

Submission of evidence from Janet Down regarding the ACV Process undertaken by Stechford Baptist Church with Birmingham City Council

14th December, 2018 – George King – Pastor of Stechford Baptist Church and the Chair of the Stechford Neighbourhood Forum – emailed Ian Ward to express a community interest in the land at the old Stechford Cascades Site – this was referred to Kathryn James, Assistant Director of Property (Interim) who confirmed that it was “the City Council’s intention to bring forward the disposal of the site of the former Stechford Cascades facility following its demolition. An executive report to this effect will be presented to Cabinet shortly. The disposal will generate a much needed capital receipt and generate economic activity within Stechford.” She asked her team to see if there were any more suitable premises available.

23rd March, 2019 – An Asset of Community Value Nomination Form (ACV1) was submitted to Diane Cull Corporate Strategy Team by George King.

11th September, 2019 – Janet Down, on behalf of SBC emailed Waheed Nazir and Diane Cull to chase what had happened and Waheed responded “In terms of the nomination form for the Cascades building / site to be registered as an Asset of Community Value I must apologise as the nomination has only recently come to the attention of the relevant officers following your email. As a result the nomination is to be considered by the officer group that considers these matters at its next meeting on the 3rd October and you should be informed of the decision shortly after that date. Can I take the opportunity to assure you that the ACV decision making process is the same and is applied consistently whether the site is in private or public ownership. The decision letter will go to George King (the Pastor) as the named individual on the form but I have also asked Doug Lee (0121 464 9858) within my Department to also contact yourself once a decision is made.”

12th October, 2019 – Janet Down chased Waheed Nazir as we had had no further update and received this email “Thank you for your email. I am on annual leave until Monday 2 December 2019 and after that date will no longer be an employee of Birmingham City Council. Ian MacLeod is now Interim Director of Inclusive Growth and can be contacted at ian.macleod@birmingham.gov.uk If you need to contact me personally, this inbox will continue to be monitored by Louise O’Neill over the next few weeks who can redirect enquiries accordingly.”

During this time, we were meeting with stakeholders, local councillors (Neil Eustace) and MP’s as well as Doug Lee and Mark Gamble to discuss the future of Cascades. We drew to their attention, on a regular basis that we had not received any responses regarding the ACV and each were trying to chase it.

November 2019 – we were informed, informally, that a decision had been made at a council meeting but that the document had to be signed off and could not be released until this had been done – we still had no idea of the outcome, although the decision had been made.

12th November 2019 – Janet Down emailed Ian Macleod about the fact that we had not received any formal response – he responded on the 20th November stating that we would hear from Doug Lee about the decision when it could be released.

11th February 2020 – Still no formal response to our ACV request. The cabinet agreed the disposal of land at a cabinet meeting and Janet Down emailed Ian Macleod our disappointment in the process and the fact that there was little stated regarding the level of community interest and consultation that had happened.

26th February 2020 – meeting with Doug Lee and Mark Gamble – still not response to the ACV. Doug apologised and said he would chase it – he believed it was still awaiting sign off.

2nd March, 2020 – Ian responded pointing out that the disposal of this land will generate a valuable capital receipt and the ACV nomination is an entirely separate process. He apologised for the delay in determining the outcome of the application and stated that the decision would be ratified within the next ten days and the outcome communicated to the applicant accordingly.

13th March 2020 – Jess Philips MP – emailed the planning officers to express her concern about the length of time the ACV was taking.

20th March, 2020 – Jess Philips notified me to say that she had just received a phone call from Ian Macleod to apologise that we hadn't received the letter. It was with the Acting CEO for sign off. He confirmed that although he couldn't give the decision he could state that the community group will be given time to come up with a proposal before it goes to the open market, and provided that the council can gain capital receipt of the land they were very keen to work with the community.

25th March, 2020 – Councillor Neil Eustace emailed Janet Down to confirm that he had had a conversation with Cllr Ian Ward city leader yesterday. He assured him that the community group will be reserved the first chance to put together a plan and offer for the former Cascades site. Officers will soon reply on the issue of asset value. He made it clear the council will need a substantial receipt for the site from whoever eventually purchases it.

8th April, 2020 – Janet Down received an email from an administrator in Ian Macleod's office with an attached letter that was titled ACV decision letter, but was actually a letter from Ian that 'referred' to the official ACV letter but was actually confirmation that we could be given three months to put together a business proposition and they would delay the land coming to the open market. Whilst this was gratefully received, it still did not outline the actual reasons for the application to be rejected.

27th August, 2020 – following a conversation with Karen Cheney, she forwarded the actual decision letter which had been sent by Andrew Perry – Property Directorate (but not signed) to George King on 7th April, 2020 (but this was never received).

The application was rejected on the following grounds:

- Past use – Leisure Centre. Following closure of the former Leisure Centre in January 2018 it has been replaced with a new modern Leisure Centre developed on the adjoining land providing better and improved facilities for community use.

- Identified ancillary use only - where the proposed use of the building is ancillary to the original use of the building.
- No evidence to think that the Asset can be made fit for the Nominator's proposals practically and within reasonable resource requirements, which will continue to further the social wellbeing and interests of the community within the next 5 years.
- The nomination makes reference to provision of offices and retail space, this is currently provided on a nearby site up the road.

We believe, if we had received this earlier, we could have taken some issue with some of the reasons, but we are too far down the road now to revisit this. The whole process has been rather torturous as you can see.

However, we remain hopeful that the final outcome of us working with the council on the possible development of this land for community use will continue and Janet Down represented us at a very positive zoom meeting on 22nd October with Ian Ward Jess Philips (MP), Ian Ward (Cabinet lead for Council) Paul Walls and Chris Jordan (Leisure), Philip Andrews, Rob King (who as believe is in the Property Services), Rebecca Grant (Cabinet office). At this meeting we had discussions about ways in which the community might be able to work in partnership with the council and are awaiting confirmation of how this might be worked out.