

CABINET – 20 SEPTEMBER 2011

SAXON CENTRE - BIG SOCIETY FUND/ASSET TRANSFER POLICY

Report by Head of Strategy and Communications

Introduction

1. On 19 July 2011 Cabinet allocated funding in the first round of the Big Society Fund. Amongst the successful bids Cabinet agreed the bid for asset transfer of the Saxon Centre at Northway, Oxford to the Oxford Boxing Academy (OBA). This decision was subject to OBA meeting the financial commitment at the existing value of the site.
2. The OBA has agreed to pay the existing use price for the site and acknowledged the Cabinet's desire that the local community have access to the facility.

Cooling-off period

3. During the eight week cooling-off period for this decision as specified in the Asset Transfer Policy a second bid for the Saxon Centre has been received and considered. Awareness of a second bidder interested in this asset was noted in the report to Cabinet on 19 July.
4. In line with the Asset Transfer Policy we are bound to consider any new bids using the same assessment process. A meeting of councillors from the Oxford locality was convened to discuss the second bid and offer comments to Cabinet to support decision making.

One-eighty bid

5. The bid is from a group called One-eighty which aims to build and strengthen the local community, by offering a full week and weekend timetable of activities, for all age groups.
6. Councillors and officers were impressed with the ambition and vision of the One-eighty proposal and were keen to support the group in its community development aims for the Northway community.
7. Councillors and officer comments on the one-eighty proposal question both the sustainability of the project and potential duplication with the existing community centre in the area.
8. On balance the view of councillors and officers is that the Oxford Boxing Academy bid provides a more sustainable future for the Saxon Centre. The full assessment of the bid with service and councillor comments is at **annex 1** and the recommendation to Cabinet at paragraph 16.

Financial and Staff Implications

9. Sale of the Saxon Centre to the Oxford Boxing Academy at existing use value will bring a capital receipt to the council. The council's total asset portfolio will reduce as a result. If the site were leased to One-eighty a nominal rent would be charged.
10. There are no staff implications in this proposal.

Legal Implications

11. The boxing academy is requesting to purchase the freehold of a site. One-eighty would wish to lease the site. Sale at a value reflecting existing use will be accepted with provision made within the transfer deeds for the County Council to recoup an appropriate proportion of any uplift in value secured subsequently through a change of use.

Equality and Inclusion implications

12. Councillors and officers are keen to encourage the boxing academy to ensure access to the relocated club to the local community and we have received a commitment from them to this effect.
13. An equality impact assessment on the Big Society Fund was provided in the July report to Cabinet.

Risk implications

14. There is a risk to the county council that Big Society projects are not sustainable and are not able to continue in the future due to a lack of resources thereby depriving the community of an important community facility.
15. As identified earlier in the report there are concerns about the sustainability of the One-eighty proposal whereas the Oxford Boxing Academy is a well established and thriving sports club and the likelihood that this would happen in the foreseeable future is minimal.

RECOMMENDATION

16. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
 - (a) **uphold the decision to sell the Saxon Centre to the Oxford Boxing Academy**
 - (b) **encourage One-eighty to work with the community centre in Northway and reconsider its application to the Big Society Fund in a future round of bidding.**

Guy Swindle
Head of Strategy and Communications
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September 2011

**Oxfordshire Big Society Fund
 BID Assessment Form**

Section 1 – Project Overview

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| Project Name: One-eighty |
| Project Description: Create a community café in Northway (Saxon Centre) as part of a community centre providing a week and weekend timetable of inspiring education and activities, for all age groups |
| Amount bid for: £14,855 + asset transfer |
| Project Location and Locality: Saxon Centre, Northway, Oxford |
| Sponsoring Councillor: Cllr Roy Darke was consulted on the proposed project |

Section 2 – BID Criteria Assessment*

Qualitative assessment

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| Community Benefits (meets identified need) Creates a venue to bring together all groups in the community while at the same time teaching volunteers working skills through the café. It is understood that there are plans for a café as part of the city council's redevelopment of the Northway Community Centre. It is not clear what the need for a café is in the community. |
| Innovation and Creativity This would be a new initiative that would involve many groups in the community and provide young people and others with a place to go. More account needs to be taken of activities of planned community centre. |
| Sustainable Business Case Social Enterprise concept needs more detail, costs in future years seem very high and possibly difficult to sustain. It is not clear how reliant the project is on the success of the social enterprise. If this is not sustainable can the community café operate independently? |
| Community Involvement The community has been consulted through surveys, and has demonstrated support for the bid. The bid has financial support from some members of the community. |

Section 3 – Service Officer View*Where applicable*

This seems an interesting bid although heavily predicated on the café idea – it is not clear how much research has been done to identify need for usage of a café in Northway and would have major concerns about the emphasis on this as this social enterprise aspect is critical to the sustainability of the business plan. The bid has good community focus and suggests programmes matched to community need. Albeit untested. Ideally we would like to see something more in relation to open access work as well Redi session in the early evening as this is what we are losing.

Section 4 – Locality Review Group Assessment

Councillors were of a consensus that the One-eighty bid is attractive and proposes a positive local facility for the community of Northway. However there were a number of concerns about the bid and business plan. These included;

- Uncertainty as to whether the project will be able to generate the required income through the BE social enterprise including a lack of detail about the interest of schools in taking this up and how this will be sustained.
- Potential overlap of activities to be provided with those of the Northway community association such as the community café and activities for older people.
- Lack of awareness of the new Community centre that is planned and the opportunities that will bring.
- The plans that do not include any income generation from use of the building by different groups.

Overall councillors felt that the One-eighty bid had some strong ideas that they would be keen to support in the Northway community but that these would be best developed through existing community facilities namely the Northway Community Centre which has potential to accommodate them.

Councillors felt, on balance, that the proposal from the Oxford Boxing Academy has more potential to succeed but were keen to ensure that the sale sets out that the local community and in particular local young people should be able to access activities provided by the Boxing Academy.

Property Comments

| Saxon Centre – One Eighty | |
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| Type of transfer requested | One Eighty are requesting a lease. |
| Lease Terms | Property & Facilities recommend a term of 5 years with an option for the tenant to break at 2 years and then annually. |

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| | <p>In line with the Asset Transfer Policy the tenant will be responsible for all repairs and maintenance and insurance.</p> <p>Also in line with the Asset Transfer Policy a notional rent will be charged but this has not be allowed for in the bid (allow £3,000pa).</p> |
| Site issues | The asset is a standalone building and was refurbished 3 years ago. |
| Condition and Required Maintenance | The asset was refurbished 3 years ago. There is required maintenance of £11,600 identified. The main item is replacement of the boiler at a cost of £5,000. |
| Sustainability of Proposal | <p>Some property running costs included in the bid are based exactly on OCC's cost information which may not necessarily reflect the cost to the community. No contingency is allowed for. A notional rent of £3k is allowed for as stated in the Asset Transfer Policy.</p> <p>No allowance is made for repairs and maintenance costs. £5k pa should be allowed for.</p> |
| Capital Implications | As at February 2011, the site has an estimated alternative use (residential) capital value of £165k. The whole site has an estimated existing use (community use) capital value of £46k. |
| Key points to note | In granting a lease to the community the County Council is losing the option of selling the site and realising a capital receipt. |
| Property & Facilities position | Should Cabinet not uphold the decision to sell the centre to the Oxford Boxing Academy Property & Facilities would support the transfer of the asset to One Eighty under a 5 year lease with a tenant only option to break at the end of the second year and then annually. |

*Taken from 'Eligibility Checklist' document included as part of the 'Guidance Notes for the Application' page on the website.