

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Council
Date:	28 September 2023
Subject:	Petition titled 'Support the Sale of Property from the Asset Disposal List to the Langley Islamic Centre for Community Development'
Chief Officer:	Pat Hayes, Executive Director, Property and Housing
Contact Officer:	Kunwar Khan, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager
Ward(s):	Langley Marish
Exempt:	No
Appendices:	None

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out the details of a Petition titled 'Support the Sale of Property from the Asset Disposal List to the Langley Islamic Centre for Community Development' which has been received under the Council's Petitions Scheme.
- 1.2 The Council is invited to review and agree its future course of action in relation to the petition.

Recommendations:

Following the debate, the Council is asked to resolve what action it wishes to take with regard to the Petition, noting the service officer's recommendation provided below:

Council recommends that the Executive Director of Property and Housing:

1. Initiates in conjunction with other Directors a review of the services delivered from the asset is completed and a decision made on future service delivery utilising less or alternative assets
2. Includes representatives of the Petition Organiser in any stakeholder engagement concerning the asset.
3. Ensures there is wide publication of any intended disposal of the Langley Pavilion such publication to specifically include the Petition Organiser.
4. Includes representatives of the Petition Organiser in any stakeholder engagement with the voluntary and community sector to inform its wider estates strategy.

Commissioner Review

Commissioners note the petition and that an Estate Strategy is currently being developed that will inform the shape and size of the retained operational portfolio and therefore, the assets that can be released and added to the Asset Disposal

Programme. A Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Policy will also be required, clearly setting out the framework for elected members, council officers and local communities, and provide a consistent and transparent approach to dealing with both applications that can be supported and those applications which are unsuccessful.

2. Report

- 2.1 This report advises the Council of a Petition – Support the Sale of Property from the Asset Disposal List to the Langley Islamic Centre for Community Development – that has been received under the Council's Petitions Scheme.
- 2.2 Council's Petition Scheme, inter alia, states that if a petition has, or acquires 1500 valid signatures the issues will be debated at a Full Council meeting (i.e. a meeting to which all elected Members are invited).
- 2.3 The Petition has surpassed the threshold of triggering a debate at full council and contains 2,136 signatures – 382 signatories on the Council's website and 1,754 signatories on a hard copy version.
- 2.4 The Petition text reads as follows:

Support the Sale of Property from the Asset Disposal List to the Langley Islamic Centre for Community Development.

We the undersigned petition the council to request your consideration in allocating a property from the Council's Asset Disposal List to the Langley Islamic Centre.

We would like to reiterate that Slough, with its population of more than 50,000 Muslims, is known for its cultural diversity and welcoming environment. This vibrant Muslim community is an integral part of the local social fabric, contributing significantly to the cultural richness and respecting diversity of Slough.

For over ten years, the Langley Islamic Centre has served as a beacon of hope, unity, and community support. It has provided essential services such as places of worship, community outreach, promoting festivals, volunteering in health crises and educational resources. Langley Islamic Centre (LIC) has been contributing in delivering these services from rented facilities provided by the Slough Borough Council.

However, we find ourselves at a point where the community services and prayer facilities are no longer adequate to cater to the growing needs of our expanding community. The demand for the allocated premises for Langley Islamic Centre is increasing, and the current facilities are not able to fully meet these needs in the current arrangements. Therefore, it is a much needed collective request for your assistance in providing a larger and suitable property for the Langley Islamic Centre so we can serve the community in more organized manner under the charity commission guidelines to help in education, youth activities and guidance for men, women & children with a base in the heart of Langley area.

We understand that the normal process for distributing properties from the Council's Asset Disposal List involves competitive bidding. However, considering the non-profit nature of the Centre and the valuable community service it offers, we would like to propose an alternative.

We respectfully request that the Council engage in a commercial discussion with the Langley Islamic Centre, based on the Council's and market assessment of the property, rather than initiating a bidding process.

This approach would ensure a fair and transparent negotiation process that recognises the Langley Islamic Centre's significant contribution to the community and its unique position as a non-profit organisation. It would also foster a continued strong partnership between the Langley Islamic Centre and the Slough Borough Council.

We trust in the Council's conscious commitment to support local communities and we also believe that allocating a property from the Asset Disposal List to the Langley Islamic Centre would significantly benefit the broader community.

We look forward to your favourable consideration of this request and thank you in advance for your support.

- 2.5 Following a service request for clarification, the Petition Organiser have informed that their request to be understood as follows:

'Langley Islamic Centre (LIC) is currently operating its services including the Friday prayers at Langley Pavilion. We would prefer to engage with SBC in commercial discussions with Langley Pavilion as a priority for LIC. The property is listed in SBC asset disposal list with a book value of £201,500, Risk profile 3, with an estimated completion date of Q3 in 2023. Therefore, we wish to engage with SBC for Langley Pavilion as a preferred choice for the community. LIC has its roots in Langley and would prefer to utilise the funds collected from the people of Langley to acquire an appropriate facility in Langley. However, if SBC has other options locally that will suit the needs of LIC, we can consider that as well. The most suitable for us was the Old Police Station building, which SBC has disposed to a property developer through bidding.'

Background

Assets identified for disposal will prior to sale need to be declared surplus. This will require confirmation from the Executive Director of the relevant service area and a Cabinet or Asset Disposal Cabinet Committee decisions will be needed to confirm an asset's status as 'surplus', in order for it to be added to the Asset Disposal Programme.

All disposals will follow this corporate process, with the exception of disposals in accordance with a statutory framework, for example right to buys and academy conversions. As a general principle, all disposals should be on commercial terms and demonstrably evidence that the test in section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 is met, namely that the disposal is for best consideration reasonably obtainable. Any decision to dispose of an asset for less than best consideration, with the exception of disposals to comply with statutory obligations, should be approved by Cabinet.

In this case part of the asset is leased to a third party and as a consequence the Council cannot at present unilaterally dispose of the property with vacant possession.

Supporting Information for debate

- 2.6 The Petition Organiser will be invited to the council meeting to speak on the Petition (up to five minutes) and the Petition will then be discussed by Members of the Council for a maximum of 15 minutes. The Mayor has discretion to extend this time taking account of the degree of public interest in the issue, the level of support given to the petition and the number of elected members wishing to express their views on the subject.
- 2.7 Following this discussion, the Council will need to decide what action to take with regard to the Petition. Where the issue is one on which the Cabinet is required to make the final decision, the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision.
- 2.8 The Scheme indicates that the Council's response to a Petition will depend on what a petition asks for and how many people have signed it but may include one or more of the following;
- Taking the action requested in the Petition;
 - Considering the Petition at a Council Meeting;
 - Holding an Inquiry;
 - Commissioning relevant research;
 - Organising a public meeting;
 - Mounting a wider public consultation;
 - Meeting with the Petition Organiser or representatives of signatories;
 - Providing a written response outlining the Council's views on the subject;
 - Referring the issue to the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee **OR**
 - Referring the issue to the relevant Committee/Cabinet;
 - Consulting statutory partners and local service providers;
 - Instigating discussions with the voluntary and community sectors; and
 - Making representations to Commercial or other Interests.

The Recommendation incorporates the following of these options:

- Considering the Petition at a Council Meeting;
- Mounting a wider public consultation;
- Meeting with the Petition Organiser or representatives of signatories;
- Providing a written response outlining the Council's views on the subject;
- Consulting statutory partners and local service providers;
- Instigating discussions with the voluntary and community sectors; and

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

- 3.1.1 Potential loss of additional profit if the asset was to be sold to open market, given the success of auction lots and bidding processes to date.
- 3.1.2 Consideration of income foregone from current occupiers including the costs of lease termination.
- 3.1.3 Additional financial implications would need to be revisited and considered following the outcome of this report.

3.2 Legal implications

3.2.1 Slough Borough Council adopted a new petition scheme in July 2010. This Petition meets the criteria listed in the [Council's Petition Scheme](#).

3.2.2 Under the Council's published Petitions Scheme a Petition that contains 1500 signatures triggers a debate at Council.

3.2.3 Disposal of a property asset is an executive function and therefore reserved to Cabinet. Full Council does not have the power to direct Cabinet to take a particular decision on this matter. Therefore if Full Council is minded to make a recommendation, this should be a recommendation to Cabinet. When making a decision, Cabinet must take account of relevant policies, its legal duties and in particular its duties under s.123 of the Local Government Act 1972 and the financial implications of any decision. Any decision to dispose of an asset at less than best consideration reasonably obtainable is reserved to Cabinet.

3.3 *Risk management implications*

3.3.1 At this stage the only known risks are potentially reputational. As the property is currently leased; in part; any disposal is currently on hold and further risks; if any; will be assessed when the asset is ready to be disposed, if it is agreed that the asset is to be disposed.

3.4 *Environmental implications*

3.4.1 No environmental implications have been identified as a direct result of this report

3.5 *Equality implications*

3.5.1 The asset is not used for operational or direct service delivery by the Council. There are no identified equality implications with the proposed future disposal of this site.

Background papers and information

- [Petition](#).