

11 November

Report of	Strategic Director – Commercial and Place	Author	Neil Hopkins / Bob Penny
Title	Briefing paper on the rebuilding of the former Garrison Gymnasium		
Wards affected	Berechurch, Christ Church, Shrub End		

## 1. Reason for scrutiny

- 1.1 This is a briefing paper to outline to Scrutiny Panel the progress made so far with the rebuilding of the former Garrison Gymnasium and the future steps to fit it out as a community centre.

## 2. Background information

- 2.1 The former Garrison Gymnasium on Circular Road South is a building of local historic significance and stands in a conservation area. Ownership of the building was transferred to the Council as part of a Section 299A agreement between Colchester Borough Council, Essex County Council and The Secretary of State for Defence stating the building had to be put to community use.
- 2.2 The Abbeyfield Community Church has been selected as the tenant following a competitive selection process. Three applications were received from groups interested in operating the building for community use and were assessed by a judging panel. The church was considered the preferred tenant because it was most successful in demonstrating the ability to meet the needs of the local community and manage the building
- 2.3 Following a major fire in 2013 only the outer walls remain which have been assessed by a structural engineer and their report states, "...it will be acceptable to retain the masonry walls, almost in their entirety,...". The insurers have confirmed they will pay for work that reinstates original parts of the building. The Council intends to do work in addition to this to make the building more lettable. For example, pre-fire no utilities were connected to the building, but utilities will be connected as part of the main contract and paid for out of Council funds.
- 2.4 The timeline since the major fire at the building is as follows: -

21/06/13	Fire at the former Garrison Gym
24/06/13	Survey of the remaining structure to assess integrity and stability
02/08/13	Out to tender for site clearance work – this had to be repeated due to the withdrawal of the preferred and second place bidders.
10/02/14	Site clearance commenced
16/03/14	Site clearance finished
09/04/14	Remaining structure deemed to be safe
01/05/14	Process started to establish scope of works and reinstatement costs

### **3. Rebuilding Plans**

- 3.1 Because of the requirement to fit out the building for community use the interior of the building will not be completely reinstated to its original internal condition and only those features needed for a community centre will be reinstated.
- 3.2 The original plan was to complete the rebuild by the end of May 2015. However officers have just been informed that the lead-time for the large windows required for the building has been extended to 12-14 weeks, resulting in a revised estimated completion date of end June / early July 2015. Work is underway with other manufacturers to see if this date can be improved upon.

### **4. Community use**

- 4.1 The Council will submit a planning application for a change of use to Non-residential Institutions and Assembly and Leisure to cover the intended community centre activities.
- 4.2 Prior to the fire in 2013 heads of terms were prepared and all was progressing with the expectation of lease completion and occupation by the Abbeyfield Community Church.
- 4.3 Discussions are well advanced regarding the use of the former gym with Abbeyfield Community Church. Heads of Terms and a draft lease are prepared but issues regarding the insurance settlement are still to be resolved. Due to the changes proposed to be made to the internal layout of the building by the Abbeyfield Community Church for use as a community centre and place of worship full internal reinstatement works are not required.
- 4.4 The “Community and Health Uses” are clearly defined in the S229a Planning agreement and will be referred to in the lease agreement.
- 4.5 Abbeyfield Community Church have prepared 3 options for the internal refurbishment of the former gym and the decision on which option to progress will be influenced by the value of the insurance settlement and funds that the church group can generate from the sale of its own property in Abbeygate, external grants and fund raising. There is also S106 money which is allocated specifically for this project as part of the 229a agreement. The insurance settlement will be negotiated on the basis of the cost of rebuild. This will be a combination of true costs of works being tendered to make the building weather tight and a negotiated percentage of the costs of the other reinstatement costs.
- 4.6 Further meetings will take place between the Council and representatives of the Abbeyfield Community Church once the insurance negotiations are clearer and the settlement value is determined. This will enable the Council and representatives of the Abbeyfield Community Church to determine the funding available which in turn will influence the decision on which of the 3 options the Abbeyfield Community Church wish to pursue. As the insurance settlement will be based on the cost of reinstating the building to its former content and some of that content does not form part of the proposals there will be discussion and negotiation regarding the allocation of funding. An Agreement for Lease is being considered to demonstrate both parties commitment to this project whilst the funding aspects are being resolved. The Lease cannot be completed until the Abbeyfield Community Church has determined which option it will progress and the funding allocations have been agreed