

**WESTGATE UPDATE**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This report updates members on matters related to the freehold acquisition of the Alexandra Surgery and the re-provision of that Surgery at Princes Gardens.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 As Members are aware, the relocation of Alexandra Surgery is essential to the Westgate development. The Council, under the terms of the Joint Venture Agreement, must provide vacant possession of the existing surgery land no later than 31 December 2010. Officers have consequently borne in mind the needs of the existing 6,000 patients at the Surgery, the doctors, PCT and the tight timescale in which to deliver alternative premises.
- 2.2 The re-provided Surgery must be within a reasonable distance of the existing site to minimise the impact on the patients and disruption to the services offered by the Alexandra Surgery's medical team.
- 2.3 Further, the Primary Care Trust must be satisfied that the re-provided Surgery is fit-for-purpose, complies with rigid premises guidelines and must be constructed to a high environmental standard. In addition, the doctors at the Surgery must be satisfied that the building location and layout enables them to best deliver services to their patients.
- 2.4 As part of the previous proposal for Westgate, the Surgery was to be re-provided on the same site. However, the revised scheme design will occupy a large part of the site and specifically, the area proposed for the Surgery. There is no other option but to seek an alternative location.

**3. Princes Gardens**

- 3.1 A review of potential sites within the town centre of Aldershot was carried out with the Doctors and the most suitable option for a new Surgery was found to be Princes Gardens.
- 3.2 Taking into account the uses of both the existing community building at Princes Gardens, and the potential for users of 35/39 High Street, it is possible

to ensure the maintenance and provision of services for the local community within the same vicinity.

3.3 The main advantage of this option is that it can provide a new Surgery within the period of time available, because the Council owns the property which means that there is no delay in negotiating and acquiring third party premises (if there were indeed any to be found). Given that the contract for the works is set at 33 weeks, work must commence no later than mid to end of March 2010. This means that vacant possession of Princes Gardens will be required by the end of February 2010.

3.4 So far as other community services are concerned, these can be accommodated within the Council's other facilities, whether it is Princes Hall or 35/39 High Street.

3.5 There have been initial discussions with the existing occupiers. It is proposed that:

CAB, Deafplus and Victim Support are relocated to 35-39 High Street; CAB will occupy the whole of the ground floor and a substantial part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of this building. Discussions are ongoing with regard to the required layout of the accommodation.

Deafplus will occupy two partitioned rooms on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor; one as an office and the other as an equipment/fitting and testing room. The second floor of this property will also re-provide a meeting room for the CAB and the Aldershot Civic Society. Both upper floors are serviced by a lift.

3.4 Princes Hall will also host the Tourist Information Point. The Credit Union may be allocated space within Princes Hall on a periodic basis for their activity. The public conveniences at Princes Hall can also be designated for public use, although there will also be adequate provision within the Westgate Development itself.

3.5 Further, the cash office will not be relocated, as residents will be encouraged to use and support local Post Offices, in keeping with the Council's commitment to supporting the network. This will require a publicity campaign to communicate directly with current users of the service, with a focus on those making cash payments. These residents will be given advice and guidance about how to pay through the Post Office network. The Head of Customer Services is currently working up a detailed action plan to address other service issues for local residents that closing the office gives rise to. Apart from payments, the Council predominantly provides the concessionary travel scheme and a general enquiry response from Princes Gardens. The Head of Customer Services is confident that replacement services can be put in place using a variety of other existing council outlets to prevent significant disruption to residents.

3.6 The corporate objective is that the High Street property will provide an invaluable resource to the residents of Aldershot. The close proximity of Alexandra Surgery with its 6,000 patients will reinforce the co-location

proposal, and further synergies can be established between organisations and agencies.

The Council anticipates that the first floor will be offered to another organisation who utilise an alternative Council owned property in the town centre and who have strong synergies with the C.A.B. No discussions have taken place with this organisation to date, as the principal objective of Council Officers has been the re-provision of those organisations that will be displaced at Princes Gardens.

#### **4. The New Surgery**

Officers have been working with a professional team headed up by a firm of architects and have had a number of discussions and meetings with the GPs, the PCT and their respective advisers. A proposed design and layout has been tentatively agreed, but requires to be worked up in more detail prior to submission to the PCT for their approval and for the planning permission for the extension and conversion of Princes Gardens.

The new Surgery must be of a high environmental rating, known as BREEAM Very Good; the impact on the environment, production of carbon dioxide and use of resources will all be minimised, whilst the use of daylight and natural ventilation will be optimised. In a setting such as Princes Gardens, this use is to be commended.

Alexandra Surgery and its 22 parking spaces for patients and staff are owned freehold by the GP Partnership. Consequently, the Partnership do not want to be (and should not be) in a lesser position in terms of their ownership arising from the redevelopment of their land. Therefore, the use of Princes Gardens as a GP Surgery will require the Council to dispose of the freehold of the property, together with land for a 200m<sup>2</sup> extension and adjacent land to provide a planting buffer for the acoustic privacy of patients. To enable the effective functioning of the Surgery and to minimise loss of public gardens, the Council will also be required to relinquish the use of up to 20 parking spaces within the adjacent car park.

However it must be stressed that the remainder of the car park will remain available for shoppers, and options aimed at maximising the availability of spaces. In the interim, there are many available parking spaces within the Council owned High Street multi-storey car park a short walk away, and it is intended that further refurbishment works will be carried out to it.

#### **4.2 Financial Implications**

The Council would ordinarily seek to compulsorily acquire the Surgery and pay compensation to the GP Partnership. Professional advisers, CBRE, have estimated what that sum would be. It is anticipated that the costs of the Surgery construction and the relocation of existing users within Princes Gardens will be met within that budget sum.

The funding of this will be met through the Joint Venture Agreement as explained at the Cabinet meeting of 3 November 2009.

To enable the project to proceed, a variation of £1million will be required to this year's Capital Programme. This would result in an estimated loss of interest of £50,000 per annum on the £1 million capital contribution. At Council Tax level this equates to an increase of £1.60. However, this situation is only expected to continue for the next 3 years (approx) until the Council has been reimbursed its costs of development through the Joint Venture agreement and the sale of land at Westgate.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 The Council must provide vacant possession of all the land required for the development to commence at Westgate. This is a conditional requirement within the Joint Venture Agreement with the Council's development partner, Citygrove.
- 5.2 To do this, it must re-provide a new Surgery for the GPs and their patients to relocate to by November 2010. The only suitable site which is both viable and available within this timeframe is the Community Building at Princes Gardens. The site also offers a unique opportunity to provide a state of the art medical facility to patients in a high profile and accessible location. The work to convert and extend the property is estimated at 33 weeks, which means that work must commence in March 2010.
- 5.3 The High Street property which has been empty for some time will provide most of the existing users at Princes Gardens with new accommodation. The proposal will also make good use of the High Street property which will become a key centre for voluntary sector uses. The Council will also work with residents currently using Council facilities at Princes Gardens to provide suitable alternative service options.

## **6. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that:

- 6.1 the Cabinet approve the proposal to offer Princes Gardens and parking to re-provide the new Surgery;
- 6.2 the Cabinet approve:
  - the re-provision of facilities from Princes Gardens as set out in this report within 35-39 High Street;
  - consequential adjustments to council Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services;
- 6.3 the Cabinet authorise the Solicitor to the Council to transfer the freehold of the Community Building and such adjacent land as may be required to satisfy planning and PCT requirements, to the GP Partnership at Alexandra Surgery,

in exchange for the freehold of their Surgery building and car parking land, in consultation with the Chief Executive and Leader to the Council;

- 6.4 the Cabinet authorise that, pursuant to Regulation 3 of the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992, the Solicitor to the Council seek planning permission to develop land at Princes Gardens Aldershot, as set out in this Report; and
- 6.5 approval be given to a variation of £1million to the 2009/10 Capital Programme.

**Andrew Lloyd**  
**Chief Executive**

**Karen Limmer**  
**Solicitor to the Council**

**Background Papers:**  
Title documents

**Contact:** Karen Limmer 01252 398600