

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE - 1 MARCH 2016

Title:

**APPROVAL TO SUBMIT PLANNING APPLICATIONS FOR THE CONVERSION
OF FOUR COMMUNITY ROOMS**

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Carole King]
[Wards Affected: All]**

Summary and purpose:

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to submit planning applications to enable the conversion of four of the community rooms to affordable homes.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

This report relates to the Council's corporate priorities of providing more affordable housing in the Borough and understanding residents' needs.

Financial Implications

The cost of management and maintenance of the community rooms is funded by the HRA, including income generated from bookings. As some of the community rooms are under utilised, there is an overall financial cost in continuing to provide the community rooms. Conversion to affordable housing offers better value for money. There is a budget allocation for this proposal.

Legal Implications

The Council will consult with the tenants within these communities who will be affected by these proposals.

Background

1. The Council has 13 community rooms that provide communal spaces for older residents, primarily those living in neighbouring properties, similar to communal lounges in sheltered housing. When they were created they were managed by on-site staff and used by tenants or let to local groups on an hourly rate as required. Over time, the use of community rooms has declined and their size and location has made it difficult to attract other users.

Review of Community Rooms

2. A working group was set up, comprising officers, representatives from the Tenants Panel and the Portfolio Holder for Housing. The group assessed each of the community rooms against agreed criteria, including how well each was used, other facilities in the local area, income and expenditure information and potential for conversion to affordable housing.

3. The assessment concluded that the following community rooms were underused and had potential for conversion:
 - Gorselands, Farnham
 - Stonepit Close, Godalming
 - Griggs Meadow, Dunsfold
 - Woodyers Close, Womersley
4. Feasibility drawings for each of the rooms were prepared. Gorselands has potential for conversion to two x 1 bedroom flats; Stonepit Close and Woodyers Close have potential for conversion to 1 bedroom flats and Griggs Meadow has potential for conversion to one x 2 bedroom flat. A budget allocation of £360,000 has been included in the 2016/17 Housing Capital Programme for these works.

Consultation

5. Ward Councillors have confirmed that they support the proposal to convert the underused community rooms in their wards to residential accommodation to make better use of the Council's resources and contribute towards meeting local housing need. Town and Parish Councils have indicated their support for these proposals.
6. Due to the current use of Gorselands for local elections and the potential for the room to provide short term office accommodation for a local charity, drop-in consultation events were held at this location in August and October 2015. The community room is now being used by Farnham Christian Community Trust as an overspill storage facility for Farnham Foodbank in the short term and will continue to be made available for elections until a suitable alternative venue has been identified.
7. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee was presented with a report at its meeting in January 2016. It supported the proposals, whilst recognising the balance between making the best use of the Council's assets to provide affordable homes, alongside the need for community facilities to be available for local residents across the borough and delivering value for money.

Timetable

8. The following timetable sets out the next steps:

Activity	Date
Confirm timetable for delivery with Ward Members	March 2016
Confirmation from Parish and Town Councils of their comments	March 2016
Newsletter to local residents informing them of the future use of their local community room	March 2016
Executive Permission to submit Planning Application	March 2016
Submission of Planning Application	April 2016
Planning Decision	June 2016
Newsletter to local residents and Ward Members to inform	June 2016

of outcome of planning application	
Appointment of a Contractor	July 2016
Newsletter to residents and Ward Members	July 2016
Construction commencement	August 2016
Construction Completion	April 2017
Available for letting	April 2017

Conclusion

9. Of the 13 community rooms in Waverley, the working group identified four which were significantly under-used and had potential to convert to additional affordable homes.

Recommendation

It is recommended that approval be given to the submission of planning applications to enable the four community rooms at Griggs Meadow, Gorselands, Stonepit Close and Woodyers Close to be converted to provide 5 affordable homes to meet local housing need.

Background Papers

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

CONTACT OFFICER:

Name: Jane Abraham

Telephone: 01483 523096

E-mail: jane.abraham@waverley.gov.uk