

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE**

Thursday, 26th April, 2012

**Present:-** Councillor Michael Clarke – in the Chair

Councillors Councillor Ian Wilkes, Cllr David Becket, Councillor Eddie Boden and Councillor Mark Olszewski

### **13. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr Miss Cooper, Cllr Snell and Cllr Mrs Heames.

### **14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **15. MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

That the minutes from the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2012 be agreed as a correct record.

### **16. THE REFURBISHMENT AND RE-USE OF THE FORMER ST GILES & ST GEORGES SCHOOL BUILDING SCRUTINY BRIEF**

A scrutiny brief was considered regarding the refurbishment and re-use of the former St. Giles & St. Georges School Building.

Officers confirmed the Victorian former primary school was not listed but was of local interest. The LEA had now built a new school in Poolfields and the Council had purchased the old school buildings to ensure that they were not demolished. A risk assessment had been carried out regarding the cost to the Council of maintaining the building both now and in the future, this was updated monthly and costs were minimal with regards to maintaining the buildings. It was however pointed out that the integrity of the building would decrease if it remained empty and that the maintenance costs could increase.

The Council had been considering re-furbishing the buildings as a 'Centre for Creative Industries', with small units for small enterprises. It was hoped that these small enterprises would be attracted to the town centre setting and the quality of the building. Consideration had also been given with regards to moving the museum and art gallery to the buildings but the costs of refurbishment had at that time been considered to expensive and public money from organisations such as Advantage West Midlands was no longer available. It was confirmed that the property had been purchased with a restrictive covenant regarding its future use.

The question was raised as to whether the covenant could be removed. Officers stated that if the County Council had cleared the site and put it on the open market then the purchase cost would have been significantly increased, because of the covenant and the fact the buildings were intended to be used for community/regeneration purposes they had been purchased at a reduced rate.

There has previously been some interest in the site from the Baptist Church and Choices Housing. With regard to Choices Housing schemes had been designed and architectural drawings prepared and a presentation made to Cabinet. The Council were now in a position to approach Choices regarding proceeding with the scheme. Attempts had been made to work with the Baptist Church but it had been unable to sell its current property and had decided to go it alone. It was confirmed that the buildings would not be sold to the private market to ensure that they were preserved.

If Choices opted not to continue with the project then an alternative plan would be produced. This could involve exploring the removal of the restrictive covenant, which would require liaison with Staffordshire County Council. Action would need to be taken quickly and it would be necessary to revisit what had already been done.

It was thought that any alternative plans would involve leasing the property rather than selling it. Officers confirmed that there was a preference for long term leases for town centre properties. This ensured a measure of control and after the initial rent-free period, a long term income. There could probably be a generous rent free period if the occupants were prepared to bring the buildings up to specification.

Members also questioned why the building was no longer being considered as an alternative venue for the museum especially if the sale of land at the Brampton was also taken into account. Members considered that this option should be revisited if the Choices option was not viable.

**17. WORKPLAN**

The Committee considered the work plans and progress of the various Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Health Scrutiny Committee.

With regard to Health Scrutiny and in particular Health and Well Being Boards, it was noted there were areas where the Council could progress independently from the County Council.

**RESOLVED:** That the work plans be agreed and updated.

**18. FORWARD PLAN**

A report was submitted identifying items listed in the forward plan of key decisions to ascertain if further examination of any issues was considered appropriate.

**Resolved:** That the contents of the Forward Plan be noted.

**COUNCILLOR MICHAEL CLARKE**  
**Chair**