

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: REVIEW OF TORWOOD & MADDISTON SITES
Meeting: FALKIRK COUNCIL
Date: 9TH DECEMBER 2009
Authors: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION SERVICES
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report has been prepared as a follow-up to the reports to Policy & Resources Committee on 17th November 2009 concerning the proposal to declare the former Torwood and Maddiston Primary School sites surplus to requirements, and a separate report (see Item 9 of Council agenda) which recommended the relocation of the Education Services office headquarter facility to an office at 2 Inchyra Road, Grangemouth.
- 1.2 The report sets out the requirements of Education Services in relation to the provision of a new single stream Roman Catholic Primary School and its requirements for replacement office headquarters accommodation. It establishes the status of these projects and explores the options and issues that might be presented in the use of the vacant sites at the former Torwood Primary school (for the new denominational Primary School) and Maddiston Primary school (for conversion to an office HQ facility for Education Services).
- 1.3 The report acknowledges the Council's current proposal for the sites which is to secure a capital receipt through sale for residential development. The Director of Finance Services advises that receipts from these sites are included in the current approved Capital Programme. If this receipt is not forthcoming, projects of similar value would need to be deleted from the current programme. The report assesses the implications of these options and makes recommendations on the way forward for the Council.

2.0 RC PRIMARY SCHOOL - BACKGROUND

- 2.1 This project involves the development of a new single phase RC Primary School, to serve the Larbert & Stenhousemuir area. This project requires the provision of a three acre (minimum) site, to provide for the new school building, with teaching accommodation for nursery to P7, indoor and outdoor play facilities and PE provision, administration and office facilities, visitor and staff car parking and bus drop off/turning facilities.
- 2.2 The main educational attribute required for a site for a primary school with a nursery class is that it provides access to learning in its broadest sense. This means that children should be provided with the opportunities to go to school and learn within their community as locally and safely as possible to provide context and relevance for their learning. This includes access to their local environment. Parents' support for learning is a key factor in children being educationally successful. A school that is local and accessible for parents

provides a better opportunity for parents to be part of the school and form good relationships with the school staff in supporting their child. This is particularly important for younger children. HMIe inspections include judgements on this aspect of a school's work.

- 2.3 Schools are an intrinsic part of their community, and also the community of schools in the area. Work between schools in a locality is now the norm. Schools are a resource for a variety of community learning experiences. The more local the facilities the more likely the community is to use them. This primary school in particular is a denominational school and is therefore part of a faith community. The location of such a school must take this specific attribute into account.
- 2.4 The planning application to locate the school at a site at Antonshill in Stenhousemuir was rejected at a recent meeting of the Council, in its capacity as planning authority. As a result the Council needs to consider its options for the location of the new school and bring forward an assessment of these options. This report gives consideration to the potential of the Torwood site.

3.0 APPRAISAL OF TORWOOD SITE

- 3.1 The appraisal of the Torwood site for the RC Primary School presents the following issues:-
- 3.2 This site is approximately 1.68 acres and is owned by the Council. It lies immediately adjacent to the main A9 road, accessed via the Glen Road junction with the A9. The former Torwood school building has been closed since June 2008, when pupils were transferred to specially built additional support needs wings at both the new Kinnaird and Maddiston Primary Schools.
- 3.3 The vacated school site is not large enough to accommodate a new single stream primary school building with associated facilities. As a result, the existing site footprint would need to be enhanced by approximately 1.4 acres to accommodate any proposed school. This would require the purchase of land immediately surrounding the site at market rates. It would also require the willingness of the existing private land owner(s) to sell the land, potentially adding quite significantly to the overall cost of the new school. The willingness or otherwise of the owner to enter into negotiations at a suitable level of value could result in the need to consider the requirements for compulsory purchase powers which could add significantly to the timescale for development.
- 3.4 The site is not allocated for any particular use in the existing Larbert and Stenhousemuir Local Plan. However the replacement finalised draft Falkirk Council Local Plan has this site designated for housing. Any proposal for a school on this site would therefore be contrary to the emerging development plan. Any additional land required to increase the site footprint to accommodate the new school would be outside the village limit and has a countryside designation which restricts development.
- 3.5 Torwood village is currently served by a small local sewerage works with very limited spare capacity. While there is existing drainage infrastructure for the old school building this may not be adequate or up to current standards for a much larger primary school facility.

- 3.6 The Torwood site is not centrally located within its Larbert/Stenhousemuir catchment area. The site is next to the A9 which has a speed limit of 60 mph and as such presents a major road safety risk to children. Indeed, its location at the extreme edge of the catchment area would mean that very few pupils that could currently attend the new school would be able to walk to school. The school previously served the whole Council area and did not have a local catchment. It had a small roll of pupils with additional support needs, most of whom were assisted with transport to this location. Use of bus transport for the new school would add considerably to the operational costs, and would increase the carbon footprint of this project at a time when the Council has an ambitious target for this to reduce. Additional land may be required to enable adequate space for bus turning etc. Again, were the owners unwilling to negotiate disposal at an agreed value, compulsory purchase may be required, which would extend timescales for delivery.
- 3.7 There would be few opportunities for pupils to interact with many aspects of the communities they live in and the location of the site would not allow interaction within their faith community as other pupils from denomination schools can. The children would have difficulties in taking part in after school activities as the location would require the majority of primary aged pupils to use a bus service that would require them to change buses or walk some distance. The location of the site would limit the involvement of parents in their child's education and members of the community in using the community facilities, particularly for those without their own transport. In summary the location of this site would lead to pupils, parents and the community being excluded from activities that are available in other primary schools.

4.0 EDUCATION SERVICES OFFICE HQ ACCOMMODATION REQUIREMENTS – APPRAISAL OF MADDISTON PRIMARY SCHOOL SITE

- 4.1 The Council is undertaking a strategic review of its office accommodation requirements, and in the course of this work it has been highlighted that the current lease of the Education Services headquarters office at McLaren House, Polmont will expire on 31st July 2010. As a result the opportunity has arisen to seek an alternative location which meets the Service's office requirements. This facility is to accommodate a minimum of 83 staff who currently work at Haypark and McLaren House. The HQ would need to include:-
- a public reception area
 - meeting rooms
 - storage space
 - janitorial & cleaning provision
 - toilets
 - staff room
 - staff and visitor car parking
- 4.2 The office space should be open and flexible enough for the service to have a more integrated office support system and support the requirement for hot desking of additional peripatetic staff not based at HQ.
- 4.3 In the report to Policy & Resources, the opportunity to relocate the office headquarters function to an existing Council office at 2 Inchyra Road, Grangemouth was highlighted. These premises were formerly occupied by Ineos and have capacity for around 100-120 staff. The property is available immediately and offers potential efficiencies for the Council, maintaining the income stream in a non-operational property that would otherwise

be vacant, avoiding the payment of rents to an external agency and avoiding major capital costs being incurred in replacement offices.

- 4.4 However, in advance of reaching a final decision, it has been suggested that the Council assess the alternative of a conversion of the existing vacated Primary School building at Maddiston.
- 4.5 The former primary school is located on a 2.75 acre site at the junction of Main Road/Parkhall Drive, Maddiston. The site is within the urban limit and use as an office is understood to be acceptable in principle, provided the level of activity is compatible with the surrounding area. The site may present some access and parking constraints, particularly in ensuring that all parking provision is made available on-site.
- 4.6 The existing site comprises a series of separate buildings which would require to be linked and significantly upgraded to provide an integrated office facility. The cost of conversion of these buildings, to provide modern, fit-for-purpose office accommodation is likely to be significant.
- 4.7 A recent survey by Development Services indicated that the main building has deteriorated significantly since it was closed 18 months ago. There is water damage to floors and ceilings which would require to be replaced. The heating and electrical systems would require full replacement as they are no longer up to standard. The external structure of the building is in reasonable condition, but the internal structure would require significant work to make it of a reasonable standard and suitable for office accommodation. There would be a requirement to replace toilet facilities to make these suitable for adults. The access for disabled people would need a major upgrade to fulfil access requirements as the building has two floors.
- 4.8 The conversion would be unlikely to provide a satisfactory office headquarters solution. Conversion of the premises would maintain the cellular format rather than the open plan accommodation offered at Inchyra Road. This would reduce flexibility and efficiency in the use of space and would add to running costs.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

Planning Implications

- 5.1 The Council has a clear and separate responsibility in its role as planning authority to consider the merits of each of the proposals in regard to the known planning framework. The implications of each of the proposals have been examined and are summarised as follows:-

Torwood – RC Primary Proposal

The proposal to develop the new RC Primary School at Torwood would present a number of planning issues:-

- The proposal would be consistent with the current Larbert & Stenhousemuir Local Plan, but is contrary to the replacement finalised draft Falkirk Council Local Plan, which allocates this site for housing.
- The need to acquire additional countryside land presents an issue in development taking place outwith the built-up area of Torwood village.
- Proximity to the main A9 presents a significant road safety risk.

- increased demand for the use of bus transport with associated planning and access issues
- Additional land may be required to enable adequate space for bus access, turning etc.
- Potential requirements to upgrade local infrastructure including local sewerage.

Maddiston - Office Accommodation

In planning terms, the proposal to convert the Maddiston Primary school for office accommodation would be acceptable in principle. However, all staff and visitor parking needs to be provided on-site and therefore parking and access requirements may have difficulty in satisfying the Council's Roads Design guidelines and are likely to restrict the capacity of the site.

Financial Implications

- 5.2 The proposals for the development of the RC Primary school at Torwood and the conversion of the Maddiston site for offices is being considered at a time when the financial position facing the Council is extremely challenging. The pursuit of these new proposals would present a number of significant financial issues for the Council.
- 5.3 The current capital programme provides a budget allocation for the building of a new denominational primary school. This budget does not provide for any purchase of land. In relation to the RC Primary School, the Scottish Government, via its Schools Building Programme has agreed in principle to fund 50% of the qualifying cost of the building of a single stream primary school. Advice has been sought from the Scottish Government and it has been confirmed that this grant cannot be used to purchase land.
- 5.4 Substantial additional capital expenditure would be required for land purchase for school site and the need for improved access and increased sewerage/drainage capacity. In addition the Council would incur ongoing costs in relation to home to school transport costs.
- 5.5 Similarly at Maddiston, significant additional cost would be likely to be incurred on conversion work on the existing buildings, upgrading the buildings to meet modern service and infrastructure requirements. There would be added revenue costs in the running of an office HQ from a converted building with limited efficiencies gained in terms of the provision of modern, flexible-use accommodation.
- 5.6 The capital programme anticipates a significant capital receipt (£1.5m) from the sale of Torwood and Maddiston sites which would be maximised by promoting the sites for residential development. This receipt will support capital investment by the Council elsewhere in modernising its asset portfolio. If the prospect for this receipt is removed, projects of equivalent value would need to be removed from the Capital Programme.
- 5.7 In addition to the potential for increased costs of pursuing the options at Torwood and Maddiston, it is important to recognise the significant cost falling to the Council in using the existing sites rather than disposing of them on the open market. The progression of these options would mean that the Council would lose its capital receipts for the disposal of desirable and valuable residential development land sites.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The Council's Asset Management Plan adopts an overall strategy to rationalise and improve accommodation to assist in demonstrating best value in service delivery. The proposals for investment in a new RC Primary school and relocation of the Education Services office HQ represent major developments in the Council's asset portfolio and provide opportunities to progress the asset strategy in a manner which promotes best value.
- 6.2 The opportunities presented by the recently vacated sites at Torwood and Maddiston Primary School sites have been appraised in relation to their options for development for the RC Primary School (Torwood), office accommodation (Maddiston) or for residential development at both sites. These options are being considered at a time of significant financial pressures facing the Council.
- 6.3 It is concluded that for the following reasons the Council should not locate the new RC Primary School at Torwood:-
- The site is not sufficiently close to the main catchment area, thus eroding the school's capacity to serve the wider Larbert & Stenhousemuir community.
 - The location would exclude pupils, parents and the community from activities normally provided within primary schools.
 - The school would be isolated from its faith community.
 - The Torwood School site is not big enough and the Council would require to purchase additional land to accommodate the RC Primary school.
 - There is no identified budget for land purchase.
 - This proposal is contrary to the emerging local plan and countryside policies would need to be addressed on the larger site.
 - There are significant traffic safety and management implications due to the site's proximity to the main A9 road.
 - There are a number of potentially significant infrastructure implications that might incur substantial additional costs.
 - The location of the site would mean almost all pupils would need to be transported by bus to school, adding to transport costs and raising the carbon footprint of the site.
- 6.4 The proposal to convert the existing school buildings for office use at Maddiston presents the following issues:-
- The existing site comprises a series of separate buildings which would require to be linked to provide an integrated office facility.
 - The cost of conversion of these buildings, to provide modern, fit-for-purpose office accommodation is likely to be significant and in any case would not provide a single, integrated open plan office.
 - Parking and road access requirements are likely to restrict the capacity of the site.
- 6.5 The result of this appraisal suggests that the Torwood site is inappropriate for the location of a new single phase RC Primary School and the Maddiston site is inappropriate for use as a office HQ for Education Services. Were the Council to proceed with these options it would additionally incur a significant cost in:-
- The capital required to invest in sites that are deemed unsuitable for this provision;

- The running costs of sites that impede their ability to secure efficiencies in transport and operations; and
- The loss of significant capital receipts which will assist the Council to invest elsewhere in its asset portfolio.

6.6 As a result it is proposed that the Council should declare both sites surplus and to make preparations to dispose of them at an appropriate point in market.

6.7 Specific proposals will be brought forward early in the New Year in regard to the development of an RC Primary School.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

7.1 The Council is asked to confirm on the basis of the findings of this review, that it should indeed progress the proposal to declare both sites surplus and issue them for disposal for residential purposes.

.....
Director of Education Services

.....
Director of Community Services

2nd December 2009

Contact Officers: Julia Swan/Maureen Campbell. Ext: 6680/0902.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil.