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From: *email redacted*

Sent: Tuesday, 19 July, 2022 12:06

To: "townclerk@northstowetowncouncil.gov.uk"

<townclerk@northstowetowncouncil.gov.uk>

Cc: *email redacted*

Subject: FW: Contextual information regarding interim facilities

Dear Mark

You have asked for contextual information to show how the district council narrowed down and decided upon the Taylor Wimpey show home option, from the other options considered. The e-mail below sets this out. [...]

Re. the process by which Council arrived at the preferred option for an interim community facility.

The list below gives an outline of alternative options explored by the district council following confirmation that the Community Wing would need to close in order to be prepared for educational purposes for academic year 2022/23. **County Council officers have been in discussion with district council officers regarding the termination of use at the Community Wing and have worked jointly on the identification of interim provision from June 2021.** As residential properties have been used on a temporary basis at other developments, this was one of a number of avenues for investigation.

- officers looked at the array of spaces provided by the primary and secondary schools in Northstowe and how this would alter over the three year period an interim provision would be required;
- investigated installing temporary buildings at various Northstowe locations;
- investigated and sought formal pre-application planning advice on alternative "off plan" residential properties;
- investigated the purchase and potential repurposing of the Taylor Wimpey Show homes, with the benefit of formal pre-application planning advice. Taylor Wimpey was approached by SCDC directly, to understand whether they might be willing to sell these properties and at what price.

The following spaces were reviewed:

Northstowe Secondary College.

- There is a Community Access Agreement in place with Northstowe Secondary College; however, of the dual use areas (that is, those that the community can access) only a sub-set have priority access for the community (an activity studio, gym and café area); the majority have priority access for the school, meaning that they are unavailable during school hours, opening from early evening only. They are available over the week ends.
- Currently, the gym and café are undeveloped and are in a shell state. Meridian Trust are permitting short term use of these areas but intend to bring forward the café and gym at the earliest opportunity, meaning these areas would then become unavailable for community bookings.

Pathfinder Primary School

- The Community Wing previously provided a range of activity and meeting spaces – library, café area, small hall, large hall, two interview rooms and office touchdown space. This occupies a footprint equivalent to six standard classrooms. It also benefits from an enclosed garden and cycle parking.
- Post refurbishment this part of the school will provide the school with six classrooms. Of these, three will be immediately put into use as classrooms. The remaining three may offer some additional bookable spaces after 4pm on school days (they will be unavailable for use during school hours for safeguarding reasons) and at weekends. However, over the course of three years, given the continued expansion of Phase 1 Northstowe, these too may be required as the school continues to grow. The school currently hires out some other spaces - its main hall, small hall, meeting room and training room, but these already have established users, with the training room used for after school clubs to provide wrap around care and throughout the holidays, when holiday clubs block book these spaces.

Temporary buildings at Local Centre and Enterprise Zone locations

The Phase 1 Local Centre is the planned location for the permanent community building. Developing a temporary community facility within this area (known as parcel 6) in the form of modular buildings would likely involve extensive ground works and could potentially require new vehicle access points and parking. Bringing forward a temporary facility here would both complicate the delivery of the permanent community building which would need to be built concurrently whilst the temporary facility was in use (not least with safety implications during construction phases) and potentially pose further delay to the delivery of the permanent community facilities and mixed-use local centre.

The same sorts of considerations regarding ground works, access, parking and complications apply to the phasing of the Enterprise Zone more broadly; the presence of temporary buildings on part of the site could also impact on the range of options open to the District Council in terms of the delivery mechanism for this site.

To obtain indicative cost estimates suppliers were identified using an existing Modular Buildings Framework. This work showed that the costs of purchasing a 195m² portacabin type building would be approx. £175,000 plus installation costs of at least £13,500. This figure makes no allowance for ground works or the costs of constructing a car park. Ground works would be in addition to the purchase and installation of the temporary building. Hire options were also explored and a small building of 94m² would result in a hire charge of over £120,000 for three years, the full extent of costs for the installation, removal and ground works would be dependent on the precise nature of the site, but ground works, parking and access construction costs would be of a similar scale to the purchase option. Both options would require planning permission, with attendant costs and lead in times.

Off-plan residential properties

Officers looked at parcels under construction at Northstowe with suitable larger properties that might offer adequate floor space, outdoor space and be configured in a way that may allow repurposing for community uses. This limited the choices to larger properties, other considerations were:

- connectivity by walking and cycling routes to other parts of Northstowe
- the property's visibility and therefore how easy it would be for users to locate it
- availability of parking within easy reach of the property.

This limited choice even further – pre-application advice was sought on an H13 property, but it concluded that permission would likely be refused at this location due in part to insufficient access to parking.

Taylor Wimpey was approached in January 2022. The rationale was that officers had narrowed down potential properties; these were Taylor Wimpey properties and so it would

be necessary to understand the stance of the housebuilder (having first had discussions with the master developer) if the district council were to pursue this approach.

The mayor, deputy mayor and town clerk were made aware of the potential show home purchase in March, having previously been informed that the repurposing of a residential property for a temporary community facility was an option under active investigation earlier in the year.

The Friends of the Wing are part of the management board of the Community Wing; as such they were aware of the forthcoming Wing closure and of the merits and demerits of each option as it was reviewed. They were informed that repurposing residential properties had been investigated in February 2022; in March 2022 it was announced at the Northstowe Community Forum that the Council had agreed to acquire premises in Northstowe with a view to securing interim community provision.

All other community groups became aware of the planned purchase of the Taylor Wimpey show homes when this was put into the public domain within the press release issued. South Cambridgeshire District Council's Cabinet considered a report (Item 20 [Cabinet – Tuesday, 22 March 2022](#)) on this range of alternatives to examine whether each could deliver the provision required for the period necessary, the costs related to each of the alternatives, their likely deliverability and the attendant risks. Their decision was that of the available options the latter offered the best way forward and recommended this approach to Full Council, which considered the matter (at their meeting, [item16a Council- Wednesday 23 March 2022](#)) and approved the acquisition.