

LONDON BOROUGH OF CROYDON

REPORT:	OFFICER DELEGATED KEY DECISION	
DATE OF DECISION	29 February 2024	
REPORT TITLE:	The Aztec Centre, 28 Boulogne Road, Croydon CR0 2QT – Asset Disposal	
CORPORATE DIRECTOR / DIRECTOR:	Jane West - Corporate Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer	
LEAD OFFICER:	Huw Rhys-Lewis – Interim Director of Commercial Investment & Capital	
LEAD MEMBER:	Councillor Jason Cummings - Cabinet Member for Finance	
DECISION TAKER:	Jane West - Corporate Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer	
AUTHORITY TO TAKE DECISION:	Delegated Authority to the Corporate Director of Resources and S151 Officer to agree the terms and final price for each disposal included within tranche 1 Assets Disposal Plan	
KEY DECISION?	Yes 0824RES	Key Decision – Decision incurs expenditure, or makes savings, of more than £1,000,000 or such smaller sum which the decision-taker considers is significant having regard to the Council’s budget for the service or function to which the decision relates
CONTAINS EXEMPT INFORMATION?	YES	Public with exempt Part B report Grounds for the exemption: Exempt under paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as it relates to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and the public interest in withholding disclosure outweighs the public interest in disclosure.
WARDS AFFECTED:	Selhurst	

1 SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1** This report recommends the disposal of the freehold of The Aztec Centre, 28 Boulogne Road. The objectives for the disposal were to secure maximum receipts, achieve bids preferably on an unconditional basis with the lowest possible transactional risk and to target capital receipts with the preferred bidder by the end of the 2023-2024 financial year. SHW undertook a full open market process. A transparent and clear process was provided for parties to undertake their due diligence to ensure considered bids. SHW received 12 offers.
- 1.2** Details of the offers received and the marketing report are included within the confidential Part B report, as this is exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), as it relates to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and the public interest in withholding disclosure outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

For the reasons set out in the report the Corporate Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer is recommended:

- 2.1** To approve the disposal of the freehold of The Aztec Centre, 28 Boulogne Road at the value stated in the confidential Part B report.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1** The disposal of The Aztec Centre, 28 Boulogne Road supports the requirements of the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) through the reduction in capital borrowing and annual revenue costs and the requirements as set out in the draft exit report being prepared by the Improvement Panel. Further commercial reasons for the disposals are included in Part B report. The recommended offer for acceptance represents best consideration. The cost of holding and running assets is second only to staffing costs and therefore it is important to ensure that they are used in the most cost-effective manner. A business case/ feasibility assessment for the disposal is included within the confidential Part B report.

4 BACKGROUND AND DETAILS

- 4.1** The Boulogne Road site provided the former equipment store for the Croydon Equipment Service (CES). Following the development of the service to provide equipment for other authorities, they were relocated to larger premises at Imperial Way. The planning it falls within is a tier 4 employment site and therefore under the current local plan is a protected use and the planners have under previous applications demonstrated a requirement to retain an employment use.
- 4.2** The site comprises a broadly flat and rectangular parcel of land with two principle buildings, a single-storey office extending to a Gross Internal Area (GIA) 4,113 sq ft (384 sq m), a warehouse extending to a GIA of 8,202 sq ft (702 sq m) and several portacabins. Total site area 0.768 acres (0.311 hectares).

- 4.3** After COVID, the site continued to be used by CES for storage but is now vacant following the relocation of CES to Imperial Way in 2022.
- 4.4** On 30th November 2022, the Mayor in Cabinet approved the Corporate Asset Management Plan together with the Corporate Property and Asset Disposal Strategy with the overall aim to reduce costs of retained corporate assets used for the delivery of services and to maximise revenue generation. Through the development of the strategy, the identification of surplus assets helps to deliver further capital receipts to reduce the Council's capital financing costs and overall running costs.
- 4.5** On 20th March 2023, the Mayor in Cabinet approved the disposal of The Aztec Centre, 28 Boulogne Road. The minutes of the decision and the officer report to Cabinet are attached as Appendix 2. The Aztec Centre, 28 Boulogne Road is included in the Report (Part A) Property Disposals Appendix. The disposal of The Aztec Centre, 28 Boulogne Road would enable the Council to reduce its debt and overall running costs to support the requirements of DLUHC. More detailed commercial aspects supporting the need to dispose of the property are included in PART B.
- 4.6** However, on 24th May 2023, a decision of the Mayor in Cabinet was taken to approve the Annual Assets Disposal Plan (AADP) and to delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Resources to agree the terms and final price for each disposal included in the Plan. This enables the Council to achieve the required asset disposals to help support the financial requirements in line with the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Also, it allows swift decisions to be taken and enables the Council to progress disposals in a more commercial manner, reducing the risk of delaying the acceptance of any offers, and securing both capital and revenue receipts at the earliest opportunity. As the AADP has superseded the 20th March 2023 approval of this disposal, a further approval is required hence this Part A and Part B Key Decision Authority.
- 4.7** The exercise of the delegated authority by the Corporate Director of Resources requires the following action to have been undertaken:
- The sign off of a business case by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) including full financial assessment.
 - A formal Red Book valuation is undertaken, (if required) on property to be sold.
 - The property must be formally marketed unless there is a clear special purchaser or offer made considerably in excess of the market value.
- 4.8** An unconditional offer would have been preferred but due to the nature of the asset, all offers were conditional. These were evaluated by SHW.

Business Case and Full Financial Assessment

- 4.9** The business case and full financial assessment is set out in the Part B report and will be considered by CMT prior to a decision. This includes a financial case for the

disposal, timing, the method of disposal, the impact risks for disposal, valuation explanation and market assessment.

Red Book Valuation and Market Assessment

- 4.10** In relation to a Red Book valuation, this is not required due to the nature of The Aztec Centre as the value of the property is dictated by the interest in the market and offers made at the time of marketing. A full market exercise has been undertaken which attracted significant interest and twelve final offers. The offer recommended for acceptance represents best consideration. As such, a formal red book valuation is not required for this disposal.

Marketing Exercise

- 4.11** The property has been thoroughly marketed through commercial disposal agents, SHW, delivering several options from interested parties with varying offers, timescales and conditions. Attached as Appendix 2 is the property marketing brochure prepared by SHW and the SHW Marketing Report is appended to the confidential Part B report. The objectives for the disposal were to secure maximum receipts, achieve offers that were on an unconditional basis with the lowest possible transactional risk and to target capital receipts with the preferred bidder by the end of the 2023-2024 financial year. SHW undertook a full open market process with a transparent and clear process for parties to undertake their due diligence to ensure considered bids. The details of the marketing strategy are set out in SHW Marketing report in the Part B Appendix. The marketing process involved full and final offers. There were twelve potential purchasers and an analysis of the offers has been undertaken by SHW, as set out in their Marketing Report, which has resulted in the proposed buyer being secured.

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1** No disposal of The Aztec Centre, 28 Boulogne Road – the business case for disposal is set out in the Part B report. As set out above, the overall aim of the approved Corporate Asset Management Plan and the Annual Asset Disposals Plan is to reduce costs of retained corporate assets used for the delivery of services and to maximise revenue generation. This disposal is required to meet those aims and enable the Council to achieve the required asset disposals to help support the financial requirements in line with the MTFS.
- 5.2** No disposal at this time of The Aztec Centre, 28 Boulogne Road – the Council's current financial pressures and need to deliver savings means that not selling The Aztec Centre, 28 Boulogne Road at this time would impact on the opportunity to reduce its debt balance. Reducing the Council's debt balance is a requirement from DLUHC and the government appointed Improvement and Assurance Panel as part of the ongoing discussion on options for securing ongoing financial sustainability for the Council.

- 5.3** No disposal of The Aztec Centre, 28 Boulogne Road to the recommended bidder - an assessment of bids is included within the SHW Marketing Report in the Part B appendix and further explained in the Part B report. The recommended offer for acceptance represents best consideration.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1** Consultation has taken place with the Mayor and the Cabinet Member for Finance in respect of the proposed disposal. The Corporate Management Team are due to consider the business case for disposal before a decision is made.

7 CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES

- 7.1** The disposal of assets will help deliver a key objective within the Mayor's Business Plan:

Balancing the Books: One of the main priorities is to get a grip on the finances and make the Council financially sustainable. With the Council still reliant on Government support to stay afloat, getting a grip on the finances is a top priority. This will mean difficult but necessary decisions to make the Council financially sustainable for the future.

To do this we will:

- Deliver the savings in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and increase our income.
- Reduce council debt by selling or letting more council assets and repaying capital loans.

- 7.2** The disposal of assets will help deliver increased income through capital receipts and wider cost savings from estate voids.

8 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

See Part B report.

8.2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.2.1** There are various powers the Council may rely upon to dispose of its assets and the Council must comply with the legal framework, including established public law principles, in relation to disposal of land and property. Under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to dispose of land and has a statutory duty to sell land at the best price reasonably obtainable ("best consideration"), unless it has the consent of the Secretary of State and subject to exceptions set out in the General Disposal Consent (England) 2003.

8.2.2 The Executive Mayor has the power to exercise executive functions pursuant to s9E of the Local Government Act 2000 and has the power to delegate those functions. The Executive Mayor in Cabinet approved the Annual Asset Disposal Plan on 24th May 2023 (item no. 12), which included the disposal of Boulogne Road - Depot (Former Accessibility Centre). The Executive Mayor delegated authority to the Corporate Director of Resources and s151 Officer to agree the terms and final price for each disposal included within the Annual Asset Disposals Plan, subject to approval of a business case by the Corporate Management Team (CMT).

8.3 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

8.3.1 Under the Public Sector Equality Duty of the Equality Act 2010, decision makers must evidence consideration of any potential impacts of proposals on groups who share the protected characteristics, before decisions are taken. This includes any decisions relating to how authorities act as employers; how they develop, evaluate and review policies; how they design, deliver and evaluate services, and also how they commission and procure services from others. Section 149 of the Act requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

8.3.2 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQulA) has been undertaken and is included as an appendix in the cabinet papers. The EQulA reveals that there is no direct negative impact on those protected groups.

8.3.3 The council remains committed to tackling inequality, recognising that there can be no fair society if some groups remain disadvantaged because of their protected characteristic.

8.3.4 The council expects its service providers to adhere to the same principles of complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty ensuring that the services we procure are both fit for purpose and represent value for money.

Approved by: Felisha Dussard Senior Communities Officer 29/02/2024

8.4 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

8.4.1 There are no Personnel, Human Resources, Customer Impact, Equalities, Environment and Design, Risk Assessment, Human Rights, considerations arising from this report.

9 APPENDICES

9.1 Part A Appendix 1 - The Aztec Centre, 28 Boulogne Road – SHW Brochure

10 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

10.1 Cabinet report of 20th March 2023 - Mayor in Cabinet approved the disposal of The Aztec Centre, 28 Boulogne Road.

10.2 Cabinet report of 24th May 2023 – Tranche 1 Asset Disposal Plan 2023/24 and Lease Renewals and Rent Review Settlements for Various Commercial Properties’

11 URGENCY

11.1 The decision is time sensitive as draft terms have been agreed by both parties and we are now in a position to exchange contracts for 29th February 2024, with a completion set for a maximum of 20 working days thereafter.