

Economy and Property Committee	
Meeting Date	30 January 2025
Report Title	Land at Great East Hall
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Joanne Johnson, Head of Place
Lead Officer	Kieren Mansfield, Strategic Programmes and Asset Manager
Classification	OPEN
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the Economy and Property Committee extend the time during which the Council commits to reserving an appropriate parcel of land for a community shop at Great East Hall, for a period of up to 12 months. 2. That any transfer of land to support the development of a Community Shop remains subject to meeting the previous conditions set by Committee on 8th March 2023.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the background to a previous decision, taken by the then Regeneration and Property Committee in March 2023, to secure the transfer of land at Great East Hall, Sittingbourne, to the Council, with a small proportion of the land intended to support the development of a community shop.
- 1.2 Setting aside and ultimately transferring land to support the development of a community shop was subject to meeting conditions set by the committee, to be met by September 2024. These conditions have not been met and the committee resolution required a further committee report be considered for the continued reservation of the land identified for its construction.
- 1.3 The report recommends the extension of the deadline for a period of a further 12 months, to reflect the delays in securing the site and to provide time for the community to consider and bring forward the project, should it wish to do so, in changed circumstances.

2 Background

- 2.1 In March 2023 the Economy and Property Committee agreed in principle that officers proceed with negotiations for the transfer of a site of 0.848ha at Great East Hall, Sittingbourne to the Council (see site map at appendix I).

- 2.2 This land was originally intended to provide the Council a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) under a 2004 section 106 agreement. The terms of the variation involve the transfer of the land and the subsequent payment of £100,000 to SBC to support the delivery of a community shop or for wider community use, plus the removal of the haul road constructed across the site. It was the intention to secure the site unfettered of existing obligations associated with it.
- 2.3 Whilst the deed of variation is close to conclusion, progress against securing the transfer of the site (and the £100,000 that would be received on completion) has been stalled by legal complications. The current landowners, Vistry Group, need to take a leading role to remove a number of title constraints placed on the land and officers are continuing to push for this to be the case.
- 2.4 A community shop was an ambition of a then ward councillor and in turn is a reflection of a wider community frustration that amenities promised by the developers have not been delivered. Therefore, the Committee agreed that an appropriate parcel of land be reserved within the site for this use, subject to the receipt and independent review of a funded delivery plan for its construction; a business plan demonstrating financial sustainability and the formation of an appropriate legal entity through which the project can be progressed.
- 2.5 The time set by the Committee to meet the conditions was September 2024 and Committee resolved that if the conditions to enter into a transaction to enable the delivery of a community shop were not met, a further committee report be considered for the continued reservation of the land identified for its construction.
- 2.6 The then ward member promoting the community shop was provided UKSPF funded access to support through the Plunkett Foundation, a specialist charity supporting the development of community businesses. However, Plunkett have reported that little progress has been made in working towards the conditions set. They have seen limited evidence of the necessary, wider community involvement in taking the necessary steps to move the project forward or secure the commitment to a community shops operation.
- 2.7 It is also noted that within the immediate locality there are also retail developments planned, which could impact on the viability of a community shop proposal. In particular, the outline planning permission for 380 houses to the east of Great East Hall, makes provision for 450 sq. m for retail use, with an indicative location approximately 450m from the site to be transferred to the Council. However, delivery and timescales for this are uncertain at this stage.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 Reflecting the delays in securing the site and to provide time for the community to consider and potentially bring forward the project, it is recommended that the Economy and Property Committee extend the time during which the Council commits to reserving an appropriate parcel of land for a community shop at Great East Hall, for period of up to 12 months.

3.2 It is recommended that any transfer of land to support the development of a Community Shop remains subject to meeting the previous conditions set by Committee on 8th March 2023.

4. Alternative Options

4.1 Not to extend the time period for the reservation of an appropriate parcel of land for a community shop. This is not recommended as the context and community will to pursue the project is not yet clear. If there is community appetite, continuing to make a parcel of land available within the site will provide a degree of certainty, if the community wishes to undertake the work to meet the conditions set. It is also likely that securing the site will in any event take some additional time to secure, given the legal obstacles that need to be resolved.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1 A community workshop attended by the ward Member and a small group of residents was held in December 2021, to discuss the possibility of establishing a community shop. During the first half of 2022 a soft market research exercise was undertaken by the community which produced a good response, from nearly 400 people. This indicated a level of interest in using a community shop. There has subsequently been attempts to form a working group through a previous ward member, but this has not generated a sufficiently active group to advance the project.

5.2 The views of those ward Members with residents in the immediate vicinity of the site have been specifically sought by officers.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Securing the acquisition of the land at Great East Hall and the subsequent transfer to support a community shop are identified in the Asset programme in the Annual Plan for 2024-2025. This service objective links to the Corporate Plan action to <i>Implement the Property Asset Strategy to support best use of our assets.</i>
Financial, Resource and Property	The land at appendix 1 would be transferred to the Council, subject to the resolution of outstanding legal issues. Any associated costs are to be found from existing budgets. The Council has made no direct financial commitment to the community shop, with the cost of delivery of a new build requiring significant fund raising. At present the support for developing community proposals for the community shop is funded by the UKSPF. However, the opportunity to continue to provide support

	<p>through Plunkett is potentially closing, with the current UKSPF programme ending in March 2025 and the terms of any new grant money for 2025/26 not yet known. There are no identified internal resources to provide this support or for delivery.</p> <p>The land transfer could provide a potential future opportunity to utilise the land for community use and/or realise value from some form of future development. This could potentially generate a future income and/or capital receipt for the Council. This would be subject to a future committee report.</p> <p>When transferred as un-landscaped open space there will be an increased maintenance, management and insurance liability for the Council, whilst the future of the site is determined.</p>
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	The Head of Place will need to complete the necessary negotiation, due diligence and agree draft contracts as applicable and undertake the work required in consultation with the Head of Mid-Kent Legal Partnership. Any future use of the site will be subject to all necessary consents being secured.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	<p>None identified at this stage. Any future use of the site would be subject to planning application(s) that will require environmental assessments.</p> <p>The existing unmanaged site, which has now remained relatively undisturbed for some years may also be contributing to local bio-diversity and any planning applications relating to the site will need to meet bio-diversity net gain requirements.</p>
Health and Wellbeing	The transfer of land will mean that a planned Multi-Use Games Area would not be delivered. However, there is other provision of open space in the immediate vicinity of this site.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage
Risk Management and Health and Safety	Any transaction is subject to an amendment to the relevant section 106 agreement. Other risks associated with the proposed transfer of the land have been identified through the due diligence process and requires significant work on the part of the existing owners to resolve.
Equality and Diversity	Any future disposal(s) relating to the site would be subject to community impact assessment.

Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.
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7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- **Appendix I** – Site plan of land at Great East Hall

8 Background Papers

- Land at Great East Hall, report to the then Regeneration and Property Committee, 8th March 2023.

Appendix 1. The site at Great East Hall included within the offer from Countryside Properties

