

REPORT TO ASSETS AND OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

MEREHEATH LANE ALLOTMENTS



Report Reference A-24-13
Meeting Date 10th February 2025
Agenda Item 6
Prepared by Town Clerk

1.0 BACKGROUND

The Town Council acquired the Warren Avenue and Sparrow Lane¹ from Cheshire East Council in 2015 on 125 year leases. The third allotment site, Mereheath Lane, was not owned freehold by the borough council and its lease did not transfer.

The Mereheath Lane site is owned by the Tatton Estate. Part is leased to Cheshire East Council which has a management agreement with the Knutsford Allotments Society. Part is managed directly by the Tatton Estate with no involvement of the Knutsford Allotments Society.

In August, the Town Clerk met with Tatton Estate/Fisher German to discuss allotment provision in Knutsford. Arising from this discussion there was agreement that it could be beneficial for all allotments to be under the same management arrangements, namely that all allotments are held by the town council and administered by Knutsford Allotment Society. At the October committee meeting the committee resolved that this should be further explored.

2.0 ACQUISITION OF LEASE

Discussions have taken place with Cheshire East Council/ANSA, Knutsford Allotment Society and Fisher German/Tatton Estate and there is agreement for the existing lease to be surrendered and a new 30 year lease to be granted to the Town Council for the existing site. At this stage the existing private allotments (which are not part of the lease to Cheshire East Council) would remain separate and not covered by the new lease to the Town Council; this position may change in the future.

As part of a lease being granted, the management agreement between the Town Council and Allotment Society would be amended to incorporate the Mereheath Lane site. Under this agreement, the Society manages the day-to-day operations with the Town Council having responsibility for tracks and boundaries.

The detailed heads of terms for the new lease are currently awaited, but it is proposed that it starts 1st April 2025 for a term of 30 years. The rent would be 60% of the income paid to the Town Council by the Society (this is the same provision as the existing lease). The lease would be contracted out of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 (removing security of tenure provisions at the end of the lease).

Based on the council's existing allotment rent multiplier, the site would generate an income of £819 per year, with a rent payable of £490. There would be no other regular costs, but would be ongoing

¹ Part of the Sparrow Lane site is owned freehold by the Town Council, part is leased from Cheshire East Council.

maintenance costs for the council's obligations with respect paths and boundaries; this will include some tree works (there are a row of established trees that heavily shade a number of plots which it would be advantageous to remove in the future). Other planned costs would be repairs to the track, installation of a gate and signage and removal of asbestos sheeting from existing fencing. This would all be planned as part of regular management of the site and funded by the council's allotment reserve alongside works to other sites². Final confirmation is awaited, but it is understood that the responsibility for the brick wall to the rear of the site is the responsibility of the National Trust as part of Tatton Park. This wall is likely to require repair in the near future so confirmation of responsibility will need to be ascertained before any lease is agreed.

Acquisition of the site is not expected to create a significant operational burden due to the partnership with Knutsford Allotment Society. The site would be included as part of an allotments management plan which will be developed to direct improvement priorities across the council's three/four sites.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

- a) The committee approves the acquisition of the lease of the Mereheath Lane allotment site and authorises the Town Clerk to agree the detail of the lease in consultation with the committee chairman
- b) The committee resolves to recommend approval of the same, and authority for the lease to be sealed, to Full Council

² Additionally, improvement works could be funded from the s106 allotments funding agreed as part of the Bluebell development alongside it being explored for use to extend the site.