

# FINANCE, POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

1 FEBRUARY 2018

## DISPOSAL OF FORMER VICTORIA ROAD SCHOOL – CHI/17/312

1. (A) In accordance with article 4 of this minute, the Committee heard the following deputation from Mr David Fryer and Mr Alistair Spence on behalf of Torry Development Trust.

Mr Spence made reference to a meeting with two Council officers who requested details of Torry Development Trust (TDT). He indicated that he had the impression that the officers had made their mind up that the TDT could not deliver their proposals, hence the report's recommendation to market the site.

He advised that in a few short weeks, the TDT had before them three different proposals for the site, however the officer report was not complimentary inferring that we would not be able to carry out our proposals. He wanted to clarify that the comments in the report which stated that we had no interest in what happened to the building as long as it was saved, were very much taken out of context. He explained that what he had referred to in this statement was that he could not care less what was done 'in terms of the three proposals', as long as the building heritage was saved.

The Committee then heard Mr Fryer make reference to the previous meeting on 1 December 2017, at which the TDT presented the case for retention of the very fine examples of granite heritage and the need to link these to new uses to meet community needs following full restoration. He explained that they had received a hand of friendship for the TDT to take the lead to develop alternative uses on the Victoria Road School site and were professionally advised by others in the family of development trusts that up to six-month's would be needed to present their assessments.

He indicated that TDT started small and was growing with opportunity and support to progress a detailed evaluation followed by public consultations on identified options to date. He questioned whether the door was being closed on them.

He made reference to the time TDT have had since the previous committee meeting (27 working days), and during this short time they had identified strong community focused options through meeting three potential development partners and projects that could deliver community benefits such as affordable housing, working mum's nursery, job club, heritage museum and sports/youth provision for Torry and the city.

He advised that in the days and weeks open to them, they have received goodwill, pro-bono offers from individual professionals, the Scotland Town Partnership, Grampian Housing Association and the Development Trust Association to assist and support them as an effective development partner.

He indicated that their community knowledge, skills and attributes of some 200+ years was an invaluable resource in that they were the community cement that could bond together a project with the potential development partners to help them achieve a new future for the granite heritage of Old Torry. In addition, in the last week, he explained that they had received 15 applications for membership of the TDT and there were more arriving as interest in their endeavours has grown.

Mr Fryer advised that Torry had a history of centuries of innovation, achievement and enterprise and a soon to be published book would record numerous Torry firsts, many of which now had world-wide significance. He explained that they were driven by that same community enterprise that also brought together funding for the first harbour school at Abbey Road in 1875. He made reference to the School, indicating that it was one of the last granite assets of Old Torry which was taken into Council ownership by the then Aberdeen Schools Board and stated that a locally lead community with inputs and engagement could help restore these fine buildings to once again meet the community needs of today. He requested that the Council should join them and allow them to complete the programme as submitted.

Mr Fryer concluded by asking members to give them the tools and they would finish the job they had started.

(B) With reference to article 9 of the minute of meeting of 1 December 2017, the Committee had before it a report by the Interim Director of Communities, Housing and Infrastructure which provided an update on the discussions with Torry Development Trust following the Committee on 1 December 2017 and sought approval for the recommendations in order to see the property and the site brought back into economic use.

Torry Development Trust's Indicative Project Programme, dated 25 January 2018 had been tabled at the meeting.

**The report recommended:-**

that the Committee -

- (a) instruct the Head of Land and Property Assets to openly market the site with the aspiration that proposals from interested parties must seek to retain as much of the buildings on the site as possible; and
- (b) to note that the outcome of the marketing exercise would be brought back to the most appropriate committee before the summer recess.

The Convener, seconded by the Vice Convener moved:-

that the recommendations included within the report be approved.

Councillor Nicoll, seconded by Councillor Yuill moved as an amendment:-

that the Committee –

- (1) delay marketing the site meantime; and
- (2) extend the period of discussion with the Torry Development Trust to 1 June 2018, to allow them to bring back proposals to develop the site.

On a division, there voted:- for the motion (9) – the Convener, the Vice Convener and Councillors Donnelly, Houghton, John, Laing, Macdonald, Sellar and Wheeler; for the amendment (8) – Councillors Allard, Cameron, Jackie Dunbar, Flynn, Catriona MacKenzie, Nicoll, Townson and Yuill.

**The Committee resolved:-**  
to adopt the motion.

**In terms of Standing Order 31.1, Councillor Nicoll intimated that he would like this matter to be referred to full Council in order for a final decision to be taken. Councillor Nicoll was supported by Councillors Allard, Cameron, Jackie Dunbar, Flynn, Catriona MacKenzie, Nicoll, Townson and Yuill.**