

Construction of a community facilities building in Cranbrook Town Centre providing flexible space for County Council services including children's, youth and libraries

Report of the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

Recommendation: That Cabinet:

- (a) **approves this proposal to deliver a community facilities building in Cranbrook town centre providing flexible space for County Council services including children's, youth, adults and libraries;**
- (b) **empowers officers to renegotiate the existing planning agreement to allow the provision of an integrated building at an earlier timescale;**
- (c) **delegates authority to officers to seek sources of funding to bridge any funding gap;**
- (d) **agrees to the County Council's membership of the new Cranbrook Strategic Delivery Board attended by the Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills and one of the two Local Members.**

1. Summary

This report seeks support to progress plans for a community facilities building in Cranbrook town centre providing flexible space for County Council services including space for children's, youth, adult and libraries.

2. Background/Introduction

Construction of the new town of Cranbrook in East Devon began in 2011. The town now has approximately 2,000 houses and over 4,000 residents. It is expected that the town will grow to about 7,750 homes with over 18,000 residents by 2031, which is about the same size as Barnstaple. Community facilities provided so far at Cranbrook include a primary school, an all-through school, a multi-purpose building with GP surgery space and a rail station. To date the only building that has been provided in the town centre is a public house.

Cranbrook has been delivered through a commercial delivery model with no public sector control of land. This model is dependent on a legally binding planning agreement (section 106 agreement) attached to the existing planning permissions for the original 3,487 houses that has established trigger points for the delivery of facilities with financial payments and delivery of land. In the case of social infrastructure for which the County Council is responsible, the planning agreement requires the developers to provide specified areas of space for children's, youth and library facilities.

A trigger point for the provision of the children's centre facilities was recently met and this Council has served notice on the Cranbrook consortium of developers to make direct provision of the children's centre facilities. This notice requires the developers to agree the specification, construct and complete the facilities no later than 10 June 2021 or upon the occupation of 2500 dwellings (whichever is later) unless otherwise agreed by the Council.

The planning agreement also requires the provision of town council offices in the town centre by the same deadline as for the youth and library facilities (prior to first occupation of the 3450th dwelling at Cranbrook) and five retail units by occupation of 2000 dwellings. Other facilities such as additional town centre shops and a food store are commercially led and the expectation is that these would be delivered by the private sector with no fixed timescales.

It is expected that additional infrastructure would be provided to facilitate the expansion of the town to 7,750 houses as allocated in the Cranbrook Plan Development Plan Document (DPD, Submission Draft February 2019). This infrastructure would be funded in part by developer planning contributions secured by planning agreements attached to the expansion area planning applications. It is anticipated that this would deliver other town centre facilities including a health and wellbeing hub and a leisure centre.

The process of coordinating infrastructure and service requirements which are future-proofed is very complex and so far there has been no resolution of what form key facilities should take and how they should be delivered. The Council considers it essential that important infrastructure is provided in an appropriately phased and timely manner due to the unusually high proportion of families with young children and need for additional support. Given the limited infrastructure currently in place, the County Council and other agencies face significant challenges in supporting the health and social needs of the growing number of residents. The early delivery of a community facility would allow provision of critical County Council services to support the growing population, in line with the Council's aim to promote resilient, healthy, prosperous, connected and safe communities. It is likely to be the first significant building within the town centre and would be a catalyst for further commercial and civic development.

A Cranbrook Strategic Delivery Board is due to be established in Autumn 2019 subject to approval by the councils involved. This advisory board would comprise members of the County Council, East Devon District Council and Cranbrook Town Council to ensure that the three tiers of local government can speak with one voice and to provide oversight. The County Council would be represented by the Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills and one of the two Local Members. The board would meet quarterly and focus on coordinating the delivery of future assets and services for Cranbrook. East Devon District Council endorsed involvement in this board and its Cabinet meeting on 4th September 2019.

3. Proposal

Commensurate with the size and importance of Cranbrook, it is proposed that there should be a multi-purpose integrated building to meet the functions of the County Council and able to adapt to future changes in service provision. This would provide flexible space for children's, youth, adult and library services with potential use for public health and highways services and council working space. In particular, the Council's Public Health Nursing Service would share the children's centre space allowing integrated working. The facility would support locality-based delivery of multi-agency services at Cranbrook. It is expected that there would be spaces that can be used/hired to other organisations. It could be delivered as a stand-alone County Council owned and operated building or combined with other civic facilities such as the Town Council offices. Subject to funding to enable early delivery, the aim would be to complete the building within the next 2 years.

The Council will work with partners to deliver these town centre facilities, including the district and town councils and the developers. It may be necessary for the Council to seek renegotiation of the existing planning agreement with the developers to provide financial contributions for the library, youth and children's facilities instead of the developers building the facilities themselves. The Council would also seek transfer of necessary land to the County Council from the developers earlier than the timescales specified in the agreement.

The triggers in the planning agreement require the delivery of children's centre facilities by June 2021 (at the 2500th dwelling at Cranbrook) and the library and youth facilities in approximately 2025 (by first occupation of the 3450th dwelling at Cranbrook). The delivery of an integrated building within the next few years would therefore involve early delivery of the library and youth facilities. It is expected that payment of contributions for the library, youth and children's facilities by the developers would not cover the full cost of early delivery of this space. Additional forward funding would therefore be required to fill the shortfall between the money available from the agreement (planning contributions) and the cost of the building. The Council would expect to manage the design and delivery of a stand-alone County Council building.

4. Consultations/Representations/Technical Data

Public consultation has been undertaken at appropriate stages of preparing the Cranbrook Plan, which has now been submitted to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for examination. The draft plan includes policies for the town centre and infrastructure delivery. The planning agreement (that provides existing developer contributions for the library, youth and children's centre facilities) was attached to planning applications which were subject to the statutory publicity and consultation processes.

There are ongoing discussions about this scheme with the Council's Local Members. Formal public consultation would be undertaken as part of the statutory procedures for determining the planning application for this new building.

5. Financial Considerations

The Council retains ambitious requirements for facilities fit for purpose for children's, youth, adult and library services. It remains committed to these services and buildings able to facilitate this work as a means of improving wellbeing and health across the local community and providing space to bring people together to learn, create and connect. Whilst work will be needed to ensure requirements for separate services are understood and accommodated within an integrated building, additional cross community and cross generational opportunities will also be made possible. The Council would seek partnerships with a range of organisations to develop these facilities and services within.

Given this opportunity to enhance the public realm in Cranbrook, and with it to improve community wellbeing and relations, the Council will seek a range of capital funding from local and national partners to accelerate the delivery of the facilities in advance of existing trigger points. As initial feasibility and design work has not yet been undertaken, the estimated cost of the new building is unknown. The funding gap between this and the money available from the existing planning agreement will not be known until this is renegotiated with the developers. As indicated above, approval is sought to seek sources of funding to address any shortfall.

6. Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change)

The development would be subject to full environmental analysis as part of the design and planning application process. The provision of a community facilities building within the town centre is considered to minimise the environmental impact of service provision at Cranbrook. A single integrated building would reduce carbon emissions and use of natural resources compared with provision of individual buildings. The building would be designed to appropriate environmental standards to meet the Climate Emergency agenda. Connection to the existing district heating system would allow the building's heating to be decarbonised when the fuel source switches away from gas.

Location of the building within the town centre on a bus route would maximise accessibility and allow users to travel by non-car modes, thereby minimising carbon emissions. The socio-economic impact is expected to be beneficial through improved provision of community services at Cranbrook within a space which would support community interaction and integration.

7. Equality Considerations

Where relevant to the decision, the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty requires decision makers to give due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

Taking account of age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), gender and gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women/ new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage/civil partnership status in coming to a decision, a decision maker may also consider other relevant factors such as caring responsibilities, rural isolation or socio-economic disadvantage.

Following approval to progress the scheme, an Impact Assessment will be undertaken alongside development of detailed scheme design. This will assess the social/equality, environmental and economic impacts of the scheme in line with the County Council process.

8. Legal Considerations

In order to achieve early delivery of these facilities, the Council would need to renegotiate the existing planning agreement with the developers to seek provision of financial contributions for the library, youth and children's facilities instead of the developers building the facilities themselves. The Council would also seek transfer of necessary land to the County Council from the developers earlier than the timescales specified in this legal agreement.

9. Risk Management Considerations

The main risks associated with this proposal are the successful renegotiation of the existing planning agreement, securing additional money to fill any funding shortfall and obtaining the necessary planning permission. As this scheme has not yet been started, there is currently uncertainty over the outcome and delivery timescale.

It is considered that this scheme would reduce risks by giving the Council greater control over the design and delivery process for these facilities. As indicated in section 11 below, there are also risks associated with the alternative 'default position' defined in the existing agreement.

10. Public Health Impact

This scheme would result in significant public health benefits by provision of a community facility building providing dedicated space for provision of essential children's, Public Health Nursing, youth, adult and library services. The building would contribute to wider public health objectives by supporting community interaction and active travel.

11. Options/Alternatives

The main alternative option to delivery of an integrated community facility building would be to allow delivery of separate buildings for library, youth and children's services as specified in the existing planning agreement (the default position). This would involve construction of the buildings by the developers in accordance with an agreed specification at the specified trigger. The children's centre would be due to be delivered as a stand-alone building by June 2021. The library and youth centre facilities are due to be delivered separately by approximately 2025 at the trigger point of first occupation of the 3450th Cranbrook dwelling. The library and youth facilities could potentially be combined with each other or the town council offices should agreement on this be reached.

A disadvantage of this default position is that it would involve later delivery of the youth and library facilities, when they are needed by the local community as soon as possible. It would also result in delivery of fragmented and inflexible buildings which are not favoured by the Council and some partners. Later (or potentially no) delivery of these community buildings would contribute to Cranbrook remaining without a town centre that provides the facilities and services required for this growing town.

It is considered that delivery of an integrated County Council community facility would be beneficial in providing the necessary facilities earlier than currently required and with greater certainty over delivery and final design.

12. Reason for Recommendation/Conclusion

The existing planning agreement requires delivery of library, youth and children's centre facilities in Cranbrook town centre within the next two to six years. It is considered that this proposal to deliver an integrated County Council community facilities building in Cranbrook town centre represents the optimal way to provide the required facilities. It would allow early delivery of Council facilities and give the Council greater control over the design, delivery process and outcome. This would enable the Council to ensure that the resulting community facility represents value for money and provides flexible integrated space that can adapt to future changes in service provision. It is therefore recommended that Cabinet approves this proposal, the associated renegotiation of the planning agreement, and the seeking of additional funding. Cabinet is also requested to approve County Council membership of the new Cranbrook Strategic Delivery Board which would allow coordination and oversight of infrastructure and service provision in the town.

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Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
Nil nw170919cab Construction of a community facilities building in Cranbrook Town Centre		hk 05 270919