



AGENDA ITEM: 5(a)

CABINET: 10th November 2015

Report of: Assistant Director Community Services

Relevant Managing Director: Managing Director (People and Places)

Relevant Portfolio Holders: Councillor Y. Gagen

Contacts for further information: Mr S. Kent (Extn. 5169)
(E-mail: stephen.kent@westlancs.gov.uk)

SUBJECT: NEW ALLOTMENTS IN SKELMERSDALE

Wards affected: All Skelmersdale wards

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To inform Members on progress made to establish new allotments in Skelmersdale, and seek approval for the implementation timetable, method of management, designation and allocation of plots.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the construction of a new allotment site off Marland, Ashurst be approved subject to obtaining planning consent.

2.2 That the process of devolved management be supported and the Assistant Director Community Services be authorised to take all necessary steps and obtain all necessary consents to enter into negotiations with Skelmersdale Horticultural Society to take on a management agreement for the site.

2.3 That the new allotment site being designated a "statutory" allotment be approved and the Assistant Director Community Services be authorised to take all necessary steps and obtain any necessary consents to undertake this designation.

2.4 That the works to extend the Digmaor allotment site be approved.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At Council in February 2015 a proposal for new allotments in Skelmersdale was approved subject to review. Work to date on the Leisure Strategy confirms the scheme would not conflict with the overall aims of the Strategy and consequently a one off capital sum of £50,000 was approved at Council in July 2015 for implementation of the scheme.
- 3.2 Two new sites were identified in Ashurst, off Marland, and Skelmersdale North, off Cobbs Clough Road, which together would have provided an additional 40 allotment plots. Since this time the Council has put the Cobbs Clough Road site up for sale, so, to compensate for this the proposed site in Ashurst has been extended from 25 to 35 plots, and an existing allotment site in Digmoor, off Back Lane, has been identified for works to extend the plot availability by 3. In total, therefore the intention is to increase the plot availability in the town by 38 plots, which is very close to the original plans. (see appendix 1 – site locations)
- 3.3 Works at the sites have been designed and costed. The larger site at Ashurst will comprise of 35 plots surrounded by a security fence, associated car parking within the site, a communal shed, store shed, water supply, possible area for bee hives, and surfaced access track from Marland. There will also be an additional parking area outside of the new site to accommodate the users of the existing allotment site and relieve a vehicle congestion issue. Should additional funding become available it is also the intention to provide each of the 35 plots with a small shed of their own.
(see appendix 2 – New Skelmersdale Allotments site plan).
- 3.4 Work to the Digmoor site is planned for the Winter period, and will comprise of clearance and re-shaping of the site to bring an area of currently unused land into use as new plots, along with a new access gate to accommodate this new use.

4.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 4.2 Talks are currently being held with Skelmersdale Horticultural Society who have managed the present Council owned allotment in Ashurst for many years with the intention that they will similarly take on the management of the new Ashurst site. Should this arrangement not come to fruition then it will be necessary to set up a new Society to run this scheme.
- 4.3 The land was transferred to the Council by the Homes and Communities Agency (formally CNT) and as such their consent to the change of use must be secured. A request has been sent and a response is awaited.
- 4.4 In Digmoor discussions have been held with the Society that runs the current site and work requirements have been agreed and a contractor lined up to complete these works during the winter period.

5.0 PROPOSALS

- 5.1 It is important to have the allotments available as soon as possible in the new year to allow new plot holders time to prepare and plant for the new growing season, therefore it is proposed to progress the major scheme as soon as planning consent is gained, and the minor scheme when vegetation dies back.
- 5.2 Devolved management has been an aim of the Council since adoption of the Allotment Strategy in 2004, so it is proposed to continue with talks with the Skelmersdale Horticultural Society for them to take on the management of the new site. They have many years' experience in managing the site off Houghtons Road and have the full support and confidence of officers to be able to manage the new site efficiently. However should these talks not come to fruition then it is proposed that the Council will work with the Community Food Growing Initiative and West Lancs Allotment Federation to establish a new Society to look after this site.
- 5.3 It is important that the Council establishes a devolved management system for its new site as the resources are not available internally to manage it. Talks with the Skelmersdale Horticultural Society have initially been very positive and they would be the preferred management group to run this site. A possible deciding factor as to whether this Society would take on this role may depend on their view of the security and recognition of the site. They have, therefore, requested that the site is designated as a "statutory" allotment site which gives it the protection of the Allotments Act 1925.
- 5.3.1 This means that should the Council want to dispose of this site or use it for other purposes consent must be given by the Secretary of State. To give this consent the Secretary of State must be satisfied that "adequate provision will be made for allotment holders displaced by the action of the local authority, or that such provision is unnecessary or not reasonably practicable."
- 5.3.2 Whilst this does not prevent a local authority from disposing of a statutory allotment it does protect allotment holders, and levels of provision, and gives sites a level of security favoured by external funders. It also gives societies the additional security to invest time and resources into the devolved management of a site.
- 5.4 Plots in the new allotment will be offered initially to people on the existing waiting lists in Skelmersdale, and should any be available after this they will be go on open offer to Skelmersdale residents. It is expected that once news of the new site is circulated the waiting lists will expand significantly. The extension of the existing site in Digmoor will be filled from its existing waiting list.

6.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 6.1 The project will support the Council's strategic aims in respect of improving access to quality facilities, providing facilities to improve the health and quality of life of the community.

7.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The capital cost of the new allotment provision will be in the region of £49,000 which can be covered by the allocation of £50,000 in the capital programme. An additional £12,000 will be sought from external sources to provide individual sheds for plotheholders.
- 7.2 All revenue costs of the new allotments, including maintenance, services, insurance, tools and equipment, will be provided by the Society managing the site, assuming that the devolved management process has been successful. Their income will derive from plot rents and external grant aid.

8.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 Devolved management of our sites has been shown to be the most beneficial way forward with local societies running sites for local people at no cost and little staff input from the Council. It is important that this aspect is achieved for this new site. However, should a Society take on this role we are reliant upon their operating methods to manage the site efficiently and effectively and provide the local community with an appropriate level of service. Hopefully this can be achieved through engaging an organisation with a good track record and tried and tested methods, and guiding their operation through a suitable lease.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix to this report, the results of which have been taken into account in the Recommendations contained within this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Site Locations

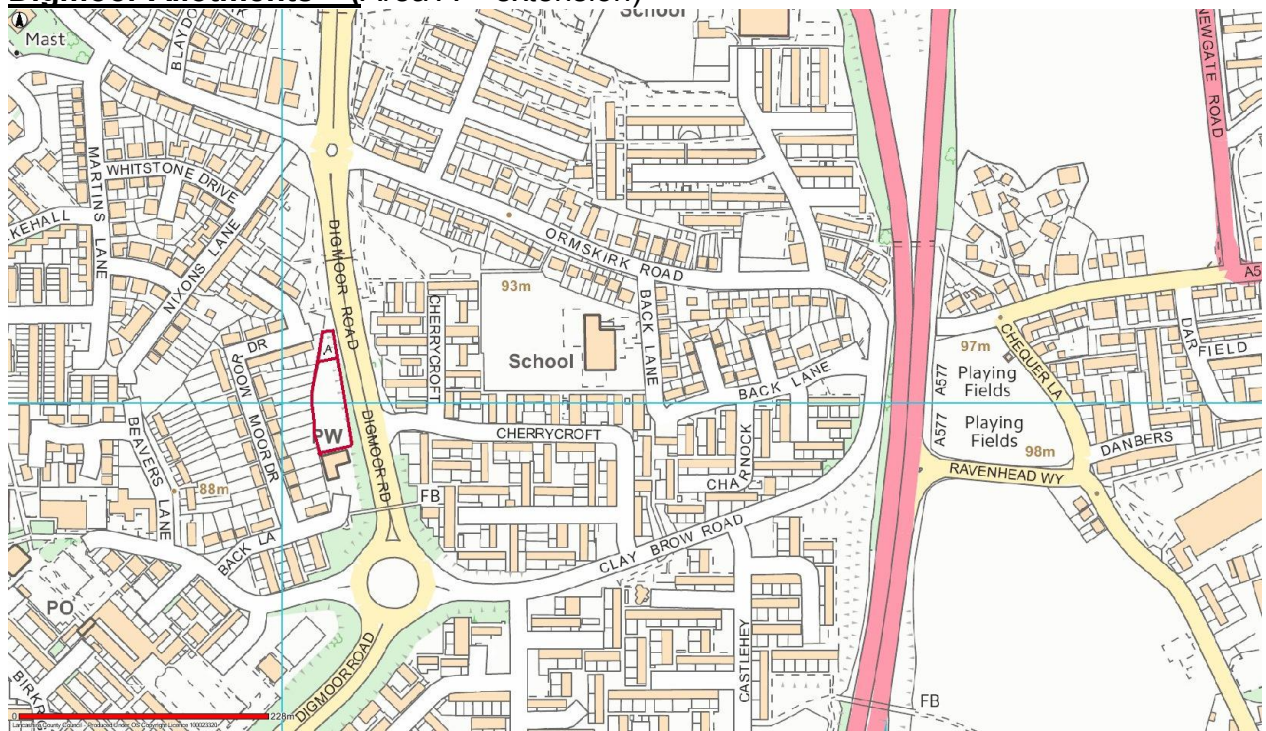
Appendix 2 – New Skelmersdale Allotments: Site Plan

Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment

New Skelmersdale Allotments

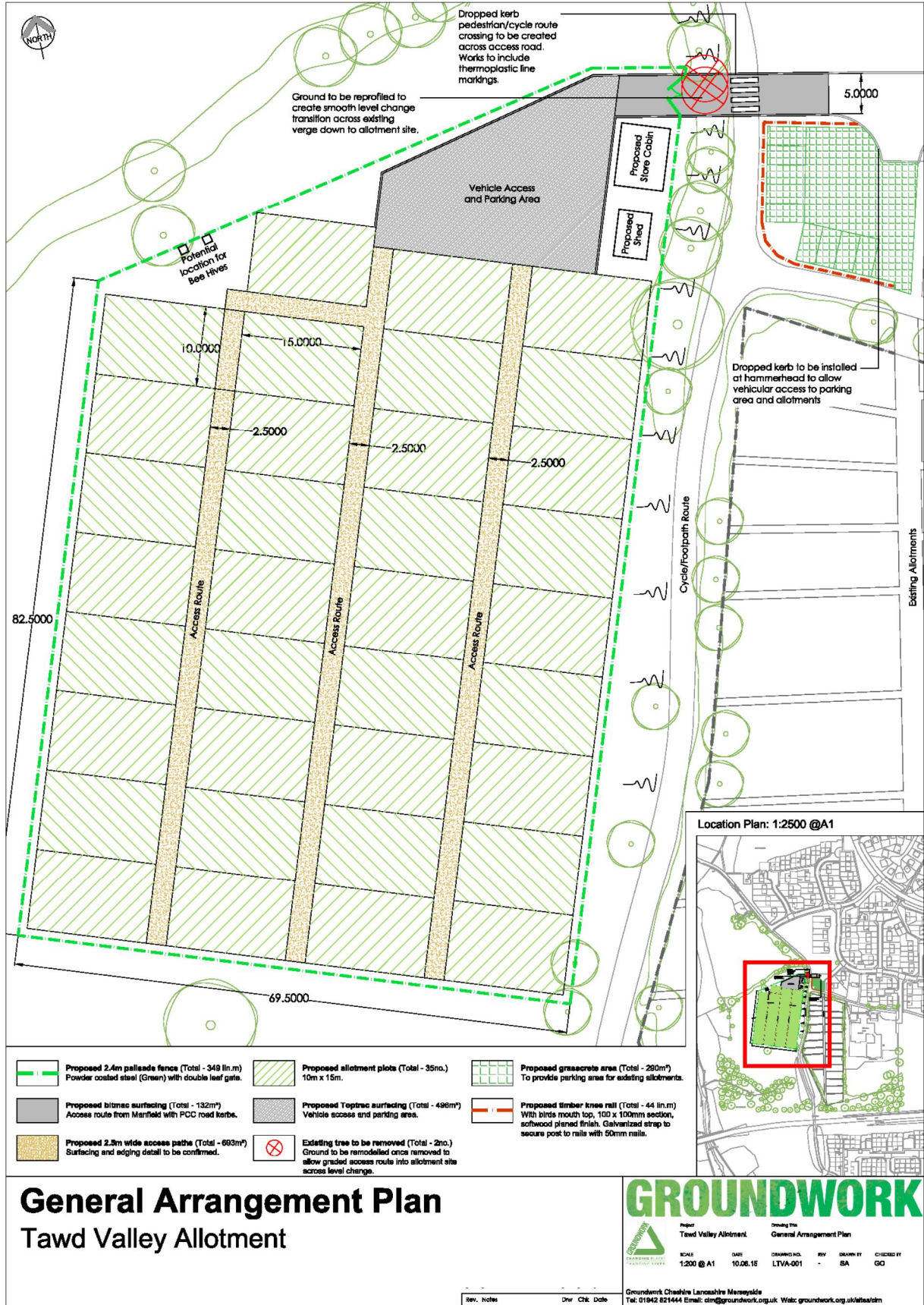


Digmoor Allotments – (Area A – extension)



Appendix 2

New Skelmersdale Allotments – Site Plan



Equality Impact Assessment Form



Directorate: Community Services		Service: Leisure, Cultural & Arts	
Completed by: Stephen Kent		Date: 24/08/15	
Subject Title: New Allotments in Skelmersdale			
1. DESCRIPTION			
Is a policy or strategy being produced or revised:	No	<i>*delete as appropriate</i>	
Is a service being designed, redesigned or cutback:	No		
Is a commissioning plan or contract specification being developed:	No		
Is a budget being set or funding allocated:	No		
Is a programme or project being planned:	Yes		
Are recommendations being presented to senior managers and/or Councillors:	No		
Does the activity contribute to meeting our duties under the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty (Eliminating unlawful discrimination/harassment, advancing equality of opportunity, fostering good relations):	No		
Details of the matter under consideration:	Creation of a new allotment site in Skelmersdale		
<p><i>If you answered Yes to any of the above go straight to Section 3</i></p> <p><i>If you answered No to all the above please complete Section 2</i></p>			
2. RELEVANCE			
Does the work being carried out impact on service users, staff or Councillors (stakeholders):	<i>*delete as appropriate</i>		
If Yes , provide details of how this impacts on service users, staff or Councillors (stakeholders): <i>If you answered Yes go to Section 3</i>			
If you answered No to both Sections 1 and 2 provide details of why there is no impact on these three groups: <i>You do not need to complete the rest of this form.</i>			
3. EVIDENCE COLLECTION			
Who does the work being carried out impact on, i.e. who is/are the stakeholder(s)?	Local allotment societies/Local Community		
If the work being carried out relates to a universal service, who needs or uses it most? (Is there any particular group affected more than others)?	Significant percentage of older generation		

Which of the protected characteristics are most relevant to the work being carried out?	<i>*delete as appropriate</i>
Age	Yes
Gender	No
Disability	No
Race and Culture	No
Sexual Orientation	No
Religion or Belief	No
Gender Reassignment	No
Marriage and Civil Partnership	No
Pregnancy and Maternity	No
4. DATA ANALYSIS	
In relation to the work being carried out, and the service/function in question, who is actually or currently using the service and why?	Local community for growing healthy food and healthy outdoor activity
What will the impact of the work being carried out be on usage/the stakeholders?	Will allow greater use by the local community
What are people's views about the services? Are some customers more satisfied than others, and if so what are the reasons? Can these be affected by the proposals?	Community fully supports allotment provision. Increased provision would be welcomed by the local community
What sources of data including consultation results have you used to analyse the impact of the work being carried out on users/stakeholders with protected characteristics?	Existing allotment waiting lists.
If any further data/consultation is needed and is to be gathered, please specify:	N/A
5. IMPACT OF DECISIONS	
In what way will the changes impact on people with particular protected characteristics (either positively or negatively or in terms of disproportionate impact)?	Better/increased allotment provision would particularly impact positively on the older population
6. CONSIDERING THE IMPACT	
If there is a negative impact what action can be taken to mitigate it? (If it is not possible or desirable to take actions to reduce the impact, explain why this is the case (e.g. legislative or financial drivers etc.).	N/A
What actions do you plan to take to address any other issues above?	On-going monitoring. <i>If no actions are planned state no actions</i>
7. MONITORING AND REVIEWING	
When will this assessment be reviewed and who will review it?	September 2016. Reviewing officer – Stephen Kent