

From: Rebeca Spore, Director of Infrastructure

To: Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services

Subject: Disposal of land at Stanhope Road, Ashford TN23 5RA.

Decision no: 25/00003

Key Decision: *Yes, the decision involves expenditure or savings of maximum £1m.*

Classification: **Unrestricted report with exempt appendix A and E**, *not for publication under Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).*

Future Pathway of report: Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division:

Ashford South – Local Member Dirk Ross (Independent).

Adjoining/adjacent to:

Ashford East – Local Member Steve Campkin (Green) and Ashford Rural South – Local Member David Robey (Conservative).

Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes

Summary: This report considers the proposed disposal of land at Stanhope Road, Ashford TN23 5RA.

Recommendations:

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations on the proposed decision to agree:

1. the disposal of land at Stanhope Road, Ashford TN23 5RA; and
2. to delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to finalise the terms of the disposal and execution of all necessary or desirable documentation required to implement the above.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report addresses the Council's intention to sell land at Stanhope Road, Ashford, which comprises approx. 25 acres (10 hectares).

- 1.2 The land is located to the south of Ashford town centre. It lies to the south of Stanhope Road, in two parcels either side of publicly accessible sports pitches, in a predominantly residential area. The main parcel of land is accessible by vehicles and pedestrians from Stanhope Road. It comprises a car park and dilapidated buildings which formerly comprised the South Kent College and Linden Grove Primary School/John Wallis Academy, with its grass playing fields to the Northeast. To the North of these buildings, adjacent to Stanhope Road, is the site of the former Ray Allen Children's Centre, which was demolished in 2023. Outside of the disposal site, the buildings comprising the current John Wallis Academy school is to the south, with Kent County Council (KCC) owned playing fields in between.
- 1.3 The second parcel of land sits to the west, adjoining Stanhope Road, consisting of open space known as Oak Field, separated from the public highway by a ditch but unfenced, as well as two areas of sports pitches (known as Pitchside and Courtside) and a further spur of land mainly consisting of a drainage ditch.
- 1.4 An aerial photograph below identifies the full extent of the site:



- 1.5 Exempt Appendix A includes a full analysis of options with financials included. This information is commercially sensitive.
- 1.6 A site plan is attached in Appendix B.

2. Background

- 2.1 The site's history was predominantly as educational use. The central parcel of land originally housed the Duncan Bowen Secondary School, which was built in the early 1960s to serve children from the recently built residential estate in the neighbourhood. The secondary school relocated to the new John Wallis Academy site (formerly Christ Church High School). The former Linden Grove Primary School occupied the adjoining buildings, which were constructed in the 1970s; this went into special measures and was taken over by the John Wallis Academy in 2012. Subsequently, the primary school was relocated to the new John Wallis Academy campus on Millbank Road, to the south, with KCC contributing towards the construction of buildings for this purpose.
- 2.2 The buildings to the west of the former primary school were last occupied by South Kent College, until their lease expired in 2004.
- 2.3 The Ray Allen Children's Centre was originally constructed in the late 1960s/early 1970s. It was demolished in 2023, following a fire. This was used for a variety of purposes for the wider community and KCC's children's services. Following a public consultation exercise in 2023, the decision was taken to re-provide these services via other means locally, so the Centre became surplus to operational needs.
- 2.4 The separate parcel of land to the west comprises approx. 11.7 acres (4.7 Hectares). Oak Field is an open grassed area accessible by the public. It is separated from Stanhope Road by a ditch to prevent unauthorised vehicular access. Pitchside and Courtside are fenced off multi-use sports and grass football pitches, used by both the John Wallis Academy and community-based sports teams (but do not form part of the Academy's playing field provision). It is proposed that these will form part of the disposal site with the benefit of the leases in place to provide for the continued use of these facilities. There is also a spur of land to the south-west of the John Wallis Academy, comprising a drainage ditch and scrub, which is included in the same freehold title and therefore included within the area proposed for disposal.
- 2.5 In 2017/18 an outline planning application for the site was submitted by KCC for redevelopment, to provide 205 residential units, 64 extra-care beds, a replacement Ray Allen Centre, with associated open space, landscaping and infrastructure. Ashford Borough Council resolved to grant planning consent, subject to a S106 agreement being entered into. However, this has been on hold, along with a number of other residential-led schemes in the River Stodmarsh catchment area, pending a resolution being found regarding nutrient neutrality. On the basis that KCC had already funded the replacement of the primary school at a cost of c£4.5m, the planning committee accepted that there would be no affordable element to the residential part of the scheme, on grounds of viability, with the proviso that should the financial position change, then an affordable contribution would become payable.
- 2.6 This outline scheme is no longer considered to represent the best outcome for the site, given that replacement of the Ray Allen Children's Centre is not required by the Council and any future purchaser is likely to submit a revised planning application more suited to market demand.

3. Options considered and dismissed, and associated risk

3.1 ***Reuse the site:*** KCC has no operational requirement for the site.

3.2 ***Continue to hold the site vacant in case of a future requirement:***
Continuing to hold the site will leave the Council with significant ongoing costs for securing it against unauthorised access and potential claims for injuries arising from any trespassing. Continuing deterioration of the remaining school buildings remains an inherent risk for KCC. The buildings have deteriorated too far to bring them back into habitable condition without substantial investment prior to any re-occupation and use. A capital receipt would not be secured against the site to offset the investment in the primary school.

3.3 ***Disposal of the asset:*** A freehold disposal will allow a capital receipt to be generated for reinvestment back into the Council's stated capital priorities and support the delivery of the Council's statutory obligations and reduce holding costs associated with the property.

3.4 ***Letting the property as part of the Tenanted Estate to generate an income:***
The current buildings on the site are in poor condition and the prospect of securing a tenant is very unlikely and considered unviable. KCC would forgo any capital receipt whilst this option was pursued.

3.5 A freehold disposal is the preferred option for the site, seeking offers on an 'all enquiries' basis to ensure all potential interest is explored in line with the Council's statutory duties and to deliver a capital receipt.

4. Marketing

4.1 Subject to the necessary approvals being forthcoming, KCC will appoint a suitably qualified agent to openly market the site in Q2/3 2025 on an 'all enquiries' basis to allow any interested parties to submit a bid for the site.

4.2 A marketing campaign to advertise the site through various media channels will be undertaken to ensure a wide audience is reached; appropriate due diligence will be undertaken on any bidders.

4.3 Bids will be appraised in line with the Council's legislative and fiduciary duties, and in compliance with KCC Freehold Asset Disposal Policy and any other relevant Council policies.

4.4 Following the formal submission of bids, these will be assessed considering:

- Ability for the purchaser to complete within the proposed timescales
- Overall price, any pricing caveats or exclusions
- Any conditionality on the proposals and the deliverability of those
- Compliance with the Local Plan affordable housing requirements, if appropriate
- Deliverability of the proposals submitted, if they are reliant on the planning process.
- Funding security
- Any cost benefit that may be relevant.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The sale of the property will result in a capital receipt which will be reinvested back into the Council's Capital Programme and will offset the previous investment by KCC in the new primary school.
- 5.2 The disposal will remove holding costs associated with the site, easing pressure on revenue budgets.
- 5.3 Further financial information is set out in the Exempt Appendix A.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 The Council has an overarching duty under s123 of the Local Government Act 1972 to obtain not less than best consideration in the disposal of property assets. It also has a fiduciary duty to the residents of Kent.
- 6.2 External legal advisors will be appointed in consultation with General Counsel.

7. Equalities implications

- 7.1 The Key Decision to be taken by the Cabinet Member does not relate to a service delivery or change.
- 7.2 An EqlA has been undertaken in relation to closure of the Ray Allen Children's Centre, as part of the Kent Communities Programme consultation and Decision 23/00101.
- 7.3 Separately, an EqlA has been undertaken for the remainder of the site and has not resulted in any implications which might impact upon a disposal of the Council's interest. See Appendix D.

8. Data Protection Implications

- 8.1 As part of this approval process and in the handling of marketing/conveyancing of the site Data Protection regulations will be observed.
- 8.2 A Data Protection Implication Assessment (DPIA) screening has confirmed that are no DPIA implications and that a further DPIA assessment is not required in respect of this decision.
- 8.3 The site has been inspected, and no sensitive material remains on site.

9. Other corporate implications

- 9.1 None - This decision will not have any impact on other areas of the Council's work.

10. Governance

- 10.1 A Key Decision is being sought in line with the Constitution and the Council's governance processes.

- 10.2 The views of the local Member Dirk Ross, have been sought in accordance with the property management protocol and in addition, due to the close proximity of two other constituency boundaries, contact has also been made with the neighbouring two local Members (Steve Campkin, Ashford East; David Robey, Ashford Rural South).
No comments have been received, and any subsequent comments will be reported to both the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee meeting and Cabinet Member taking the decision.

11. Next steps and Conclusions

- 11.1 An indicative timetable for the planned disposal is set out below:

Stage	Timescale
Marketing	Q2/3 2025
Bid appraisal	Q3/4 2025
Exchange	Q1 2026
Completion assuming unconditional sale	Q1 2026
Completion assuming conditional sale	Q1/2 2028

- 11.2 The site has been declared surplus to the Council's operational requirements. In accordance with the Council's strategy of recycling assets to produce capital receipts for reinvestment into capital project priorities, it is recommended that this site is progressed for disposal.

Recommendations:

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations on the proposed decision to agree:

1. the disposal of land at Stanhope Road, Ashford TN23 5RA; and
2. to delegate authority to The Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to finalise the terms of the disposal and execution of all necessary or desirable documentation required to implement the above.

12. Background documents

- 12.1 Kent County Council Family Hub Services Consultation:
<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s122113/23-00092%20-%20Appendix%201%20Family%20Hub%20Services%20Consultation%20Written%20Report.pdf>
- 12.2 EQIA Kent Communities Programme (Community Assets):
<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk:9071/documents/s122333/23-00101%20-%20Appendix%20F.%20Kent%20Communities%20Programme%20Decision%20EQIA%20Pack.pdf>

12.3 Record of Decision 17/00071:

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s80982/1700071%20signed%20ROD%20John%20Wallis%20Part%202.pdf>

12.4 Record of Decision 17/00076

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk:9071/documents/s77983/Signed%20RoD.pdf>

13. Appendices

13.1 Appendix A – Exempt Appendix A

13.2 Appendix B – Site Plan

13.3 Appendix C – Proposed Record of Decision

13.4 Appendix D - Equalities Impact Assessment for the disposal of land at Stanhope Road, Ashford

13.5 Appendix E - Exempt Appendix E - Stanhope Road Planning Position Statement

14. Contact details

Lead Officer:	Relevant Director:
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