

Faith Strategy Group Meeting 27 November 2024

Attendees

Clare Gibbons – SCDC

Ellen Cox – SCDC

Katie Ixer – Cambridgeshire County Council

Rev'd Beth Cope – Northstowe Church Network

Josh Monterio – Emmanuel Church

Jawad Nawash – Northstowe Muslims

Mike Chiu – Cambridge Alliance Church

Introduction

- Mike Job attended as a new member of the faith group after SCDC recently became aware of Cambridge Alliance Church using The Cabin.

Proposed acquisition of Faith/Community Land at Northstowe and Subsequent Disposal

- The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the paper published on the District Council's website, item 18 [Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 3 December 2024, 10.00 a.m.](#)
- The paper outlines the proposed process. Officers have been advised that the Community Asset Transfer policy need not be applied, as it wasn't developed with this in mind.
- The recommendation of the paper is to open the bidding process early 2025 ahead of the receiving transfer of the land. SCDC confident the developers will transfer the land early 2026. This timeline would allow SCDC to open a bidding process for a year and conclude in parallel with SCDC taking transfer of the land. As it is a disposal of land SCDC needs to agree the terms at the outset of the bidding process. Draft head of terms have been shared as an appendix to the Cabinet paper.
- CG stressed that the Cabinet's decision will be made on Tuesday, so any further feedback on these proposals can be sent to CG to provide to Cabinet at that meeting, or representatives can attend in person, since it is a public meeting.

Heads of Terms

- Clause 6: 999-year lease with a peppercorn rent
- Clause 7: Rent deposit of £5,000. This figure has been set so that it shouldn't deter faith groups from being able to put a bid together but sufficient to ensure that winning faith group proceed with their plans in a timely manner.
- Clause 8: Charge to be made reflecting the likelihood that the users of the building will access the local space, in particular the lake. The service charge would not be transferred to Greenbelt but would be held in a separate account by the District Council.
- Clause 11: Doesn't rule out underleases so a faith group could bring in its own operator, putting in sufficient flexibility.
- Clause 15: SCDC will not take transfer of the land until all the works have taken place.
- Clause 16: SCDC will monitor on an annual basis that the building continues to be of broad benefit to the community. Can take the land back if it doesn't.

JM enquired about the service charge. CG clarified that every house owner pays a contribution to manage the open space, and it was felt that given the users of the building are likely to overspill and use the public space, particularly the lakes, this would be a useful addition. If it is not included in the heads of terms now it couldn't be added at a later date.

Secretary of State decision:

Given it is being recommended to offer a 999-year lease this will mean a Secretary of State decision is required to dispose of land for less than best consideration.

There is a firm belief from Leadership Team that that process will not hold the process up. SCDC can seek an advisory in principle decision, but before a decision is taken the Secretary of State would need to know who the District Council would be disposing of the land to and the public benefit that will come from that.

BC stated there is a risk on faith groups so if can an indicative response from Secretary of State could be sought this would be appreciated.

EC updated the group that a site investigation to understand ground conditions has taken place and we hope to receive the report before Christmas in time to open the bidding process January 2025.

CG stated that the outcome of the Cabinet meeting would be shared at the Community Forum next week and encouraged all faith groups and their members to attend that meeting.

JM asked if it would be possible to do a survey to understand how many residents within Northstowe are actively involved in faith groups. CG agreed that this would be useful information but felt that this may be a question to add to another survey, as there is a risk of survey exhaustion at Northstowe.

JM enquired about the Permanent Community building. CG stated an update will be provided at the Community Forum.

JM asked for thanks to be given to Mari from Northstowe Arts for her assistance with the faith focused lantern workshops.