

TBS/25/1  
Land & Property Committee  
31<sup>st</sup> January 2025

## The Property Change Programme Report of the Director of Transformation and Business Services

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Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

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### **Recommendation**

That the Committee be asked to agree:

The following sites are declared surplus to DCC's requirements and disposal is progressed:

- Land at Moortown Picnic Site, South of South Molton on North Devon Link Road
- Land at Sidemoor Picnic Site, South of South Molton on North Devon Link Road
- Land at Rooksbridge Former Picnic Site, A39 between Barnstaple & Bideford
- Land at Lydacott Former Picnic Site, A39 between Barnstaple & Bideford
- Canal House at Grand Western Canal, Tiverton
- Land at Honiton Park and Ride, Exeter – South West Corner
- Land at Lemonford Depot, Bickington – bridges storage yard
- Marldon Oak Valley, Paignton
- Land at Lambeth Walk, Dawlish
- Bowring building, Moretonhampstead
- Land at Ideford (former picnic site), Kingsteignton
- Silverhill Lodge Garden to west of building, Barnstaple
- Land Parcel in Alphington, Exeter
- County Hall Cottage, Exeter

### **Background / Introduction**

The Property Strategy focuses on four key principles; Reduce, Dispose, Retain, and Repurpose aimed at transforming our corporate estate and this will form the methodology for reviewing the future use of our assets. The Property Strategy was set out in the Phase 1 Property Report presented to Cabinet in October 2023.

### **Update on Phase 1 and 2 Disposals**

The Phase 1 property disposals agreed at Cabinet October 2023 have progressed as follows:

- Larkbeare House, Exeter – Now being actively marketed again following determination of the listing of the garden.
- Compass House, Exeter – Sold.
- Matford Lane, Exeter – On hold, included in the Exeter Local Plan consultation published in December 2024.
- Ivybank, Exeter – buyer has recently withdrawn, site remarketing has recommenced.
- St Georges Road Youth Centre, Barnstaple – The site is now being jointly marketed with the adjoining land from North Devon District Council and Yeo Valley Primary School (Digital Academy).
- Pottington Industrial Unit, Barnstaple – Sold.

### **Update on Phase 2 Disposals**

- The Hive, Exmouth – Marketing has commenced.
- 2-4 Meeting Street, Exmouth – Sold subject to contract.
- Rosalind House Gardens, Tiverton – Marketing has commenced
- Lea Combe, Axminster – Marketing has commenced
- Sowton Industrial Estate Residual Land Freeholds, Exeter – 1 freehold sold subject to contract.

### **Update on Phase 3 Disposals**

- Baxters Farmyard – Marketing to commence February 2025.
- Fremington Quay Store – Marketing has commenced
- Glebe Farm, Rattery – Class Q permitted development right application being made for resubmission
- Gas Lane Torrington – Site testing completed in December 2024 and findings to be reported when water testing results are complete.
- Long Stone Cross, Ashburton – Dartmoor National Park have been contacted to provide an update and feedback requested within next 4 weeks

**Other capital receipts** likely to be generated from the sale of property assets in 24/25 include the following:

Barns at Lower Pilehayes Farm, Woodbury Salterton

Land at Middle Winsham, Braunton

Lower East Week Farmhouse, South Tawton

Exmouth Bus Station Freehold disposal

Various sundry other small pieces of land already declared surplus with values of less than £50,000.

# 1. Proposal

## 2a. Proposed Phase 4 Disposals

It is recommended that the following assets be declared surplus to DCC's requirements and disposals are progressed:

- Land at Silverhill Lodge Garden to west of building, Barnstaple – This land is superfluous to the operation of Silverhill Lodge (elderly person's day centre). The garden area is considered to be ideally suited to be developed for Intensive Supported Housing. A Pre App was carried out on this site for development which was supportive of this site coming forward for development.
- Part remaining land at Aldens Farm in Alphington, Exeter – This land was not brought forward as part of the original Aldens Farm outline planning. It is now considered that this land could be used for Intensive Supported Housing. The total site is 0.38 hectares and the area required for development will be 0.1 hectares.
- Land at Moortown Picnic Site, South of South Molton on North Devon Link Road – This is on the North bound carriageway opposite Sidemoor. This site has been let out for the last 9+ years to a third party to operate a cafe in the tenants own temporary building. The site is 2.23 hectares. A recent review of the site has identified the potential for an improved commercial position either via the disposal of part or all the site, or for a commercial lease of part or all the site.
- Land at Sidemoor Picnic Site, South of South Molton on North Devon Link Road – This is on the South bound carriageway opposite Moortown. This site has been let out for the last 9+ years to a third party to operate a cafe in tenants own temporary building. The site is 2.19 hectares. A recent review of the site has identified the potential for an improved commercial position either via the disposal of part or all the site, or for a commercial lease of part or all the site.
- Canal House at Grand Western Canal, Tiverton – This building has been used by the rangers for the canal as offices and a small training & education room. The building needs significant investment and given the proximity of other office accommodation in Tiverton, we can relocate the current users. The visitor centre on the canal can be utilised for educational visits.
- Land at Rooksbridge Former Picnic Site, A39 between Barnstaple & Bideford – This is on the south side of the A39 and has been vacant for a number of years and is not accessible by the public. It is intended that this site is placed on the open market for consideration.

- Land at Lydacott Former Picnic Site, A39 between Barnstaple & Bideford - This is on the north side of the A39 and has been vacant for a number of years. It is intended that this site is placed on the open market for consideration.
- Land at Honiton Park and Ride, Exeter – South west corner of site – following the pandemic the usage levels of the P&Rs have significantly reduced and this area of the car park is rarely used. This would present a rare vacant lot in Sowton and the capital receipt would be split with Exeter City Council.
- Land at Lemonford Depot, Bickington – This site is currently used by the Bridges team for storage which can be relocated to another DCC depot. The site is strategically placed between Ashburton and Newton Abbot and would be suitable for a range of commercial applications.
- Marldon Oak Valley, Paignton – Former pupil referral unit used by an academy trust on a site owned by DCC. This site will require DFE approval to dispose and declaring surplus is necessary to progress this process.
- Land at Lambeth Walk, Dawlish – This is a 0.5-hectare vacant plot of land which has been unoccupied for numerous years and is located to the east of Westcliff Primary Academy, and south of the former daw vale residential home.
- Bowring Building Moretonhampstead – The building was transferred to DCC at nil value in 1962. It is proposed to agree the site can be disposed of to facilitate the transfer of the building to Moretonhampstead Bowring Library Charitable Trust following a business case proposal to transfer at nil value as a ‘community asset’.

The site is a listed building and was originally gifted to the town for community use. A valuation assessment concluded that the cost of repairs required would outweigh any positive capital receipt

- Land at Ideford (former picnic site), Kingsteignton - on the A380 and has been vacant for a number of years and is not accessible by the public. It is intended that this site is placed on the open market for consideration.
- County Hall Cottage, Exeter – This site is located on the County Hall grounds and is currently vacant.

## **2b. Update on key property matters in Exmouth, Tiverton and Tavistock**

- Exmouth and Tiverton programmes completed since phase 3 update (see link to the [report](#) from 10 October 2024 Land & Property Committee).
- Newton Abbot and Totnes area – DCC is in the process of relocating Adults Services staff to Forde House in January 2025 (Teignbridge District Council) and Children’s staff have relocated to Follaton House

(South Hams District Council offices in Totnes). Forde House will also accommodate Trading Standards which will be relocated from Ryefields.

- Ryefields will now be used by Highways, some of the term maintenance contractor staff, Parking Enforcement and Highway planners. The use of Ryefields will mean that the Rydon Depot offices can be declared surplus to avoid significant backlog maintenance costs.

## **2c. Update on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Property Position**

An update was requested on this at the October Land & Property Committee

There is likely to be an increase in locality-based teams working using existing DCC assets, schools offices, district council, libraries etc.

We are repurposing the following assets for SEND:

- Seaton Childrens Centre – proposal to repurpose into SEND provision for Mill Water Special School
- Yeo Valley childrens Centre – proposal to repurpose to support SEHM Cohort for three years from Sept 25 in the first instance.
- Alexandra Centre, Tavistock – subject to listed buildings consent, that is to be repurposed to support SEND places in West Devon.

In addition, Cranbrook – land is identified for a new special school, Devon will hold the freehold.

Further work exploring additional SEND Satellite sites includes:

- Exeter – potential satellite provision from Ellen Tinkham – a similar building to Bodley House that supported the last expansion would be appropriate
- South Hams – as above but for Bidwell Brook
- North Devon – early exploration of opportunities in North Devon

## **2. Options / Alternatives**

DCC has considered three options for Phase 4 of the Property Change Programme:

- a) Dispose – this is the option recommended by this report, to support the property strategy to transform the estate and dispose of the listed properties. These assets will generate significant capital receipts, ongoing revenue savings, and avoids the requirement for revenue and capital investment in the sites for critical backlog maintenance.
- b) Retain – do nothing and retain our portfolio as status quo. This option is not recommended as it has been identified that these buildings are not cost-effective or essential to service delivery as there are other assets where

services could relocate. This is also not recommended as it will significantly hinder the Council's financial sustainability targets.

- c) Repurpose – opportunities have also been explored to repurpose these assets to meet other corporate priorities, including key worker housing, SEND provision and Children in Care placements and these will be considered based on priority and demand moving forward.

### **3. Consultations / Representations / Technical Data**

Consultations are not required for these disposals as they are not related to closure of service. Where staff or services are being relocated these are within the same locality.

### **4. Strategic Plan**

The Property Change Programme contributes to four of the six priorities in the Council's Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025.

As well as delivering vital capital receipts from rationalising the corporate estate and associated savings from reduced infrastructure services, energy costs, carbon emissions and investing in modern, fit for purpose, energy efficient workplaces, the Property Change Programme will:

- Respond to the climate emergency.
- Support sustainable economic recovery.
- Improve health and wellbeing.
- Help communities be safe, connected and resilient.

### **5. Financial Considerations**

It is estimated that the properties identified in Section 2a above will generate capital receipts in the range of £1.5m - £2.2m (depending on planning approval) and reduce operational revenue costs by circa £50k per annum.

Disposal of surplus property and generating capital receipts is a key strand of the Council's financial strategy. Maximising capital income is important in that it will support financial capacity to invest in essential capital priorities and minimise the need for additional borrowing. This supports the corporate priority of long term financial sustainability, ensuring the Council lives within its means, maintains a balanced budget and adequate reserves.

A key principle in the financial strategy is that capital receipts are not ringfenced, and form part of the pool of general capital resources to support overall priorities.

### **6. Legal Considerations**

The lawful implications of the proposal have been considered in the preparation of this report.

When disposing or repurposing our property assets, the County Council's responsibility is to ensure that all relevant legislation is complied with; this includes Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 (Disposal of land by principal councils), which requires the Authority to obtain 'best consideration' for any property that is disposed of and requires the authority to advertise the potential disposal of public open space land where that is relevant. These obligations will be met in the disposal of any assets.

## **7. Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)**

It is anticipated that most sites are likely to be redeveloped for residential or commercial development and will be subject to a Planning Application Process if this takes place.

As part of any planning process it will be necessary in the majority\* of cases that Ecology & Bio Diversity Net Gain calculations will be required (\* - unless there are specific reasons that planning applications do not require these). Environmental Protection of sites is therefore provided by the planning process.

In addition, the Building Regulations Process also ensures that construction is carried out in a manner which optimises the use of energy & water to be minimise Climate Change impacts.

The Social & Economic Impacts of these sites being developed are likely to be very positive in the case of the Commercial Developments in terms of Job Creation and boosting Devon's Economy. In the case of Residential Development then much needed homes will be created including a proportion of these being Affordable Accommodation which is in significant demand.

## **8. Equality Considerations**

The proposed site disposals in 2a have minimal direct impact on equality considerations as the majority of the sites are land parcels that are not providing a service to the community.

The exception being the Canal House at Grand Western Canal, Tiverton, where the service would be relocated within a 0.8-mile radius to sites with better accessibility and sites that are already visited frequently by members of the public to access DCC and district services.

An equality impact assessment has been completed and is attached to the committee agenda and also available at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/impact/property-change-programme-phase-4/>.

## **9. Risk Management Considerations**

This proposal has been assessed, and all necessary safeguards or action have been taken to safeguard the Council's position.

The corporate and community risk registers will be reviewed to ensure all relevant risks in the Property Strategy are captured and managed.

## **10. Summary / Conclusions / Reasons for Recommendations**

In summary, occupancy statistics demonstrate that we can reduce our portfolio without detriment to services and this property change programme will reduce our carbon footprint, provide value for money, generate capital receipts, and reduce revenue expenditure contributing towards the financial sustainability of the authority.

The property portfolio will be reviewed as part of an ongoing rolling programme to ensure the estate is aligned to the corporate priorities, including making best use of assets and buildings.

### **Matthew Jones**

Director of Transformation and Business Services

### **Electoral Divisions: All**

Cabinet Member for Policy, Corporate and Asset Management: Councillor James McInnes.

### **Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers**

None

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The Property Change Programme