

# MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

## EXECUTIVE REPORT

**Report Title: Community Asset Transfer (CAT) of Lingfield Farm  
Community Centre and surrounding open space**

**Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development:  
Charles Rooney**

**Executive Director of Neighbourhood and Communities: Kevin Parkes**

**5<sup>th</sup> March 2014**

---

### PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Executive Sub Committee for Property on the current position of Lingfield Farm and the progress being made towards the CAT of the Countryside Centre building and adjacent open space.

### SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that Executive Sub Committee for Property considers the information within the report and approves that the South Coulby Residents Association (SCRA) submit a business case with a view to agreeing a rolling 12 month licence to occupy/lease for the Lingfield Farm site, until the CAT can be progressed.

### IF THIS IS A KEY DECISION WHICH KEY DECISION TEST APPLIES?

- |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. It is over the financial threshold (£150,000) | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| It has a significant impact on 2 or more wards   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Non Key  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

### DECISION IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE

4. For the purposes of the scrutiny call in procedure this report is

Non-urgent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Urgent report	<input type="checkbox"/>

If urgent please give full reasons

## **BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION**

5. Lingfield Farm and the surrounding land is 7.75ha (18.67 acres) in size and is situated within Coulby Newham in south Middlesbrough. It has not been an agricultural concern for some time, but retains a farm building and extensions that were last used as the Lingfield Countryside Centre (2000-2010)
6. Since the closure of the Countryside Centre in November 2010, the buildings have been largely unused. Alternative internal uses have been considered on several occasions without success, and as part of the 2012/13 budgeting process it was confirmed that the buildings would no longer be required for service delivery purposes. The buildings are currently empty and are an ongoing liability to the Council.
7. The site had been considered for the development of residential dwellings, but following consultation with the local Ward Councillors, Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development and community it was determined that the site be considered for a CAT, as part of a wider development scheme involving land to the south and east, which have been allocated in the draft Local Plan for housing. In effect Lingfield Farm buildings and associated land would form a community park for this area of town.
8. In accordance with the principles of the Council's Change Programme, the opportunity for community facilities to be managed by local residents and associated groups reduces long term revenue pressures on the Council for maintenance and support. In many instances the empowerment of community groups has led to the improvement of facilities as they are able to access funding streams unavailable to local authorities.
9. Two expressions of interest have previously been received from Coulby Newham Juniors FC and the South Coulby Residents Group, to utilise the former Countryside Centre building for community use and the use part of the adjacent open space for football use. Since the expressions of interest were submitted the groups have now constituted themselves as the South Coulby Residents Association (SCRA).

### **Coulby Newham Public Open Space**

10. The Council has begun to consult on the proposed housing allocations as part of the Local Plan. The Local Plan identifies that Coulby Newham will deliver approximately 1000 dwellings up to 2029. The proposed housing allocations are immediately adjacent to Lingfield Farm and the existing housing that surrounds the site. A plan is attached in appendix 1.
11. The development of housing on this land would see a large amount of additional population in the Coulby Newham area. This would leave the Lingfield Farm site as the largest piece of public open space in Coulby Newham. The open space at Lingfield Farm already plays an important role in providing a safe area for recreational activities for the surrounding community.
12. With the level of development that is proposed, the importance of a community facility and open space at Lingfield Farm will increase significantly. The nearest alternative community centre to the Lingfield Farm site is Langdon Square Community Centre, this is not easily accessible to the residents of south Coulby Newham. Not only will

the open space and community facility at Lingfield Farm be utilised by the existing community but will provide an important function for any new residents from the proposed new development.

13. Within the Local Plan – Housing Publication Document, the development at Coulby Newham is required to incorporate the community facilities and open space at Lingfield Farm.
14. Upon adoption of the Local Plan, there is the potential for a proportion of the capital receipt received for the housing land at Coulby Newham to be deducted to facilitate improvements to the open space element at the site in consultation with the community. This would be in lieu of provision of a dedicated open space within the development and this in effect, would be cost neutral to the Council. It is envisaged that Lingfield Farm will become a hive for community activity which will act as a focal point for the new development.
15. Given the integral relationship of the site being the open space provision supporting any new development, any CAT of the site to the community should be integrated with the development of new dwellings at Coulby Newham to ensure the space is suitable for both existing and new residents. The new development would also enable capital resources to be released to ensure an appropriate quality of open space. Until the Council is in a position to transfer the facility, a short term lease arrangement could be agreed to enable the community to use the facility.

### **Community Interest**

16. Discussions have been on going with the SCRA and the Ward Councillors with a view of working towards the CAT of the buildings (excluding farmhouse) and land at Lingfield Farm. The community is eager for the facility to be open and available for their use. SCRA has previously been given a licence to occupy by the Council to hold open days and a recent Gala which was well attended by the community and supported by the Council. The football club also use the outbuildings on site for storage of their training equipment and are eager for the main building to be available for changing and toilet facilities.
17. SCRA has confirmed that they are not interested in the asset transfer of the farmhouse. Other disposal avenues have been considered; however given the long term proposed CAT, any use within the farmhouse would have to be complimentary to community use. It is estimated that the maintenance backlog of the farmhouse is circa £73,000. It is proposed that the Council market this building on a tender basis, whereby it will be evaluated on both price and proposed usage to ensure that it complements the community use of the site. This would ensure that part of the sites heritage is maintained amongst new developments. Such marketing would be best undertaken to coincide with the potential CAT consideration.
18. It has been relayed to the SCRA that the Council will not be in a position to agree to a full CAT of the facility until there is certainty over the housing allocations at Coulby Newham. An option which has been discussed would be for a rolling 12 month rolling licence to occupy/lease which would allow the community to have use of the facility until the CAT can be progressed. The group would be responsible for all costs associated with the running of the facility. SCRA has expressed their desire to progress with this option if possible. It also gives time for the community group to develop its capacity and associated business plans.

19. Initial discussions have been held with Groundwork regarding the possibility of them working with the community to improve the open space at Lingfield Farm and assist with the capacity building of the SCRA. This would ensure that the open space is well designed and suitable for a wide range of user groups from the existing and new community. Groundwork would also support SCRA to become financially sustainable.

### **Achieving 2 Year Olds Project**

20. In 2011, the Government announced the intention to introduce free early education for children aged two years. Following national consultation in December 2012 with the early education sector the Government proposes to increase this provision by 40%. Whilst, the Government places emphasis on the private sector to meet the market demand, the local authority retains the statutory duties to manage the market.
21. It has been identified that there is a shortage of provision in south and east Middlesbrough. As part of a market testing exercise, the Countryside Centre at Lingfield Farm amongst other venues has been identified as being of interest to early education providers.
22. Wellbeing, Care and Learning have held a meeting with the SCRA to discuss the proportion of the building that would be required should it be determined that this is an option that should be progressed. The SCRA has confirmed they would be interested in a nursery provider utilising part of the building should they be granted a lease. This may also enable SCRA to develop a limited income stream which will be important to developing a long term sustainable business plan.

### **Moving Forward**

23. Discussions are continuing with the SCRA and Ward Councillors with a view to providing continued access to the buildings, the group have canvassed the local community and businesses to seek their views on the facility being available and have identified potential users of the facility. They have also assembled a volunteer list with various skill sets of people interested in assisting in the day to day running of the facility.
24. Discussions are also continuing with Wellbeing, Care and Learning regarding their requirements from the building, and how this can be accommodated with community use.
25. Prior to the recent Community Gala held at Lingfield Farm, there were some minor repairs and various safety testing carried out on the building. There is an issue with some shrubs that have grown outside of the building breaking through a window. This will be addressed prior to any potential lease with the community.
26. It is proposed that the SCRA submit an outline business case to the Council demonstrating that they are able to manage the facility free from Council subsidy. If this is successful then the Council look to agree terms for a rolling 12 month licence to occupy/lease until the Council is in a position to complete the CAT.

## **IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IA)**

27. An impact assessment has been carried out on the decision to grant the SCRA a 12 month rolling lease/license at Lingfield Farm. This decision would have no detrimental impact upon of any groups.

## **OPTION APPRAISAL/RISK ASSESSMENT**

28. The options available to the Council are:

**Option 1 – Grant a 12 month rolling licence to occupy/lease to the SCRA prior to CAT** – this would mean that the facility is immediately available to the community, providing a valuable resource to the residents of Coulby Newham. This option would be cost neutral to the Council, as the SCRA would assume full responsibility for the running and maintenance costs of the building.

**Option 2 – Do not grant a 12 month licence to occupy/lease to SCRA** – the facility would remain closed and unavailable to the community until a CAT can be progressed. The Council is responsible for the maintenance and security of the building, this will continue until a full CAT can be granted.

## **FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS**

29. **Financial** – There would be no financial implications to the Council as the SCRA would assume the responsibility for all maintenance and running costs associated with the site. The Council is currently responsible for the maintenance and security of the buildings and surrounding land, as a result of granting a licence to occupy/lease to the SCRA there may be a small revenue saving to the Council.
30. **Ward Implications** – The granting of a 12 month rolling licence to occupy/lease would ensure that a valuable resource is available to the residents of Coulby Newham. Ward Councillors have been consulted and are in full support.
31. **Legal Implications** – To draft the necessary licence/lease.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

32. It is recommended that the Executive Sub Committee for Property considers the information within the report and approves that the SCRA submit a business case with a view to agreeing a rolling 12 month licence to occupy/lease for the Lingfield Farm site, until the CAT can be progressed.

## **REASONS**

33. This would support the VCSE and enable a valuable resource to be brought back into use in the Coulby Newham area which is well supported by local residents and Councillors.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

No background papers used in preparing this report

**AUTHOR: Michael Canavan**

**TEL NO: 729114**

---

*Address:*

*Website: <http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk>*