

# REPORT TO ASSETS AND OPERATIONS COMMITTEE LONGRIDGE DEVELOPMENT ALLOTMENTS AND COMMUNITY BUILDING



**Report Reference** A-22-13  
**Meeting Date** 13<sup>th</sup> February 2023  
**Agenda Item** 9  
**Prepared by** Town Clerk

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## 1.0 BACKGROUND

The strategic development site at Longridge is currently subject to an outline planning application (ref 21/3100M). The latest revisions to the plans have added in proposals for allotments and for the previously proposed doctor surgery (which is not wanted by the Knutsford Medical Partnership) to be replaced with a community building.

The Town Council owns two allotment sites in Knutsford and will receive the new allotment site at the Tabley Park development later this year. It will then be managed, with the Sparrow Lane and Warren Avenue sites, but the Knutsford Allotment Society on behalf the Town Council.

The Welcome is currently seeking new premises. The proposed community building could suit their needs (subject to the detailed design which would form part of a reserved matters application). The Welcome has confirmed its interest in the site.

Notwithstanding the Town Council's objection to the planning application (which have been formulated by the Planning and Licensing Committee), it is prudent to 'twin-track' discussions with the developer and borough council such that should the application be approved, the town is not disadvantaged.

The Town Clerk corresponded with the agent for the applicant in early January (a briefing note on this was sent to all members on 6<sup>th</sup> January). The agent advised that Cheshire East Council had suggested a community growing garden rather than allotments be provided. The Town Clerk advised the applicant that:

- The council has a long allotment waiting list demonstrating the demand for allotments
- The council has originally requested that allotments be provided on this site when it met with the agent in advance of the submission of the application
- The council is aware of a resident who is keen to develop a community growing garden in that area so a hybrid model could work
- The council is taking the ownership of allotments on the Tabley Park site and would expect to do so on this site to manage them with the council's other sites (which enables waiting lists to be managed across the town)

In respect of the community building, the Town Clerk advised that:

- It may be that the property could be transferred to the Welcome itself as it is a limited company with the ability to hold property
- That the council would likely agree to hold the property for the benefit of the community and lease it for a nominal rent to the charity if that was felt to be a better option by the applicant.
- That either way it should be secured by s106 agreement to provide certainty either way.

## 2.0 PLAN

The below plan shows the allotment/community garden area and community hall in the latest indicative plan submitted by the applicant. It should be noted that this is an outline application and the detail would be determined at a reserved matters application.



## 3.0 ASSETS POLICY

The council's assets policy states that the council should only acquire assets which are both within Knutsford and "add to or preserve services and public realm it provides to residents and visitors".

In both instances, acquisition of the properties add to/preserve services provided to residents. The allotments would add to the council's existing allotment provision and address undersupply. It would ensure allotments for the town are managed cohesively. In respect of the community building it would support preserving access to community services in this area and address undersupply of community space in this area.

Allotments have been financially self-sustaining, meeting the second test of the policy. It is envisaged the building would be let to the charity on a full repairing/insuring lease at a nominal rent, therefore not affecting the council's finances with the lease providing the usual safeguards the council has secured in its commercial leases.

## **4.0 RECOMMENDATION**

### **3.1 ALLOTMENTS**

The Town Council took ownership of allotments through community asset transfer from Cheshire East Council in 2015. The council also agreed to take ownership of the new allotments on Devis Way, these should be ready this year. The council manages its allotments in partnership with the Knutsford Allotment Society who deal with all tenants and retain a portion of income. The allotments are self-financing with any surplus allocated to a reserve for future maintenance. There is a strong demand for allotments.

The agreement for the Devis Way allotments is that the developer will create a 'ready to go' allotment site including boundary treatments, paths, parking and internal laying out of allotments. The council would seek the same for this site.

It is recommended that the committee recommends to Full Council that it:

- a) Approves the principle of a freehold transfer of allotments at the Longridge development site
- b) Authorises the Assets and Operations Committee to determine the detail of the transfer

### **3.2 COMMUNITY BUILDING**

The community building is a significant potential benefit for the community around this site; The Welcome has been in search of new premises and this could provide the solution needed. The charity, as a limited company, could own the premises itself.

There is patently need for further discussion with the applicant and The Welcome on this matter and, until the reserved matters stage, the detail of the building is currently unknown.

One option would be for the Town Council to own the freehold of the property and lease it to The Welcome for a nominal (£1) rent on a full repairing insuring lease. The advantage of this would be that the building is in public ownership and should the charity ever cease to operate the building would be available for alternative community use as determined by the council.

Alternatively, the council could indicate now that it does not wish to be involved in the property, leaving all discussions to The Welcome.

It is recommended that the committee determines whether it wishes to have involvement in the property. If the committee does, it is recommended that it recommends to Full Council to approve the principle of a freehold transfer of a new community building at the Longridge site and authorises the committee to undertake negotiation and agree the detail of the transfer on the model of it being leased on a full repairing insuring lease to The Welcome.

Subject to the decisions made, the council would seek to ensure the s106 agreement secures the appropriate ownership model. This would ensure it is fixed before the site is sold to a developer.