans

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