

POSSIBLE ACQUISITION OF PART OF ROLLE COLLEGE, EXMOUTH

Report of the Executive Director for Children and Young People's Services and the County Solicitor

Recommendation : that the Council indicate to the University of Plymouth that it is no longer interested in the acquisition of this site

1. At its meeting on 23 April 2009 the Executive received the report which is at Appendix 1 to this paper. It resolved that *negotiations with the University of Plymouth for the acquisition of part of the Rolle College site in Exmouth continue on the basis outlined in report CS/09/3, acknowledging that the costs of any community use of the remainder of the site should not be borne by the County Council.*
2. There were accordingly three elements of this proposed transaction to be pursued:

Negotiations with the University of Plymouth

These continued on the basis outlined in the original report and quickly established that although the University was willing in principle to divide the campus along the boundary indicated on the site plan it was unwilling to include the properties cross-hatched on the plan within the indicative purchase price and preferred to dispose of these elsewhere by private treaty.

Educational Use

Paragraph 7 of CS/09/3 refers to an independent study to assess the educational needs of 16-18 year-olds but also of provision for 14-19 year-olds within the Area Partnership (which has responsibility for framing recommendations on the best pattern for such provision across the whole of the East Devon District Council area). In the intervening period, while a final decision on the Regional Spatial Strategy is awaited, the Partnership has not been able to finalise its research but it now seems unlikely that there will be much additional demand for education accommodation in Exmouth. The most optimistic current assessment is therefore that only 25% of the available building space at Rolle could sensibly be assigned to educational use.

Exeter College, which initially expressed interest in joint arrangements with Exmouth Community College, has now entered a strategic partnership with Bickton College and its focus has understandably changed while Exmouth College has indicated that it is uncertain that it can economically manage a unit at Rolle given the budgetary pressures which the College already faces.

In addition to these concerns over the revenue funding of an educational facility the Council consistently stated that the capital costs of refurbishment or upgrading of the buildings on the site would have to come from outside the Authority and the current difficulties of the Learning and Skills Council mean that no commitment from them has been forthcoming.

Community Use

The diminishing educational requirements for space at Rolle mean that the balance has now tilted and that if the site was to be acquired the lion's share of the accommodation there would need to be utilised by the local community. While the educational aspects were being reviewed no active steps to develop the scope for community use have been taken by the officers but, equally, no action has been taken by local community representatives to submit a possible Business Plan to the Council. It is also worth saying that the Library Service has never favoured the suggestion that it should relinquish accommodation in the town centre and relocate to the Rolle campus.

3. Given the reservations and lack of progress identified under all three headings above it is difficult to maintain a compelling case for the acquisition of the Rolle College site and our recommendation is therefore that the project should be abandoned and the University of Plymouth advised that the Council is terminating negotiations.

ANNE WHITELEY

ROGER GASH

Electoral Divisions : Exmouth Brixington & Withycombe; Exmouth Halsdon & Woodbury; Exmouth Littleham & Town

Cabinet Members : Councillor John Hart (Policy); Councillor John Clatworthy (Finance and Property); Councillor Christine Channon (Education); Councillor Stuart Barker (Adult Services and Libraries)

Contact for Enquiries : Roger Gash
Tel No : 01392 382285 Room : G26

Local Government Act 1972 : No background papers

APPENDIX 1

CS/09/3
EXECUTIVE
23 April 2009

NOT FOR PUBLICATION BY VIRTUE OF PARAGRAPH 3 OF SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 & S36 OF THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

The Executive is being recommended to treat this report as confidential because it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of the University and disclosure of which would be likely to inhibit the free and frank provision of advice and exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation or the effective conduct of public affairs.

ACQUISITION OF PART OF ROLLE COLLEGE, EXMOUTH

Report of the Chief Executive and the County Solicitor

Recommendation : that negotiations with the University of Plymouth for the acquisition of part of the Rolle College site in Exmouth continue on the basis outlined in this report

Background

1. The Rolle College campus is surplus to the requirements of the University of Plymouth and the property has been on the market for sale, for some time. East Devon District Council has indicated that residential development of the site would be acceptable in planning terms. This would be a prime site for residential development in the town but it is understood that the University's prospective buyers have withdrawn in view of the current economic conditions.
2. Prior to the closure of Rolle College, it was identified that part of this accommodation might be suitable as a base from which to provide non-vocational and vocational training for 16-19 year olds and discussions took place between the County Council, Exmouth Community College, Exeter College and the University over the possibility of purchasing part of the site and buildings for this purpose.
3. At that stage the price that the consortium might have been in a position to offer, approximately £3m but this was not acceptable to the University. However, the University has indicated that it now may be prepared to consider a price of this order.

The Property

4. The part of the site originally under consideration comprised the area edged black on the attached plan, net of the two areas indicated by hatching.
5. The property comprises a mixture of buildings mainly built in the 1950's and 60's (Main Building, Refectory, Art Block and Daw Building) plus the Owen Building built about 6 years ago. Within the older buildings are a Gym, Hall, Library, Dining Hall, Kitchen/Servery and administrative offices plus a number of classrooms. The

Owen Building comprises a theatre and lecture rooms. The area of the site is approximately 1.7 hectares and the total gross internal area of the accommodation is some 6400m².

6. The older buildings are in fair condition for their age and the Owen Building is in good condition. Overall some capital investment in modernisation works and energy efficiency improvements would be required and a detailed assessment of refurbishment costs is being undertaken.

Educational Use

7. An independent study was undertaken in 2006 which indicated that there was some demand for post 16 education facilities in the Exmouth area. Since then new legislation has been enacted which requires 16 – 18 year olds to be in education, employment with training or without training. In order accurately to assess current demand a further independent study should immediately be commissioned which takes into account not only the new legislation but also the needs identified by the 14-19 Area Partnership to which Exeter College and Exmouth Community College belong.
8. This study will indicate both the type of courses and the number of learners for whom education and training facilities are required. This will enable the Council to assess what additional funds, over and above the purchase costs, will be needed to ensure the building can be converted, where necessary, so that it is fit for purpose. The Learning and Skills Council has indicated that, currently capital funding could be available for refurbishments once a sound educational business case has been presented and analysed.

Community Use

9. Initial indications are that at most only half the buildings on the site would be required for educational and training purposes but meetings with Exmouth members, representatives of the District Council and the local Member of Parliament have taken place and there is clearly enthusiasm for the remainder to be adapted for community use. An offer of private investment for such a purpose has already been received. To translate this enthusiasm into a practical business case the Town Council could be invited to lead urgent work with external stakeholders to demonstrate the long-term viability of such a plan.

Possible Terms and Conditions of Acquisition

10. It is unlikely that the University will be prepared to sell the property for less than £3 million and this should therefore be regarded as the putative purchase price. Such a sum, even with refurbishment costs added, appears to be a sound investment since it would cost around £9 million to replicate the buildings on a new site elsewhere.
11. The valuation advice is that once stability returns to the property market £3 million could, if necessary, be achieved on a resale of the property for residential development.
12. There would be some advantages in terms of usability and management if the site was extended to include the hatched areas on the plan. It would be necessary for the University to erect a fence on the boundary with its retained land and to separate gas,

electricity, water and other services. If the negotiations for the acquisition of the site continue it should be on this basis.

PHIL NORREY

ROGER GASH

Electoral Divisions : Exmouth Brixington & Withycombe; Exmouth Halsdon and Woodbury;
Exmouth Littleham and Town

Executive Member for Resources and for Communities : Councillor Brian Greenslade
Executive Member for Children and Young People's Services : Councillor John Smith

Contact for Enquiries : Roger Gash ext 2285

Local Government Act 1972 : Background papers - None