

**Report of ENE Area Leader**

**Report to Inner East Area Committee**

**Date: 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013**

**Subject: Alston Lane Community Centre proposals**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Killingbeck & Seacroft	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary of main issues**

1. This report provides members of the Inner East Area Committee with an update on proposals for the future use of Alston Lane Community Centre.
2. The report sets out proposals to return the property to family housing utilising funding available through the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funding.

**Recommendations**

1. That members of the Inner East Area Committee note the contents of the report and agree to Alston Lane Community Centre being declared surplus on the condition that HCA and HRA funding will be used to convert the premises into family housing.

## **1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 The report provides members of the Inner East Area Committee with an update on proposals for the future use of Alston Lane Community Centre.
- 1.2 The report sets out proposals to return the property to family housing utilising funding available through the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funding.

## **2 Main Issues**

- 2.1 Alston Lane Community Centre is located in the South Seacroft neighbourhood within the Killingbeck and Seacroft ward. The property is located within the East Leeds Regeneration area, which is a priority regeneration programme area for the Council.
- 2.2 The community centre was created in the mid 1980s from two pairs of semi-detached dwellings that were constructed in the 1950s. Further alterations were carried out in the mid 1990s. Although the ground floor has been modified to create larger rooms in which various activities have been delivered over the years, the first floor is relatively unaltered, with the bedroom layout almost intact. The layout and access to the first floor, via domestic stairways, is not suitable for community use.
- 2.3 Anecdotal evidence suggests that the building was well used by local people in the past, when local residents 'managed' the building and encouraged use. In recent years though there has been a decline in numbers using the centre, the management committee has ceased to exist, and the building has deteriorated due to lack of investment.
- 2.4 Current users of Alston Lane are:
  - Space 2 – a third sector organisation providing commissioned services on behalf of various organisations and funders. Space 2 uses the building on a Tuesday, between 09.30-16.30. The organisation occupies several small rooms on the first floor to deliver a service to vulnerable men (approximately 8) across the East Leeds area. Activities include counselling, practical skills and group work. Space 2 is in receipt of a subsidy for the space and pay a charge of £15 per day. This has been agreed until the end of December 2013.
  - Councillor surgeries are held at the building on a Wednesday evening between 19.00-20.00 hours. This use is free of charge.
  - Both Space 2 and Councillors are key-holders. There is no on-site caretaker at this building.
- 2.5 The running costs for Alston Lane in 2012-13 were £14,064. The centre brought in an income of £1,440. Based on current usage this income figure is unlikely to increase in 2014/15. No additional letting requests have been submitted.

- 2.6 As Alston Lane is suitable for conversion back into housing, the building was included in the Council's bid to the Housing and Communities Agency's (HCA) Empty Properties Funding, which was made available in September 2012. It was subsequently confirmed that this funding had been secured for conversion of Alston Lane back into housing, with funding also being contributed from the Housing Revenue Account. Initially the bid for HCA funding included a proposal to convert the property into 1 bedroom flats. However concerns were raised in relation to this proposal, including the potential for anti-social behaviour with unsupported 1 bedroom accommodation.
- 2.7 At the same time, discussions took place with GIPSIL with a view to them taking on the running of the centre. However, this option was not considered to be feasible by GIPSIL and they expressed support for returning the premises to residential use. Further discussions with ward Members resulted in an agreement to return the premises to housing but only if this was for family housing, not 1 bedroom accommodation. In response, further discussions took place with the HCA around the flexibilities of the funding and they have confirmed that the funding can be used for conversion to family housing rather than 1 bedroom accommodation.
- 2.8 Ward Members were approached in September 2013 by a member of the public who stated that they wished to purchase Alston Lane and retain it for community use. In terms of the Localism Act and Assets of Community Value, the local community could nominate this property. However, it should be noted that no such application has been received. Colleagues from Asset Management met with the individual concerned to discuss his interest. However, no clear proposal or business case was presented and no finances had been identified to cover the market value of the property, currently estimated as £135,000. Interest from the local resident clearly did not present a sustainable option for the long term future of the centre.
- 2.9 As Alston Lane Community centre is underused, in poor condition and, due to its layout can only accommodate a limited range of activities, the Inner East Community Centres sub group supports its closure and conversion to housing, providing support is given to identify alternative venues for current user groups. Discussions are currently taking place with Facilities Management to facilitate this. The Denis Healey Centre has been declared surplus by Children's Services and is currently being transferred to Citizens and Communities. It is envisaged that current users at Alston Lane Community Centre can be transferred in January 2014.

### **3.0 Corporate Considerations**

#### **3.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 3.1.1 The Inner East Community Centres Working Group (Cllrs Hyde, Maqsood, Khan) met on 7<sup>th</sup> March and 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013 and discussed the future of Alston Lane. However, at the 7<sup>th</sup> March meeting, Cllr Hyde expressed a preference for Alston Lane to be transferred to GIPSIL. This option was explored with GIPSIL - they did not wish to take on Alston Lane and expressed their support for it to be returned to housing. At the 27<sup>th</sup> June meeting, Cllr Hyde expressed his concern regarding

conversion of the property into 1 bedroom housing. Further discussions subsequently took place between Cllr Hyde and the ENE Area Leader during July, August and September 2013. Through these meetings agreement was reached that if the HCA Empty Properties proposal could be amended from 1 bedroom accommodation to family housing, this would be supported that option. The Regeneration Programmes team have discussed the family housing option with HCA and they have confirmed that this is acceptable within the agreed funding.

### **3.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

- 3.2.1 There are no specific implications for equality and diversity. However, any potential impact will be mitigated through providing support to relocate all current user groups into local, appropriate premises.

### **3.3 Council policies and City Priorities**

- 3.3.1 Leeds needs investment in new homes and the aim is to attract maximum investment from the private sector and government. Within the City Priorities Plan 'best city...to live' priority there is a specific aim to maximise regeneration investment to increase housing choice and affordability within sustainable neighbourhoods.

### **3.4 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 3.4.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.
- 3.4.2 There is no exempt or confidential information.
- 3.4.3 In line with the Council's Executive and Decision Making Procedure Rules, agreed at Full Council May 2012, all decisions taken by Area Committees are not eligible for Call In.

### **3.5 Risk Management**

- 3.5.1 There are no major risks associated with the content of this report.

### **4.0 Conclusions**

- 4.1 As Alston Lane Community Centre is underused, in poor condition and, due to its layout can only accommodate a limited range of activities, the Inner East Community Centres sub group supports its closure and conversion to housing, providing support is given to identify alternative venues for current user groups. This proposal will make the most of available funding through the HCA, reduce the need to spend Council budget on an under-utilised building which is not fit for purpose as well as providing much needed family accommodation in South Seacroft.

## **5.0 Recommendations**

5.1 That Members of the Inner East Area Committee note the contents of the report and agree to:

- a) Alston Lane Community Centre being declared surplus on the condition that HCA and HRA funding will be used to convert the premises into family housing.
- b) Current users at Alston Lane will be supported to find alternative accommodation and this is likely to be at the Denis Healey Centre.

## **6.0 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

6.1 None.

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available for inspection on request for a period of four years following the date of the relevant meeting. Accordingly this list does not include documents containing exempt or confidential information, or any published works. Requests to inspect any background documents should be submitted to the report author.