

Report of	Associate Director of Alliance Integrated Strategic Partnerships	Author Rory Doyle
Title	Purchase of Five Fields Court, St Edmunds House and two adjoining areas of land in Greenstead – Part A	
Wards affected	Greenstead Ward	

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks approval for the purchase of Five Fields Court, St Edmunds House and the two adjoining land areas from the current landowners, Notting Hill Gensis (NHG). The land is situated in Greenstead, Colchester. Further detail on the land can be viewed as per the Heads of Terms appended to the report on part B of the agenda
- 1.2 In March 2021 Colchester was awarded an £18.2m 'Town Deal' from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), subject to approval of business cases. The largest component of our Town Deal is a £6.7m allocation to the "Heart of Greenstead" scheme.
- 1.3 The Heart of Greenstead project aims to transform the built environment at the centre of the community including new and refurbished homes, retail, public open spaces and an integrated community and health facility (incorporating the relocation of an existing GP surgery, library, and housing office) all aligned to active/safe design and liveable neighbourhood principles. Alongside and interwoven with these physical assets is a programme of community capacity building, free bicycle provision, new digital infrastructure, digital skills development, employment and training opportunities.
- 1.4 In August 2021, the Local Government Association launched its 'Estate Regeneration Fund' (ERF) offering a one-off total £10m in the 2021/22 financial year to assist a handful of housing-led estate regeneration schemes. This funding was intended to assist the unblocking of existing schemes with strong backing and support but requiring further capital investment in order to proceed.
- 1.5 Colchester was successful in its ERF bid for £2.3m and this will significantly boost the Greenstead project. The confidential section of this report covers how the Estate Regeneration Fund award will be utilised in developing and delivering the project; this information being redacted in the public report in the interests of commercial confidentiality.
- 1.6 The purchase of these properties will facilitate the regeneration of Greenstead in line with the phase two objectives of the Heart of Greenstead scheme to improve the historic poor urban design of the built environment and tackle long standing issues, notably a shortage of affordable homes, fear of crime and antisocial behaviour of which the physical environment is a key contributor.
- 1.7 Before the Heart of Greenstead scheme phase two can proceed it is important to ensure that landholdings at the development site are under one ownership. CCC currently owns around 2/3 of the site. The purpose of the successful application for capital grant through

the ERF was to purchase the remaining landholdings from NHG who operate the two sheltered accommodation schemes at the site.

- 1.8 NHG have in principle (subject to their board approval) approved the proposed asset transfers and are collaborating with the council regarding TUPE of staff, transfer of appropriate maintenance contracts and resident engagement.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To approve the purchase of Five Fields Court, St Edmunds House and two adjoining areas of land outlined in the Appendix from NHG as per the Heads of Terms appended to this report.
- 2.2 To delegate authority to the Associate Director of Alliance Integrated Strategic Partnerships in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources Cllr Mark Cory to negotiate terms, conclude the legal documents or any relevant consequential matters to complete the acquisitions.
- 2.3 To approve funding for the purchase as follows - £2.3m funding award from Estate Regeneration Fund, in line with the funding terms plus additional funding from the Council's General Fund which under the proposals within this report will see the assets appropriated to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The purchase of these properties and land will facilitate the regeneration of Greenstead in line with the Heart of Greenstead scheme phase two objectives. Phase two will see the development of new affordable homes, new retail, and wider public realm improvement across the site.
- 3.2 This specific part of the Town Deal programme enables a once-in-a-generation investment in this strong and proud community, which now requires renewal of its physical environment.
- 3.3 In the light of the overall Town Deal award received by Colchester being £6.8m smaller than the original Town Investment Plan, the Town Deal Board agreed in June 2021 to the principle that wherever possible, projects would seek other complementary sources of funding to boost their viability and deliverability.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Do not purchase the properties and land as set out in this report. This would be detrimental to regeneration plans for Greenstead and will mean the Council cannot deliver the objectives set out in the business plan submitted to DLUHC for use of Town Deal funds.
- 4.2 The ERF grant was awarded for the purpose of acquiring the land. The Council will likely be required to return the £2.3m fund.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 The Heart of Greenstead project aims to transform the built environment at the centre of the community including new and refurbished homes, retail, public open spaces and an integrated community and health facility (incorporating the relocation of an existing GP surgery, library and housing office) all aligned to active/safe design and liveable neighbourhood principles. Alongside and interwoven with these physical assets is a programme of community capacity building, free bicycle provision, new digital infrastructure, digital skills development, employment and training opportunities.
- 5.2 The acquisition of Five Fields Court, St Edmunds House and the two adjoining land areas from NHG will enable delivery of the project outcomes in full. As well as improving the historic poor urban design of the built environment the project aims to tackle long standing issues notably a shortage of affordable homes and fear of crime and antisocial behaviour of which the physical environment is a key contributor.
- 5.3 The ERF was set up by government to assist a handful of housing-led estate regeneration schemes nationally to progress on the basis there was strong backing, but further capital investment was required in order to proceed.
- 5.4 Further information can be found in the report at part B of the agenda.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 Equality Impact Assessments are part of developing and implementing specific project activities within the Town Deal programme, and the Council will have due regard to its Public Sector Duty continuing to work to tackle discrimination and inequality and help to create a fairer society, improve housing choice and social mobility (including for protected groups).
- 6.2 Consideration is being given to equality and diversity issues in respect of individual schemes, initiatives and projects that contribute to the delivery of the Town Investment Plan. These are set out in each Town Deal project specific business case.
- 6.3 This project will have a tangible positive impact for people who are wheelchair users or who have an accessibility need; i.e. within the 'Disability' heading under the protected characteristics definition in the Equality Act of 2010, as a proportion of the homes will be delivered with enhanced accessibility standards. Furthermore, all the new homes delivered will have a positive impact for all those who cannot afford market housing, and this will include some individuals with protected characteristics.

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 The following Strategic Plan References are relevant to this scheme:

Deliver Homes for those most in need:

- Improve existing Council homes to keep them in good repair and improve energy efficiency.
- Build new Council homes for our residents.
- Ensure all new homes are designed to a high quality across all tenures.
- Continue to improve and modernise available housing for older people

Improve health, wellbeing and happiness:

- Tackle the cause of inequality and support the most vulnerable people in Colchester

- Improving the lives of Colchester residents and those most in need, working with the NHS, charities and others.
- Improve facilities and routes for cyclists and walkers to enable active travel behaviours, healthier lifestyles and reduce car use.
- Ensure major regeneration projects put physical activity, cycling and walking at the forefront of development.

Growing a fair economy so everyone benefits:

- Work with partners to facilitate a high skill, high wage, low carbon workforce.
- Tackle local skills shortages working with businesses, University of Essex, Colchester Institute, and other partners.
- Ensure our strategy for inclusive economic growth supports the ambitions outlined in the North Essex Growth Strategy, the Local Industrial Strategy, and our Town Deal.
- Ensure the Council's assets continue to contribute to economic growth and opportunity.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 The Town Investment Plan was developed through full consultation with the City and County Councils at both Member and officer level, the Town Deal board and an advisory group.
- 8.2 Engagement and coproduction with the community is a key element of The Heart of Greenstead project with this work being led by Community 360 alongside other local stakeholders. The Heart of Greenstead Project Board is a diverse group including ward councillors, local residents and members of the community. As the project progresses through a new masterplan refresh and outline planning application preparation, further local and stakeholder consultation will be undertaken for this project building on the relationships developed to date including the establishment of a local community taskforce chaired by Community 360.
- 8.3 Consultation and engagement with prospective tenants will be undertaken on behalf of the Council by CBH. Further consultation with tenants will take place on the wider Heart of Greenstead project and plans for the future once the purchase has completed.
- 8.4 The Town Deal programme is subject to a communications and engagement plan which includes publicity and branding.
- 8.5 Consultation with three members of staff commenced 16th November 2023 by Notting Hill Genesis. Working towards TUPE date 31st March 2024. Employer liability information will be reviewed by CBH, and process followed in line with TUPE regulations.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1 Further information can be found in the report on Part B of the agenda.

10. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 10.1 The proposal aims to promote positive health and well-being for our residents, and this policy theme features prominently in several of the programme interventions being developed. The 'We are Colchester' board, advisory group and groups preparing specific projects include representation from the Health Sector, 'One Colchester' Partnership, Colchester Borough Council's Communities team and a number of other bodies with

responsibility and focus on health and wellbeing including links to the Sport England funded Local Delivery Pilot.

- 10.2 The scheme supports the Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy for Essex and North East Essex Health and Wellbeing Alliance's core aims to work together to tackle not just ill-health, but the causes of ill-health, and work in partnership to reduce inequalities and create healthy, resilient communities for everyone. Residents in the new development will be supported in fully realising the health and wellbeing benefits of increased activity & participation. The scheme builds upon Colchester's status as part of a Local Delivery Pilot with Sport England and Active Essex.

11. Health and Safety Implications

- 11.1 There are no specific concerns at this stage of the development and implicit in the land acquisition. Risk will be identified and assessed as part of master planning and preparing for the construction phase of the project and addressed at that stage.
- 11.2 Health and safety of the current residents on the site is a key success criterion of this scheme and will form part of the scheme development.
- 11.3 A stock condition survey has been undertaken to ensure the buildings are safe and compliant with building standards and regulations, ensuring ongoing duty of care for resident tenants.
- 11.4 Surveys have been completed by a Senior Building Surveyor working for Colchester Borough Homes. These surveys have found no evidence of any Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) during the inspections at the properties at Five Fields and St Edmunds house.

12. Risk Management Implications

- 12.1 Identifying the current total amount of arrears that is due to NHG.
- 12.2 CBH undertook a review of the Stock Condition Survey provided by NHG in 2022 and confirmed likely maintenance costs were in accordance with its parameters. A RAAC survey was undertaken in November 2023, and it was confirmed that there was no RAAC in either of the buildings.
- 12.3 The TUPE of staff from NHG to CBH. Possible provision may be needed in case of medium term redundancy pending future plans for building redevelopment. Immediate liabilities will be pension and staff liabilities (sickness and holidays for example).
- 12.4 Ensure relevant novation of contracts (if necessary) and/or pick up work required through extensions to existing contracts making sure that these run seamlessly.
- 12.5 Budget considerations are reviewed to ensure that there is available spend for the management of the buildings for 2024/25.

13. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 13.1 The acquisition of land unlocks the full benefit of a wider site renewal which subject to a new masterplan will enable the development of new homes and buildings with significantly better energy performance, and significantly increased use of active and sustainable travel within and to/from Greenstead.

Appendices

Plan

