



CABINET – 31ST JANUARY 2018

SUBJECT: LAND AT CORONATION ROAD EAST UI BLACKWOOD

REPORT BY: ACTING DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES AND S151 OFFICER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval to the principle of disposing of land between Coronation Road and Lilian Road, Blackwood (shown edged black on the attached plan) to the Pobl Group.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 In February 2013, the land at the rear of Lilian Road, Blackwood was declared surplus to requirement.
- 2.2 Officers have identified a need for affordable housing and a proposal for the site is being worked up with Pobl (our housing association partner).

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

The contents of this report link to the following key strategic objectives:

3.1 Housing Focus

“Encourage the development and maintenance of high quality, well designed and efficient, sustainable homes and environments which can meet all needs.” (*Community Strategy: Living Environment – Objective 1*)

“Ensure an adequate and appropriate range of housing sites are available across the County Borough in the most suitable locations to meet the housing requirements of all sections of the population” (*Local Development Plan –Objective 9*)

“Meet housing requirements through the provision of a range of good quality, affordable housing options.” (*Aim 5: Affordable Housing – Local Housing Strategy*)

“Provide good quality, well-managed homes in communities where people want to live, and offer people housing choices which meet their needs and aspirations.” (*Aim 6: Housing Management - Local Housing Strategy*)

“Promote sustainable and mixed communities that are located in safe and attractive environments.” (*Aim 11: Community Regeneration - Local Housing Strategy*)

There is a need to increase the number of affordable homes for purchase or rent (*Improving Lives and Communities – Homes in Wales – April 2010*)

3.2 Well Being of Future Generations

The proposal contributes to the following Well-being Goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015:

- ✓ A sustainable Wales
- ✓ A prosperous Wales
- ✓ A more equal Wales
- ✓ A Wales of cohesive communities.

4. THE REPORT

4.1 Policy Context

- 4.1.1 There is a significant need for affordable housing across the County Borough. Policy CW11 of the Local Development Plan (LDP) sets Affordable Housing Targets throughout Caerphilly County Borough, ranging from 40% in the higher viability area around Caerphilly Basin, to 0% in the Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Area (HOVRA). Economic indicators and housing need have influenced these targets.
- 4.1.2 An operational housing requirement for the provision of affordable housing has been identified; the housing waiting list data for the Blackwood area demonstrates that there is housing demand in this area. The 2015 Local Housing Market Assessment identifies a shortfall throughout the County Borough of 526 affordable homes per annum. It also identifies a high number of households who are living in unsuitable housing because their accommodation no longer meets their requirements arising from disabilities, medical conditions or old age.
- 4.1.3 Members will recall that the Council's currently zoned housing association partners are United Welsh, operating in the western valley and Pobl, operating in the eastern valleys. As this site falls within the area zoned for Pobl, it is the Council's partner for this scheme.
- 4.1.4 Pobl will prepare a scheme in consultation with relevant officers to identify a mix of properties that addresses the needs identified within the Council's Housing register. Other benefits that Pobl can bring are the emphasis on sustainable construction including Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3+ and Targeted Recruitment and Training (TR&T).
- 4.1.5 The Protocol for Disposal of Property states, at paragraph 8.1(iv), that in those cases where it is possible to market a property but the Head of Property is of the opinion that this course of action may not be in the best financial or service interests of the Authority, Cabinet approval will be obtained before direct negotiations are opened with a single party, and the views of ward members will be taken into consideration.

4.2 The Planning Perspective

- 4.2.1 The site in question lies within the settlement boundary of Blackwood, as defined in the Adopted Local Development Plan (LDP). The settlement boundary defines the area within which development would normally be acceptable subject to all relevant policy considerations and all other development management considerations.
- 4.2.2 Policy SP6 of the LDP requires development proposals to 'contribute to creating sustainable places by having full regard to the context of the local, natural, historic and built environment'.
- 4.2.3 A shortfall in affordable housing is a significant issue facing residents in the county borough. In this context Policy SP15 seeks to deliver at least 964 affordable houses through the planning system up to 2021.
- 4.2.4 In summary, officers consider that the release of this site for residential development is acceptable in principle, subject to all relevant policy considerations and all other development management considerations that will be dealt with at the Planning Application stage.

- 4.3 In February 2013, Social Services declared the land at the rear of Lilian Road, Blackwood surplus to requirement and, in accordance with the protocol on the strategic and operational management of the Council's property, responsibility for the site was transferred to the corporate portfolio.
- 4.4 Anecdotally, the site has had a history of anti-social behaviour – fly-tipping, fires etc. – although there are no formal reports of problems at the location.
- 4.5 Since then Property has been working to bring the site forward for disposal; colleagues in Planning and Highways indicated some technical difficulties with any proposal for development and officers have been working collaboratively to overcome the issues.
- 4.6 Notwithstanding the declaration in February 2013, Social Services has continued to make use of part of the site for parking and did make representations that a strip of this land is used as car parking for the resource centre (as staff are unable to park in the street and that it was one of the things the neighbours insisted on when the service was set up here); officers in Social Services suggested that, if this is taken away, it will cause problems for the neighbours and will lead to complaints as Lillian Road is “renowned” for its car parking problems. Furthermore, staff coming into the service, and going home late at night might be at risk if unable to park close to the house.

The Assistant Director – Children's Services reviewed the matter holistically, and recognised

1. the site's history of anti-social behaviour, and
2. that there is alternative parking, both on and off road, in the locality.

Accordingly, he agreed that the Service representations should be withdrawn

- 4.7 There is no operational requirement for the site other than a need for affordable housing (identified by colleagues in Housing) and we are working up a proposal for the site with Pobl (our housing association partner).
- 4.8 Cllr Dix is against the sale of the land, as using the land for housing will result in the loss of habitat for invertebrates. Additionally, any houses on the land would create traffic problems, as the lane is narrow, with its junctions onto the main road being unsuited to deal with the extra traffic.
- 4.9 Both Cllr Etheridge and Cllr Farina-Childs have concerns about additional traffic flow and volumes; whilst Cllr Etheridge appreciates there may be a shortfall in houses, he does not believe this to be an appropriate site for housing.
- 4.10 Pursuant to section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972, disposal of public open space requires that an advertisement be placed in a newspaper circulating in the area, for two consecutive weeks; in this instance advertisements were placed in 'The Campaign' on 26th July and 2nd August 2017.
- 4.10.1 By the deadline for responses (noon on 17th August 2017) 15 (fifteen) objections had been received, all of the opinion that the land is not appropriate to be built on referencing: a lack of privacy, light, and space; increased noise levels; increased traffic; reduced parking spaces; highway safety; drainage and flooding issues; ecological concerns.
- 4.10.2 These are all matters to be determined as part of the Planning process, not the sale of the land. As noted above, ward members have already voiced opposition to the disposal.
- 4.10.3 Although outside the deadline for responses noted above, Cllr Dix has asked that the following observations from an elderly resident, who is severely disabled and unable to walk, be included:

1. If the land is sold and houses built, the only safe access to the town centre will be lost; the resident drives a mobility scooter from home, crosses the road and then drives past the proposed site onto Gordon Rd; there is no other safe access/route to the town (see plan 2 attached on which the current route is shown dashed).
2. The sale will mean that she will not be able to access the town, as the road past the site will see a marked increase in traffic, due to builders etc. The situation will not improve if the houses are built as the road is very narrow and will be busy with increased traffic from the new houses. There is no footpath and no footpath will be constructed, due to the road being so narrow.

The locations of the dropped kerbs are noted also on Plan 2; it can be seen that the assertion there is no other safe access/route to the town is not sustainable although it might be argued that the alternative route via Coronation Road and Gordon Road is somewhat less commodious.

- 4.11 In the event that Pobl is unable to proceed at market value (because its total cost of development, including land acquisition and build cost, is limited by Welsh Government regulations), a further report will be brought forward setting out options for members' consideration.

5. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 5.1 This proposal contributes to the Well-being Goals as set out in Links to Strategy above. The scheme is also consistent with the five ways of working set out in the sustainable development principle, as defined in the Act. The scheme is integrated in that it contributes to a number of the Well-being goals and supports the objectives of other stakeholders within the community. Implementation of the scheme exemplifies collaboration across organisational boundaries; working together for the good of our communities in pursuit of shared objectives.
- 5.2 RSLs, as developers, generally take a longer view, protecting (as far as possible) and improving the local environment and infrastructure for the future. Other benefits that RSLs can bring are an emphasis on sustainable construction including Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3+, and Targeted Recruitment and Training that will enhance employment prospects and skills of local people, particularly the young and those at a disadvantage, and promote equality of opportunity.

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) screening has been completed in accordance with the Council's Equalities Consultation and Monitoring Guidance and no potential for unlawful discrimination and / or low level or minor negative impact have been identified, therefore a full EqIA has not been carried out.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 A capital receipt will be received from the sale of this land.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no personnel implications of the report.

9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 Initially, Social Services raised an objection to the proposal on operational grounds but, once it was demonstrated that alternative solutions exist, the objection was withdrawn.
- 9.2 Disposal of public open space requires an advertisement to be placed in a newspaper circulating in the area, for two consecutive weeks (26th July and 2nd August 2017). Ward members were advised of the proposed sale, as was Blackwood Town Council. Officers are content that the rules on consultation have been observed.
- 9.3 Cllrs Dix, Etheridge, and Farina-Childs all oppose the sale of the land for the reasons given in the report.
- 9.4 Blackwood Town Council raised no objection to the sale of the land but reserved the right to comment on any plans as and when a planning application is submitted.
- 9.5 An advertisement was placed in 'The Campaign' on 26th July and 2nd August 2017, for two consecutive weeks; 15 (fifteen) objections had been received, all of the opinion that the land is not appropriate to be built on referencing: a lack of privacy, light, and space; increased noise levels; increased traffic; reduced parking spaces; highway safety; drainage and flooding issues; ecological concerns.
- 9.6 These are all matters to be determined as part of the Planning process, not the sale of the land. As noted above, ward members have already voiced opposition to the disposal.
- 9.7 There was a sixteenth objection, received after the deadline, from an elderly resident expressing personal safety concerns relating to the use of a mobility scooter. However, as noted in 4.10.3(2) there is an alternative route via the pavements of Coronation Road and Gordon Road.
- 9.8 There are no other views expressed as a result of consultation that differ from the recommendation.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 That land shown edged black on the plan attached at Appendix 1 is transferred, on terms to be agreed, to the Pobl Group.
- 10.2 That approval of the detailed terms of that transfer is delegated to the Head of Property Services in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Homes and Places.
- 10.3 If terms cannot be agreed, a further report will be brought forward setting out options for members' consideration.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 The asset is surplus to the Council's operational requirements.
- 11.2 An affordable housing scheme will be delivered that meets with the needs identified within both the Council's Local Housing Market Assessment and the Housing register.
- 11.3 Paragraph 8.1(iv) of the Disposal Procedure in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution states that Cabinet approval will be obtained before direct negotiations are opened with a single party where it is possible to market a property but where the Head of Property Services is of the opinion that this course of action may not be in the best financial or service interests of the Authority.

12. STATUTORY POWER

12.1 Local Government Acts 1972 and 2000, and The Local Government Act 1972: General Disposal Consent (Wales) 2003. This is a Cabinet Function.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Plan showing the land
Appendix 2 Plan showing the current route and locations of the dropped kerbs on Coronation Road and Gordon Road



