

# **Progress Report on the development of disused buildings in Manor Farm Park, Northfield – January 2020**

**For the Trusts and Charities Committee meeting**

**22 January 2020 10.30am, Council House Committee Room 2**

## **Outline**

Previously, Trustees of the George Cadbury (for Park) Trust (the “Trust”) have supported work to restore disused buildings at the main entrance to Manor Farm Park, Northfield. [January 2017, September 2017, January 2019]. Studies commissioned by the City Council and Friends of Manor Farm Park show that it would be viable to restore the old farm buildings and the lodge in the park for use as a community facility which would be run by a Charitable Organisation. To facilitate this, Trustees will need to apply to the Charity Commission to vary the terms of the Trust to allow the site to be leased to a third party and for commercial activities for charitable purposes to take place.

## **Recommendations**

Trustees are requested to:

1. Agree in principle to the Community Asset Transfer to a Charitable Organisation on a long-term lease;
2. Instruct the Trust’s officers to make an application to the Charities Commission to vary the terms of the Trust as a matter of urgency;
3. Ask officers to confirm in writing the intention of forming a formal partnership with the proposed charitable trust as the preferred partners.

## **Proposed approach**

A group of stakeholders (including BCC, Bournville Village Trust, Friends of Manor Farm Park), proposes to create a Charitable Organisation that, working in partnership with BCC, will renovate and operate the site on a long-term lease following a Community Asset Transfer from the Trust.

Following a series of studies, (described below), including surveys of park users and local residents, the Stakeholder Group has decided it is feasible to renovate and develop the buildings on the site. They would be converted into community facilities for use by individuals and groups to promote well-being and healthy living activities in the park as well as promoting its heritage, thus continuing the legacy of George Cadbury. The facilities will include meeting spaces for hire, exhibition space and a community-enterprise-run café with toilets. The layout of the overall site would be agreed in conjunction with the Council.

## **Why is this the preferred approach?**

Studies by Acivico on the condition of the farm buildings and the lodge show that it would cost BCC £750,000 and £290,000 respectively to bring the two buildings back into use. The former Cadbury Barn (destroyed by arson in 2017) was insured and the Trust received an insurance pay-out in of £250,000 following its destruction, of which £166K remains; there is also an outstanding Section 106 grant of £132,000 for use on community facilities in the Park. However City Officers have indicated that they will not be able to secure the necessary additional funds to renovate the buildings.

Other studies show that the buildings are poorly insulated and would need considerable work to bring them up to present building standards; presently they are being used for storage for equipment used by the Parks and Nurseries Department and are not suitable for other uses without investment.

However, business feasibility and catering studies have shown that a community facility which hired rooms, put on events for the local community and operated a café would be financially viable. A Charitable Organisation would be able to access sufficient funds from grants, loans and investors to renovate the site. These sources of funding are not available to Local Authorities and this is why the most suitable approach is for a Charitable Organisation to develop and operate the site on a lease.

Under the terms of the original Trust the site cannot be sublet or used to undertake commercial activities. So, the Trustees need to make an application to the Charities Commission to vary the original Trust before the development can proceed. The variation is also needed to enable the proposed Charitable Organisation to demonstrate it can apply for and secure the necessary funds to undertake this work. Given the nature of the project, which may be complicated and because application timescales can be long, the application for variation needs to be made without delay, or it could hold up the whole project.

## **Recent development of the Project (formerly the Cadbury Barn project)**

Built in 1895, the Cadbury Barn was used to host parties for families from the inner city. The site comprised the timber framed Cadbury Barn (destroyed in 2017 by arsonists), another two storey Victorian barn adjoined to further outbuildings (the farm buildings), a three bedroom lodge, a garden and car parking.

The Stakeholder Group has created a vision to develop the site to celebrate its historic, cultural and natural heritages by creating spaces for community use, a café, workspaces and an exhibition area. The site will be sustainable both from an environmental and financial point of view.

The Trust and Charities Committee has previously supported this approach. [January 2017, September 2017, January 2019]

## **Studies carried out**

As agreed by the Trust in January 2019, using funds from the insurance pay-out on the original Barn, BCC officers commissioned site condition surveys, utility condition surveys and Acivico architects' plans for the buildings on the site. Under the terms of a COGA, Friends of Manor Farm Park, acting on behalf of the Stakeholder Group, also commissioned a detailed business plan, a catering report, an environmental report and an architect's report on alternative designs for the site. The Friends applied successfully to the National Lottery for a grant to employ a Project Manager to manage its work with the city council. They have also had discussions with the National Lottery Fund about capital and revenue grants for the project as well as talking to private investors who have an interest in funding community facilities in the area. The Friends of Manor Farm Park have carried out two surveys recently that confirm users' support for the proposed developments.

## **Next Steps**

The Stakeholders will work with City Officers to develop Heads of Agreement for the project and set up a Charitable Organisation that can apply for funds from a range of parties. Work can start on the Community Asset Transfer and preparation of the lease but none of this can be finalised until the Charity Commission has approved the Trust's variation application, so it is essential that this application is submitted without further delay, having first been approved by the Trust in January 2017. The Charitable Organisation will establish a project team to draw up plans to transform the site into a community facility. We anticipate that it will take about two years before the site is operational, but this is conditional on a speedy application to the Charities Commission.

The support of the Trustees in furthering this project as outlined above will therefore be both vital and much appreciated.

John Stewart and Lesley Pattenson  
on behalf of Friends of Manor Farm Park and the Stakeholders Group  
8 January 2020