

Agenda Item No: **Report No:**
Report Title: **St Mary's Social Centre – Response to Petition**
Report To: **Council** **Date:** **8th May**
Cabinet Member: **Cllr James Page**
Ward(s) Affected: **Lewes Castle; Lewes Priory**
Report By: **Corporate Head of Property, Regeneration and Enterprise**
Contact Officer(s)-
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Purpose of Report:

To respond to the Petition received on 27th February 2013 in connection with St Mary's Social Centre, Christie Road, Lewes.

Officers Recommendation(s):

- 1 To note the petition and the strong community support for services and facilities provided by St Mary's Community Centre and to take this into account if and when at any time in the future there is any proposal either to sell or redevelop this site.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. At the Council meeting on 27th February 2013, a petition signed by 4158 people was presented. The petition states:

'Petition to Lewes District Council to save St Mary's Social Centre and Supporter's Club from being sold for redevelopment.'

Information

1. Background

- 1.1 St Mary's Social Centre is a community facility in the Lewes Castle ward. The Supporter's Club operates an annual membership and provides licensed premises; entertainment; traditional bar games such as skittles, snooker, pool and darts; and an external seating and BBQ area.
- 1.2 The property is leased to the Trustees of St Mary's Social Centre. The lease is for a term of 15 years which expires on 24th March 2022. The current rental is £10,000.00 p.a. The tenant has a full repairing lease.
- 1.3 The centre is 600sqm and sits within 0.265ha (2650m²) of land in the centre of Lewes Town.

The Regeneration Property Tender

- 1.4 In early 2012 the estates office identified a number of sites in Council ownership which were not being used for the direct provision of Council services.
- 1.5 St Mary's Social Centre is listed as one of a potential 49 properties, spread out across the District, that the Council owns. A high level assessment indicated that there is the potential for the Council and its chosen partner to deliver up to 700 new homes; enhanced community facilities and open space; and new commercial space.
- 1.6 In May 2012 Cabinet approved the recommendation set out in the report "Tender for Property Joint Partnership" to go out to tender for a partner who the council could work with on a number of council owned sites. The list of potential sites were included as part of a confidential appendix to the report.
- 1.7 The tender exercise is underway and is being carried out in accordance with EU procurement rules. The tender exercise does not commit the Council to any sale or redevelopment of the St. Mary's or any other site.
- 1.8 The instruction which has gone out to potential tenderers is that the Council has 4 key objectives. The first of these is the enhancement of community facilities and accessible open space, with no loss of existing facilities. The others are regeneration benefits, risk mitigation and a financial return.
- 1.9 Any proposal to dispose of any site would need to be the subject of a future report to Cabinet. Tenants and stakeholders will be consulted before any such report goes forward. Any redevelopment proposal would need to be the subject of a planning application in the usual way and in accordance with the usual planning public consultation process.

2 The Planning Policy Context

- 2.1 The Council's adopted planning policies work to preserve community facilities. Local Plan Policy RE10 prevents the loss of valued community facilities unless it can be demonstrated that adequate provision can be made either on or off the site. This policy is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which requires planning decisions to achieve places that promote opportunities for meetings with members of the community who might not otherwise come into contact with each other; and to guard against the unnecessary loss of valued social, recreational and cultural facilities that the community needs.
- 2.2 This local and national policy approach has been carried through into Core Policy 7 of the Proposed Submission Core Strategy, which states that the Council will protect existing community facilities and resist the loss of sites or premises currently used for the provision of community facilities unless:
- (a) A viability appraisal demonstrates that continued use as a community facility or service is no longer feasible; or
 - (b) An alternative facility of equivalent or better quality to meet community needs is available or will be provided in an accessible location within the same locality; or
 - (c) A significant enhancement to the nature and quality of an existing facility will result from the redevelopment of part of the site or premises for alternative uses.

3 Register of Assets of Community Value

- 3.1 On 5th April the Council approved a nomination for St Mary's Social Community Centre to be an asset of community value. The Centre has now been listed in accordance with the legislation. This means that if the Council were to consider any disposal of property the community would have 6 months to prepare a bid to buy the asset.

4 Financial Appraisal

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 St. Mary's Social Centre is currently the subject of a 15 year lease from the District Council. The lease is due to expire on 24th March 2022.

- 5.2 The lease contains a six month landlord's break clause in the event the landlord wishes to demolish the premises, or part, for or in connection with any scheme for redevelopment.
- 5.3 Exercising the break clause will end the contractual lease, but a statutory tenancy (under Part II of the Landlord & Tenant Act 1954) will come into effect automatically at that point and, if termination of the lease is contested by the tenant, the Council would have to satisfy the court that it has proper grounds to oppose a renewal of the lease.
- 6 Background Papers**

Tender for Property Joint Partnership Cabinet Report May 2012

<http://cmis.lewes.gov.uk/CmisWebPublic/Binary.ashx?Document=4998>