

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 9

meeting date: 4 SEPTEMBER 2018
title: KESTOR LANE, LONGRIDGE
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 This report follows the discussion at the last Committee meeting in May 2018 and sets out the advantages and disadvantages of alternative management/ownership options for Kester Lane recreation ground in Longridge.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Community Objectives – To sustain a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley, encompassing our objective to encourage economic development throughout the borough, with a specific emphasis on tourism.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 At the meeting of Community Committee in May 2018, it was agreed to dedicate the Kestor Lane recreation ground site to the fallen of WW1, with a dedication ceremony to take place in November 2018.

2.2 Although the site was not purchased by public subscription, but instead by the local council at the time, it is nonetheless very dear to many people in the Longridge.

2.3 Kestor Lane has a play area, skate park and outdoor gym on it as well as providing a green outdoor space where sport is played and in the summer plays host to fairs and the Longridge Field Day.

2.4 It is difficult to isolate the day-to-day spend that the Council incurs on this piece of land, as such costs are accounted for under the Ribble Valley Parks cost centre, covering all parks and open spaces. However, in 2017/18 there was a large element of spend under the Play Areas capital scheme for this site of £8450 to renew play equipment.

3 THE OPTIONS

3.1 Option 1- The Borough Council could transfer Kestor Lane to the ownership of Longridge Town Council at no cost, so that they have complete control of the site. The Town Council on behalf of the residents of the town would then manage the land, including the general upkeep. The Town Council already operate the Skate Park and green gym; the children's play area could also be included in the transfer. Thus placing the entirety of the site under one ownership.

This has the advantage the site would be owned and managed by the Town's local representatives. It would ensure that any concerns Longridge residents had could be addressed via the Town Council and not the Borough Council. It would be a relatively straightforward hand over from Borough to Town Council. Any income from events and activities on the site would accrue to the Town Council.

The disadvantage for the Town Council would be it would need to put in place a maintenance regime for the area and if it included the play area arrange for insurance, inspection and maintenance. The ongoing revenue costs of the area would also be transferred. The Borough Council would lose an asset, the value of which is unknown.

- 3.2 Option 2 - The land could be registered as an asset, e.g. community value, under the Community right to buy scheme, this would protect the field from any future proposals to sell the land.
Advantages to this is that it is not a complicated process, although the Town Council would need to be involved as the interested party in the event of any suggested future sale, they would need to nominate the land. Were a whole or part sale to be proposed the right to bid would be enacted allowing the Town Council a period of time to raise the funds to secure the asset.
Disadvantages; the Town Council would need to raise any proposed purchase price if such a sale were proposed.
- 3.3 Option 3 -The Council could enter into a legal agreement with Fields in Trust, giving them a mutual interest in the site. Meaning any future proposals for the site would need their permission, including enhancements for recreation. This is a non-reversible option, unless suitable new alternative land is provided elsewhere nearby for FiT to consider their legal interest being moved to.
Advantage; the Council and any future version of it are bound by a legal agreement with FiT which prevents disposal of all or part without their agreement.
Disadvantage; all the responsibilities and costs of the site remain with the Council, all future strategic decision making for the site would need the approval of FiT before anything could be done. The agreement is not reversible for any reason, without the agreement of FiT who would withhold that subject to an alternative site being made available. Whatever happens with the development of the town in the future for the benefit of residents would if it involved the Kestor Lane site require the permission of FiT, which is not guaranteed, for example a school or something the Town wanted. Local control of the site is given away to a third party.
- 3.4 Option 4 - The Council could dedicate the land and/or rename it to commemorate the ending of WW1. The Council has already agreed the dedication by the Mayor in November 2018.
Advantage; the Council could make a decision to retain ownership of the land which would then be kept alongside the deeds. Therefore, this would be referred to in the future if any question were raised about a possible sale of all or part of the land. It is simple to enact and means that decisions do not have to be referred to a third party when determining what is the best option for the area for the local people.
- 3.5 Option 5 - The Council could maintain the current position, i.e. do nothing, the Council has no intention of selling the land, it is an important area of open space used for play and recreation. Sport England as a statutory consultee would object if it were to be sold. Local people would make their views known as occurred with the Berry Lane Medical Centre proposal and the Council as a statutory and responsible body is able to take those views into account and respond accordingly.
Advantages; Makes the local elected representatives responsible for ensuring that decision about the area are made in the best interests of the Longridge community.
Disadvantages; Trying to assure some Longridge residents that the future of the site is safe under the control of the Borough Council.
- 3.6 Option 6 - The land could be leased to a Longridge community body, who would in turn look after the area on behalf of the local people. Such a lease could be 75 years or more, ensuring that local people have a say in how it is look after and used.
Advantage; this will ensure the area is secured for as long as the lease is made for, with decisions on how it is used and managed being taken by a local body, similar to LSEC.
Disadvantages; It is possible to terminate a lease. The body which leased the land would need to have the resources to manage it properly, because there is limited annual income arising from the site insufficient to cover maintenance of the green space and play areas.

4. ISSUES

- 4.1 All 6 options outlined are possible for the future of Kestor Lane. The Council is already committed to it being dedicated to the fallen of WW1 and being renamed as The Memorial Field.
- 4.2 A local group has commissioned a 2m high sandstone memorial and a plaque. Future ownership and liability of the memorial is yet to be determined.
- 4.3 None of the options is likely to be universally popular and Longridge TC responded to Committee's request for their views by expressing a clear preference for option 3. This appears to be viewed as the only means, in the view of Longridge TC, to preserve the field for the benefit of future generations.
- 4.4 Following receipt of the Town Council's response, we have received further communications seeking confirmation that the application for FiT will be made under the category of Centenary Fields.
- 4.5 The simplest and most straightforward option which would recognise the local desire to protect the field would be option 4. However, if it is true that people in Longridge are concerned that the Council is seeking to do something different with the site, then either option 1 or option 2 would put control of its future in the hands of Longridge Town Council.

6 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications
- Resources – It would depend on the option chosen, however none have any significant resource implications for the revenue budget.
 - Technical, Environmental and Legal – All of the options will incur officer time, the transfer of the land to Longridge Town Council would see the land holding of the Borough reduce.
 - Political – The Longridge Town Council have been asked for their view and they have asked that Kestor Lane be assigned to FiT, though they have not been given the options outlined in this report.
 - Reputation – The site is very popular, so achieving a satisfactory outcome is important for the many Longridge residents.
 - Equality & Diversity – No implications identified.

7 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 7.1 Committee considers the report and determine which option the Council should follow.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS – None

For further information, please ask for Mark Beveridge, extension 4479.