

**Report to the Asset Management and
Economic Development Cabinet
Committee**



**Epping Forest
District Council**

**Report reference:
AMED-006-2015/16**

Date of meeting: 15 October 2015

Portfolio: Asset Management and Economic Development Cabinet Committee

Subject: Progress Report on the St John's Road, Epping, Development

Responsible Officer: Derek Macnab (01992 564050)

Democratic Services: Jackie Leither (01992 564756)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That Members note progress on the St John's Road, Epping, Redevelopment Project.

Executive Summary:

The St John's Road site is in a key town centre location in the market town of Epping, Essex. The site itself is in public ownership with Essex County Council the majority landowner, with Epping Town Council and Epping Forest District Council owning adjacent land.

With the relocation of the junior school and closure of the Adult Education and Youth Centres on the site, it was recognised that any redevelopment of the area would need to be given careful consideration. This was not only due to its relationship to the historic heart of the town and that the site was potentially of significant strategic importance with respect of the emerging Local Plan, but also presented a unique opportunity to significantly enhance community facilities for residents, delivering associated economic development benefits.

In conjunction with the County and Town Councils, in March 2010 the District Council's Cabinet Committee commissioned a Design and Development Brief for the area, to provide planning guidance. A period of extensive consultation ensued leading to the agreement of a mixed use scheme, i.e. retail, leisure and an element of residential. Following adoption, a joint marketing exercise was undertaken to appoint a preferred development partner i.e. Frontier Estates. Frontier's proposals will deliver a Food store, 3 screen cinema, a mix of shops and restaurants, new Town Council Offices and Meeting Rooms, plus some residential. Their scheme is regarded as delivering the aspirations of the Design & Development brief, offering facilities to a wide cross section of the local community.

In order to move the scheme forward given the level of public interest, the District Council has agreed to purchase Essex County Council's land holding. The purchase also includes the sale of Lyndsey House in Epping to the County Council, for the purpose of supported accommodation for vulnerable adults.

Epping Residents have expressed concerns about the length of time the site has been vacant.

This report provides an update on the progress of the scheme.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To update Members on the progress of the St John's Road Redevelopment Scheme, which is a major strategic site in Epping, with the potential to deliver significant community benefits.

Other Options for Action:

Not to provide an update at this point.

Report:

1. In January 2010, Epping Forest District Council and Essex County Council, appointed town planning consultants, Urban Practitioners to provide a development and design brief for the St John's Road area of Epping. The main impetus for the study was the relocation of the former Epping Junior School, to a new building nearby. This resulted in the release of a significant area of land for redevelopment, in a central location in the Town.
2. Another significant feature of the site is that it is co-located with other areas of land in the ownership of public bodies, namely, Epping Town Council (Council Offices and Epping Hall) and Epping Forest District Council (Housing Repairs Depot). By virtue of this, the opportunity was taken to strategically consider the wider area in a holistic manner, to include the Library and Registry Office and St John's the Baptist Church, in terms of the Design and Development Brief.
3. A draft Design and Development Brief was prepared in conjunction with key stakeholders which identified, four broad development Options, namely Option One – Retail Led Option; Option Two – Leisure Led Option; Option Three – Retail and Leisure Option; Option Four – Residential Option.
4. The proposed Design and Development Brief was then subject to extensive public consultation during March and April 2012. This exercise prompted more than 400 responses from the local community. The main issues, which people felt it most important to consider in the Town Centre, were
 - (i) Improved community and leisure facilities;
 - (ii) The protection of historic buildings and respect for their scale;
 - (iii) Space for adult education;
 - (iv) Protection of existing trees.
5. The Design and Development Brief was intended to not only provide a vision for the future of the area, but once agreed by the Councils' Cabinet and Full Council, represent non statutory planning guidance. In summary, now that it has been formally agreed by the District Council, it has become a material consideration for any future planning application for the sites, and forms part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan.
6. Taking on board the results of consultation, the Design and Development Brief was formally agreed, on the basis of a mix-use development. A joint marketing campaign was undertaken by Essex County Council and Epping Forest District Council. A number of Expressions of Interest and resultant bids were received. An evaluation was then undertaken to determine which proposal best reflected the aspirations and guidance contained in the Design and Development Brief, and also met the financial objectives of the landowners. Frontier Estates

Ltd, were selected by all parties as the preferred developer, their proposal containing a Food Store, 3 Screen Cinema, Shops and Restaurants, as well as an element of residential. The scheme would involve Epping Town Council relocating from their Council Offices at St John's Road Hall into new offices and community space in the partially listed Centrepoint Building, which will be retained.

7. In order to procure the development, it was agreed by Essex County Council that they would sell their land to Epping Forest District Council. The District Council would then enter into a tripartite agreement with Epping Town Council to sell the totality of the site to Frontier Estates Ltd, subject to three pre-conditions:
 - (i) Detailed Planning Approval being obtained;
 - (ii) Frontier Estates Ltd securing an agreement for lease with a Food Store operator;
 - (iii) Access to the site being achieved.
8. As part of the Tripartite Agreement, Frontier Estates are to provide temporary community facilities for Epping Town Council, until their new offices are constructed in the Centrepoint building.
9. Epping Town Council have employed their own agents, quantity surveyors, engineers and solicitors to ensure that the new accommodation in the Centre Point Building, to replace Epping Hall is suitable for their purposes. Detailed discussions have taken place and specifications for the work have been agreed. Details of the works are being finalised and final drafting matters between solicitors are being agreed. .
10. ETC will remain in Epping Hall until the temporary accommodation has been provided. The Tripartite Agreement will become unconditional, when the three conditions have been satisfied. EFDC will also keep the Housing Maintenance Depot operational until this time although alternate sites are being explored..
11. At the time of discussions regarding the contract for sale of Essex County Council's land at St John's Road, a need for provision to meet the accommodation needs of vulnerable adults was identified in the locality. The Council is the freehold owner of Lindsay House in Lindsey Street, Epping, which had previously been leased to the Abbeyfields Society for housing the elderly. As demand for this type of bedsit accommodation reduced, the Charity did not wish to extend its occupancy. Therefore, after negotiation with the Diocese around the extension of the covenants, Essex County Council expressed a desire to purchase the building and convert it for use for supported living for vulnerable adults. The purchase of Lindsay House, therefore, became part of the negotiations with the District Council acquiring the County Council land at St John's Road. A sale price has now been agreed between the County and District Council. However, as Essex is selling the land to another public body, i.e. EFDC, they have sought the Secretary of State's approval, by means of a State Aid application. A concern that prompted the application is that the County Council have received a higher unsolicited offer from a residential care home provider. Whilst of higher value, a large care home would not be in accordance with the Design and Development brief prepared by the planning authority and would not deliver the wider community benefits.
12. It is likely by the time that this report is considered by Members, the necessary State Aid Approval will have been received. The contract has now largely been agreed and the only remaining point of negotiation with the sale, is that Essex County Council have asked for a clause to protect themselves, should the St John's Road redevelopment change substantially from the mixed use scheme. The wording of this clause is now close to agreement between the respective solicitors. The District Council is committed to delivering the scheme that is in accordance with the Design and Development Brief. In this regard, one of the pre-conditions specifically relates to the provision of a Food Store. The developer will have to submit a full

planning application, which will need to be supported by all the relevant technical studies in relation to traffic and environmental impacts etc. Again, this should be in accordance with the mixed-use scheme originally submitted, reflecting the Design and Development Brief, in order to increase the likelihood of a successful permission.

13. Unfortunately, the extension of the Lindsay House covenant, the detailed negotiations around conditions of sale and the necessary State Aid application, have led to delay. However, it is hoped that the sale can be concluded and the tripartite agreement entered into in the next few weeks. Going forward it will then be for the developer to submit the necessary Planning application anticipated early in the New Year.

Resource Implications:

Funding has been allocated in the Council's Capital Programme to facilitate the project.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The Council has appointed external solicitors to undertake the purchase of Essex County Council's interest and subsequent disposal of the site to the preferred developer,

Safer Cleaner Greener Implications

All construction will be in accordance with modern building regulations with regard to energy efficiency. Security measures such as CCTV will be incorporated.

Consultation Undertaken

Essex County Council and Epping Town Council are development partners.

Background Papers

Design and Development Brief for the St John's Road Area and Cabinet Reports.

Risk Assessment

If the project was not to complete as envisaged, the Economic and Community benefits would not be delivered.

Due Regard Record

This page shows **which groups of people are affected** by the subject of this report. It sets out **how they are affected** and how any **unlawful discrimination** they experience can be eliminated. It also includes information about how **access to the service(s)** subject to this report can be improved for the different groups of people;

and how they can be assisted to **understand each other better** as a result of the subject of this report.

S149 Equality Act 2010 requires that due regard must be paid to this information when considering the subject of this report.

The Scheme will be accessible for people of all ages and abilities.