

## **Divisions Affected – Eynsham**

### **DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE**

**13 September 2024**

#### **Development and Disposal of part of North Farm, Aston**

**Report by Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Cabinet Member is **RECOMMENDED** to:

- a) **Approve, as a key decision, the freehold sale of land comprising part of North Farm, Aston.**
- b) **Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Resources (Section 151 Officer), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, to consider officer recommendations and agree the final purchaser and sale price.**

### **Executive Summary**

1. North Farm is an agricultural site comprising a farmhouse, farmyard and an area of agricultural land on the northern edge of the village of Aston in West Oxfordshire. This report focuses on the farmyard and farmhouse.
2. The property was historically let on a secure Agricultural Holdings Act tenancy. This tenancy fell away in 2016 on the tenant's death and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) took the site back in 2017.
3. There has been various activity on the wider site since OCC took the tenancy back, with a new children's home (Aspen House) recently built on one of the paddocks and the northern farmland being looked at for biodiversity net gain. The remaining farmyard/house was added to the disposal list.
4. The decision was taken to add value to the site by seeking planning consent.
5. When/if planning permission is achieved, the intention is for the farmyard and farmhouse to be marketed for sale.

## **Background**

6. OCC own the freehold of the agricultural unit at North Farm, Aston. The farm was let to a lifetime tenant under the Agricultural Holdings Act. The tenant passed away in May 2016 and vacant possession was secured in September 2017.
7. The site within this report consists of the following:
  - Farmhouse – Lying directly on North Road on the northern edge of the village. The house is a four-bedroom stone cottage with a reasonable garden. The property was in poor condition when the lease ended and is currently vacant, requiring significant expenditure before it could be occupied.
  - Farmyard – A range of modern style, portal frame farm buildings behind the farmhouse, with their own access onto North Road. There is a small grass paddock to the north of the yard.
  - The wider farm also includes three small paddocks on the northern edge of the village and two larger arable fields further north.
8. The farmyard and farmhouse were considered to have development potential, and the farmyard was considered for disposal in 2017 with the decision made to enter the property onto the disposal list and explore opportunities to add value through the planning process.
9. On the assumption planning permission is achieved, the intention is that the property will be marketed for sale.
10. Services within OCC were given a final opportunity to submit interest in September 2023, with no further interest coming forward by the deadline in October 2023. The property has now been declared surplus to the operational requirements of the Council.

## **Risk Management**

11. The Council must ensure that all capital payments received come from the client account of a firm of solicitors acting for the purchaser, which has taken responsibility for money laundering checks. The Council may wish to conduct independent checks on the source of the funds and must reserve the right to withdraw from the transaction at any stage in the event that these are not completed to its satisfaction.

## **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

12. The sale of the site supports the agreed Property and Asset Strategy agreed in November 2022, by maximising the value of investments to support the long-term

financial sustainability of the Council land and supporting the local community by the provision of land for social housing.

## **Staff Implications**

13. There are no staff implications.

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

14. There are no equality and inclusion implications.

## **Financial Implications**

15. The Capital & Investment Strategy for 2024/25 agreed by the Council in February 2024 sets out that the principle that capital receipts should be treated as a corporate resource and used across the capital programme flexibly.

16. The eventual sale would provide a capital receipt as set out in the disposals programme. The sale price will have been supported by a period of open marketing. The disposal will therefore be compliant with the best value requirements as set out in section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Comments checked by:

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## **Legal Implications**

17. The Council has power to dispose of its land assets pursuant to Section 123(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, subject to its duty to ensure it receives best value for them. The Council owns the freehold to the site.

Comments checked by:

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## **Sustainability Implications**

18. There are no sustainability implications

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**Appendix1 – Exempt Information**

22 August 2024

