

## **PROPERTY REVIEW - COBDEN ROAD CENTRE, COBDEN ROAD, SEVENOAKS**

### **Cabinet – 6<sup>th</sup> December 2012**

Report of the: Corporate Resources Director

Status: For Consideration

Also considered by: Finance Advisory Group 24 October 2012  
Performance and Governance Committee 13 November 2012

Key Decision: No

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### **This report supports the Key Aim of**

Effective Management of Council Resources (Review of the Council's property holdings)

**Portfolio Holder** Cllr. Ramsay

**Head of Service** Head of Legal & Democratic Services – Mrs. Christine Nuttall

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### **Recommendation to Cabinet**

That the Cobden Road Centre, Sevenoaks be declared surplus to the Council's requirements and sold on the open market by auction.

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### **Introduction**

1. The District Council has owned the Cobden Road Centre for some 22 years, having acquired this former Kent County Council school in the sum of £270,000 to provide voluntary sector accommodation.
2. At the time of the purchase the property had the benefit of a planning consent to demolish the premises and to construct 6 town houses on the site (this consent has been long expired)
3. The property was converted in the sum of £125,000 to provide three areas of accommodation, the bulk (approx.. 90%) of the original school buildings was let to Age Concern as a day centre and offices, a portacabin in the former playground was let to Relate (West Kent Marriage Guidance) as counselling rooms and one room within the main building was let to Parenthood (Time to Talk) as an office and counselling room Age Concern contributed a further £112,800 towards fitting out their accommodation.
4. The Cobden Road Centre was originally constructed in the 1880's and although maintained over the years many of the building elements are close to their life expectancy. The 10 year Asset Maintenance plan identified £445,000 of work

necessary just to maintain the property not including improvements or the cost of compliance with legislation (Disability Discrimination Act, Fire Precautions Act, Electricity in the Workplace regulations etc.).

5. Age Concern relocated to their own purpose built premises in 2007 and Relate surrendered their lease in 2010. The last remaining tenant, Time to Talk, vacated their accommodation in August 2012 and now operate from accommodation shared with Sevenoaks Mind in St John's Road, Sevenoaks.
6. Maintenance and running costs over the 5 years has averaged £5,000 p.a. of which a proportion was recharged to the tenants. With the property now vacant the Council's liability for non domestic rates amounts to some £9,700 p.a. and the annual insurance premium amounts to £1,190 p.a.
7. The District Council had purchased the property to provide accommodation for voluntary sector organisations and given the future costs of renovation, modernisation and the lack of possible tenants for this size of accommodation (some 570 m<sup>2</sup> of usable floor area) it is recommended that the Cobden Road Centre be declared surplus to the Council's requirements.
8. The property is located with the Hartslands Conservation Area and as such there is a presumption that the property would be retained for conversion (subject to planning consent) and could only be considered for redevelopment in exceptional circumstances.
9. If sold on the open market and given the conservation area status it is anticipated that conversion into one or more dwellings would be favoured by any purchaser in which case a capital receipt in the region of £400,000 could be expected (this could have increased to in excess of £500,000 if redevelopment were permitted).
10. With a property such as this former school and given its location within a conservation area it is important to ensure that it is widely marketed and it is recommended that the property be placed in a suitable auction.
11. Any sale particulars will include a suitable statement relating to the planning status of the property and location.

#### **Other Options Considered and/or Rejected**

12. Retain the property – there are no operational requirements for this accommodation and the cost of refurbishing the accommodation to a lettable standard would be prohibitive
13. Renovate the property for disposal – this would involve the Council in capital expenditure and may not deliver what is required by the market
14. Dispose of the property for redevelopment – this course of action is not considered feasible given its planning status

## **Key Implications**

### Financial

15. The disposal of the is property will add a capital sum to the Council's reserves and reduce revenue expenditure in respect of non domestic rates, insurance and which could be incurred in maintaining it in a safe and acceptable condition

### Community Impact and Outcomes

16. The impact of the change of status of this property within the Hartslands Conservation Area will be controlled as part of the planning process. There is currently an informal agreement to allow local residents to park within the site which will cease upon change of ownership.

### Legal, Human Rights etc.

17. There are no legal or humans rights issues identified

### Resource (non-financial)

18. There are no non-financial resource issues

### Value For Money and Asset Management

19. This proposal conforms to the Councils' strategy of not retaining property that does not accommodate a service requirement and reduces revenue costs to the Council whist increasing the Council capital reserves.

### Equality Impacts

20. This proposal is not a policy issue nor has any equality impacts

## **RISK ASSESSMENT STATEMENT**

21. Retaining the property will incur the Council in maintenance and security costs with no identifiable accommodation requirements.
22. Disposal by auction may lead to pressures for the property to be redeveloped this can be mitigated by ensuring that the planning status is well publicised in advance of any disposal.

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Location map

Appendix B – Comments from Local Member

## **Contact Officer(s):**

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**Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources**