

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
COMMITTEE

10 September 2019

**DISPOSAL OF A HRA ASSET AND REMOVAL OF FORMER RAILWAY BRIDGE –
GREEN LANE, STUDLEY**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllrs Craig Warhurst and Brandon Clayton
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Judith Willis/Guy Revans
Ward(s) Affected	None
Ward Councillor(s) Consulted	No
Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 Members are requested to declare the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) property No. 65 Green Lane, Studley surplus to requirements and for Officers to dispose of the property.
- 1.2 Due to the structural condition of the brick arched former railway bridge in Green Lane, this structure be demolished with the reduction of the associated embankments. This will allow the existing footway/cycle track to be vertically realigned, and provide an increased site area for No. 65 Green Lane, thereby allowing the existing property to be demolished with two new residential plots being provided in its place.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Executive Committee is asked to RECOMMEND that:

- i) **No. 65 Green Lane, Studley be declared surplus to requirements and officers to dispose of the site;**
- ii) **Any HRA capital receipt achieved based on the current market value of No. 65 Green Lane, be used to increase the HRA stock;**
- iii) **Option C - The Capital Engineering Scheme be approved, with Authority be delegated to the Head of Environmental Services to submit a detailed planning application to Stratford-on-Avon District Council, for the complete scheme. If successful, the Planning consent will include an outline approval for the erection of 2 No. 4 bed houses;**
- iv) **The sites for the 2 No. 4 bed houses be marketed and the received monies, after deduction of the amount as described in ii) above, shall be used as Capital funds towards the cost of the Engineering Works;**

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- v) The additional funds required to complete the Engineering Works be taken from the Capital Locality Scheme Capital Programme 2019/20, as the proposed works are of the nature that the budget was set up for in the first instance;
- vi) The estimated cost of the Engineering Works cannot be finalised at this time, as Officers are currently endeavouring to determine the most cost effective method of disposing of the extensive surplus material from the excavated embankments. However, subject to the satisfactory outcome of this analysis the total Engineering Works should not exceed £200k.

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 Disposal of the site will generate a capital receipt for the HRA, together with the increase in the value of the site with planning permission for two new residential plots. The additional receipt above the current value of the HRA asset achieved through the engineering works will provide monies towards the main Capital scheme. The total Engineering Works are estimated at this stage to be £200k.
- 3.2 Funding for the Engineering works will be funded through the Capital Locality Scheme Budget which has sufficient unallocated budget for this work. The estimated final cost to the budget is identified in confidential appendix D.
- 3.3 If the removal of the bridge is not agreed, Officers consider that a full structural survey will be required by a suitably qualified and experienced Structural Bridge Engineer. Officers believe this will cost in the region of £20k - £25k, as it is likely that a full structural analysis will be necessary in addition to a detailed visual inspection and survey. The result of such an exercise will almost certainly require immediate remedial works to be undertaken, irrespective of costs, which could be considerable. Once this path is taken, an annual inspection will be a necessity, together with financing any resulting remedial works. A perennial drain on this Authority's asset maintenance budget.

Legal Implications

- 3.4 There are no legal implications.

Background/Service Implications

- 3.5 No. 65 Green Lane is owned by Redditch Borough Council (RBC) and is an HRA asset but lies within Stratford-on-Avon District Council boundary. The property is currently void and Officers do not consider that it is suitable to remain as part of the HRA stock.

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- 3.6 The property is a 2 bedroom 3 person cottage constructed pre 1919 and the external construction of the property lacks adequate insulation properties. The property is currently void.
- 3.7 Internally the property is very small. On the ground floor there is a living room leading to a small kitchen, with a further lean to utility area and the only wc in the property. Off the living room there is a shower room. The stairs are very steep and narrow and have a 90 degree turn at the bottom. Upstairs there is a double bedroom and a single bedroom only.
- 3.8 As a two bedroom house this property would normally be allocated to a family, but Officers do not consider it suitable. In order to improve the property and make it suitable for letting, significant work including a two storey extension would be required.
- 3.9 Officers do not consider this would be a suitable option and consider the sale and use of the capital receipt for the Housing Growth Programme would provide better value for money.
- 3.10 In close proximity to this site there exists a brick arched bridge structure spanning Green Lane that was formally the route of the now disused Evesham to Redditch railway line. This structure, together with associated land is owned by RBC. Part of this again lies outside of the Borough boundary. The railway line down to where Brickyard Lane abruptly changes direction and the bridge structure was originally owned by the former Development Corporation with such assets being transferred to RBC some years' ago.
- 3.11 Green Lane and Brickhouse Lane are adopted highways, under the responsibility of both Worcestershire and Warwickshire County Councils (refer to Appendix B).
- 3.12 From a recent visual inspection, the actual bridge structure gives considerable cause for concern, as bricks have fallen from one of the soldier courses on the western face of the structure. Also, it is evident that surface water has penetrated the structure itself which will undoubtedly affect its structural integrity over time.
- 3.13 The deck of the structure facilitates the Sustrans Cycle Route 5 over, but this footpath construction has failed at each end of the span of the bridge, presumably resulting again from the ingress of surface water. The stone copings on the top of the parapet walls show signs of lateral movement due to the deterioration of the mortar bedding. In addition, RBC undertook remedial works some years ago, where bricks from the arch soffit had become displaced and fallen directly onto the highway below.
- 3.14 As a result of the above structural concerns, RBC appears to be left with three possible courses of action, these being as follows:
 - i) Option A – Do-nothing option is extremely likely to result in the existing brick arched bridge structure deteriorating over time, which may again not only cause loose bricks to fall onto the highway below, but other elements may

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become at risk, due to its structural integrity being compromised. A health and safety risk that cannot be permitted to occur. A structural survey would be required due to the risks identified with the bridge;

- ii) Option B – Undertake an independent structural survey of the bridge structure, and following this, instigate the recommended remedial works, which could be substantial and obviously expensive. Future regular maintenance inspections and resulting works will be a continuous drain on RBC's asset maintenance resources;
- iii) Option C – This proposal which is considered the most prudent and cost effective, removes the existing bridge structure completely, thereby removing altogether the need for any costly future maintenance. Relocates part of Green Lane to provide a more acceptable horizontal alignment and junction arrangement with Brickhouse Lane. Reduces the embankment within the locality of Green Lane thereby facilitating an at-level crossing for the Cycle Route (refer to Appendix A).

The realignment of the Cycle Route with the removal of the embankment will also facilitate a larger site area of No.65 Green Lane. Consequently, this will enable demolition of the existing cottage and the provision of 2 No. 4-bed houses, with an acceptable eastern visibility splay (which is lacking with the present highway configuration), subject of course to Planning Consent being forthcoming from Stratford-on-Avon District Council. These sites with outline Planning Consent can then be sold on the open market.

- 3.15 The preferred Option C above, would of course be gaining some financial benefit from the disposal of the residential site (No.65 Green Lane). Obviously, however, only the potential increased value of this site can be utilised for use as part payment of this scheme, as the estimated value of the site as it now stands is with the HRA fund.
- 3.16 It is of course a matter of fact that both Highway Authorities will significantly benefit from this highway improvement, which currently suffers from extremely poor forward visibility on Green Lane itself, and similar visibility restrictions at the Brickhouse Lane junction. As a result, both County Councils have already been advised of the proposal in detail, and 'invited' to contribute financially towards the cost. Regrettably, both County Councils have replied giving their preliminary approval, but are unable to contribute financially.
- 3.17 This Council's responsibility is for the bridge structure itself, and obviously the cycle way over it, in as much as the bridge provides the support for this asset where it crosses the highway. Although the cycleway construction is adopted by the County Councils, it is our opinion is that we cannot merely demolish the bridge structure and then leave the cycleway with a substantial 'gap' in its route, to be 'filled' by others.

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- 3.18 In view of both of the Highway Authorities not being able to contribute financially towards the preferred highway realignment works, we are left with undertaking only the minimum of works necessary. These will consist of demolishing the actual bridge structure, removal of the embankments at each end sufficiently enough to regrade them to an acceptable longitudinal gradient, and provide a realigned footway/cycle way with an at-level highway crossing at Green Lane. Reinstatement of elements of kerbing, carriageway, drainage, verges, etc., within the vicinity of the removed bridge will of course be necessary, but the existing carriageway alignment will of course remain as before, albeit in an unnecessary configuration. Consequently, the revised design of the scheme has been based upon these parameters (refer to Appendix C).

Customer/Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.19 The disposal of an unfit property and reinvesting into more appropriate affordable housing will assist in providing appropriate affordable housing for customers.
- 3.20 There are no equality or diversity implications.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 The existing brick arched bridge structure, due to its structural integrity being compromised, if not removed, may result in further elements becoming loose and falling onto the highway below. A health and safety risk that cannot be permitted to occur.
- 4.2 The bridge structure, although being a redundant asset as far as the former railway network is concerned, is probably still an important icon to a number of railway enthusiasts. As such, this may involve some opposition to its removal, but as highlighted within Option B, retainment of this structure would necessitate annual assessments and increased costs to the Council.

5. APPENDICES

- A - Drawing No. P2237/1 – Preliminary Layout
B - Drawing No. P2237/4 - Existing Layout (Planning Application)
C - Drawing No. P2237/5 - Proposed Layout (Planning Application)
D - Exempt Information - Financial Estimates

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

7. KEY

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None

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