

# Gloucester City Council

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>6 November 2019</b>	
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>The Demolition of Wessex House and Intended Land Use</b>			
<b>Report Of:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economy and Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods</b>			
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	<b>All</b>			
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Budget/Policy Framework:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Ruth Saunders, Head of Communities</b>			
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<b>Appendices:</b>	<b>1. Site Map</b>			

## FOR GENERAL RELEASE

### 1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek approval to demolish Wessex House and gain Cabinet agreement in respect of the future use of the land.

### 2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that:

- (1) Wessex House be demolished and,
- (2) the site be redeveloped to provide accommodation to assist the Council in discharging its duty to secure accommodation for eligible persons under the Housing Act 1996 or to lever further opportunities to meet this need.
- (3) authority will be delegated to the Head of Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods, The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economy, Council Solicitor and Section 151 Officer to identify appropriate procurement options for the site.

### 3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 The City Council purchased the lease of the disused Wessex House in order to improve the pedestrian link leading from Great Western Road, including the subway beneath the railway station, to Bruton Way. The upgrade of the public realm on either side of the railway station is presently being designed in partnership with GWR and a planning application is expected in the first half of 2020. Preparatory work and the demolition of Wessex House itself could commence shortly and be completed very early next year subject to consideration of this report.
- 3.2 Recently the site has been subject to reports of antisocial behaviour and health and safety concerns resulting in unbudgeted costs for the Council.

- 3.3 Another council owned site, the car park on Bruton Way and adjacent Bentinck House, will be demolished in the coming months as part of the Kings Quarter redevelopment creating an opportunity to combine demolition procurement for this site.
- 3.4 In advance of redevelopment, it is proposed that the site be laid out for car parking to meet the parking needs of Gloucester City Homes following the loss of spaces at Bruton Way Car Park. This will be achieved via a short-term agreement between the two parties.
- 3.5 It should be noted that as part of the redevelopment of Gloucester Railway Station, a small element of the site will be required to widen the access to the underpass to provide a safer route for pedestrians. This requirement does not affect the ability to redevelop the former Wessex House site for the proposed purpose.

#### **4.0 Social value considerations**

- 4.1 Demolition of this site will reduce the likelihood of antisocial behaviour which will benefit local residents.
- 4.2 Gloucester City is in need of housing so using this unused asset will realise social benefits to our residents.

#### **5.0 Alternative Options Considered**

- 5.1 Leaving Wessex House unused would likely result in costs and management issues for the Council.
- 5.2 The cost to redevelop the building as it is would be expensive and would not be as likely to maximise on the potential of the site.
- 5.3 Uses other than housing would be acceptable in planning terms. However, they would not meet the immediate need to provide accommodation for our residents.

#### **6.0 Reasons for Recommendations**

- 6.1 Wessex House is a Council asset which could help the Council to meet some of its ambitions for the City and is currently serving no purpose. The plans for demolition nearby have created an opportunity to progress a project to develop the Wessex House site.

#### **7.0 Future Work and Conclusions**

- 7.1 The Head of Communities will work with the Cabinet Member for Communities to further explore the detailed use and delivery of accommodation for this site.

#### **8.0 Financial Implications**

- 8.1 There are no additional financial implications for the demolition of Wessex House, The procurement and funding for the demolition of Bruton Way and Grosvenor House was approved by Cabinet 10<sup>th</sup> July 2019. The demolition of Wessex House has been included in this procurement with no additional costs.
- 8.2 Further redevelopment of the site will require detailed business cases to prove financial viability of any future proposal.

## **9.0 Legal Implications**

- 9.1 The title to Wessex House will need to be checked to ensure that there are no restrictions on future use of the land.
- 9.2 The use of the land for car parking by Gloucester City Homes can be achieved under delegated authorities. When considering options for redevelopment Officers should seek legal advice.
- 9.3 Under the Housing Act 1996 the Council has duties to secure accommodation in certain circumstances for persons presenting as homeless. Consideration will need to be given as to whether appropriation of the land to be held for the purposes of housing will be required.

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

## **10.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications**

- 10.1 This project is low risk because, once the building is demolished and the site is levelled it can be used as surface parking until development begins, creating a further income for the Council.

## **11.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA) and Safeguarding:**

- 11.1 A PIA Screening has been completed and a full PIA is not required.
- 11.2 This proposal will have a positive impact on safeguarding as antisocial behaviour on the site will be reduced when the building has been removed.

## **12.0 Other Corporate Implications**

### Community Safety

- 12.1 Although empty buildings are always at risk of criminal activity and antisocial behaviour, the risks increase when a building is empty for a long period of time. Wessex House has been empty for several years and is high risk in terms of security and fire risk.

### Sustainability

- 12.2 The procurement and funding for the demolition of Bruton Way and Grosvenor House was approved by Cabinet 10<sup>th</sup> July 2019. The demolition of Wessex House has been included in this proposal with no additional costs.

### Staffing & Trade Union

- 12.3 Not applicable