

Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities

18th November 2021

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities - Councillor David Welsh

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Property Services and Development

Ward(s) affected:

Lower Stoke

Title:

Stoke Aldermoor Life Centre – Update November 2021

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

Stoke Aldermoor Life Centre (“the Centre”) is owned by the Council and has been managed by volunteers of Stoke Aldermoor Community Association since they occupied this part of the building in 2007.

The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities and seek approval for an ‘expressions of interest exercise’ to consider if any other community groups are interested to operate community activities. This exercise will be conducted whilst the existing occupier remain in-situ to continue with the daily activities within the centre and for the benefit of the wider community.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities is recommended to:

1. Authorise the Director of Property Services and Development to seek expressions of interest in the building whilst Stoke Aldermoor Community Association remain in situ.
2. Request officers to report back on the results of the above exercise and conducting interviews in consultation with Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities.

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1 - Stoke Aldermoor Life Centre Site Plan

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 Stoke Aldermoor Community Association (SACA) currently occupy and operate out of Stoke Aldermoor Life Centre which is a Council owned building and within the operational property portfolio. Since 2007, SACA have been operating out of the centre on an 'informal' basis.
- 1.2 SACA conduct various activities for the local community to use and the Council presently has a 'landlord and tenant' relationship with the volunteers of the centre but without a formal agreement in place.
- 1.3 In February 2016, a Cabinet report titled Connecting Communities Phase 1 approved a recommendation that all community centres should be self-sustaining by March 2017 (no subsidy in the form of repairs and maintenance) and that Community Associations enter into leases to this effect. Majority of the community centres have entered into long leases and SACA remains one of the last few to complete this. The current set up of the existing organisation has not made it possible to enter into a long lease.
- 1.4 Presently the Council has spent £14,088 in 2018/2019, £18,620 in 2019/2020 and £25,829 in £2020/2021 and £11,400 for the current financial year 2021/2022, in reactive repairs and maintenance works in the centre.
- 1.5 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to invite community groups to express their interest to run and manage Stoke Aldermoor Life Centre. Following this exercise, a long lease will be available for the selected community group to consider further and take on the full management and maintenance of the centre. It is vital to appoint the right organisation for the benefit of all residents and the whole of Lower Stoke community. The main criteria for the organisation is to demonstrate a sound financial plan, previous building management experience and the proposal must include the facility to include all members of the community, regardless of age, sex, religion and socio-economic backgrounds.
- 1.6 The existing occupier SACA will continue to run and operate from the centre and will be invited to submit their 'expressions of interest' accordingly.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

Option 1. Seek expressions of interest from community organisations whilst existing occupiers Stoke Aldermoor Community Association (SACA) remain in-situ during this exercise.

- 2.1 This option allows Council officers to conduct a transparent exercise whilst searching for an appropriate community association to manage the centre to benefit the whole community. The results of this exercise will subsequently be reported to the Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities.

This option will allow organisations to come forward and demonstrate how they plan to run the centre sustainably and benefit the whole community. If SACA are not considered as part of the Expression of Interest (EOI) exercise, officers will negotiate a suitable time with SACA to agree vacant possession to allow the new organisation to plan accordingly.

2.2 Option 2. Consider entering into a lease for one year with SACA on a full repairing basis.

- 2.3 This option will allow the existing organisation to sign a one-year lease and manage the centre on a full repairing and liability basis with no financial support from the Council. The organisation will need to demonstrate how they will operate and run the centre by providing an updated business plan which will satisfy the Council on all aspects of running the centre. During the last 2 months of the one-year lease ending, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities will be updated by a further report.

Option 3. Retain Status Quo

- 2.2 If the Council continue to do nothing, it will continue to pay the repair and maintenance costs of a building with the occupier paying existing running costs. This is not a viable option in the long term for both existing occupier SACA and the Council.

2.3 Recommendation-

To proceed with Option 1, seeking EOI exercise whilst SACA remain in situ and this option also provides the existing organisation of the centre to either submit their own interest or partner up work with another organisation. Any organisation taking on the centre is expected to sign up to a long lease, in accordance with the Connecting Communities Cabinet report.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

The expressions of interest exercise would be carried out and this would act as part of the consultation process. Lower Stoke Ward Councillors have been notified and were invited for comments, the results of which will be reported at the meeting.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 If Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities proceeds with the recommended Option 1, it is anticipated that the expressions of interest exercise would commence late January 2022 and the results of this exercise would be reported immediately to Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities.

5. Comments from the Director of Finance

5.1 Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications as a result of the decision made.

6. Comments from the Director of Law and Governance

6.2 Legal implications

There are no legal implications associated with this report

Property Implications -

The Centre forms part of the Councils Property portfolio. The Council currently meets all the major operating costs of the Centre whilst receiving minimum income to defray costs. The Council will be seeking a community organisation that could run the centre on a sustainable basis (expenditure met from income).

7. Other implications

7.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's Plan?

By inviting expressions of interest to manage the centre, the Council will seek to use its community resources to ensure the greatest effect to most residents in the area.

7.2 How is risk being managed?

The Council carried out health and safety inspections throughout the property and carried out repairs and maintenance and put in place procedures to ensure that the community centre could remain open and in use.

The Council does not have the resources or the finances to sustain the current situation long term.

7.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

The Council does not have the resources or the finances to sustain the current position. The outcome of the expression of interest exercise will result in a sustainable position going forward without the need for Council subsidy and which provides maximum benefit for the local community from the site.

7.4 Equalities / EIA

A full EIA would be undertaken on completion of the expression of interest stage.

7.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment

There are no impacts on the environment arising from the expression of interest exercise.

7.6 Implications for partner organisations?

There are no implications for any partner organisations.

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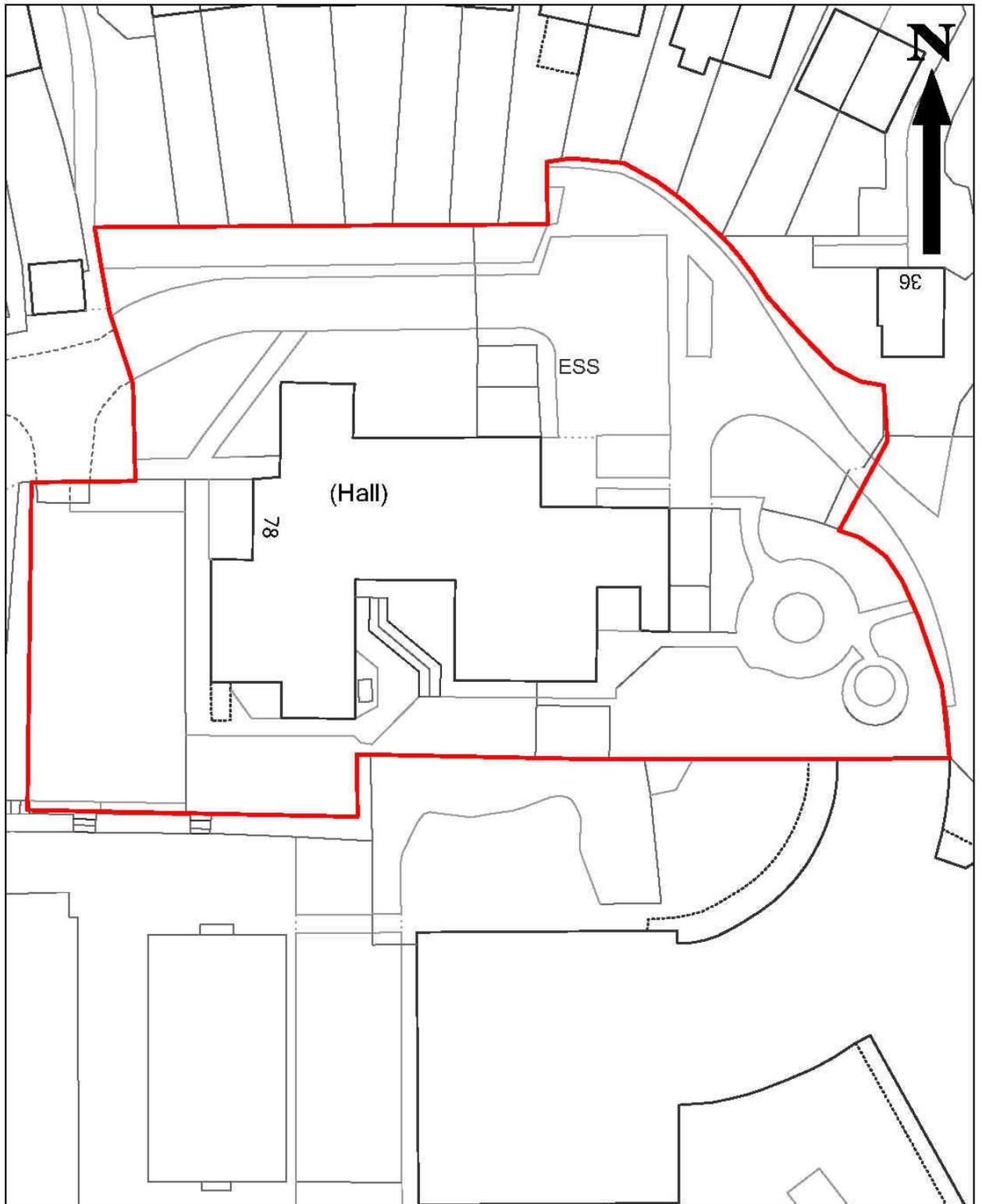
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Stoke Aldermoor Life Centre - Lease Plan

Drawn By: LB
 Scale : 1:500 @ A4
 Date:02/11/2021

Richard Moon - Director, Project Management & Property Services

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