

Question and Answer Sheet Proposal to transfer the ownership of Dairy House Bridge and Oak Tree Fields

1. Do you know who the new owners will be and do you have someone lined up to purchase the sites?

These are only proposals at this stage. As the sites are currently not for sale we have no one lined up to take on these sites and at this stage would not have an idea who may express an interest if the proposal to transfer the ownership of these sites is agreed by the Council's Cabinet.

2. Will the Local Authority continue to be the landlord?

If the proposal to transfer the ownership of these sites is agreed, Wiltshire Council would no longer be the owner or landlord after the transfer.

3. Has anyone expressed an interest in purchasing the sites?

Not at this stage. We have, however, been contacted in the past by people expressing an interest in taking on ownership of the sites, but these enquiries have not been taken forward.

4. Will we all be evicted?

No one will be evicted should the Council transfer the sites and we would like to reassure tenants that any transfer of ownership will only be on the condition the sites remain as Gypsy and Traveller sites. The only circumstance in which action might be taken by the Council before a transfer is for breach of your existing Mobile Homes Act Agreement.

5. How will the Council ensure that the new landlord invests into and improves the sites?

As part of the assessment of bids we will evaluate the bidder's proposals for investment into these sites.

6. How will you ensure the sites remain as Gypsy and Travellers sites?

We will seek to ensure this through the terms of the transfer.

7. Why are you abandoning our gypsy and traveller community?

We are committed to ensuring the sites remain Gypsy and Traveller sites. By transferring ownership, the future of the sites can be secured. A new owner can bring in new investment and ensure site improvements. We will continue to retain ownership of 50 other pitches elsewhere in the County.

8. Could the rent and service charges be put up?

Following any transfer of ownership the Council will not be able to influence either the rent or service charges. However, in regard to rent the landlord will need to comply with the rent review requirements contained within the Mobile Homes Acts and for service charges it is normal practice for the landlord to justify the charges based on actual costs from the previous year and follow the terms of your existing Mobile Homes Act Agreement.

9. What will happen to my current rent arrears and notices?

It is normal practice for any new landlord to take on the current liabilities including any current rent arrears and to continue with any arrangements including suspended possession orders.

10. Will we be asked to remove our own caravans and purchase ones owned by the new owner?

We understand that this would be a breach of your existing Mobile Homes Act Agreement, which will be binding on the new owner.

11. Will we have the option to purchase our own plots or the sites?

If the sites are placed onto the market anyone would be able to express an interest in taking on the ownership of the sites, although we are not seeking to transfer plots or parts of the site in isolation.

12. Can the Local Authority consider closing both sites and create new ones elsewhere?

There is no intention to close these sites at the current time.

13. What would be the cost to improve these two sites?

Depending on the extent of the works the costs to the Council is estimated between £3m and £7m.

14. When will the council be discussing and making this decision about this proposal and will we be able to attend this meeting to express our views?

The decision will be made at Wiltshire Council's Cabinet meeting on Tuesday 3rd July 2018 at County Hall Offices in Trowbridge. This meeting will just deal with the principle of transferring ownership and will not have any details of future owners.

15. Will the residents from both sites be able to attend the Cabinet meeting being held on Tuesday 3rd July 2018.

Wiltshire Council's Cabinet meetings are public meetings and anyone is able to attend. When the agenda has been confirmed for this meeting we will provide all residents with a copy.

If you would like to attend this meeting or if you would like the opportunity to speak please ensure you make contact with William Oulton to confirm your attendance. William can be contacted using the following email:-

William.Oulton@wiltshire.gov.uk

16. Would the Council consider selling Dairy House Bridge and moving the residents from this site onto Oak Tree Fields as well as utilising the Transit site

The Council does not wish to see a reduction in the amount of available pitches for Gypsy and Travellers and the sale of Dairy House Bridge would firstly reduce the total number of pitches and will also not raise sufficient funds to ensure that Oak Tree Fields was refurbished to the required standard.

17. When will you be carrying out a site meeting on our pitches for all residents

Following initial feedback from the engagement sessions, it has been agreed that we will attend both sites on Wednesday 23rd May, starting at Oak Tree Fields at 9.30 and then travelling to Dairy House Bridge. Cllr Toby Sturgis the Cabinet Member with the responsibility for Gypsy and Travellers will be attending with the Heads of Operational Housing, Nicole Smith and Head of Housing Strategy and Assets, Janet O'Brien

18. What are the reasons for the Council not being able to refurbish these sites when it was confirmed in 2014 that all sites would be refurbished

It was our intention to complete a full refurbishment of all 5 gypsy and traveller sites across Wiltshire. All sites required this work as all were in poor condition. As part of a phased programme of investment phase 1 included the refurbishment of Lodehill, Fairhaven and Thingley, which are all now complete. When this work was originally undertaken, the Council had access to significant amount of grant funding from the Homes and Community Agency. This funding covered the majority of the works, without which the council would have faced significant challenge to fund the costs from existing Council budgets.

Funding was secured to support works to the remaining two sites. However, when the works were tendered, the tender prices were significantly in excess of the grant funding secured leaving a £3m funding gap. Due to the lack of funding available within the Council's capital budget the project was then unable to proceed and the funding had to be handed back.

19. Is it not possible to sell some of the Council owned social housing stock to help fund the refurbishment of the Gypsy and Traveller sites

The council social housing stock are assets that belong to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Any money that is made following the disposal of any social housing stock owned by Wiltshire Council can legally only be used for the benefits of tenants who are included within the HRA. The Gypsy and Traveller sites are part of the Council general fund and therefore we are not legally able to use HRA funds to invest in these sites

20. Is it not possible to sell the transit site and use the money to invest and refurbish Oak Tree Fields and Dairy House Bridge?

The value that will be obtained from the sale of the transit site would not be enough to refurbish either site.

21. Is it possible for the Council to repair the sewers on the Oak Tree Field site and allow the residents to carry out all other repairs on the site?

The council would like to see the standards of both sites brought up to the required level to provide suitable conditions for all residents and ensure the site complies with the standards as described in the Mobile Home Act. This is one of the main reasons why we are considering the transfer of ownership as a new owner will be able to raise funds to invest which the Council is unable to do.

22. Has the Council considered any other options than to sell the sites?

For the past 12 months the Council has been doing work in regard to a number of options. In considering these options we have had in mind a significant improvement required on both sites, the long term investment requirements on the sites as well as compliance with the Mobile Homes Act and the assessment of need for gypsy and traveller pitches across Wiltshire. The options considered have been:-

- Do nothing
- Minimal refurbishment and drainage improvement
- Improvement of pitches
- Transfer of ownership of sites

23. Why is the cost to carry out the refurbishment on these sites so expensive?

The refurbishment works for both these sites were out to tender for any contractor to submit a bid to complete the required works. It was unfortunate that the Council only received one bid and this quote was very high.

24. What will happen if the sites are not sold?

If it is agreed that we proceed with the transfer of ownership of these sites and within a reasonable period the sites do not sell or no offers are received we would need to re-evaluate the options and go back to cabinet for a further decision

25. Why are we not able to buy another piece of land to build a new traveller site?

The council doesn't have sufficient funds to purchase land and build a further Gypsy and traveller site-

26. Is it possible to increase the pitches on Oak Tree Fields and move the residents from Dairy House Bridge onto the Oak Tree field site, making use of the transit site and paddock if needed?

It is our intention to ensure we retain the current number of pitches for Gypsy and Travellers. Closing Dairy House Bridge would mean a reduction in the overall pitch numbers available across Wiltshire. The sale of Dairy House Bridge site would not provide enough funds to bring Oak Tree Fields up to the required standard as well as the refurbishment that would be needed to accommodate the residents from Dairy House Bridge.

27. Would the council consider a community land trust?

Yes the Council is prepared to consider a Community Land Trust

28. If it was possible for the residents to create a community land trust would the council consider a discounted price?

If residents wanted to consider a community land trust then a discussion could take place in regard to the transfer value.

29. Will the sites be sold as one?

If the proposal to transfer the ownership of the sites is agreed then the sites will be sold separately. Dairy House Bridge as one lot and Oak Tree Fields and the transit site as another. A purchaser could consider purchasing both sites or just place a bid for one.