

## Land at Redcote Lane, Leeds

Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021

Report of: Head of Asset Management

Report to: Director for City Development

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

### What is this report about?

#### Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- National Grid Property Holdings Limited own the freehold title for approximately 32 acres of land to the South West of Redcote Lane forming part of Kirkstall Valley Nature Reserve (Appendix A). The land is allocated as greenspace in the adopted Site Allocations Plan and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust have been involved in the maintenance and management of this land for many years on behalf of National Grid.
- National Grid has identified the land as surplus to their requirements and decided to sell the site by auction on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2021.
- The land provides an important amenity function locally. As a consequence, the Council has explored the potential purchase of the land in advance of auction and has had discussions with National Grid's agents in this respect. The acquisition of the land by the Council would maintain the status of the land as an important local amenity and urban green corridor. The acquisition will also be complementary to the Council's Flood Alleviation Scheme 2 which is currently under construction and our wider activities to improve our reliance to climate change.
- In addition the continued access to such amenity land will support health and wellbeing benefits for nearby communities and local residents who can access and move through the area from both Armley and Kirkstall. The land can also support opportunities to respond to the Climate Emergency through tree planting and the future potential for Ground Source heat generation.
- Upon the Council acquiring the land, it is initially intended that the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust continue to undertake maintenance, management and conservation work. The Yorkshire Wildlife Trust have expressed their interest in continuing to manage the site.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that the Director for City Development:

- a) Grants approval to the Council acquiring the land at Redcote Lane (edged in red on Appendix A) in advance of auction, for a consideration of £1 in addition to buyers fees.
- b) Agrees to the terms set out in Appendix B and C which form the standard auction terms for Allsop LLP and special terms for acquisition of the land at Redcote Lane.
- c) Authorise Allsop LLP to sign and exchange the contract with the vendor on the Council's behalf as required in the auction terms at Appendix B and C if the Council's offer is accepted.

## Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 1 National Grid who own the freehold of the subject site at Redcote Lane (see plan at Appendix A) have entered the land for sale by auction as part of their programme to dispose of surplus assets.
- 2 In acquiring the land, the Council will be able to ensure it is retained as a local amenity and urban green corridor in the future and be able to plan for its future enhancement.

## What impact will this proposal have?

**Wards affected: Armley and Kirkstall**

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

- 3 In purchasing the land the Council will be able to provide additional protection as the landowner for the nature reserve, maintaining public access whilst also working with partners to further enhance the ecology and biodiversity benefits that the site can contribute.

## What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- 4 Consultation has taken place with the Executive Member for Resources as well as Ward Members. Whilst the land is in the Armley ward, it borders Kirkstall and is an important area of land within the Armley/Kirkstall corridor. In addition, discussions have taken place with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust in relation to their continued involvement in respect of the management and maintenance of the land.

## What are the resource implications?

- 5 The acquisition of the land at a value of £1 will be funded from the Asset Management and Regeneration Service budget. It is recognised that the purchase of additional assets brings with it increased liabilities for the Council to ensure that Health and Safety is maintained and that any other management and maintenance obligations are addressed.
- 6 Technical and Legal due diligence has been undertaken to understand these liabilities and are set out in Confidential Appendix B.

## What are the legal implications?

- 7 Under Part 3, Section 3E(g) of the Council's Constitution (Officer Delegation Scheme (Executive Functions)) the Director of City Development has authority to discharge any function of the Executive in relation to Asset Management.

- 8 The proposal constitutes a **Significant Operational Decision** and is therefore not subject to call in.
- 9 The information contained in Appendix B relates to the financial or business affairs of the Council and its considerations in coming to the recommendation in this report. This information is not publicly available from the statutory registers of information kept in relation to certain companies and charities. It is considered that since this information was obtained through negotiations for the purchase of the land/property referred to then it is not in the public interest to disclose this information at this point in time. It is considered that whilst there may be a public interest in disclosure, much of this information will be available from the Land Registry following completion of the purchase and consequently the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing this information at this point in time. It is therefore considered that this element of the report should be treated as exempt under rule 10.4.(3) of the Access to Information Procedure Rules.

### **What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

- 10 The main risk which is being mitigated through the Council acquiring the land is that the nature reserve is purchased by a party who may not continue to commit to the protection and enhancement of the nature reserve. The main risk associated with the acquisition of the site is relating to the maintenance and management obligations that this brings with it. These are understood and set out in confidential Appendix B but in summary focus on issues that come with owning a site adjacent to a river.

### **Does this proposal support the council's three Key Pillars?**

Inclusive Growth       Health and Wellbeing       Climate Emergency

- 11 The proposed acquisition supports the city's response to the climate emergency through the protection and enhancement of important ecology and biodiversity areas. In addition through maintaining public access, the site can continue to provide health and wellbeing benefits for residents across West Leeds but in particular the communities of Armley and Kirkstall.

### **Options, timescales and measuring success**

#### **What other options were considered?**

- 12 There has been careful consideration about whether the Council should proceed with making an offer to purchase the land given the long-term maintenance liabilities. As such, the Council could consider standing aside and allowing National Grid to seek bids through auction. However, this could result in the site being purchased by a party who do not prioritise the sustainable management of the land and its continued enjoyment by the public.

#### **How will success be measured?**

- 13 The main success will be the Council acquiring the land for the consideration set out in this report. In the longer term, it is hoped that the ecology and biodiversity benefits for this land will be visible for local residents to enjoy.

#### **What is the timetable for implementation?**

- 14 Subject to approval of this report, the Council will plan to exchange contracts on the 8<sup>th</sup> November 2021. On this basis, the transaction will progress to completion and the site will be withdrawn from the public auction.

## **Appendices**

15 Appendix A – Site Plan

16 Appendix B – Confidential appendix

17 Appendix C – Confidential appendix ii

## **Background papers**

18 None