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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Council are keen to develop the East Oxford Community Centre. The intention is to improve the provision of community facilities and to consolidate the offer on the Princes Street site, whilst looking at other potential developments on the remaining two sites. The options appraisal presented in this report is meant to provide the Council with a range of options to meet their needs and budget, by exploring how to make best use of the available land and existing assets already on the sites. The Council’s ambition of delivering a high quality scheme that is cost neutral has been taken into account when exploring the various options.

1.2 THE BRIEF

The high level brief of the project was formulated in the architect’s brief document of the tender for architectural services. The outline project brief is reproduced here:

The delivery of a new EOCC on Princes Street must create a well-designed multi-functional publicly accessible building that has a wider community appeal. The key Council deliverables include creating a flexible community facility that is suitable for a range of uses and users including but not limited to:

- A new multifunction hall
- IT resource centre
- Art rooms
- A radio and film production room
- Meeting rooms and flexible office space
- Foyer with refreshments area for informal community meetings

The redevelopment of the community facility should:

- Be an energy efficient facility with reduced running costs
- Increase usage and representational users from the local area
- Provide access to improved facilities for local groups/organisations and services
- Utilise sustainable strategies in building materials and landscaping.

The brief was further defined through consultation and the initial range of draft options has been refined and narrowed to the ones presented in this report. In summary options 2 - 3 were discounted as they offer very little gain for a relatively high cost. Option 5 is desirable, but unaffordable and options 0, 1 and 6 have been discarded as there is a clear need for a community facility which the council very much support. Therefore this report focuses its attention on Option 4, and two approaches on how to progress with the project.
The brief was further developed during the consultation period with the tenants, hirers and users of the three community facilities and included discussions with ward Councillors. In parallel Purcell worked closely with the development and community officers of Oxford City Council and with the development advisor and cost consultants from Faithful & Gould / Atkins to formulate a more defined brief and identify a capital project cost that the team should work to.

An initial option appraisal carried out in November 2015 enabled the cost consultant to identify high level costs which were consequently reviewed in order to finalise the brief. Oxford City Council identified a project budget of £670k which as demonstrated is only sufficient to carry out the backlog of routine repairs and maintenance along with a minor refurbishment. The funding shortfall between the budget and aspiration has to be met by the potential development of the remaining sites.

Based on the valuation of the sites in 2012 and reviewed in 2015 by Kemp and Kemp, it may be possible to increase the funding up to £2m - £2.5m by the sale of the additional sites which is reflected in the proposed description of this report. The financial model that looked most feasible in order to meet the initial requirements and provide a cost neutral scheme was identified on the Princes Street site and can be briefly described as follows:

- To refurbish the existing main hall to provide adequate community facilities
- To refurbish and extend the existing block currently occupied by Fusion Arts to provide a suitable location for Fusion Arts and Film Oxford to operate as synergies between the operation of the two charities were identified during the consultation
- To re-develop part of the remaining site to achieve approx. 260sqm of building footprint for multiple occupancy space
- To release part of the land to the open market to offset and fund the community project
- To release the Collins Street and Catherine Street sites to the open market to further fund the community project.

A separate exercise carried out by Purcell and Kemp has demonstrated that the capital receipt of the project could potentially be increased to approximately £1.88m. Working with this budget offers the potential to make best use of the existing historic building and improve the quality of the current provision. This budget would allow to cover for all of the project costs of the main proposal illustrated in this report.

An alternative approach has been explored to further exploit all the intrinsic qualities of the site as shown further in this report. The benefits that the alternative option could provide can be summarised as:

- Refurbishing the existing main hall to provide excellent community facilities
- Provide a more usable, versatile space in the existing hall.
- Providing an increased area of new build elements.
- Realise the full potential of the sites.
- Improving the long term viability of the building
- Improving the setting and streetscape

The increased capital receipt derived from the re-development of Collin Street, Catherine Street and the north section of the Princes Street sites would not cover for the entire higher cost of this alternative proposal. However, it demonstrates how an increased budget for the project would allow a larger new build element for the East Oxford Community Centre, as shown in the Section 3.7 Future Possibilities For Development.
2.0 THE SITES

2.1 THE EAST OXFORD COMMUNITY CENTRE ON PRINCES STREET

Since its formation in the 1970’s, the EOCC has been playing a very important role for East Oxford. It provides a central place for local groups to meet and encourage community activities. The EOCC distinguishes itself from most of the other community centres in Oxford because it is not housed in a purpose-built facility but located in a dilapidated Victorian school which was turned into a very vibrant community centre, driven by the local resident association.

Since then, many community groups started to meet and use the facilities at the EOCC such as the Cowley St. John Playgroup, East Oxford Drama Group, Bloomin’ Arts and many more followed. The EOCC currently offers accommodation for continuous hirers who use the premises on regular basis, as well as local organizations that need permanent venues. In addition, the venue can generate some income by hiring rooms for one-off occasions like concerts, socials, market sales, hustings, etc. The local community relies on the venue and these expectations have been made clear by most of the people who we met during the initial consultation period.

As indicated by the document produced by OCC/OPT/EH mentioned in the opening quote, the building is valued locally for its connection with the community and contribution to the aesthetic character of the area. Additionally, its community value is very high because of the social role that it has covered since the EOCC was established. It was identified as a local heritage asset because it met one of the key characteristics. This is the following:

“Community centres that have taken older buildings and provided new uses that build community cohesion by providing opportunities to share culture, encourage artistic expression and celebrate together.”

Together with other community centres in this area of Oxford, the EOCC has played an important role in helping ethnic minorities and groups with specialist needs to integrate with the city’s society. It also provides culturally themed activities, yoga classes, as well as acting as a venue for a long-standing and widely popular open-mic gig, citizens’ and immigration advice for refugees, an association promoting the integration of women within the society, a community brass band, and a community kitchen amongst other organisations and activities.

The centre was created when St. John’s Boy’s School was closed and has a particular focus on the arts acting as both a live music venue as well as running community art projects which started in the 1970s with Bloomin’ Arts and is now carried on by Fusion Arts.

One of the buildings on the site houses the Chinese Community and Advice Centre whose remit is to “assists the Chinese community in Oxfordshire by providing independent quality advice and services, enabling them to gain equal access to public resources, improve their quality of life and integrate into society.”

Most of the uses listed above reflects the role East Oxford Community have played in helping new arrivals to integrate with the city’s society.

2.2 SIGNIFICANCE

Although not listed, East Oxford Community Centre is recognised as a local heritage asset on the Oxford Heritage Asset Register: A driving force behind this is its communal value: not only is it a valued place for the local community to come together, there are also members of the community who can remember their time at the site when it was still operating as a school. Added to this is the architectural value of the main building on the corner of Princes Street and Cowley. Although simply ornamented, it retains a good design quality that is very much of the Victorian period. There is potential to enhance this further through traditional repairs to the brickwork and also the removal of the unsympathetic lean-to on the Princes Street elevation. It has been suggested in the OHAR entry that G.E. Street may have been involved in the design of the school building in his capacity as Diocesan architect. As yet, there is no evidence to support this but there is potential for further associative value to boost the significance of the building should Street’s involvement ever be confirmed. The other buildings on the site are of a lesser, in places negligible, architectural value.
2.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDINGS

Main Hall (St John’s School)
The site occupies a prominent location along the Cowley Road. The historic school building is a 2 storey T-shape brick building with services on one side which appear to be part of the original construction and a 1980’s lean-to extension on Princes Street which houses the kitchen. The kitchen extension hides some features of the original building. The roof is a tiled pitch roof above the main building and extensions with visible protruding elements. An additional floor was added in the main hall of the school most probably to increase the capacity. The additional floor is supported by a stand alone structure. It is assumed that the existing circulation area was built when the new floor was added. Various other additions were added ad hoc to respond to specific needs, such as draught lobby, operation office, storage, additional toilets, etc. Some of the metal windows have been recently changed for modern replicas, mostly for acoustic reasons.

East Building (Chinese Community Centre)
To the north east 2 storey brick building houses the Chinese Community Centre. The elevations are plain, with regular fenestration, and a flat roof. The building has got a rectangular plan with external load bearing walls and no additional structure internally. A later single storey extension was built to the south along Princes Street; it is in a severe state of disrepair due to water ingress and vandalism and has been condemned.

West Building (Fusion Arts)
Behind the main building is what most likely used to be the old school’s sports hall which was built in the early 20th Century. The external walls are masonry with metal trusses supporting a pitched metal roof with rooflights on the west side. The hall is divided into two main spaces with smaller rooms on the south side and storage near the boundary. The roof insulation has been recently upgraded and is internally exposed.

North Building (ACKHI)
A long and narrow one storey building defines the north boundary of the site. It is a concrete framed with masonry infill, with metal windows and an asbestos cement corrugated roof. The internal layout presents a series of rooms side by side connected by a long corridor along the courtyard.

Courtyard / External areas
Currently the courtyard and the external areas are covered with black top in acceptable condition although the top wearing layer presents some cracking and thinning. The levels on the site and on the ground floor of the buildings are inconsistent.

Image 01
2.4 OVERVIEW HISTORY

The East Oxford Community Centre was initially established as the charitable St John’s Boys’ School in 1866, four years before primary education became compulsory in England. Its foundation was supported by Father Richard Meux Benson, Vicar of the Parish of Cowley St James, and the Society of St John the Evangelist.

The site remained in use as a school for over a century until the 1970s, evolving to incorporate additional new buildings. It subsequently gained a new community use which continues to this day.

A mid-20th-century photograph (image 01) of the site from Cowley Road shows the original school building prior to the construction of the lean-to which now obscures much of the Princes Street elevation, and also shows the more modern building further up Princes Street which was built between 1922 and 1939.

Another photograph of a similar date (image 02) shows the rear elevation of the main school building – the smaller windows indicating that rooms other than classrooms were concentrated at this end of the building.
The East Oxford Community Centre (EOCC) sits on the corner of Cowley Road and Princes Street. The site includes four buildings. The most prominent and important building is the Main Hall. It provides space for two event halls, a community kitchen, a social club and bar, a pottery room, male and female toilets, and office/community spaces. It is in a reasonable state but would benefit from a reorganisation of spaces and internal refurbishment. The once plain façade to Princes Street has been lost to a lesser-quality lean-to extension. The three other buildings are situated to the north, east, and west of the site.

Fusion Arts, a community art organisation, currently uses the West Building which is in a reasonable condition.

The North building is not in good condition and the building footprint does not make an efficient use of the available space.

The East Building is currently occupied by the Chinese Community for a variety of purposes. The building is in poor repair and provides little insulation. A significant portion of the ground floor is unusable and has become derelict.

The figures on these pages relate to the Gross External Area (GEA). The calculations are indicative since they have been obtained from scaling of OS maps and may be different to actual values.
2.5 THE GAMES HALL ON COLLINS STREET

East Oxford Games Hall is a sports hall facility on one of the secondary roads off Cowley road. The hall houses two badminton courts and can be hired by teams. Local groups use the building for classes of capoeira, scouting, martial arts and other community uses. The building occupies almost entirely the trapezoidal plot of land. It is a concrete structure with external brickwork walls and a tiled roof. The interiors are quite plain and include the sports hall and changing room on the ground floor with a timber stair leading to a raised spectators’ gallery and an office with storage on the first floor. Although the floor finish was recently renewed, the Games Hall is in very poor condition and does not meet modern standards.
2.6 COMMUNITY BUILDING OCCUPIED BY FILM OXFORD ON CATHERINE STREET

The building at the corner of Catherine Street and Howard Street was built in the 1950’s and its original use was public baths and showers. The lack of sanitary facilities in private houses used to be a recurrent issue in expansion areas. The one storey building was built with a concrete frame and brick external masonry. A clerestory window at high level runs along all the external walls. The building is covered by a flat roof and the volume at high level above used to be the water tank feeding the baths and shower. Internally nothing is left of the original feature of the previous use as it is now occupied by a community film production studio. The interiors have been adapted to suit the use. On the same plot, a small community garden has been created to the south and a car park is located to the north of the building.

The figures on this page relate to the Gross External Area (GEA). The calculations are indicative since they have been obtained from scaling of OS maps and may be different to actual values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landscaped area / car park</th>
<th>190 sq m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Film Oxford</td>
<td>175 sq m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Oxford Games Hall</td>
<td>498 sq m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The East Oxford slipper baths pictured just before their closure in March 1978.
3.0 THE PROPOSALS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Further to Purcell’s appointment to prepare a feasibility study for the re-development of the EOCC, we immediately started to work together with Oxford City Council to formalise the brief. In parallel we collaborated with the Community Officer to meet various stakeholders, including the current tenants, regular hirers and different users of all the three sites object of this study.

Once priorities were established and a deeper understanding of the site and its use was reached, we started to test some options from the point of view of usability, logistics, cost and added value of the existing buildings on the site. All the considered options included the refurbishment of the main historic building on the Princes Street site. Some initial options also considered the retention and refurbishment of the east building currently occupied by the Chinese Community Centre, although the initial cost estimate from the Quantity Surveyor showed that the high cost of the asbestos removal and the works need to achieve a suitable level of energy performance for this building did not justify the retention in comparison with a complete re-development of this part of the site. The initial draft option appraisal also helped to give an order of the projects costs to the different elements of the site.

MAIN PROPOSAL

The option appraisal demonstrated that the most viable option is to release part of the land to the open market and use that value to offset the capital cost of the re-development of the remaining site. Due to the configuration of the site boundaries and the location of the existing building, the most efficient way to divide the current site is to split it along the southern face of the 2-storey brick building, which currently houses the Chinese Community Centre. The south portion of the land where the oldest building is located and more directly related with the public aspect on the Cowley Road can remain as a community centre, whereas the north side would be more desirable to the open market to be re-develop for residential use.

After further interrogation to the cost estimate generated by the initial draft proposal, Oxford City Council identified an order of value of £2.3 million as the capital budget cost and asked the team to finalise the options on this basis. The proposals for the East Oxford Community Centre presented in this document involves the retention of the original St John’s school building and the one storey building to the west, currently housing Fusion Arts. Both building can be adequately re-furbished and M&E services renewed to meet modern standards.

ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL

An alternative proposal that focuses on the historic value and importance of the old school building is also illustrated in this study. In this option the historic school hall is stripped of the internal and external later additions, such as the numerous partitions, lobbies and one storey extensions and lean-to.

The prominent location of the building and direct link with the Cowley Road which acts as the main thoroughfare to East Oxford can be emphasized by re-invigorating the old school hall and turning this into the main attraction of the site. This building could house the most representative congregation foyer, which would be a double height space with the bar and kitchen on one side and a gallery running at high level with a mezzanine above the bar. The bar can serve the area to the north of the building at the same time directly linked to the main foyer for events. The upper floor can be dedicated to an exhibition/performance space. A mezzanine and a gallery can extend the experience of the main foyer on the 1st floor. The vertical circulation is ensured by a reconfigured and more efficient new stair and lift block to the east.
3.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL

The proposal includes the demolition of the derelict area of the East Building, the North building, and associated making good. The Main Hall and West will have general improvements, mainly to integrated services and systems and a reorganisation of spaces to provide efficient management. The north section of the site will be sold or redeveloped by OCC to finance this project. A new building will be designed to house a variety of community services. A new fence and gate will be provided to give security to the courtyard.

OUTCOME

- Refurbished existing premises to offer community services meeting modern standards
- Reduced running costs and facilitated maintenance
- Purpose built extension to cater for community services currently on other sites
- Site layout allowing for future extensions/development

The figures on these pages relate to the Gross External Area (GEA). The calculations are indicative since they have been obtained from scaling of an OS maps and may be different to actual values.
MAIN HALL STUDY AS EXISTING

Activity Space
1 Main Event hall
2 Multi-use room

Flexible Use
3 Flexible use space

Catering
4 Lean-to Kitchen
5 Bar

Circulation Space

WC / Storage
6 Male WC
7 Female WC
8 Store

Explored view of the existing layout of the EOCC

EOCC, Feasibility Study, May 2016
Aerial view of proposed changes to the EDCC as seen from the South East
### 3.3 ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL

Compared to the proposal as described in 3.2, the alternative also includes the demolition of the condemned area of the East Building and the North Building, but also:

- The extension to the east façade of the Main Hall
- The Main Hall will be thoroughly reorganised to improve the spaces and create a more welcoming face to the EOCC.
- The kitchen will be relocated internally within the old school. This will allow direct access to the Main Hall for public events directly from the corner of the Cowley Road / Princes Street

### OUTCOME

- Raised community value of existing Heritage Asset by emphasizing the qualities of the iconic building
- Enhanced flexibility of the main building
- Site layout allows further extensions and development for future proofing
- Reduced running and maintenance costs
- Multipurpose buildings allow consolidation of community uses

### TOTALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Area (sq m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main hall - alterations &amp; refurbishment</td>
<td>590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West building - light refurbishment</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Storey new build</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscaped area</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land to be offered to open market or developed for housing by OCC</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1024</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures on these pages relate to the Gross External Area (GEA). The calculations are indicative since they have been obtained from scaling of OS maps and may be different to actual values.
Exploded view of the proposed layout of the EOCR following refurbishment.
Aerial view of alternative option for the changes to the EOCC as seen from the North West
### 3.4 HERITAGE IMPLICATIONS

Both of the proposed options offer benefits to the heritage value of the East Oxford Community Centre. An accumulation of poor quality additions over recent decades has meant that the historic south building has continued to meet the evolving needs of the community; however, this has diminished the building’s architectural value.

The primary proposals would improve the usability of the building and the environment it provides, which would benefit its communal value.

The alternative option is more beneficial in terms of the improvements it would bring to the built fabric and consequently the long-term viability of the building. The removal of the ground floor lean-to would reveal the original east elevation and make a more positive contribution to the streetscape. The internal space would originally have comprised lofty and bright interiors. The reinstatement of a similar scheme in the south hall would be hugely beneficial, both in terms of the internal space offered and also the improvements externally where the floor would no long be visible cutting across the windows.

The new building proposed would not exceed the establish scale of the site and its surroundings, and therefore would not impact negatively on the streetscape and setting. The condemned building proposed for demolition is not considered to be of heritage value and its replacement would therefore be wholly acceptable.

Overall, both options would provide benefits to the heritage value of the historic main hall. The driving force behind the beneficial impact are the increased levels of community cohesion the two options would afford and, consequently, communal value. The additional changes in the alternative option continues this even further with a wealth of improvements to the built fabric.

### 3.5 SITE OPTIONS

As described in the image above, the full site will be used during construction. The design of the new building will have to take account of the party wall that will be created. The central courtyard could be used as the site compound so that access to it does not get in the way of construction work.
The anticipated use of the buildings is suggested in the diagram on this page. The main hall has been described on previous pages. Art rooms could exist in their current location while film related activities could take advantage of spaces that are harder to light naturally. The remaining area of the new-built element will house additional community centre services on the ground floor. Further office space will be located on the first floor.

In the future, the land to the north of the site can be sold on the open market. This will reduce the expense paid directly by the city council. Should the works take place to construct the new building and renovate the main hall then the next step should be to replace the West Building. The opportunity exists to demolish this building with access gained through the courtyard.
The use of the site could be maximised in the future and all buildings linked around a central courtyard. The new building could be extended via the same module to the edge of the site. A new building to the west should be designed to maximise the amount of light possible through the roof. A new building to the east could provide an overall entrance whilst enclosing the courtyard and binding the complex together.
4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

4.1 ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND CARBON FOOTPRINT

The proposal illustrated in this report endeavours to make the best use of the existing buildings on the site. This is good practice for a sustainable approach to the development as it does not waste the embedded energy of the existing buildings. The Purcell Index of Sustainability (PIOS) is implemented throughout the scheme from the very beginning and will monitor the achievements at key design stages. This will make sure that all the sustainable options are explored from the very early stages and that material are chosen and sourced responsibly.

The energy demand and conservation of energy of the existing buildings will be reduced by working on the element of building fabric that contribute most to this (e.g. insulation, roofs, walls, windows, masonry). The efficiency of the development will be increased by understanding how the buildings are used, looking at engineering solutions, and always keeping in mind the relation between costs and benefits. The avoidance of over-engineered solution will prevent additional maintenance costs.

During the next phases of the design any appropriate alternative energy source for the site will be considered as part of a Low or Zero Carbon technology assessment.

The design team will work with the client’s Facilities Management team to ensure that the use of simple engineering solution, the implementation of a services distribution strategy and the use of readily available material will facilitate the maintenance regime and minimize the running costs.

4.2 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The proposals in this report intend to establish a design approach for the development of the East Oxford Community Centre. We have considered all the options listed in the table under Section 1.1 and through a process of interrogation we have identified Option 4 as the most viable solution bearing in mind value for money. The proposal makes the best use of the site with a total expenditure of £2.3m as advised by Faithful and Gould. Part of this budget cost comes from £670k investment from OCC and the rest is obtained by selling the other properties or developing them for housing by OCC and reinvesting their value in the EOCC.

Property consultant Kemp & Kemp have carried out a revised evaluation exercise of the capital receipt generated by the released sites based on Purcell’s updated residential design. This has shown that with the Council’s £670k investment, the project budget could potentially be lifted to approximately £2 - 2.5m. Faithful and Gould have carried out a preliminary costing exercise which has shown that the main option illustrated in this report is financially viable within this budget by selling or re-developing the potential residential sites and the north section of the Princes Street land. The alternative proposal would enable a more fundamental refurbishment of the historic school building to make best use of the available space in this iconic building which has been identified as a potential heritage asset. Although the allocated budget and the potential capital receipt are not sufficient to cover the increased cost of this alternative option. Alternatively, an increased budget would also allow a larger purpose built extension to the community centre.

If Oxford City Council wish to proceed, we suggest that the next step will be to submit an application for Outline Planning Permission for the residential sites. This will enable more budget certainty to be gained. To allow us to proceed with this we will require full topographical site surveys to be carried out. Additionally, we would suggest that initial investigations are carried out in the old school buildings to assess the condition of the structure and the services, and also carry out architectural and asbestos surveys.

At this stage we have not had a detailed discussion with Oxford City Council about the planning constraints as we expect this to happen as part of the pre-planning consultation. We anticipate that once we do start the discussion, there is the possibility that a requests may be made for the building to be listed due the sensitivity of the scheme and the prominent location of the site. We do not think that this will make a substantial difference to the approach that the City Planners will take since the approach taken in both the options illustrated in this proposal is sympathetic with the historic building on site.

This is an exciting project and offers the potential to deliver high quality community facilities in the heart of East Oxford. It also has the potential to showcase Oxford City Council providing affordable housing, and in doing so addressing the housing shortage, whilst reducing operational costs and annual expenditure and maximising the sustainability of the current stock.