

CASTLEFIELD ALLOTMENT SITE

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Wards affected: Oakridge and Castlefield ward

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET

The Committee is requested to consider the results of the feasibility work and decide whether, subject to a successful felling licence and the necessary amendment to the lease to Chiltern Rangers CIC of Castlefield Wood, to recommend to Cabinet the allocation of £61,000 from Special Expenses reserves to create a new allotment site in Castlefield.

Corporate Implications

1. District or Parish Councils are Allotment Authorities within their areas. Under Paragraph 9(1) of Schedule 29 to the Local Government Act 1972, if there is both a District and Parish Council for the area in question, the function falls to the Parish not the District Council to fulfil; however, for the High Wycombe Town area the function lies with the District Council.
2. Under S.23 of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908, Allotment Authorities have a duty to provide sufficient allotments if there is demand for them. As defined by S.22(1) of the Allotments Act 1922, allotments of less than 40 poles are known as allotment gardens.
3. Subject to the Allotment Acts (including the above and the Allotments Act 1925 and the Allotments Act 1950 which make further provisions), and equality legislation particularly the Equality Act 2010 which includes at S149 the Public Sector Equality Duty, an Allotment Authority can set its own rules on the management of allotments, including designating persons eligible for a plot, notices to be given, size of allotments, conditions under which they can be cultivated and rent to be paid.
4. The proposal is for the cost of the work to create the allotment site to be funded from Special Expenses reserves. The minimal site maintenance requirements will be undertaken by Quadron Services and it is predicted these costs will be offset by the income from the lettings that they will manage.

Executive Summary

The feasibility work for new allotment sites in Castlefield has found that one site is unsuitable for conversion to allotments due to soil contamination. The estimated cost to convert the second site into allotments is £61,000 and is subject to approval by the Forestry Commission for a felling license and amendment to the current lease to Chiltern Rangers as this includes the site.

Sustainable Community Strategy / Council Priorities - Implications

This links to the Sustainable Community Strategy objective around promoting a healthy lifestyle.

Background and Issues

In September 2014 High Wycombe Town Committee requested a feasibility study be undertaken on two new potential allotment sites in Castlefield. Site A was an old allotment site within Castlefield Wood which is now a hazel coppice but used to be an allotment site. Site B is adjacent to Desborough Castle and the current allotment site. A map showing the two sites is included in appendix A.

As the Committee knows allotment gardening can go in and out of fashion. The allotment service has operated with a waiting list for plots for a number of years. However this followed a period where some sites experienced significant levels of vacancy and were closed, such as Abbey Barn North, which was poor quality, and Castlefield, which was close to Desborough allotments. As the allotment site bordered woods it was planted with hazel coppice to remove the need to maintain it as grassland.

Soil surveys have been completed on both sites. Site A has passed the tests and is an acceptable site for an allotment. The survey on Site B showed some area would be unsuitable for an allotment site and it is, therefore, not recommended to progress this option.

The costs for converting Site A from an area of hazel coppice to a workable allotment have been estimated. This work will require grubbing out the hazel, cultivating the land and seeding the areas between the plots to form paths. Installation of an access road with bunding, car park and fencing is included along with a new water supply for the site. The estimated cost of this element is £45,000.

Site A would, if converted to allotments, have the capacity to include 25 plots of 250 square metres (equivalent to 5 poles). The site would be managed by Quadron Services as part of the Green Spaces contract with the income going to the contractor. The Committee would be investing to provide improved services to town residents but would not generate a financial return to cover the costs of the project.

In order to remove the hazel coppice a Forestry Commission Felling Licence will be needed. This licence requires the Council to plant an equivalent area of woodland. Two smaller sites have been identified where replacement trees can be planted, namely a small meadow area adjacent to the woods at Booker Recreation Ground and a small area of grassland adjacent to the woods bordering Desborough Castle, see map in appendix 2. This is estimated to cost £12,000. It should be noted that the Forestry Commission can refuse to grant a licence.

The current area is leased to Chiltern Rangers CIC as part of the lease for Castlefield Wood and the Council will need to seek an amendment to the lease and access rights to the new allotment site. It is recommended the Council agrees to pay the associated legal fees and this is estimated to cost £4,000.

The overall project cost is £61,000.

The requirement for additional allotment sites arose from the findings of the Allotment Review which reviewed the strategic need for allotments across the town

and concluded more allotments are required. The proposed allotments at Abbey Barn South will not fulfil all the strategic need. The current waiting list as at 30 November 2015 held for HWTC sites is made up of 34 individuals. Some people are on more than one site waiting list, and the site specific waiting list numbers are as follows:

Site	Number of people on waiting list
Back Lane	8
Desborough Castle	6
Green Hill	5
Hicks Farm Rise	12
Hughenden Park	5
Lime Avenue	4
Queensway	3
Totteridge	9

Options

There are two main options:

Option One – Create a new allotment site at Site A within Castlefield Wood.

This will cost an estimated £61,000 and provide 25 new plots, which will help to reduce the waiting list. This will provide more plots for local residents to use. Maintaining an allotment is known to have positive health benefits.

Option Two – Do nothing

The Committee has supported the need for a new site. However it could wait to see what impact the proposed new allotment site being provided at Abbey Barn South has on the waiting list before deciding whether an additional site is needed. This is the only reserve site that will have an allotment site within it so it is likely that additional allotments will be needed once all four High Wycombe reserve sites have been developed. However this may enable the Committee to defer its expenditure for several years.

Conclusions

The results of the feasibility work have been concluded. In order to convert the site in Castlefield to an allotment site is estimated to cost £61,000 and if the recommendation is to progress then a felling licence will be applied for from the

Forestry Commission and steps will need to be taken to progress an amendment to the lease.

Next Steps

If approved by Cabinet and once the felling licence has been approved and the lease duly amended the identified works will be ordered.

Background Papers

HWTC reports in January 2014 and September 2014