



Report subject	<b>BCP FuturePlaces Ltd - Outline Business Case for Christchurch Civic Centre Site</b>
Meeting date	8 March 2023
Status	Public with confidential appendix
Executive summary	<p>BCP FuturePlaces Ltd, (“FuturePlaces”) a wholly owned Urban Regeneration Company (URC) was set up with the fundamental purpose to drive “Place Making”, regeneration and property market transformation both across key sites owned by the Council and the wider area to support the aspirations set out in the Council’s Big Plan.</p> <p>The FuturePlaces business plan approved by Cabinet in June 2022 lists the key sites the company has been tasked with progressing the regeneration of including the former Christchurch Civic Centre site following its decommission due to local government reorganisation and the creation of BCP Council.</p> <p>This report sets out the outline business case (OBC) and highlights FuturePlaces recommended use for this site to be developed for hotel and residential use.</p> <p>Whilst the OBC considers the overall viability of the recommended option based on high level assumptions, the FBC will confirm the exact design, time, cost, and quality expectations as well as the proposed delivery pathway and overall affordability. It is only at FBC stage that firm consideration can be given as to whether it is still best to progress with the redevelopment proposal and the necessary commitment and funding approvals sought from the Council.</p> <p>Cabinet is required to review the options outlined in the OBC and consider if the recommended option is the most appropriate and affordable and authorise FuturePlaces to progress with the preparation of a full business case (FBC).</p> <p>The OBC has been prepared in accordance with HM Treasury Green Book guidance.</p>

<p><b>Recommendations</b></p>	<p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>a) Approves the OBC for the former Christchurch Civic Centre site as set out in Appendix A to this report endorsing the recommended option contained therein;</b></li> <li><b>b) Ratifies previous report decisions to declare the asset surplus to requirements and notes the potential to phase the redevelopment of the site to enable the hotel use to progress ahead of residential plans for the reasons outlined in this report;</b></li> <li><b>c) Agrees to pay FuturePlaces for its development advice, services and costs associated with the preparation of the OBC totalling £169k and to include the scheme in the Council’s Capital Investment Programme.</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Cabinet RECOMMENDS that COUNCIL:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>d) Agrees to move the project to Full Business Case stage and commit costs estimated at £969k.</b></li> </ul>
<p>Reason for recommendations</p>	<p>To contribute to the Council’s Corporate vision, specifically helping to create dynamic places, investing in the homes our communities need, and delivers against the Big Plan: Act at Scale</p> <p>FuturePlaces was formed to ensure BCP Council has the capacity, expertise, and resources to drive investment in regeneration and unlock value from major Council owned sites; it will also enable BCP Council to ensure that we deliver new homes and create well designed, local neighbourhoods.</p>

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Philip Broadhead, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Economy, and Strategic Planning
Corporate Director	Graham Farrant, Chief Executive
Report Authors	Sarah Longthorpe, Director of Delivery - Regeneration
Wards	Christchurch Town
Classification	For Decision

## Background

1. BCP Council's Big Plan sets the ambition for the BCP area to be world class – one of the best coastal places in the world in which to live, work, invest and play. The Big Plan sets out five key aims that, if achieved, would deliver changes across the whole area supporting the creation of over 13,000 jobs across the local economy, the growth of businesses and prosperity of local communities.
2. BCP Council is the UK's 10th largest urban authority. The Council's Big Plan sets out the need to 'act at scale' by intensifying development in town centres and unlocking land on redundant brownfield sites, such as Holes Bay. In theory, the Council is in a strong position to drive investment in regeneration. In practice, it lacks the capacity to deliver at the necessary scale and pace to meet the challenges of growth and has insufficient in-house expertise in urban development and place making.
3. FuturePlaces Ltd was created in 2021 with the aim of achieving a step change in the scale, pace, and ambition of regeneration across the BCP area. The Council now has the potential to deploy the resources and expertise needed to deliver regeneration at scale, in a way that was more difficult for its predecessor authorities.
4. FuturePlaces business plan, approved by Cabinet in June 2022 sets out the Stewardship proposition and strategic objectives of the company alongside its delivery plan, ways of working, governance, and funding structures.
5. The business plan listed 16 sites alongside thematic studies and cross cutting projects and prioritised 5 delivery projects sites including Christchurch Civic Centre.
6. The project gateway process is based on HM Treasury Green book guidance and requires that Cabinet/Council approve the OBC stage before an FBC is progressed. In accordance with the HM treasury green book guidance an OBC comprises 5 aspects, these are:
  - Strategic Case – demonstrate case for change
  - Economic Case – consider value for money
  - Commercial Case – assess the commercial viability
  - Financial Case – determine affordability
  - Management case - delivery

7. In summary, an OBC brings together feasibility work to validate that a project is feasible and worth pursuing to detailed design. Feasibility work includes consideration of appraising the site feasibility, constraints, commercial viability, planning policy and any other material considerations and planning obligations. The OBC purpose is to appraise options and highlight a recommended option that seeks to optimise the site and is acceptable in planning terms, whilst also including the anticipated outcomes, the funding strategy, and details the balance of costs, benefits, and risk foreseeable at that stage.
8. An OBC outlines the procurement strategy and seeks approval to commence the tender process. It is also important to note that approval of the OBC will support the necessary works to develop a full business case (FBC).
9. The purpose of the next stage, the FBC is to finalise the design and business case. It will outline the final time, cost, and quality expectations of the project as well as the proposed delivery pathway and check it is still in line with the OBC expectations. It is at this stage that firm consideration can be given as to whether it is still best to progress with the redevelopment proposals and approval can be sought.
10. Members are required to consider the regenerative benefits of the recommended option alongside the implications outlined in the financial commitment required to complete the FBC in order to decide whether to endorse this approach.

### **Options Appraisal**

11. The OBC provides a full list of the options considered including 'Do nothing' and 'Do minimum' options and sets out the reasons for FuturePlaces recommending its preferred option.
12. FuturePlaces was set up to promote a long-term stewardship approach to the development of the Council's assets and has developed options on that basis, seeking to optimise the value of the assets over the longer term.
13. However, in light of the current financial position of the Council as reported to Cabinet on 7 September, FuturePlaces has undertaken additional work to consider an option at the OBC stage that considers the short-term capital receipt realisation from a disposal at this point in time in order to assist and inform the Council's budget decision making process.
14. A Council decision to rationalise the Council's office accommodation, dispose of Christchurch and Poole Civic Centres and consolidate into Bournemouth Civic Campus has already been made. The 'Do nothing' option would incur cost implications to the Council associated with maintaining vacant buildings and would not deliver any new homes or wider regenerative benefits.
15. The Council has the option to not approve the proposed OBC. The risks associated with not progressing are highlighted in the risk assessment section of the OBC and summarised in this report. This option would result in high costs incurred with maintaining vacant properties, would not stimulate regeneration activity, and the Council would not realise best value from its asset base.
16. Members are required to consider and determine if the recommended option is the best route for the Council to progress having considered its alignment with the Council's strategic objectives and Big Plan and the overall affordability through to delivery.

17. Approval of the recommendations put forward in the OBC would result in FuturePlaces developing two FBCs: one for the hotel proposition; and one for the residential offer. This will allow for the hotel proposal to come forward more quickly, without being tethered to the residential development and progress to delivery sooner. The delivery of the hotel project will add a value uplift to the residential project, as indicated by recent research undertaken by Knight Frank into the “halo effect” of a high-quality hotel.

### **Christchurch Civic Centre**

18. This site was declared surplus following local government reorganisation and the creation of BCP Council. Following relocation to the Bournemouth Civic Campus the Christchurch offices are now vacant.
19. The OBC recommends that Christchurch Civic Centre is repurposed as an 84 bed hotel and that the rear car park is partially used for parking to support the hotel use and the provision of approx. 36 new homes. It proposed that the front car park on Bridge Street is retained and enhanced through landscaping and design to provide public parking and to facilitate hotel arrivals/drops offs.
20. The proposal is focused around retaining the existing building as it has recently been refurbished and is not considered to be end of life. Other complexities include that the building is an unusual shape, with stepped floor levels and therefore has limited uses, alongside wider site constraints, in particular the flood risk as the building forms part of the flood defences. The OBC considers these constraints in more detail and further due diligence and flood risk mitigation strategies will be worked up as part of the FBC and will be required for a planning application.
21. This OBC has highlighted the benefits of progressing both the hotel and residential elements simultaneously under one reference masterplan however with a FBC for each element that supports different paces of delivery. The FBC will consider in detail the impact of a consolidated or phased build out programme from an affordability, value, risk, and construction disruption basis.
22. The recommended option meets the Council's strategic objectives and delivers against the Big Plan: Act at Scale by delivering new homes.
23. The recommended option includes a loss of approx. 40 public car parking spaces and the associated income of approx. £25k pa. It is expected that this income would be displaced to nearby Council car parks and the OBC highlights the overall regenerative benefits to the town centre of developing part of this site to provide new homes in order to support the decision to close part of the car park.
24. The OBC identifies a benefit-cost ratio (BCR) of the recommended option of 1.27. A BCR of above 1 is considered acceptable.
25. A copy of the OBC is attached at appendix A and contains confidential appendices.

### **Soft Market Testing**

26. FuturePlaces has undertaken soft marketing testing on their recommended option. This has concluded that there is market interest in the boutique hotel concept in this location.
27. Detailed proposals will be filtered through the FBC process to identify a recommended option to BCP.

## **Consultation**

28. FuturePlaces has consulted with the following members on the Christchurch Civic Centre OBC – Councillor Nigel Brookes as Lead Member for Christchurch regeneration, Christchurch Town Ward Councillors, Christchurch Town Council and Christchurch Residents Association. All were supportive of the principles outlined in the OBC, subject to seeing more detail before an FBC is approved.
29. The draft OBC was considered at a Place Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 2 February 2023. Feedback focused on the requirement to demonstrate the need for a high-quality hotel and on concerns that the high flood risk could limit development potential. The panel discussed if this could be explored further as a priority before significant funds are committed. FuturePlaces advised that the flood risk would be considered along with other due diligence during the FBC stage and is necessary to inform a planning application. It was also suggested that further engagement is undertaken as part of the FBC stage.
30. FuturePlaces will also consider meanwhile uses for the site whilst the flood risk issue and the FBC is progressed.
31. The O&S Committee recommended to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder that a flood risk report be obtained as part of the OBC.
32. With regards to the residential element, FuturePlaces will consult with housing development colleagues on the potential mix and tenure of the scheme and will continue to engage as this is firmed up at FBC stage to ensure it aligns with the Council's strategic housing objectives.

## **Summary of financial implications**

### **FuturePlaces - General**

33. The approach to funding the company approved by Cabinet on 22 June 2022 means that FuturePlaces is funded in the first instance by a loan. The Council approved a £8m working capital loan facility to FuturePlaces in order that the company may manage its cashflow, particularly prior to a scheme being included in the Council's Capital Investment Programme (CIP) and thereby enabling FuturePlaces to invoice for work undertaken to date.
34. The initial risk of incurring expenditure on the OBC resides with FuturePlaces. FuturePlaces must assure itself that it is able to provide expert advice that results in the presentation of a viable and deliverable business case to the Council, that will be approved by Members and thereby triggering payment of the development advice.
35. Each scheme's supporting business case must consider the options available and outline its recommended option, setting out the anticipated outcome, the funding strategy, and details of any pertinent risks. The OBC stage will likely include high level estimates and assumptions but the necessary due diligence and evidence to provide robust data must be completed as part of the FBC.
36. Payment shall only be made for development advice once a scheme has been approved and included in the Council's CIP. Payment will cover costs incurred to date by FuturePlaces including external costs, staff costs and a contribution to overheads in accordance with the mechanism outlined in the company business plan approved by Cabinet on 22 June 2022.

37. The commissioning team has verified that the third-party services have been procured in accordance with the Council financial regulations including PCR 2015 and that the costs relate to these projects and the nature of the services and advice sought is appropriate and necessary to inform the OBC.
38. The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) does not contain any revenue budgets to fund advice from FuturePlaces as all costs are expected to be capitalizable. Should FuturePlaces require payment outside of the current funding method, a budget shall need to be explicitly requested, and approved, for inclusion in the Council's MTFP.
39. Should costs be incurred by the Council for capital schemes which then do not complete as intended, the costs would need to be written off to the Council's revenue account. No provision has been made in the Council's MTFP for such an event and therefore any write off would create a financial pressure in the year it occurred.
40. The costs associated with the preparation of the OBC and the ongoing financial commitments and risks developing the FBC regarding the Council are outlined below.

### **Christchurch Civic Centre**

41. The scheme has been assessed based on the high-level data included in the FuturePlaces OBC. Greater detail, following further due diligence, will be made available at the FBC stage.
42. Alternative options and outcomes are considered in the OBC but have been discounted. These include:
  - a. Do nothing: retaining the site which would continue to incur holding costs related to the decommissioned surplus asset. None of these have an ongoing budget included in the Council's MTFP.
  - b. Disposal: a quicker return is likely (c£3m), but the current flood defence risk means the optimum value may be hard to achieve. Control of the timing and outcome would be lost.
43. The recommended option in the FuturePlaces Christchurch Civic Centre business case indicatively requires the Council to borrow £26.452m in total over 50 years using prudential borrowing.
44. The intention is to retain the hotel and residential elements and to earn rental income from the housing and hotel operations. The OBC makes broad assumptions on the residential and hotel income rates and includes allowances for voids, which are in line with current market expectations.
45. All assumptions will be firmed up at the FBC stage with any challenges they currently present addressed (policy, financial, planning, design, delivery).
46. Financial challenges specific to this scheme include managing increasing construction costs, changes to borrowing costs particularly interest rates, and the wider economic effect on rental income that can be achieved. The current modelling indicates a viability gap of £0.7m per annum between the annual cost of operations and servicing debt, compared to the income it is forecast to generate.
47. Consequently, Members need to assure themselves that these challenges can be overcome and are not insurmountable before agreeing to commit further sums.

48. Accepting the project risks and cost of progressing a FBC, the Council will, upon consideration of the FBC need to satisfy themselves that any borrowing is in accordance with the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities, and predominately the requirement to demonstrate that is affordable.
49. The impact on current car parking income has been considered minimal by FuturePlaces. A car parking review is currently on-going and will provide greater clarity during the full business case phase.
50. It should be noted that a previous Council decision to close Christchurch Civic Centre generated savings that were included in the Council's MTFP from 1 April 2022 and are contributing to the funding of the Council's transformation programme. Temporary holding costs necessary until the future of the site is decided are currently being covered from temporary resources within services.
51. FuturePlaces development advice costs to date regarding the OBC total £169k with a further £969k forecast to complete the FBC. Should Council approve the recommendations in this report £169k would become payable to FuturePlaces.
52. If the FBC does not demonstrate a viable scheme which the Council can progress, and it is therefore aborted, then any costs incurred to date would need to be written off to the Council's revenue account, potentially £1.138m in this case.

### **Summary of legal implications**

53. Cabinet is requested to approve the OBC in relation to Christchurch Civic Centre and authorise FuturePlaces to progress to full business case. Cabinet is also asked to declare the asset surplus to requirements, note the potential to phase redevelopment of the site, and agree to pay FuturePlaces the costs associated with the development of the OBC.
54. Section 122 of the Local Government Act 1972 gives the Council a general power to appropriate Council-owned land that is no longer required for the purpose for which it is held for any purchase for which the Council has a statutory power to acquire land. Section 226 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 authorises the Council to acquire land for planning purposes where the Council believes the acquisition will facilitate the development or improvement of the land and achieve or promote the economic, social, or environmental well-being of any part of its area.
55. Section 233 of the TCPA further permits the appropriation of land for planning purposes where that land is to be sold or leased to a 3rd party to secure the best use of the land and any buildings or works upon it or to secure such development of the land as is needed for proper planning purposes. The Council is also required to obtain the best consideration reasonably obtainable for the land.
56. In reaching a decision, Cabinet members should consider whether the expenditure associated with this next phase is prudent having regard to the Council's general fiduciary duties. It must also reach a decision by reference to all relevant considerations, disregarding irrelevant ones and be satisfied that the course of action is a rational course of action for the Council. The OBC sets out the detailed rationale for this proposal as well as the forecast costs and potential benefits of moving the proposal onto the next phase.
57. Consideration should be given to any risks associated with this proposal and these are set out in the OBC and should be fully addressed in detail as part of the FBC in the event that approval is given to progress to this stage.



58. In the event that the decision is taken to proceed with this proposal, detailed legal advice will be required to fully explore the issues set out in this report including a full exploration of the most appropriate delivery model. Legal advice in relation to any contract or procurement issues arising in progressing the development of a full business case should be sought at the relevant time.

### **Summary of human resources implications**

59. FuturePlaces has its own employment terms and conditions and payroll arrangements. Therefore, there are no human resources implications for the Council.

### **Summary of sustainability impact**

60. As a Council owned company, FuturePlaces will be required to provide its operational response to the Council's climate change emergency declaration.
61. FuturePlaces will contribute to the Council's Climate Emergency action plan by ensuring new development is resource efficient, adopts low carbon technology and leads to sustainable communities which are resilient to climate change and contribute to Biodiversity Net Gain either on site or through natural capital and landscape strategies.
62. FuturePlaces will be tasked, through the Commissioning Contract, with pursuing a low carbon approach to development: minimising the carbon impact of new developments, ensuring walkable neighbourhoods, and providing good access to public transport services.
63. FuturePlaces will play a key role in ensuring that opportunities are taken to reduce our city region's carbon footprint by providing sustainable transport choices and delivering low carbon, energy efficient buildings. They will aim to lead by example developing cleaner supply chains building local capacity to take forward the carbon reduction agenda. Cleaner supply chains and building the capacity to deliver carbon reduction locally.
64. Within the constraints of commercial viability and value for money, FuturePlaces will aim to deliver the best possible standards of low-carbon, energy efficient buildings taking account of the established BREEAM classifications. FuturePlaces is recommending the retention and redevelopment of the civic centre building, rather than demolition, in recognition of the significant level of embedded energy in the building.

### **Summary of Levelling Up Goals and Support**

65. This scheme will support the government's Levelling Up agenda ([Levelling Up the United Kingdom: Executive Summary](#)), in particular it supports the Levelling Up 'Medium Term Mission' to restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost:
- **Pride in Place:** By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.
  - **Housing:** By 2030, renters will have a secure path to ownership with the number of first-time buyers increasing in all areas; and the government's

ambition is for the number of non-decent rented homes to have fallen by 50%, with the biggest improvements in the lowest performing areas.

- Crime: By 2030, homicide, serious violence and neighbourhood crime will have fallen, focused on the worst affected areas.

66. In addition, the Council has adopted the following 'Levelling Up' Goals with its three priority goals being 8 - Good health and well-being, 12 – Building homes and sustainable communities & 14 - Achieve equality through diversity & inclusion, all of which will be supported by accelerating regeneration.

### **Summary of public health implications**

67. By accelerating regeneration and investment there will be a better prospect of sustaining jobs and prosperity across the BCP area, improving housing and high-quality open spaces, with well designed, walkable, inclusive neighbourhoods that help promote health and well-being.
68. FuturePlaces will aim to produce developments that place a premium on quality-of-life considerations including safe, walkable neighbourhoods with good local amenities and access to quality green and open space.

### **Summary of equality implications**

69. As a company wholly owned by the Council operating under the Teckal exemption, FuturePlaces will be bound by the same obligations in relation to equalities as the Council itself and full Equalities Impact Assessments will be undertaken as developments are progressed.
70. At this OBC stage an EIA conversation/screening document has been completed for the site and reviewed by the EIA panel. The panel found the assessment proportionate and good to proceed subject to minor changes or mitigating actions as part of the development of the FBC. A copy is attached at Appendix B.
71. It concludes that the proposal will benefit the location in terms of regeneration and will support BCP FuturePlaces stewardship approach ensuring the delivery of housing and the creation of sustainable, well-designed and inclusive local neighbourhoods.

### **Summary of risk assessment**

72. The recommended option would require the Council to take on all the associated design, planning, construction, hotel operator and sale risks. The key risks associated with the proposal are summarised below:
- Design & Planning stage** - Title and legal due diligence.
  - Planning risks** through failure to achieve consent for proposed projects.
  - Construction Risk** through procuring and managing assumptions against industry inflation.
  - Market risks** through the ability to secure a hotel operator and through a downturn in the property market affecting local property rental values.

- v. **Reputational risks** through FuturePlaces creating difficulties for the Council e.g., developing a position contrary to planning policy.

### **Background papers**

### **Appendices**

Appendix A - Christchurch Civic Centre OBC with confidential appendices

Appendix B - EIA Screening Tool