

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET: 2 JULY 2008

GALSTON TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

Report by Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support / Executive Head of Finance and Asset Management

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek cabinet approval to take forward a regeneration strategy for Galston town centre as part of the Restoring Communities Programme, with the aim of delivering on the ground improvements to the benefit of the town centre and the wider Galston community, including the refurbishment of the existing Council accommodation at 7-9 and 11 Cross Street, Galston.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 As the largest of the Irvine Valley Settlements, Galston is identified in the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan as a Service Centre, and is recognised in the Finalised Draft of the Alteration to the East Ayrshire Local Plan as a focus for future development. The majority of Galston town centre is located within the town's Outstanding Conservation Area, which contains within it 12 listed buildings. However, Galston town centre is also identified as suffering from decline, with a number of highly prominent vacant and derelict buildings detracting considerably from the potential amenity and attractiveness of the Outstanding Conservation Area.
- 2.2 In August 2007 Drivers Jonas was appointed, following a successful tendering process, to carry out a study to identify potential redevelopment solutions for the town. The finalised consultant's report concludes that the regeneration of Galston town centre will not take place without substantial commitment from the Council and that a long term comprehensive approach is required, if the continual decline of the town is to be halted and reversed.
- 2.3 In addition to the consultant's report, our Technical Services have undertaken work to identify options in relation to modernisation of the Council's own office accommodation within Galston. At the Cabinet meeting on 20 February this report was deferred to allow the outcome of the Planning study to be considered. The Council currently occupy premises at 11 Cross Street as the Local Office and the first floor of 7 – 9 Cross Street for Social Work office accommodation. This accommodation is now in need of refurbishment and upgrading.

- 2.4 The new Galston Primary School is due to open in August 2008 making the existing school buildings surplus to Council requirements. The two school buildings, located on Glebe Road, both of which are listed, offer significant development potential, primarily for residential development when taken together with the associated school grounds. The disposal of these buildings, is anticipated to provide a significant capital receipt.

3. PROPOSED WAY FORWARD

- 3.1 In order to address the visible decline of Galston town centre, it is proposed that the Council take a proactive approach to improving key sites and buildings within the town centre. It is proposed that the approach will focus on three key proposals as detailed below:

Council accommodation at 7 – 9 and 11 Cross Street

- 3.2 As indicated in paragraph 2.3, the Council accommodation within the town is in a fairly poor condition. A number of options have been considered in terms of how to best meet the Council's office requirements within Galston namely:
- (i) an extension to Galston Library to accommodate the Local Office. Estimated cost = £300,000
 - (ii) an extension to the library to accommodate both the Local Office and the Social Work Offices. Estimated cost = £2,200,000
 - (iii) the development of a new building on the site of the current library, incorporating the library, Local Office and Social Work Offices. Estimated cost = £2,600,000
 - (iv) refurbishment of existing building to accommodate Local Office and Social Work Offices. Estimated cost = £1,600,000
- 3.3 It is considered that there is considerable benefit to the town of retaining the Council's presence within its centre. This provides a key service that brings people into the town, the loss of which could further damage the vitality of the town and the shops and businesses located within it. Furthermore, the relocation of the Council out of 11 Cross Street, which forms a prominent building with some character, would result in a further vacant building within the town centre, which could prove difficult for the Council to dispose of. It is also noted that the Co-op, which occupies the ground floor premises of 7 – 9 Cross Street, has recently invested substantially in re-fitting the shop unit, signaling their intention to maintain their operation within the town centre.
- 3.4 It is proposed, therefore that Option 4 be taken forward. This option will require staff to be relocated during the refurbishment works; however, the

soon to be vacated school buildings would be available to accommodate this requirement.

Informal Car Park at Church Lane

- 3.5 The informal car park to the rear of the Council offices with access from Church Lane, is in poor condition and detracts from the Outstanding Conservation Area and town centre as a whole. Title to a small part of the site is included within the titles to the adjacent Council properties at 7-9 and 11 Cross Street with a further part over which the Council has a servitude right of access being included within the title to the properties at 8-12 Bridge Street. Research is ongoing in an attempt to identify current ownership details in respect of the remainder of the site. Further significant Council resources have been put into the flood prevention works on Burn Anne, which runs along the eastern boundary of this site.
- 3.6 In order to allow improvements to be made to this area, it is proposed that the Council consolidate its ownership interest and thereafter the Council invest in upgrading significantly this piece of land, through formalising the car park and making environmental and landscaping improvements to the area.

Acquisition and conversion of privately owned properties

- 3.7 The amenity and appearance of Galston town centre is severely undermined by the existence of a number of prominently sited vacant and derelict buildings. These buildings are all in private ownership and have remained vacant for a significant number of years. The consultant's report is quite clear in so far as it concludes that these buildings will not be brought back into active use without public sector involvement. It is, therefore, proposed that the Council acquire several buildings, all of which have potential for conversion to residential or other uses, subject to finding a development partner (possibly a Building Preservation Trust) to which ownership will be transferred and to the assembly of a funding package. It is proposed that the following buildings be acquired:

- (i) 3 – 5 Cross Street and 2 – 6 Bridge Street
These prominently sited listed buildings in the centre of the town have lain vacant for a number of years, with the latter having suffered from severe fire damage. The buildings are both in a very poor state of repair and visually, are hugely detrimental to both the Outstanding Conservation Area and the town as a whole. It is considered that these properties would be suitable for conversion to residential flats in conjunction with a local Registered Social Landlord.

(ii) 2 - 4 Cross Street

The former Portland Arms is a B listed building, which has been vacant for a number of years. Should the Council acquire this building, it is considered that it would also be suitable for conversion to residential use. In addition the Galston Youth Forum has expressed interest in utilising this building for a community use.

(iii) 1 – 2 Riverside Flats

1 – 2 Riverside Flats are sited to the rear of the Buck's Head at 8 – 12 Bridge Street, with access taken from the informal car park area described in paragraph 3.4. The flats are of relatively recent construction, having been granted planning permission in 2000 and formed through the conversion of old storage accommodation. The flats are not of particularly high quality and do not reflect the character of the Outstanding Conservation Area.

As recommended in the consultant's report, it is considered that in order to bring maximum benefit to the town centre these flats should ideally be acquired and demolished. This would open up the informal car park to the rear, improving access and creating additional amenity space within the town centre. It is however, acknowledged that as the properties are still in active use, the acquisition may prove to be beyond the Council's means.

- 3.8 With regards to implementation, it is proposed that a development partner, such as a Building Preservation Trust, be sought to undertake the refurbishment and conversion work. Informal discussion with a number of Trusts has indicated that they would be interested in working in partnership with the Council on such a project. Following the refurbishment work, it is suggested that the residential accommodation thus created should be transferred to a Registered Social Landlord, which would let and manage the completed development.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The allocation of £1.6 million is included in the current Capital Plan for the refurbishment of the Council office accommodation. The proposal to progress with Option 4 can be accommodated within this budget at current prices.
- 4.2 The cost of acquiring the vacant buildings comprising 2 – 4 Cross Street, 3 – 5 Cross Street and 2 - 6 Bridge Street has been estimated in the consultant's report to be in the region of £120,000. The acquisition of 1 – 2 Riverside Flats is estimated in the consultants report to cost £240,000. It is proposed that funding be included in the review of the Council's

Capital Investment Plan. In addition, it is proposed that Historic Scotland will be approached in order to seek grant funding in light of the listed nature of the buildings.

- 4.4 A clearer picture of the extent of the project and the true costs involved can only be determined following further completion of the outstanding title research, the completion of initial acquisition discussions and a more detailed examination of the properties involved.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The use of compulsory purchase powers may be required to advance the project, but would only be utilised if a funding package can be put together and a development partner brought on board, to which ownership of the acquired properties can be transferred.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None directly arising from this report.

7. COMMUNITY PLAN IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The proposed approach to improving and regenerating Galston town centre will contribute towards achieving targets within the 'Improving the Environment' objectives within the Community Plan.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 The cabinet is asked to:

- (i) agree the broad approach to the regeneration of Galston, based on the three proposals outlined in Section 3**
- (ii) agree the proposal to refurbish the existing Council accommodation at 7 – 9 and 11 Cross Street**
- (iii) agree, in principle, the acquisition of those parts of the informal car park outwith Council Ownership together with the properties listed in section 3.7, either through negotiation or compulsory purchase if necessary, subject to securing a funding package and a development partner, to which ownership will be transferred.**
- (iv) agree, in principle, to funding being included as an option in the review of the capital Investment Plan.**

- (v) agree that further work be carried out to develop the proposals further and ascertain detailed costs, and to allow an implementation programme to be developed.
- (vi) note the content of this report.

Elizabeth Morton
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18 June 2008 (AD/SA)
FV-AN

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

- (i) Galston Town Centre Feasibility Study by Drivers Jonas – Property Consultants, May 2008

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