

TITLE	Arborfield Community Facility Operator
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 26 September 2019
WARD	Arborfield; Barkham; Finchampstead North; Finchampstead South;
LEAD OFFICER	Director of Locality and Customer Services - Sarah Hollamby
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement - Wayne Smith

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To confirm the Finchampstead Baptist Church (FBC) as the preferred operator for the new community facility being provided as part of the necessary infrastructure for the Arborfield Strategic Development Location. Confirmation at this stage enables the FBC Centre to play an integral role in the design and delivery of the new community facility.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) approves the Finchampstead Baptist Church as the preferred operator for the new community facility within the Arborfield Strategic Development Location, subject to agreement of the terms of lease;
- 2) receives a report at a later date recommending the specific terms of formal agreement with the Finchampstead Baptist Church to operate the community facility within the Arborfield Strategic Development Location.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the necessary infrastructure for the Arborfield Strategic Development Location, the developers (Crest Nicholson) are required to provide a new community facility up to a maximum size of 1285sqm, with a cost cap of £2,635,380.00 if a library is to be included within the facility, or £2,176,840.00 if a library is not included.

The Shaping Our New Communities (SONC) document was agreed by the Council in 2015 and sets out the Council's approach to the delivery of new community facilities in the borough. This established a preference for new community facilities being operated by local community organisations. This approach has been publicised widely to the town and parish councils, the voluntary sector and local faith organisations.

Since the adoption of the SONC, the Council has been approached by a number of different groups to enquire about operating the new community facility in Arborfield.

In December 2018, the Finchampstead Baptist Church (FBC) contacted the Council to formally express their interest in operating the new community facility being delivered as part of the Arborfield Strategic Development Location. The FBC have an established

track record in running community facilities, having operated the very successful FBC Centre in Finchampstead since 2010.

As part of their aspiration to operate the community facility in the Arborfield SDL, the FBC has been actively engaging with the local community in Arborfield to establish a connection with them and to shape their ideas about what type of community facility and activities local residents will value.

In their discussions with the local community and with the Council, the FBC have made it clear that it is not their intention to simply replicate the facilities and activities delivered in the FBC Centre. The FBC would instead tailor the new facility to the community around it and to be mindful of the other facilities being provided as part of the new district centre.

Since the FBC submitted their expression of interest in operating the new community facility, all of the other groups who had also contacted the Council to explore this possibility have confirmed the end of their wish to be considered. In some cases, this has been due having reached an understanding with the FBC on how the new community facility would be able to accommodate all of their activities.

The success of the FBC in delivering a new community facility in Finchampstead and the positive commitment shown to actively engage with the community in the Arborfield SDL indicate that the FBC would be a sensible choice as the operator for the new community facility.

The FBC have indicated their willingness to explore options to enhance the facility being provided with their own investment, and to potentially manage the delivery of the build process. Both of these options would require the further approval of the Council at a later stage.

BACKGROUND

The Section 106 agreement with Crest Nicholson, the developer for the Arborfield Strategy Development Location (SDL), places the following infrastructure requirements for community facilities:

Arborfield SDL - S106 Agreement Community Centre

Community Centre means the provision of a community centre building (which may include a new library) which shall be a maximum of 1285 square metres to serve the SDL and which will be provided in accordance with the approved Community Centre Specification subject to the Costs associated with the provision not exceeding the Community Centre Cost Cap.

Community Centre Cost Cap means where a new library is to be included in the community centre building the sum of £2,635,380.00 or where a new library is not to be included in the community centre building the sum of £2,176,840.00 in both cases such amounts to cover the Costs associated with the construction and delivery of the Community Centre.

Community Centre Specification means a specification submitted by the Owners to the Council for approval pursuant to the provisions of Part 4 of Schedule 4 of this Deed which shall include the following details:

- a. Overall size of the Community Centre
- b. Its internal layout and indication of the principle internal floor and wall finishes
- c. Indication of the external appearance and materials for the Community Centre
- d. Indication of the external area including the amount of car parking and landscaping principles

The Shaping Our New Communities (SONC) document agreed by the Council in 2015, sets out the agreed policy position on new community facilities provided within the SDL's and includes a preference for local community organisations taking on the responsibility for their operation.

The Council has been actively promoting its approach for delivering and operating new community facilities within the SDL's for a number of years. This has been done through the SDL Community Forums, in local media, and directly to local town and parish councils and other community organisations.

The SONC also includes objectives of delivering capacity building work with local community organisations to increase their confidence and abilities in operating community facilities.

The delivery of the new neighbourhood centre and community facility in the Arborfield SDL is still at the Masterplanning stage and therefore is a number of years away from being completed.

Selecting an Operator for a New Community Facility

The Executive is responsible for agreeing an operator for new community facilities within the SDL's. It is expected that in making this decision the Executive would be informed

of benefits of choosing one organisation over another, alongside sufficient assurances about the sustainability of the recommended operator.

The following are the information and assurances the Council would consider before taking a decision on a preferred operator for a new community facility:

- A clear overarching aim for the new centre
- An understanding of how this centre will meet the needs of the new community
- Evidence of engagement with local residents and other stakeholders
- A sound business plan and operating model
- Agreement with the Council's lease requirements

These requirements have formed the backbone of the discussions with the FBC in determining their suitability as an operator for the new community facility in Arborfield. Details of their responses to each element are presented in the Business Case below.

BUSINESS CASE

The following summarises the proposal submitted by the Finchampstead Baptist Church

Finchampstead Baptist Church & FBC Centre

Finchampstead Baptist Church (FBC) has been part of its local community for over 175 years. During the past 20 years the church and its involvement at the heart of the community has grown significantly. More recently, in 2010, in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) and Finchampstead Parish Council (FPC), it built the FBC Centre.

This 2300m² community centre has become an integral part of Finchampstead and the surrounding communities, with approximately 3600 people visiting it each week. This includes hundreds of children, youth people and adults attending the activities that are run at the centre. The facilities in the FBC Centre include a café, the WBC Finchampstead library and Children's Centre, the local Police office and the FPC Office.

The financing for the FBC Centre was done independently by the FBC. This included securing the appropriate investment for the construction of the centre and developing a suitable operating model to repay this investment within seven years. This repayment was achieved within six years and the FBC centre is now generating a surplus from its activities which supports the future development of the facility and its services.

Community Engagement on the Arborfield Community Facility

FBC have already begun researching what the Arborfield community feels their needs are and what would be of most benefit to them in the short and long term. As with the development of the FBC Centre, the FBC recognise that a vital part of any development is to meet the identified needs of the community. FBC has already been active in attempting to identify these needs through a variety of means, including:

- An established group of Arborfield residents participating in current FBC facilities/groups and discussing with them about what their perceived needs are for the area, what they would like to see and be involved with
- FBC staff hours dedicated to exploring Arborfield development opportunities and engaging with the community
- Attendance at Arborfield Green Community events, promoting links to FBC, the new green pathway and completing questionnaires identifying things that they would like to see and allowing us contact with them in the future
- Attendance at current community groups, for example mother and toddler groups.
- Meeting with community leaders and developers to identify what is already being done
- Attendance at sessions run by other service providers for example Sure Start Children's Centre
- Familiarisation with current community facilities
- Attendance at Consultation meetings with developers, architects etc...

FBC intends to continue to develop community links with individuals, parish councils, local churches, local schools, and has started to run a Pop-up Café in the existing community centre once a week.

Arborfield Community Facility

Prior to designing and opening the FBC Centre, FBC wrote to every household in Finchampstead to ask what aspirations they had for local community facilities. From a response rate of over 15% (representing over 600 households), the top 3 wishes were a café, a sports hall and a library. All three were incorporated into the design and construction of the FBC Centre.

Any facility being built in Arborfield Green would have to offer facilities and activities that the local community would want, being mindful of other services and facilities which are available in the local area.

Whilst local community wishes will be different to Finchampstead and may change over time, the most common comment received, anecdotally, is "we want an FBC Centre in Arborfield".

At this stage and depending on which other facilities are to be offered in the new neighbourhood centre, it would be envisaged that a central café, rooms of various sizes for children, youth and adult activities and a larger space for larger gatherings would be incorporated into the facilities.

As there is an existing sports facility nearby, it is unlikely that a sports hall would be included. However, there may be a need for a things such as a theatre or arts space.

Part of the success of the FBC Centre is the 'total package' offered, including the play-park, the MUGA and the greenway routes which link the FBC Centre to Arborfield Green. It would make sense to explore where similar facilities could be offered to enhance the usage of any community facilities. Any design would have to ensure that each area has a multi-purpose design brief to maximise usage.

Potential Lease Terms

The expectation of the FBC is that any lease term would have to be looked at in light of the plans for the operation of the facilities and long term business plan. FBC see this as a long-term project.

FBC is a not-for profit charity and would be committed to the community of Arborfield Green. It would wish to enter into running the community facilities for the long term and would expect a minimum of a 25 year lease.

FBC would also like to explore opportunities for providing their own additional investment into the community facility.

Suitability of the FBC as an Operator for the Arborfield Community Facility

It is clear that the FBC and their proposal for the new community facility meets all of the assurances that the Council would require at this stage in the delivery of the new community facility in Arborfield.

The FBC are a financially stable organisation that has a track record of successfully delivering and operating a new community facility. Their commitment to this project has been demonstrated by their ongoing engagement activities with local residents to establish a connection and understanding with them about the facilities and services they want and would value.

Appointing a preferred operator at this stage enables them to be involved in the design process for the new community facility and its associated operating model.

The specific lease arrangements and other formal agreements with the FBC for the new community centre will be brought to the Executive at a later date for approval.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council continues to face severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of reductions to public sector funding and growing pressures in our statutory services. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions of approximately £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil	yes	Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	yes	Capital
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	yes	Capital

Other Financial Information
The delivery of the new community facility in Arborfield is an infrastructure requirement for the developer and therefore will be delivered by them or by any associated S106 contributions. At this stage there are no plans for any further investment by the Council in this project.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
The FBC is conducting ongoing engagement activities with the local community as detailed in the report. The Council will continue to engage with the local community through the established SDL Forums and associated communications.

Public Sector Equality Duty
An equality impact assessment will be completed on the specific proposal for the new community facility once it is developed.

List of Background Papers
Shaping Our New Communities Document (2015)

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