

57 SOUTH STREET, ROCHFORD

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report advises Members of the responses received from the Council's partner agencies about the future use of 57 South Street and recommends that the present use be discontinued on expiry of the lease and the building and adjacent land be disposed of.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 At the last meeting of this Committee, Members considered the future of this property, which is owned by the Council and currently leased to Essex County Council for use as a youth information and education facility.
- 2.2 Before making any decision, the views of the Council's partners in this project and a site visit were requested.
- 2.3 The site visit took place on 8 February and was attended by five Members: Cllrs T G Cutmore, R A Amner, J P Cottis, Mrs H L A Glynn and Mrs S A Harper, who recognised the inadequacy of the building for use as a youth facility.
- 2.4 Comments have been received from Rochford Parish Council and Essex County Council's Youth Service, which are attached (Appendix 1).

3 DISCUSSION

- 3.1 As was mentioned in the earlier report, the building has provided a venue for limited information and training services to be provided for local young people, as well as a facility for occasional use for domestic violence counselling, but the youth activities are severely constrained by the size and layout of the structure. Essex Youth Service wishes to locate elsewhere in Rochford into a more suitable facility.
- 3.2 Rochford Parish Council considers that it is not cost effective to keep the youth facility open. They have expressed concern about the condition of the building. The Property Maintenance and Highways Manager has advised that, over the term of the lease, many responsive repairs to the fabric of the building have been carried out as well as routine planned inspection and servicing of the stairlift, electrical, alarm and heating services. The Building Surveyor has concluded that the damage to the stairlift has probably been caused by misuse and the way in which the building is being used inevitably leads to heavy wear and tear on the internal decoration, etc.
- 3.3 Consideration might be given to use of the building for a different purpose, but Members need to bear in mind a number of constraints, including:-
- the layout and room sizes, including access issues.

- the age, condition, work required to enable longer term use for any purpose, and the potential costs of conversion to make the building suitable for an alternative use.
 - location – away from the main shopping/public transport centre.
 - location within the Rochford Conservation Area, in an area zoned for residential use.
- 3.4 Use as offices by the Council, other agencies or for letting on the open market is not an attractive option because of the unsatisfactory layout and access. Discussions with Rochford Housing Association, for example, have confirmed their need for level access, flexible open plan offices that can easily cope with modern requirements for IT cabling, etc.
- 3.5 Use as a Tourist Information Centre or local museum will also encounter access problems and there would be ongoing revenue costs to operate them. The location means that usage would probably be quite limited. Tourist information, in particular, might be better provided either in the Council's reception area or in the new library in the town centre.

4 YOUTH/COMMUNITY SERVICES IN ROCHFORD

- 4.1 Essex County Council is changing the way it delivers services to children and young people by setting up localised multi-disciplinary teams of staff who will work closely with schools and other local services including the Police and District Council. This approach, known as "Teams Around Schools, Children and Communities (TASCC's)", will provide integrated services to children and young people from 0-19 and will be implemented in phases over a period ending October 2008.
- 4.2 As part of its consideration of issues around antisocial behaviour, the Review Committee has taken evidence from the Youth Service Area Manager, Mr Mark Hughes, and from the County Council Portfolio Holder, Councillor Mrs Tracey Chapman, concerning the implementation of the new TASCC teams and other proposals. These include proposals for the provision of a Children's Centre at Doggetts School which might incorporate extended schools facilities and wider community use.
- 4.3 As a result of these developments, it is not clear at this time what facilities and resources will be needed to deliver services to local young people.

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Taking all these matters into consideration, it seems timely to consider disposal of the building and adjacent land, identified in the attached plan (Appendix 2).
- 5.2 The building is considered to be surplus to requirements due to its unsuitability for use and high cost of refurbishment.

- 5.3 The most advantageous price for the Council is likely to be achieved by sale with outline planning permission for residential use, and, subject to Members' approval, a design brief will be produced to ensure the high visibility of the site, Conservation Area issues, etc., are fully taken into account.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Repairs and improvements costing an estimated £56,000 are required to enable the building to continue to be used over the next few years. The annual maintenance budget for 2006/07 for the property is £4,000 and provision will be required each year if the building continues to be used. Change to a different use is likely to involve additional conversion costs.
- 6.2 The NNDR bill for 2006/07 is £3,000 and insurances £200.

7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**
- (1) That the Council dispose of 57 South Street, Rochford at the most advantageous price, following expiry of the current lease to Essex County Council in July 2007.
 - (2) That a design brief be prepared and outline planning consent for residential development be sought.

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Background Papers:-

None.

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