

Disposal of Stibbington Outdoor Centre, Stibbington

To: Assets and Procurement Committee

Meeting Date: 22 January 2025

From: Executive Director of Finance and Resources

Electoral division(s): Sawtry and Stilton

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan ref: 2025/018

Executive Summary: This report considers the disposal of the Grade II listed building and associated land at Church Lane, Stibbington, Peterborough, PE8 6LP.

The preferred bid for the freehold of the site on an unconditional basis is over £500,000, subject to contract.

The Council's disposal policy requires Committee approval for disposing of properties over £500,000.

Recommendations: The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Review and approve the recommended offer received after the recent marketing of the property, in accordance with Section 123 of the Local Government Act.
- b) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Finance and Resources in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Asset and Procurement Committee to agree on terms, execute the necessary documentation, and complete the disposal of the site.
- c) Note the disposal to the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee as requested by Children and Young People's Committee, noting the s151 advice as set out at Paragraph 3.1.

Officer contact:

Name: Helena Coulston
Post: Principal Surveyor
Email: helena.coulson@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

1. Creating a greener, fairer, and more caring Cambridgeshire

1.1 This report relates to the Council's following ambitions

Ambition 1: Net zero carbon emissions.

Ambition 6: Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised.

Ambition 7: Children and young people have opportunities to thrive.

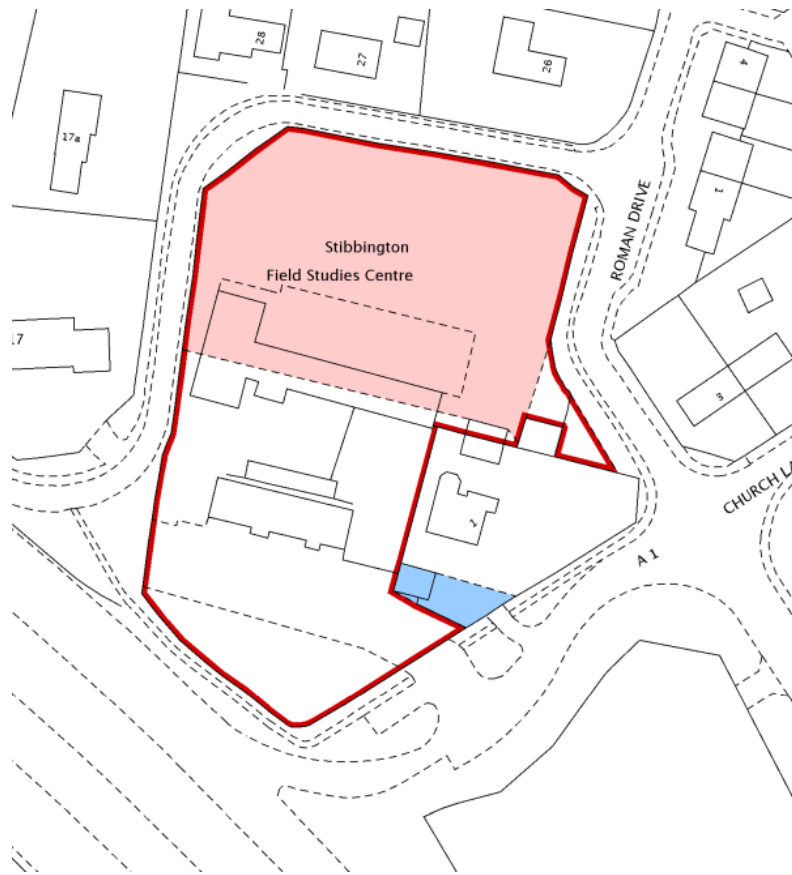
2. Background

2.1 The Committee is asked to approve the disposal of Stibbington Outdoor Centre for more than £500,000 which exceeds the threshold for officer delegation.

2.2 The Stibbington Outdoor Centre in Stibbington, owned by Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC), is a solid brick-built former school building constructed around 1871-1872 with a pitched slate roof. The total site area is 0.67 ha (1.6 acres). Please refer to the location plan and photograph below.



Photo of The Old School House



Stibbington location plan

- 2.3 Historic England awarded the property a Grade II Listing on 7 February 2024 (List entry number 1488090) for the Former Board School and outbuilding to the north.
- 2.4 The area shaded pink on the location plan above has the benefit of a right of way over adjoining land granted in a conveyance made in 1948. The area shaded blue is subject to various rights for the benefit of the property
- 2.5 The building has an Energy Performance Certificate of G.
- 2.6 The Stibbington Outdoor Centre, was previously operated by the Council's Outdoor Education service, using residential accommodation in a temporary single-storey modular building known as the Terrapin. The site has not functioned as a school for over 10 years.
- 2.7 Planning consent for the Terrapin expired on August 31, 2023 (planning ref18/05008/CCA). This consent can be renewed, or if not, the building must be removed. The Terrapin, erected in 1988 and extended in 1997, includes classrooms, a canteen and kitchen, and residential accommodation (13 bedrooms configured to sleep 34 children and 4 adults) and is now at the end of its operational life.
- 2.8 The site and surrounding area have significant archaeological interest, with extensive Roman activity, including a town, several forts, and pottery industries spread across Stibbington, Water Newton, and north into Peterborough but it is not a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

- 2.9 Any alternative use of the site would require planning permission, Listed Building Consent and most likely further archaeological investigations.
- 2.10 The property is not registered as an Asset of Community Value.

3. Main Issues

Disposal

- 3.1 Children and Young People's Committee on 17 January 2023 approved the closure of the centre. The Committee resolved that "*If the closure is agreed, a proposal to be made to Strategy and Resources Committee for the earmarking of the capital receipt to support the investment and sustainability of Burwell House and Grafham Water*". The Director of Finance and Resources has since confirmed that in line with the Council's Capital Strategy, all capital receipts should first be applied to the overall funding and treasury management of the capital programme and should not be ring fenced to specific schemes.
- 3.2 The former Stibbington Outdoor Centre has not been in operational use by the County Council since 31 August 2023. Future service needs and potential uses for the building were evaluated according to the Council's procedures for surplus assets and the disposal Policy. The evaluation confirmed that there was no current or anticipated council service or operational need for the building. The Local Parish Councils and Huntingdon District Council were offered the opportunity to buy the building in line with the Council's disposal policy, but they expressed no interest in the property.
- 3.3 Leasing the property was considered, but it was considered too costly due to the recent Grade II listing and the expired planning permission for the temporary Terrapin buildings, which are at the end of their operational life and should be demolished as they require significant investment. The property currently has an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of G. Although the previous Government had planned to require leased commercial properties to have at least an EPC rating of B by 2030, this deadline was withdrawn. However, the requirement is likely to return as the current Government is consulting on similar changes and since April 2023, the minimum EPC rating for leasing remains at E. This limits the Council's options to retain and lease the property without incurring further costs to improve the asset or apply for an exemption. Therefore, the option to let the property was discounted.
- 3.4 Marketing the site with the benefit of a planning consent for development was also considered but obtaining planning would be costly with an uncertain outcome. This was discounted due to the nature and location of the site, with an open market freehold sale considered the best way to achieve best consideration. This approach allows the Council to reduce future liabilities across its overall estate while achieving best consideration more quickly.
- 3.5 The property was marketed in June 2024 by local agents Eddisons, who offered it in two lots. Lot 1 included the main building and car park area, guided at £250,000. Lot 2 invited offers for the rear land on a conditional or unconditional basis, including an overage agreement with a percentage of any future uplift in value. Please refer to the linked marketing particulars for more details. [Marketing particulars](#)

- 3.6 This attracted a total of 9 bids. Two separate parties made offers for the individual lots: one for Lot 1 at the asking price, and the other for Lot 2 on a less-than-best basis. Since all other offers were for both lots together, it was decided that pursuing the independent lots would not achieve the best consideration at this time.
- 3.7 Bids were assessed based on two categories of scoring 40:60:
- Deliverability and Funding – 40. Proof and availability of funding. Timing of funding. ie conditional on planning
 - Financial Value – 60. Financial offer.
- 3.8 Some of the bids were conditional, subject to obtaining planning consent and others had overage considerations, which affected their deliverability and best consideration compared to the unconditional offers received. To establish the best consideration, parties were contacted in September 2024 and invited to submit their best and final unconditional bids.
- 3.9 Please see **Confidential Appendix 1** for a summary and analysis of the bids received which are ranked in order of preference. All bids were assessed based on the financial receipt and deliverability in terms of planning risk, proof of funds, and timescales. The summary scoring is set out in the table below:

Table 1: Summary of bids received and scored assessment

Bidder	Scoring		
	Deliverability and Funding (40)	Value (60)	Total
1	25	35	60
2	35	48	83
3	35	42	77
4	10	59	69
5	15	20	35
6	20	5	25
7	34	50	84
8	35	45	80
9	38	58	96

- 3.10 The preferred bidder, (bidder 9), has made an unconditional offer which is over £500,000 and has provided proof of funding.
- 3.11 The bidder's proposal aligns with CCC's corporate priorities, particularly Ambitions 1, 6 and 7, by benefiting the community and positively impacting the area.

4. Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 Several alternative options have been considered and dismissed.

- a) **Retain for Council use:** The property has been declared surplus to requirements due to a lack of service demand and is unsuitable for modern council service needs.
- b) **Consideration of other bids:** See confidential appendix 1.
- c) **CCC could try to obtain detailed planning for the site.** Due to local land values, the site's proximity to the A1, its Listed Building status, and nearby archaeological sites, significant planning gains are unlikely. Additional holding costs and the expired planning consent for the Terrapin building, which would need renewal or demolition, were also considered.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 5.1 It is recommended to accept the offer from the preferred bidder, as it is the highest deliverable bid. The bidder is credible, has available funds and their bid is unconditional. They plan to use the building in a manner that respects the location and will bring employment opportunities to the local area.

6. Significant Implications

6.1 Finance Implications

The terrapin building is at the end of its economic life. The main building now Grade II listed and associated costs to maintain and upgrade not within the current capital programme. Holding costs are £30,000 per annum. There would potentially be a capital receipt (the value is outlined in Appendix 1), in 3 months from acceptance.

6.2 Legal Implications

Pathfinder Legal has been instructed and has completed title checks. Selling both lots together will reduce legal fees. Unconditional contracts are expected to incur fewer legal fees than conditional contracts and will likely take less time to complete.

6.3 Risk Implications

The main risk to the Council is that the bidder may change their proposal before completion or do not complete the transaction. Additionally, the Council will have no control over any change of use after the sale. Although overage provisions were explored with earlier bidders, these bids were not considered the best option due to their conditional nature, relying on planning approval and market conditions. Therefore, an unconditional bid is considered the most reliable way forward.

6.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

As a public sector organisation, we must remove unlawful discrimination, advance equal opportunities, and promote good relations between people. The proposal provides for training of all ages within the community that would benefit the local community positively in line with Ambition 6 and 7.

A completed and approved Equality, Impact Assessment (EqIA) can be requested with the reference EQIA-00796.

6.5 Climate Change and Environment Implications

By reusing an existing building in a manner sympathetic to the surrounding area and utilising existing transport links, the property can be maintained with its embedded carbon.

The property has an EPC level G and requires significant investment and updating to align with the Council's net zero objectives. Selling the property to be used in a sympathetic manner to the historic layout would support embedded carbon.

7. Source Documents

7.1 CONFIDENTIAL Appendix 1- Table of Offers