

Decision Maker: Resources Portfolio Holder

For Pre-decision Scrutiny by the Executive and Resources PDS Committee on 10th October 2013 and the Environment PDS Committee on

Date: 1st October 2013

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Executive Non-Key

Title: **PRIORY GARDENS AND ADJOINING FORMER PUBLIC TOILET BLOCK**

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Chief Officer: Nigel Davies, Executive Director of Environment & Community Services
Marc Hume, Director of Regeneration and Transformation

Ward: Orpington

1. Reason for report

To suspend the marketing of the former Priory Gardens Public toilets to provide an opportunity for the Friends of the Priory Gardens to use this building as a base from which to operate a horticultural gardening volunteer programme.

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Resources Portfolio Holder agrees:

To suspend the sale or demolition of the former toilets adjacent to the Priory Gardens, whilst officers investigate external funding opportunities to permit the Friends of the park to have use of this building for volunteer gardening related activities.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy
 2. BBB Priority: Excellent Council Quality Environment Contributes to other BBB priorities
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: £1,500 for conversion to a bothy and £40,000 for an information centre should external grant be secured. This would free up £17,850 from the property planned maintenance budget to be used for other maintenance works. However, there is the potential loss of a capital receipt
 2. Ongoing costs: Between £600 and £2,200 per annum for business rates, utility and maintenance costs
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Park Partnership
 4. Total current budget for this head: £35,370
 5. Source of funding: Existing revenue budget for 2013/14, plus any additional external funding which can be secured to fund the information centre conversion
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Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 2
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: 0.05 fte
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Non-Statutory - Government Guidance
 2. Call-in: Applicable
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): all visitors to Priory Gardens, Orpington (difficult to quantify as no records kept)
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Ward Councillor Views

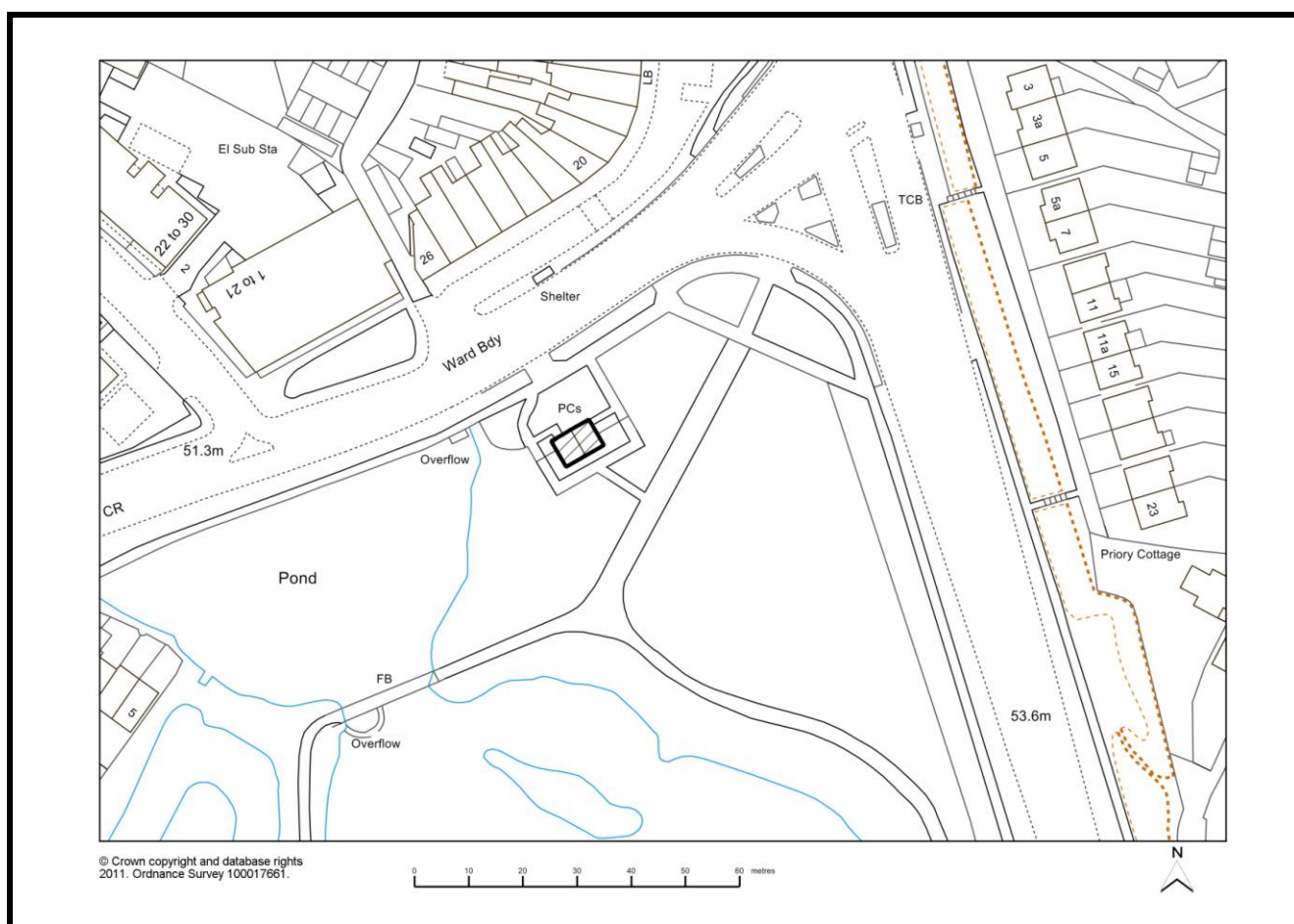
1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Yes
2. Summary of Ward Councillors' comments: Councillor W Huntington-Thresher supports the recommendation. Any further comments received from Ward Members will be reported to Committee and the Portfolio Holder:

3. COMMENTARY

3.1 Following the Environment PDS Committee on the 5th April 2011, the Environment Portfolio Holder agreed to the closure of the public toilet adjacent to Priory Gardens, Orpington. The Resources Portfolio Holder then agreed to their disposal or demolition on the 21st November 2012, following pre-decision scrutiny by the Executive and Resources PDS Committee. The Priory Gardens public toilets building has not been marketed so far, whilst the alternative option outlined in this report is considered.

3.2 At this site, both the sale and demolition options are complicated by the fact that the electricity supply to the building is shared with the park. Therefore a separation of the service will be required, which would be costly and expected to be met by any prospective purchaser should the property be sold. The cost of the demolition and separation of the electricity systems is £17,750 and was to be funded from the planned maintenance programme

Priory Gardens, Orpington



3.3 The Council has a long and successful record of working with the community, with over 50% of all of Bromley's parks now being supported by individual Friends Groups.

3.4 Working in partnership with the Borough's grounds maintenance contractor, *The Landscape Group*, officers have generated local resident interest. A new volunteer gardening team has formed and begun to maintain these historic gardens. To enable this group to develop, there is now a requirement to provide a tool store for their gardening equipment, as well as shelter, a bothy and a toilet.

This building provides an ideal location for this proposed facility adjoining to the park. By spending £1,500 from existing revenue budgets, this property can be easily adapted into a bothy with shelving for tools, a facility to make hot drinks and will include additional security measures. External funding will be sought within a 24 month period to expand on the modifications to provide a complete upgrade of the facility to include a kitchen and information centre at an estimated cost of £40,000. A similar adaptation of a former toilet block, to create a Friends work store, small kitchen and information centre, was created recently in Kelsey Park, Beckenham, and is managed solely by the Friends of Kelsey Park. A further example is the Friends of Keston who have utilised the former toilet block at Westerham Road to provide tools storage, a kitchen and toilet facility for their practical work days.

- 3.5 There is an additional cost of £1,600 p.a. for business rates to occupy this building, which will be funded from within the Parks and Green Space budget. However this may become void if it can be proved to the District Valuer that the building's use has been adapted for parks related activities. It is estimated that annual utility costs of up to £600 may be incurred which will be funded from within the existing Parks and Greenspace budgets.
- 3.6 Officers will seek to secure external funding to make the Priory Gardens facility into a showcase information centre and Friends' work store. Such a building would also provide additional security for the site and would attract more users to the park.
- 3.7 If the application for external funding is unsuccessful and/or if the Friends volunteer group has no further need of the former toilet block at some point in the future, then the building could then be offered for sale or demolition as originally agreed. A capital receipt would be generated through the sale of this property, but in view of its unique nature it is very difficult to anticipate interest or to estimate the value for the building. To date sale prices for toilets have ranged from £42,000 to over £100,000, but only where alternative uses have been possible. An alternative use for the Priory Gardens toilet block has not been identified.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council's aims include being a Council which manages its assets well.
- 4.2 The Council seeks to empower communities by working with individuals and groups to improve their local environment. One of the key aims set out in the Environment Portfolio Plan 2013/16 is to "Promote the activities of Friends groups in enhancing the Borough's parks and street scene".

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Resources Portfolio Holder on 21st November 2012 agreed that the public toilet in Priory Gardens was to be demolished or disposed of. The cost of the demolition together with the separation of the electrical system is estimated at £17,850 and was to be funded from the property planned maintenance budget.
- 5.2 This report is recommending that the sale or demolition of the premises be suspended for up to 24 months to enable officers to investigate whether external funding could be secured to convert the premises into an information centre and to be used by the Friends group during the period.
- 5.3 Should external funding be secured then there will be a saving of £17,850 within the planned maintenance budget that could be re-allocated to undertake other maintenance works.
- 5.4 It would also mean that the Council would forgo generating a capital receipt, the value of which cannot be estimated at this moment in time.

- 5.5 The cost of altering the toilet block to make it suitable for use as a shelter, toilet and tool store for volunteers is estimated to be £1,500 which can be funded from within the existing Parks and Greenspace budget for 2013/14.
- 5.6 Additional revenue costs for the business rates and utilities will be incurred up to an estimated total of £2,200 which again can be contained within the parks budget. This annual cost may reduce to £600 per annum should the business rates not become payable.
- 5.7 Any major improvements to convert the building to an information centre will cost approximately £40,000 and officers will investigate whether external funding can be secured to meet these costs.
- 5.8 Should Officers be unsuccessful in securing the external funding, a report will be brought back to the Resources Portfolio Holder for a decision about the future of the building.

6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires a local authority to secure the best consideration reasonably obtainable when it disposes of land (other than on a lease of seven years or less)

Non-Applicable Sections:	Personnel Implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Environment PDS Committee, Friends Annual Report 25 th June 2013 Executive and Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee Former Public Toilets, 21 st November 2012 Environment PDS Committee - Public Toilet Provision, 5 th April 2011