

# REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

## ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY



<b>Report Reference</b>	C-22-32
<b>Meeting Date</b>	6 <sup>th</sup> March 2023
<b>Agenda Item</b>	10
<b>Prepared by</b>	Town Clerk

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### 1.0 BACKGROUND

At its February meeting, the Assets and Operations Committee resolved to make recommendations to Full Council concerning the acquisition of property. The recommendations concerned the Freeholders Hut, a small operational storage building which the council has leased for 20 years, and the proposed allotments/community building at the Longridge development (currently at the outline planning stage).

### 2.0 FREEHOLDERS HUT

#### 2.1 BACKGROUND

The Town Council has leased the Freeholders Hut (Northwich Road, near Hooked on the Heath) from the Friends of the Heath (formerly Nether Knutsford Freeholders, the registered owners of the property) since at least 2001. The small building (11 sqm) is used for storage of materials and various items used by the Town Ranger and for events. The previous lease ended on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023. The Town Clerk had been in discussion with Friends of the Heath to agree a new 10-year lease. Friends of the Heath have been reviewing options and agreed that ownership is no longer beneficial to the group and, recognising how useful it is to the Town Council, have offered to transfer the property to the Town Council.

Friends of the Heath is not requiring payment, but requests the council covers any legal costs involved in registering change of ownership of the property with the Land Registry. The title of the property is currently registered therefore the transfer would be a simple property transaction. Friends of the Heath suggest one solicitor could be appointed to act. The estimated cost for this would be approx. £500.

#### 2.2 ASSETS POLICY APPRAISAL

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" (2.1). The building is a small operational building used for storage. It is essential for the provision of services as the council has little storage elsewhere. It therefore meets the test of 2.1.

The building will require occasional maintenance. As an operational building, it will not generate income, however this is offset by the fact that it saves the council cost in obtaining storage space elsewhere and enables the council to hold stocks of supplies which reduces operational costs. It therefore contributes positively to the overall financial position of the council.

#### 2.3 RECOMMENDATION

The Assets and Operations Committee resolved to recommend that Full Council approves the acquisition of the Freeholders Hut.

### **3.0 POTENTIAL ALLOTMENTS AND COMMUNITY BUILDING**

#### **3.1 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 was 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 (Devis Way) 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) and the Welcome has confirmed its interest in use of the site. The Assets and Operations Committee noted the potential for wider community use of the building too.

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 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.

#### **3.2 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 could be let to a charity on a suitable terms which would not be detrimental to the council's finances and providing the usual safeguards the council has secured in its commercial leases. The Assets and Operations Committee would determine the precise detail of the use of the building before giving final approval to acquisition.

### **3.3 RECOMMENDATION**

The Assets and Operations Committee resolved to recommend 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
- c) Approves the principle of a freehold transfer of a community building at the Longridge development site subject to the council being involved in the design of the building and not being restricted as to how the building is used
- d) Authorises the Assets and Operations Committee to determine the detail of the transfer

### **4.0 RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Council:

- a) approves the acquisition of the Freeholders hut as outlined
- b) approves the principle of the acquisition of the potential allotments and community building at the Longridge development site authorising the Assets and Operations Committee to determine the detail of the transfer(s)
- c) authorises the sealing of any documents necessary for the transfer of the properties approved for acquisition