

SUBMISSION TO CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL TO SUPPORT THE DEVOLUTION OF COMMUNITY ASSETS COMPRISING THE CAR PARK, PLAYING FIELD, PLAY AREA, TENNIS COURTS AND WOODED AREA DOWN TO THE SHROPPIE FLY CAR PARK TO AUDLEM PARISH COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

The decision taken on 13th April 2015 by Cheshire East Council's Finance Committee that '... approval be given for the following assets to be prioritized for approval to transfer and that reports on their transfer be prepared and considered by the Portfolio Holder as a priority:- a. Audlem – Car Park, Playing field and playground and land at rear of Audlem public hall....' was greeted with pleasure by the vocal group of residents who have argued in favour of the playing field being transferred to the Parish Council.

In 2014 our Ward Councillor, Cllr Rachel Bailey, persuaded Cheshire East Council of the potential community benefit of such a transfer. The Parish Council was then surprised to find that Cheshire East Council also proposed devolving the car park, tennis courts and playground to the Parish. Public and Parish Council meetings demonstrated support for the takeover of this whole area and a significant amount of work was done by a Working Group to ensure the Parish Council was fully aware of what would be involved.

THE BENEFIT OF THE LAND TO THE COMMUNITY

The assets concerned are used extensively for the wider benefit of the local community and also by residents of adjacent parishes and the many tourists who come to Audlem.

The Playing field area hosts many community events, organised by volunteers, which are the envy of many other communities and are important factors in Audlem's reputation as a vibrant village.

These include:

- Audlem Carnival – established in 1812
- Picnic in the Park
- Festival of Transport
- Bonfire and fireworks

The complex is also important to local residents' recreational and social life with opportunities for children to play and learn tennis & football skills locally and to enjoy the outdoors. An adult football team uses the pitch on Sundays and, in line with other adult teams, is charged for the use by Cheshire East Council.

The northern side of the field is a designated dog exercise area – the only one in the village. This is supported by Dog Waste Bins for owners to easily dispose of their waste.

Car Park

The car park is currently maintained by Cheshire East Council. It is the only public car park in the village and serves the local Medical Practice and the Public Hall as well as providing parking for people using the shops and walking in the locality. There is currently no charge for parking on the car park but there is always a risk that compulsory parking charges will be imposed in line with the other car parks in East Cheshire. Residents feel strongly that parking should remain free of charge.

Playing field

In addition to general recreational use by children, dog walkers and knock-about footballers, the playing field is used as Audlem Football Club's pitch. The field has not been maintained to the level required by the Football Club and it is hoped that local management would ensure direct control of grounds maintenance and enhance the quality of the recreation area.

Play area

The children's playground is managed by Cheshire East Council. It is extensively used by local children and visitors. Although safety checks are carried out these do not appear to be undertaken with the level of frequency residents would like and when safety issues are reported they are not acted upon in a timely manner as is required under H&S rules. Local management would ensure that local residents could take part in ensuring the safety of the play area.

Tennis Courts

The Tennis Club Committee manages and maintains the area which is used mainly by members but the public are able to use the pitches according to the terms of the lease with Cheshire East Council. Audlem Parish Council would have the opportunity to negotiate a new lease with the Tennis Club to secure this long-term facility

Wooded area between Playing Field and the Shroppie Fly

This is a sloping wooded area which has been left in an unkempt state. Local environmental groups are keen to manage and maintain this area for the benefit of conserving wildlife and also for children to play safely in a more 'wild' area.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Since the proposal was first made to take over the Playing Field the Parish Council has been developing a fund towards its future management. The Parish Council's financial situation is strong and a copy of the latest accounts is attached. It is recognized that the devolution of the Playing Field will not be met by any proportionate reduction in Council Tax and that in years to come residents may have to pay a higher Parish precept to maintain the area.

A financial plan has been prepared to support the proposed takeover and a copy is attached to this document.

PREVIOUSLY DEVOLVED ASSETS

In 2011 Audlem Parish Council took over the running of the Public Toilets from Cheshire East Council when they decided to close these (non-statutory) facilities throughout the Authority. The transfer was well managed by a Working Group of the Parish Council who liaised with officials from Cheshire East Council throughout. This has been a very successful move and the condition of the toilets is always positively commented upon by residents and visitors. An honesty box generates a small

income of between £400 - £500 p.a. which is used to offset day to day running costs. This has set the benchmark for how the Parish is able to positively manage maintenance and costs and has contributed to community confidence that the Parish Council is well placed to take on the Playing Field area.

FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF THE AREA

The Parish Council recognizes the importance of the assets identified to the community as a whole and wishes to ensure that the land remains as a community asset for recreational use. Prior to the vote being taken to proceed with the transfer a report was drawn up by a Parish Council Working Group providing Councillors and residents with evidence of community consultation, costs, a risk/benefit analysis and means of managing the risk involved in managing the complex.

In terms of future management it is envisaged that initially the Parish Council will take a very 'hands on' approach whilst all the various processes and procedures are set up, tried and tested. During this period further research will be done into the best means of future management. This includes an investigation into setting up a charitable trust through which this asset (and possibly other Parish Council assets) could be managed. Advice is being sought from the Charities Commission and Fields in Trust and the Parish Council will set up a sub-committee to manage this activity.

CONCLUSION

Audlem Parish Council trusts that the information provided here and in the accompanying documents will be sufficient to demonstrate the commitment, enthusiasm and ability of Councillors to take on and manage these community assets to the benefit of both current and future residents. We formally request Cheshire East Council to agree '.... that approval be given for the assets to be prioritized for approval to transfer.....' as the Finance meeting of 13th April 2015 indicated and that the transfer can be completed as swiftly as possible.

Audlem Parish Council

Print Date 08/07/2015

Reconciliation of accounts for the period
01/04/14 to 31/03/15

Position as at 31/03/2014		Position as at 31/03/2015
£ 52,104.29	Balance brought forward at 1st April	£ 63,433.48
£ 43,430.60	Plus total receipts (ex VAT)	£ 46,386.34
£ 95,534.89		£ 109,819.82
£ 31,529.27	Less total payments (ex VAT)	£ 36,844.42
£ 64,005.62		£ 72,975.40
£ 572.14	VAT receipts less payments	£ 955.11
£ 63,433.48	Total	£ 73,930.51
	Represented by:-	
£ 34,989.38	Santander Current a/c	£ 44,381.89
£ 15,786.06	Santander Instant Reserve a/c	£ 15,817.68
£ 12,726.85	Co-op Bank a/c	£ 14,051.57
£ 63,502.29		£ 74,251.14
£ 68.81	Uncashed cheques	£ 320.63
£ 63,433.48	Balance carried forward	£ 73,930.51
£ 2,540.00	Reserved Funds	£ 6,440.00
£ 60,893.48	Cash Available	£ 67,490.51

