

**COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER:
CONDUIT HEAD, NOBOLD****Responsible Officer:** Steve Law, Strategic Asset ManagerEmail: steve.law@shropshire.gov.ukTel: 01743 281017

1. Summary

- 1.1 As part of the Council's core objective to strengthen our local towns and villages, the Strategic Asset Management team are working with town and parish councils, as well as the voluntary sector, to enable the transfer of suitable land and buildings to community groups and organisations. The Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy provides a framework and guidance to assess which transfers are viable and implement their transfer.
- 1.2 The policy contributes to the Council's objectives as set out in the Asset Management Strategy Section 5: Commission and work in partnership to empower communities. Releases of properties, or land, where appropriate are carried out through freehold or leasehold transfers to communities reducing revenue or maintenance burdens for non-core assets.
- 1.3 A report summarising the assessment of an application made by the Shropshire Beekeepers Association in respect of Conduit Head, Nobold SY5 8NP has been considered by the Director of Place and Enterprise and the recommendation is to transfer the property by way of a 99-year lease which, in accordance with the CAT policy, is subject to Cabinet approval.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is requested to:-
 - a) authorise that a 99 year full repairing and insuring lease of Conduit Head, Nobold, be granted to the Organisation;
 - b) give delegated authority to the Strategic Asset Manager to agree final terms for the lease and to complete the transaction.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1 If the Organisation fails to maintain the building the risk is that the building will return to the Council and the cost of maintaining and securing the site would revert back to the Council.
- 3.2 If granted the lease the Organisation intend to further protect and enhance the site, with a long-term vision to develop the well-heads as a visitor attraction.

4. Equalities and Diversity Issues

- 4.1 Bringing the site back into use and making it available for local groups will mean its accessibility is secured in the future for the community.
- 4.2 Membership to the Organisation is open to anyone who is interested in furthering the purposes of the organisation. In addition members of the public will be able to attend the site on open days and activities.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The site is currently maintained by Shropshire Council as part of its corporate estate. The annual running costs of the building are met by Assets and Estates. There has been little or no expenditure at the site in recent years, apart from £1200 reactive works required in 2015-2016 to make weather-tight the listed building (following advice from the conservation team) and to secure the well-heads. Any potential savings are therefore difficult to quantify; but would be realised through transfer of the liability for the site.
- 5.2 Rent from Shropshire Beekeepers Association is proposed below market value at a rent of £1 per annum if demanded, as the organisation will not be operating the facility on a commercial basis.

6. Background

- 6.1 The site extends to approx. 0.5 HA of sloping mature meadows, hedgerows and marsh areas supporting numerous species of fauna and flora and as such has long been recognised for its wildlife value, making it an ideal location for the proposed project. In addition the site accommodates a derelict visitor centre building (which is to be refurbished by the tenants), a timber walkway (also to be refurbished by the tenants) leading through 9 well heads to a listed pump house. Prior to the organisation and Shropshire Council undertaking works at the site in 2016, it was in a poor state of repair and had been the subject of anti-social behaviour.
- 6.2 Outdoor Partnerships rented the site from Severn Trent for a countryside volunteers' programme until around 2001. Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council then acquired the site which was inherited by the Council in 2009 when it became a Unitary authority.

Outdoor Partnerships have since investigated the possibility of relocating their team to the site, but this was determined as unaffordable.

- 6.3 The building has not been used by any Council services for a number of years. There were previously discussions of converting the site into a visitor centre, but no funds were available. The site has been a maintenance liability and has attracted anti-social behaviour and vandalism.
- 6.4 The organisation has been occupying the site via a license arrangement since July 2016. Since occupation they have already cleared and tidied the site, erected security fencing, and made the derelict building watertight. If granted the lease the organisation intend to further protect and enhance the site, with a long-term vision to develop the well-heads as a visitor attraction.
- 6.5 The organisation previously rented land at Radbrook College to undertake activities and house an apiary. Since the disposal they have needed to seek alternate accommodation.
- 6.6 The organisation promotes and furthers the craft of beekeeping through an ongoing programme of theoretical and practical activity. It aims to educate the public about the threats to bees and the subsequent impact on the natural environment. It provides access to a rewarding pastime that can contribute to the good of the individual and community.
- 6.7 The organisation was established in 1924 and has experience of maintaining a site.

7. Additional Information

- 7.1 The proposed transfer complies with State Aid. The applicant will provide services for the local community and as such are not the subject of competition across Europe.
- 7.2 The proposed grant of the lease for a £1 is a sum that is less than market value for a lease of the site. The disposal by way of the grant of the lease at a nominal rent is covered by Circular 6/03 under the Local Government Act 1972 General Disposal Consent 2003. This consent allows for the disposal of a property/site at less than best consideration where the disposal contributes to the promotion or improvement of one or more of economic, social and environmental wellbeing in the Council's area and where the difference in value is less than £2 million.
- 7.3 The lease will be on a full repairing and insuring basis, with tenant only break clauses every 7 years after an initial period of 30 years. The organisation has requested this as they state it could be advantageous in obtaining grants/funding.
- 7.4 The organisation is a registered charity. A management committee is in place and holds regular, minuted meetings. The organisation has an accounting and financial control policy. Independently audited accounts are available. The organisation's financial forecast takes into account operational costs and future investment in the facility.
- 7.5 The organisation's activities contribute to meeting the following Council's priorities:

- Resilient Communities: The range of opportunities for leisure, culture and community participation has increased, with low or no funding.
- Operation of the Council: Corporate support and reduce overheads

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Shropshire Council Community Asset Transfer Policy

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Cllr. Michael Wood - Portfolio Holder for Corporate Support

Local Member

Cllr. Keith Roberts

Appendices

A. Plan of site