

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

**AGENDA
ITEM NO**

13 OCTOBER 2016

8b

Report Title	LAND AT WALLBRIDGE, STROUD.
Purpose of Report	To determine the future use of land at Wallbridge, Stroud.
Decision	Strategy and Resources Committee RESOLVES that the Head of Asset Management progresses discussions with Stroud Town Council, Gloucestershire County Council and Ecotricity on the design, costs and funding of a landscaping scheme for the land at Wallbridge and implements a scheme in consultation with those parties and the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Community Services and Licensing Committee and Environment Committees.
Consultation and feedback	Public consultation has been undertaken by Stroud Town Council through the neighbourhood development planning process.
Financial Implications and Risk Assessment	<p>The report recommends that further discussions are held with Stroud Town Council, Gloucestershire County Council and Ecotricity on the design, cost and funding of a landscaping scheme for the land at Wallbridge.</p> <p>The Council approved a capital budget of £90,000 as its contribution to a developing a public open space on the site. Therefore, any potential scheme must not cost the Council more than the £90,000 set aside.</p> <p>David Stanley – Accountancy Manager Tel: 01453 754100 Email: david.stanley@stroud.gov.uk</p>
Legal Implications	<p>No legal implications arising other than the need for the committee to ensure that the proposed use is compatible with the delivery of the Canal Project.</p> <p>Karen Trickey, Legal Services Manager Tel: 01453 754369 Email: karen.trickey@stroud.gov.uk</p>

Report Author	Alison Fisk Head of Asset Management (joint) Tel: 01453 754430 Email: alison.fisk@stroud.gov.uk
Options	The Council could do nothing and leave the site grassed over or it could market it for commercial uses.
Performance Management Follow Up	Regular update reports to Committee.
Background Papers/ Appendices	Appendix A - Site plan Land at Wallbridge.

Background

- At its meeting in June 2015 Committee resolved:

That the Head of Asset Management:

- Completes the transfer of the Wallbridge site with Gloucestershire County Council as soon as possible.*
- Promotes discussion with other interested parties to explore options for the space, including obtaining a commercial value for the site.*
- Reports back to Committee for a decision on the future use of this site.*

- The Council has allocated £90k 'to provide match funding for a public open space on the Wallbridge'. Whilst provision has been made in the budget for the funding needed to carry out relevant works, the committee is not bound to approve such a scheme in preference to the alternative options.

Transfer

- The transfer has been slow to progress because of concerns over the stability of the old brewery wall and the difficulties the County Council has had gaining access to the lower parts of the wall (where the canal is in water) for a structural survey to be undertaken. Agreeing the extent of land to be transferred, (ensuring that the maximum extent of land is transferred whilst respecting and allowing for the needs of the County as Highway Authority) has also taken some time.
- However, the land to be transferred has now been agreed (see indicative plan at Appendix A) and solicitors instructed. SDC will not take the freehold of the land to the north of the canal at this time, as the County is still considering what remedial works it will undertake.
- Whilst the transfer had not completed at the time of drafting this report, it is expected to imminently and the next opportunity for reporting to Committee is April next year – effectively adding a 6 month delay to an already protracted project.

Options for future use

6. Discussions have taken place with the Town and County Councils to explore options for the space and recommend a way forward for the site that would retain public access and be a flexible space with scope for commercial activity.
7. In the short term it was agreed to:
 - (a) create a hard standing area at the bottom of Plot 1, incorporating the former road, with removable bollards to restrict access to the area below the entrance to Travis Perkins (this will require a Stopping Up Order to be made),
 - (b) retain the top area as a seating area (this plot will remain with the County until the issues regarding stability of the old brewery wall have been addressed.),
 - (c) explore ideas for public art.
8. Discussions on the longer term proposal, that is, the potential for commercial uses including a small, interesting, building on the site was overtaken by the emerging Stroud Town Centre Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) which has now been supported through a public referendum and will be considered for adoption by Council at its meeting on the 27th October. The Wallbridge site is included in Policies AP5a: Local Green Spaces and in AP7: Gateways, of the Plan.
9. Officers made representations to the Planning Inspector at the public hearing held for the NDP with the aim of retaining flexibility for uses for both this site and Capel's Mill which would enhance the use of the canal and benefit the town centre. This is significant because a designation as a local green space provides special protection against development and has a similar effect on the management of the land to Green Belt policy. As a result AP5a has been modified to allow for :

'Appropriate development which would enhance the enjoyment of the identified Local Green Spaces may be permitted. At Wallbridge and Capel's Mill such uses may include cafe/ice cream kiosk, bicycle hire and information centre. Commercial workshops, storage or housing are not likely to be an appropriate form of development in these locations.'
10. The need for Wallbridge to act as a draw for visitors as well as provide a sense of arrival is also recognised and acknowledged by the Town and District Councils and in Policy AP7 of the NDP.
11. The value of the site has been previously reported as likely to achieve in the region of £150k to £200k for commercial development in light of the allocations in the Stroud Town Centre NDP this is clearly now at the very top end of market value, which is now considered to be in the range of £100k to £150k. There remains the possibility of generating a capital receipt at some

time in the future but also there is the possibility of generating revenue from the site for temporary commercial uses.

Conclusion/ Recommendation

12. This is an important gateway site to the town and an attractively designed open space on the whole site, next to the canal, would greatly improve this entrance to the town centre. It is already used by the public and for community events such as the Fringe Festival to great effect and this could be significantly increased, by the right scheme.
13. Discussions are also in progress with the Town and County Council over highway improvements to the area surrounding the site.
14. Officers have explored options for the space, including commercial uses with key stakeholders and have sought to protect a wider range of uses as possible through the Neighbourhood Development Plan process.
15. Whilst the site could be marketed for a permanent commercial use once the District Council owns it, this is not recommended. Demand and support for such types of uses is likely to increase over time, particularly if funding is secured for Phase 1b of the canal. A more formally landscaped area will also enhance the attractiveness of the site and is expected to increase the use of it.
16. The Council has made funding available to proceed with a formal landscaping scheme. The interest from Ecotricity in the future use of the site remains and the offer of a significant financial contribution to a landscaping scheme is still available. It is recommended that the Council also seeks a contribution from Stroud Town Council if agreement on a scheme can be reached.
17. A scheme can be designed to ensure that it does not preclude some future small commercial development of the site, and works with and benefits the canal as has long been intended.
18. It is recommended that officers now progress discussions with the Town and County Councils and Ecotricity on the design, cost and funding for a landscaping scheme for this site and that this is implemented, subject to consultation and being within budget, as soon as possible.