

LISCARD HALL, CENTRAL PARK, WALLASEY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the necessary demolition of Liscard Hall, following a fire in the building and the options, which the Council may wish to consider with regard to the future of the site of the Hall and depot buildings.

2. Background

2.1 At Cabinet on 14th November 2007, Members were advised that two developers had submitted appropriate schemes, in response to the Development Brief issued to the market for the opportunity to refurbish Liscard Hall. It was resolved that both developers be invited to proceed to Stage 2 of the Selection Process.

2.2 The two Companies subsequently discussed their initial proposals with officers to ensure that they were compatible with the Council's aspirations and planning requirements. Having satisfied Officers that their respective schemes were compliant with the Development Brief, the necessary Tender documentation for Stage 2 of the selection process was sent out, with a completion date set for their return of 1st September 2008.

2.3 On the night of 6th July 2008, the Hall was subject to an arson attack. This caused such extensive structural damage that the Council had no option but to demolish the building on 7th July 2008, in the interests of public safety. A retrospective application for Listed Building Consent, required to demolish the Hall, is being prepared and will be considered by the Council's Planning Committee, English Heritage and the Secretary of State.

2.4 The two Companies who were working up their proposals remain committed to a scheme and their continuing interest is considered in more detail later in this report.

2.5 Where the Hall stood is now a cleared level site within Central Park, with the footings and basement of the Hall now covered with topsoil. The Park is an area designated as Urban Greenspace for protection from development in the Council's adopted Unitary Development Plan. Accordingly, the next section of this report examines various options.

3. Option 1

To incorporate the site of the Hall as an additional area of Central Park.

3.1 This option would require minimal expenditure, as the site has already been seeded as part of the demolition contract, and the increased area of grass involved would have only a marginal effect on the revenue costs required to maintain Central Park.

However, this option would not record the existence of the building, which might be considered to be detrimental to the historical legacy of Liscard Hall.

- 3.2 Option 1 would comply with the Council's adopted Unitary Development Plan policy for Central Park

4. Option 2

To grass over the site leaving the top of the external and basement walls exposed as features to show the original structure and footprint of the Hall.

- 4.1 This option will require further investigation to determine how much of the external and basement walls were damaged by the demolition and how much material will need to be excavated from the basement, to give definition to the structures remaining.
- 4.2 In addition, an explanatory plaque could be erected describing the archaeological remains and history of Liscard Hall.
- 4.3 Option 2 would comply with the Council's adopted Unitary Development Plan policy for Central Park.

5. Option 3

To build on the site of the Hall.

- 5.1 The original Development Brief described how the Council's existing planning policies might be satisfied by an appropriate development, because the principal objective was to preserve, restore and refurbish a Grade II Listed building, bringing it back into a suitable beneficial use.
- 5.2 As the building has been demolished, the Council's planning policies applicable to a designated Urban Greenspace will apply to the cleared site. UDP Policy GR1 – The Protection of Urban Greenspace, states:

On land designated as Urban Greenspace, facilities for visitors, sport or play will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the proposals would not:

- (1) prejudice the continued use of the site for open air recreation; or*
(2) prejudice the visual amenity, landscape character or nature conservation value of the site

Development for other purposes on land designated as Urban Greenspace, other than for the re-use of existing buildings, will not be permitted unless alternative provision of equivalent community benefit is made available.

- 5.3 In these circumstances, it will be difficult to present a scheme, which involves the erection of a new building on the site of the Hall that would comply with this policy.
- 5.4 Option 3 would only comply with the Council's adopted Unitary Development Plan policy for Central Park, if alternative provision of equivalent community benefit could be secured somewhere else within the locality.

6. Option 4

To try and promote a new scheme to refurbish the Depot Buildings, in isolation.

- 6.1 The depot has two buildings capable of conversion. They are the main depot building 426m² GIA (4585sq ft) and the detached cottage 103m² GIA (1100sq ft), currently used as a mess room. They are in poor condition and operationally unsatisfactory because they create excessive traffic movements within the park. Also, there are activities carried out at the Depot that are not directly linked with the maintenance of Central Park and would therefore be better serviced from alternative depot locations.
- 6.2 The buildings are still listed as curtilage buildings to the Hall because there was a functional and land ownership relationship. Now that the Hall has been demolished English Heritage will need to consider at some time in the future de-listing and make an assessment as to whether the depot complex and garden should be listed in their own right. The Council might also wish to see them restored and preserved, irrespective of whether they are listed or not.
- 6.3 As existing buildings to be re-used, the opportunity for a prospective developer to submit a scheme that might be satisfactory in planning terms is likely to be more achievable, than in respect of the cleared site of the Hall. However, the scale and condition of the buildings available for development are such that they may be of limited interest to the commercial market, particularly in the current adverse economic climate.
- 6.4 Option 4 would comply with the Council's adopted Unitary Development Plan policy for Central Park subject to any impact on the remaining Listed Buildings or Structures.
- 6.5 Although the original Companies, who submitted proposals to refurbish the Hall, remain interested in any new build scheme, Members are advised that either of the Options 3 & 4, will require a new Development Brief to be prepared and a new procurement procedure to be commenced.

7. Local Consultation

- 7.1 On 17th September 2008 a meeting of the Liscard Hall Steering Group, comprising local Ward Members and Friends of Central Park, was held to try and determine whether there was a consensus locally in support of any one particular option, or any alternative proposals that might be forthcoming from the community.
- 7.2 In summary, the Group would prefer to see the Council fully examine the planning circumstances that now apply to the cleared site, to see if there was any realistic possibility of securing a new building on the site. The Group was also prepared to see any such development proposals cover, as previously, the depot and outbuildings.
- 7.3 The Group also felt that any new Development Brief prepared to promote a new build scheme should, as far as possible, repeat the sequential preferences for development which had originally been proposed for the Hall i.e. Self Sustaining Community Uses, Self Sustaining Leisure Uses, Commercial Uses and finally and least favourably Residential Use.

- 7.4 The Council committed significant Officer and Member time and effort to try and secure a future for the Hall. Much of that work could be modified and adapted to try and secure a new development on its cleared site, if the planning hurdles can be overcome.
- 7.5 The conclusion of the Group was that the site of the Hall and its environs are examined in detail, to see what re-development opportunities might be possible, in the new circumstances.

8. The Insurance Claim

- 8.1 Asset Management has provided the Council's insurers with full details of the structure and layout of the Hall, together with photographic evidence of the condition of the building before the fire. It has also supplied the Development Brief for the refurbishment of the Hall and two schemes submitted by the prospective developers.
- 8.2 The loss adjusters are to appoint an Independent Valuer to work up a valuation of the building in its condition before the fire, in need of refurbishment, which will be used as a basis of settlement of this claim. The Insurers have met the demolition costs, site clearance and making good the ground.
- 8.3 The Council could seek to settle the claim by asking the Insurers to rebuild the Hall. The Director of Finance does not recommend this because the Council will need to find unquantified capital resources of its own to complete any scheme and would find the insurance monies significantly reduced to reflect any betterment that a new building creates.

9. Strategic Objectives

- 9.1 The selection of the options to seek a new building on the site together with the refurbishment and conversion of the depot buildings will support the Council's priority to improve the use of the Council's Land and Asset.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 None at this stage. The Council may receive a capital receipt when the insurance claim is settled.

11. Staffing implications

- 11.1 None

12. Equal Opportunities implications

- 12.1 None

13. Community Safety Implications

- 13.1 The building had to be demolished because it was unsafe and could not be made safe as a standing structure and the site has now been cleared of materials and left safe.

14. Local Agenda 21 implications

14.1 None

15. Planning implications

15.1 Central Park is designated as Urban Greenspace in the Unitary Development Plan and any future planning application for development at the former Liscard Hall site would be assessed against Policies GRE1 and GR1 'The Protection of Urban Green Space'.

15.2 Facilities for visitors, sport or play can be permitted under the terms of this policy, other types of development could only be considered if suitable compensatory measures can be put in place to provide equivalent community benefit elsewhere. This normally requires provision of open space elsewhere in the area. The policy also allows for the existing buildings to be converted for other suitable uses.

15.3 As the main listed building has been demolished, the case for any substantial enabling development has diminished any other enabling development would have to be proportionate to securing their long term future under the terms of Policy CH1.

15.4 There is a statutory requirement to determine applications in accordance with the Unitary Development Plan unless it can be demonstrated that material considerations indicate otherwise. A planning application at this site which departs from the adopted planning policy would need to be referred to the Secretary of State before planning permission could be granted.

16. Anti-poverty implications

16.1 None

17. Human Rights implications

17.1 None

18. Social Inclusion implications

18.1 None

19. Local Member Support implications

19.1 This report will be of interest to Ward Members in New Brighton, Wallasey, Liscard and Seacombe.

20. Background Papers

20.1 None

21. RECOMMENDATION

- 21.1 That the Cabinet authorises Officers to explore the viability of Option 3 and/or Option 4 in order to try and procure a beneficial use of the site of the Hall and its environs and to report back to a future meeting.

Bill Norman

Ref. AM/SH/

This report has been prepared by Sam Hird who can be contacted on 0151 691 8463