



COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

UPDATE ON FORMER WEST CALDER WORKSPACE, SOCIETY PLACE, WEST CALDER

REPORT BY HEAD OF FINANCE AND PROPERTY SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To advise of the current position and proposed future actions in terms of the vacant property known formerly as West Calder Workspace, Society Place, West Calder.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council Executive:

1. Notes the property is surplus to requirements and has been marketed since early 2014 with limited interested received to date;
2. Notes the ongoing revenue costs associated with the property and that the current position is unsustainable;
3. Notes the interest in the property from West Calder and Harburn Community Development Trust regarding Community Asset Transfer and instructs officers to report back on the outcome of the trusts feasibility and proposal development;
4. Recognises that any asset transfer will require to be completed within twelve months to minimise ongoing revenue cost burdens and mitigate the ongoing empty property risks.
5. Instructs officers to prepare costs and undertake technical investigations for the demolition of the property to provide a cleared site for marketing should the proposed asset transfer not proceed; and
6. Notes that a future report will be presented to consider the proposed asset transfer.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	Being honest, open and accountable; providing equality of opportunities; making best use of our resources; working in partnership
II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	None.

III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None.
IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators	None.
V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	None.
VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	Existing revenue costs represent a pressure on the Tenanted Non-Residential Portfolio budgets and staff management time. Community Asset Transfer or Demolition would result in a saving of £35,000 per annum and provide a site more suitable for redevelopment
VII Consideration at PDSP	Not Applicable.
VIII Other consultations	Local elected members for the ward have been provided with a copy of this report for their information. The West Calder and Harburn Community Development Trust and the West Calder Community Council have been notified of the contents of this report.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D1 Background

Council Executive on 21 May 2013 approved the former West Calder Workspace, Society Place, West Calder being marketed for sale. The property is shown highlighted in Appendix 1. This decision was taken on the basis that the condition and suitability of the workspace was no longer viable for the council to repair and modernise. The facility was replaced by the development of the former surgery property at Dickson Street, West Calder.

Officers engaged with West Calder and Harburn Community Council (WC&HCC) and West Calder and Harburn Development Trust (WC&HCDT) regarding their aspirations to retain the building and identify suitable uses for the property. Discussions began before the property became vacant however, to date no formal request for asset transfer have been submitted for the use of the building by the community. The WC&HCDT have however, recently secured funding to undertake a feasibility to develop proposals to retain the property.

The property has continued to be advertised for sale subject to the planning brief which reflects the community desire to retain the building. Although there has been sporadic interest as a refurbishment project, nothing tangible has materialised.

During this time, the condition of the property has continued to deteriorate and the property has been subject to ongoing vandalism and break-ins. It is important to note that the property directly borders both the railwayline and private houses and therefore the continued deterioration represents an increasing health and safety issue.

D2 Current Position

The property still remains on the market for sale. However, with the changes to Non Domestic Rates in 2016 that saw industrial properties subject to 90% vacant rates, the property is now incurring approximately £35,000 of rates liabilities per annum. The property will also be subject to surface water and sewage charges from April 2017, as well as increased non domestic rates. These costs, along with any works to ensure health and safety and security is maintained are unsustainable.

The property over the past year has increasingly become subject to vandalism and regular break-ins. Given the proximity to the railwayline which will be electrified therefore increasing risks and being within a residential area the property has been identified as an emerging health and safety concern.

As noted, interest has been expressed by the community (West Calder and Harburn Development Trust) to acquire the property by Asset Transfer. Funding has been secured by the community to undertake a feasibility for the redevelopment of the property. This will be completed in the near future and determine the viability of community ownership of the property.

D3 Proposal

Officers have developed a proposal which seeks to mitigate the long term ongoing expenditure, staff resource and statutory compliance burdens this property represents whilst also trying to accommodate community aspirations to retain the property. The proposal is in two stages, as follows:

1. **Asset Transfer** - Officers will continue to work with the community to develop formal proposals as part of their current feasibility work, leading to the submission of an asset transfer request prior to the end of 2017.

This is the first step of the asset transfer process and the council will remain liable for all costs for the building until ownership transfers. Due to the ongoing burdens the property represents, it is proposed that a deadline of one year is set for the formal transfer of the property failing which officers are instructed to progress demolition and site clearance works.

During the next year the property will continue to be marketed for redevelopment and should any offers be received these will be reported to Council Executive and advised to the community.

2. **Demolition of the building** – Should no commercial offer or community asset transfer be concluded within twelve months the only remaining viable option will be demolition. It should be noted that this has not been approached lightly due to the historic interest in the community to retain the building. With the limited interest for redevelopment over the past four years and no firm community proposals to date it is prudent to consider demolition as a viable option to mitigate the ongoing revenue and empty property risk burdens.

Costs for demolition of the building were previously estimated at £150,000, plus the cost of relocation of the sub-station (subject to negotiation with Scottish Power). Officers will progress investigations to finalise costs and technical requirements in parallel to ongoing marketing and taking forward community proposals. Should demolition occur this would provide a cleared site with the potential for residential development site and generation of a capital receipt for the council. Historic elements of the building such as the “co-operative bakery alcove door” would be proposed to be retained and stored until a more suitable place is found within the community.

It is proposed that a future report will be provided to Council Executive to consider the outcome of the community asset transfer proposals and whether demolition is to be progressed.

E. CONCLUSION

Despite marketing and previous community interests the property remains an ongoing revenue expenditure and empty property risks burden. It is therefore proposed to implement a two stage process to enable community asset transfer failing which the property will be demolished. This process will remove burdens and gives a clear direction of travel.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

“The Future of West Calder Workspace, Society Place, West Calder” – Council Executive 21 May 2013.

Appendices/Attachments:

Appendix 1 – Location Plan

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Date of meeting: 29 August 2017