

# RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

DECISION

meeting date: TUESDAY, 9<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2021  
title: COUNCIL ASSETS IN LONGRIDGE  
submitted by: JOHN HEAP – DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES  
principal author: JOHN HEAP – DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

## 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To remind committee of the physical assets in Longridge that are under the control of this committee.
- 1.2 To consider whether it is in the Council's interest to change the use of any of these assets
  - Community Objectives – To sustain a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley
    - To help make peoples lives safer and healthier
    - To protect and enhance the existing environmental quality of our area
  - Corporate Priorities - To ensure best use of council resources

## 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At a meeting of the Councils Longridge Assets Working Group held on 3 February 2021, it was resolved that this committee should receive a report regarding the Longridge assets under it remit.
- 2.2 The dialogue around Longridge assets (as apposed to Council assets elsewhere in the borough) appears to be driven, at least partly, by local concern for the future of Longridge Civic Hall under the stewardship of Longridge Social Enterprise Company (LSEC). However, keen local interest has been shown consistently over time in other assets, such as Kestor Lane Recreation Ground and the disused toilets in Longridge.
- 2.3 Although the Council owns 23 separate sites in Longridge, the meeting of the working group concentrated its discussions on four specific assets, namely:
  - The former public toilets (King St.)
  - The Civic Hall and associated parking
  - The Old Fire Station Youth Centre (Townley Buildings, Bury Lane)
  - The Over – 60s Club (Townley Buildings, Bury Lane)

## 3 ISSUES

- 3.1 Each of those assets was discussed in some detail. Consideration was given to existing uses (outside of lockdown restriction, of course) and concern was expressed that each of them could be put to better use to benefit the local community.
- 3.2 In the course of the discussion, it emerged that in the case of three of the assets, LCC retain an interest in one form or another, with LSEC also retaining an operational interest in the Civic Hall.

- 3.3 So, for the purposes of this meeting, committee is asked to consider the asset from the list that has least complication, which is the disused toilet block on King Street (sometimes referred to as Market Place toilets)
- 3.4 These toilets were closed in 2012 along with 8 other sets of toilets across the borough. Officers have received a number of expressions of interest in this site in the intervening period, but the Council has not, so far, resolved to dispose of it so none of the enquiries has been pursued.
- 3.5 On learning of that history, the working group resolved that this committee should be asked for a view on the future of this disused toilet block.
- 3.6 Clearly, no urgent use of the site in question has emerged since the closure nine years ago, the question facing committee is whether to accept the view of the Longridge Assets Working Group that better use can be made of the site, and make the site available, or to reject that view and retain the site in its present state.

#### 4 RISK ASSESSMENT

##### 4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources – The value of the King St. toilets site is not known currently, but if the site were offered for sale on the open market, given the location of the site and the level of interest shown in the past, it is likely that the Council would receive a sizeable capital receipt.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – There are no technical or legal issues giving cause for concern at the time of writing. One of the reasons for this site being the subject of discussion is the fact that minimal maintenance has been carried out in the recent years and the site is somewhat overgrown by the surrounding shrubbery. Whilst not exactly an eyesore, the site does detract from the street scene.
- Political – There is little doubt that one of a number of sources of pressure for the Council to re-examine its use of assets in Longridge is the Town Council, who are keen to see investment in the town. Although the other sites considered by the working group were constrained by existing leases, this site would be one where committee might consider that a different use could contribute to that shared objective.
- Reputation – The council has responded to local pressure by convincing a working group to examine whether/how better use can be made of Council assets in Longridge. Moving swiftly to reach a view on how best to respond in relation to the King Street site – whatever committee's view might be – would demonstrate to the people of Longridge that this committee continues to listen to their concerns.

#### 5 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

- 5.1 Agree to relinquish control of the King Street toilets site, and
- 5.2 Recommend to Policy and Finance Committee that the site be advertised for sale on the open market.

JOHN HEAP

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to Policy and Finance Committee, January 2021 – Review of Longridge Assets.