

BRIEFING NOTE

Liddington Hall Farm Fields – Proposed Community Right to Bid (Asset of Community Value Nomination)

Prepared by: Gaynor White (retiring Clerk to the Council)

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1. Purpose

To seek the Parish Council's support for the nomination of the Liddington Hall Farm fields as an **Asset of Community Value (ACV)** under the Community Right to Bid provisions.

The purpose of the nomination would be to formally recognise the longstanding recreational and community value of the fields and to provide the local community with an opportunity to respond should a relevant disposal of the land be proposed in the future.

2. Background

The Liddington Hall Farm fields were transferred by Surrey County Council in 1945 for the benefit of what is now Merrist Wood College.

The future of the fields has been a matter of local concern for many years. Since the 1970s, various proposals have been made for development of the land.

More recently, the fields were considered through the preparation of the Guildford Local Plan 2019–2034. Their potential allocation generated significant local opposition, and the site was ultimately withdrawn from the proposed allocations, with valuable support from the then Leader of Guildford Borough Council, Cllr Paul Spooner.

The land represents a significant ongoing maintenance commitment for Merrist Wood College, understood to be in the region of £30,000 - £40,000 per annum.

3. Established Community Use

The fields are extensively and regularly used by local residents and visitors for informal outdoor recreation, particularly walking and dog walking.

This is not simply land which the community considers attractive or would like to preserve. It is land which is currently and actively used by the community and has been for many years.

Situated on elevated ground at approximately 200 feet above sea level, the site provides extensive views across the surrounding countryside towards Camberley, Pirbright Ranges and the Hog's Back. Its open character, accessibility and rural setting provide opportunities for exercise, recreation, enjoyment of the countryside and social interaction.

These activities contribute directly to the social wellbeing and recreational interests of the local community, including opportunities for physical activity, access to nature and informal community interaction.

The community value of the site is further demonstrated by its established public access. Worplesdon Parish Council spent approximately four years establishing the public rights of way across the upper field, thereby securing recognised public access across part of the site.

The pond also has a longstanding community and recreational function and is currently held on a long lease by the Fairlands, Liddington Hall and Gravetts Lane Community Association for use by its fishing club.

Taken together, the public rights of way, informal recreational use and established fishing use demonstrate that the community connection with Liddington Hall Farm fields is substantive, longstanding and continuing.

4. Asset of Community Value Considerations

For land to qualify as an Asset of Community Value, its actual current use – or a use in the recent past – must further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community, and it must be realistic to consider that such use can continue within the relevant statutory period.

There would appear to be a strong case that Liddington Hall Farm fields meet these principles.

The recreational use of the fields is current rather than historic or aspirational. Residents already use the land regularly for walking, dog walking, exercise and enjoyment of the countryside, while the pond supports an established recreational fishing use.

There is also every reason to consider that these community uses could continue into the future. They do not depend upon the construction of new facilities or the establishment of a new community activity; rather, the nomination would recognise uses which are already taking place and which have become established over many years.

The site's accessibility, public rights of way and longstanding pattern of recreational use therefore provide strong evidence of its continuing contribution to local social wellbeing and social interests.

5. Why Nominate the Fields?

There is a strong and longstanding desire within the local community to see the recreational and community value of the Liddington Hall Farm fields retained for future generations.

Previous proposals affecting the land have demonstrated the importance which the community places upon its open character and continued accessibility.

An ACV nomination would formally recognise that community value and provide an additional mechanism through which the community's interests could be represented should circumstances affecting the ownership of the land change.

It is important to recognise that designation as an Asset of Community Value would not prevent development, prohibit the owner from selling the land, give the Parish Council a right of first refusal or guarantee that a community bid would ultimately succeed.

However, should a relevant disposal subsequently be proposed, the Community Right to Bid provisions could provide a period during which an eligible community interest group could consider whether it wished to prepare a bid.

The nomination would therefore represent a proportionate and precautionary step to safeguard the community's opportunity to respond to any future disposal, without committing the Parish Council to purchasing the land.

6. Potential Future Acquisition

Should the land become available for purchase at some future date, the Parish Council could work with residents and community organisations to investigate whether acquisition for permanent recreational and community use was achievable.

Potential funding options at that stage could include a combination of:

- Public Works Loan Board borrowing, subject to the necessary approvals, business case and affordability;
- grant funding;
- community fundraising and crowdfunding;
- contributions from partner organisations; and
- other external funding opportunities available at the relevant time.

Any decision to pursue acquisition would be an entirely separate matter for the Parish Council.

It would require consideration of the purchase price and independent valuation, funding arrangements, borrowing implications, ongoing management and maintenance liabilities, legal due diligence and the most appropriate means of securing the land for community benefit in the longer term.

The proposed ACV nomination does not commit the Parish Council financially to any future acquisition.

7. Conclusion

Liddington Hall Farm fields have a longstanding and demonstrable relationship with the local community.

Their value derives not simply from their appearance or from a desire to retain undeveloped land, but from their actual and continuing use for recreation and activities which further local social wellbeing and social interests.

The established public rights of way, regular informal recreational use and community fishing use provide tangible evidence of that relationship.

Given this established use, and the reasonable prospect of those uses continuing into the future, it would be appropriate for the Parish Council to seek formal recognition of the fields as an Asset of Community Value.

8. Recommendation

That Worplesdon Parish Council supports the submission of an Asset of Community Value nomination under the Community Right to Bid provisions in respect of the Liddington Hall Farm fields, having regard to their longstanding and continuing recreational and community use and their contribution to the social wellbeing and social interests of the local community; and authorises the Clerk to prepare and submit the necessary nomination to Guildford Borough Council.