

COUCIL – 8 FEBRUARY 2024

## AMENDED PAPER

### PETITION – ST MARY'S COMMUNITY CENTRE, BYFLEET

#### **Amendment**

*This report has been republished to correct two typographical errors. In paragraphs 3.5 and 3.8 of the original report reference had been made to 'West Byfleet'. These have now been corrected to refer to 'Byfleet'. No other changes have been made.*

#### **Executive Summary**

Woking Borough Council has received a petition which asks the Council to reject the proposed plan to relocate the Elderly Day Care Facilities and fully consult with local residents on any future proposals regarding St Mary's Community Centre.

In accordance with Woking Borough Council's arrangements for petitions, the matter has been referred for consideration by Council.

#### **Recommendations**

Council is requested to consider the petition and determine accordingly.

#### **Reasons for Decision**

Reason: To agree a response to the petition

The Council has the authority to determine the recommendation set out above.

<b>Background Papers:</b>	Paper petition.
<b>Reporting Person:</b>	Frank Jeffrey, Head of Democratic Services Email: frank.jeffrey@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3012
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Steve May, Head of Leisure and Communities Email: steve.may@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3302
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Ellen Nicholson Email: CllrEllen.Nicholson@woking.gov.uk
<b>Date Published:</b>	31 January 2024

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 A petition has been received which asks the Council to reject the proposed plan to relocate the Elderly Day Care Facilities and fully consult with local residents on any future proposals regarding to St Mary's Community Centre, Byfleet. The petition has been received as a paper copy and received 425 signatures. The petition organisers also ran an electronic petition on change.org that gathered 2,756 signatures.
- 1.2 The number of signatures exceeds the threshold required for a petition to be referred to a meeting of Council and accordingly the Petitioner or their nominee has been invited to present the petition at the meeting of Council.
- 1.3 The petition has been submitted in the following terms:

*“St Mary's Community Centre in Byfleet has been a haven for our elderly, frail, and vulnerable residents. The day care facilities include care and assistance from support staff, hot drinks and a hot midday meal, social and gentle exercise activities, and a return journey on the accessible Bustler bus.*

*The services are vital in ensuring their well-being and social integration in our multigenerational community space. In addition, the community centre is more than just a facility; it represents familiarity and comfort for its users who have built relationships with staff members and other users of the building including families and children over the years.*

*A sudden change in environment can be detrimental especially for those suffering from cognitive and physical impairments such as dementia and visual impairments. We, the undersigned, are opposed to the proposed relocation of the Elderly Day Centre Facilities away from St Mary's Community Centre, Byfleet. We call on Woking Borough Council to:*

1. *Reject the proposed plan to relocate the Elderly Day Care Facilities; and*
2. *Fully consult with local residents on any future proposals regarding to St Mary's Community Centre, Byfleet”*

- 1.4 The paper petition was received on 18 December 2023.

## 2.0 Petition Scheme

- 2.1 As the number of signatories exceeds 300 the petition falls to be debated at the Council. In accordance with the Council's scheme for dealing with petitions, the petitioner has been invited to attend the meeting and present the petition. The presentation of a petition is limited to not more than three minutes, and should be confined to reading out, or summarising, the purpose of the petition, indicating the number and description of signatories, and making supporting remarks relevant to the petition.
- 2.2 Following the presentation, Members of Council will have the opportunity to ask questions of the petitioner. Thereafter, Council will discuss the petition and determine what action, if any, is to be taken. The Portfolio Holder has provided comments which are set out below.

## 3.0 Portfolio Holder Comments

- 3.1 I want to start by recognising the determination and compassion of the residents of Byfleet, evident not only in this petition to save St Mary's, but also through the work carried out by the community during the pandemic.
- 3.2 I think it is important to re-emphasise the Council's financial position. The Council faces a critical financial shortfall owing to its historic investment strategy. On Wednesday 7 June 2023,

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our Section 151 Officer issued Woking Borough Council (WBC) with a Section 114 Notice in response to the unprecedented financial challenges facing the authority. The 114 notice sets out how the Council faces a budget deficit of £1.2bn.

- 3.3 The Council must take action to set a sustainable medium term financial strategy and live within its means. It therefore has to stop funding non statutory services. This includes day care services.
- 3.4 I recognise the value that day care services at St Mary's brings to elderly and vulnerable residents. The Council has considered the equalities implications of this decision and is looking to mitigate the impact wherever possible, for example through signposting residents to alternative community provision.
- 3.5 We have also identified, through our public consultation process, a number of interested parties in Byfleet who have indicated that they would be interested in taking over the running of St Mary's through a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) arrangement. This would enable the Council to make the required savings whilst retaining the asset for community value.
- 3.6 CAT is not an easy option. That is why the Council has moved quickly to produce a CAT policy which provides a clear framework and procedures for a CAT to follow. This policy has been co-produced with community representatives, including some of those interested in pursuing a CAT for St Mary's.
- 3.7 The Council also recognises that a CAT transfer will take time to complete. That is why we have committed £140,000 UK Shared Prosperity Funding to supporting the process and ensuring that facilities can stay open whilst a CAT transfer takes place.
- 3.8 I hope that the commitment of Byfleet residents to keep St Mary's open, combined with the approval of the Council's CAT policy and the injection of significant UK SPF will enable this much-loved facility to continue to offer some, all or even more services in the future.
- 3.9 Therefore, given that discussions are ongoing with the local community about the future of St Mary's, I would recommend that the Council thanks the petitioner and local residents for raising their concerns and assures them that we are committed to exploring every opportunity to maintain services at the Centre.

REPORT ENDS

