

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

12 JULY 2022

CABINET MEMBER RESPONSIBLE FOR FINANCE: COUNCILLOR MALCOLM LONGLEY

Report Title	Asset disposals
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List of Appendices

Appendix A – List of Possible Site for Transfer to Parish Councils

Appendix B – List of Estate Shops Proposed for Transfer

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report seeks authority to dispose of assets, namely various parcels of community land and open spaces to relevant parish councils¹, and various commercial disposals. It also proposes a new delegation to allow swift responses to future opportunities to host battery energy storage facilities (BESFs) on the Council's land.

2. Executive Summary

Overview

2.1 The Council owns a large and varied estate. This calls for ongoing management to ensure it is delivering the best outcomes for the residents of West Northamptonshire, in line with the Council's vision and goals. As a result of ongoing work, a number of areas where disposal of parts of the Council's land would be beneficial have been identified. Most of the proposed disposals outlined below are freehold, but one is leasehold.

Parish council transfers

- 2.2 The Council owns a significant amount of public open space which is within parishes of parish councils. This land is currently managed by the Council. The Council currently pays the maintenance costs for these areas, although in many cases this is charged to residents of those parishes by means of special expenses council tax. Various parish councils have recently approached the Council to seek a transfer of these areas of public open space land to them. Such transfers would be consistent with the principle that such assets would be deliver greater benefit if they were managed within, and by, the communities that they serve.
- 2.3 In Appendix A is a list of assets that were requested for transfer. The respective parish councils have expressed a desire to secure the transfer of the open space from the Council to enable them to manage them for the benefit of the local community.
- 2.4 The report therefore seeks authority from Cabinet to progress the disposal of those assets. These disposals relate to assets where the transaction could be considered to represent a value at less than best consideration, as they are proposed to transfer for a nominal £1.

Northampton estate shops

2.5 On 4th March 2020 the Cabinet of Northampton Borough Council (NBC) authorised the disposal of fifteen community shops. Under this decision, the current tenants were to be

¹ For brevity, 'parish council' is used for all such entities in this report, whether they have the style of town, community, or parish council, or other permitted style.

- afforded an option of first refusal to purchase the freehold provided that each such purchase met the market value stated within an independent 'Red Book' valuation.
- 2.6 As a result of local government reform in Northamptonshire, on 1st April 2021 NBC, Daventry District Council (DDC), South Northamptonshire District Council and Northamptonshire Council (NCC) were abolished, and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) was created as the sole principal local authority for its area.
- 2.7 While NBC had progressed discussions with the respective tenants, none of the proposed sales completed prior to vesting day. One was subsequently approved by WNC Cabinet and has completed. The remainder were put on hold whilst the new Council considered the best approach. Following this, in accordance with the decision reflected in the 2022-23 budget, it is proposed to proceed with disposal of the remaining shops. The budget also expects alternative income-generating investments to be secured, for which investment will be necessary.
- 2.8 This report therefore seeks authority to continue with the freehold disposals of the community shops listed within Appendix B on the terms set out within this report.
 - Booth Meadow proposed battery energy storage facility
- 2.9 The Council owns land at Booth Meadow to the rear off Museum Way, Northampton. Previously forming part of the NCC portfolio, the site is currently used for a variety of uses.
- 2.10 The Council received several unsolicited approaches by market participants who have expressed an interest in using part of the site for a BESF. This would have a number of benefits including supporting renewable generation and resilience of the local electricity grid. The interest is due to the site's location adjacent to a major substation. To progress this interest, the Council was requested to enter a Letter of Authority which would allow the interested parties to secure capacity from the Grid. Entering into such an agreement at this stage would create a "first come first served" position which would not be conducive to obtaining the highest value for the Council.
- 2.11 Given the capital costs involved in creating a BESF facility, operators often look for long term lease commitment. It is currently envisaged that the lease required at Booth Meadow House would be in the order of 40 years should command a significant rental income. The value and term likely to be involved mean that a Cabinet decision is required.
- 2.12 It is also intended to review other sites where similar opportunities may arise. Given the potential for competition with other landowners, to enable both these sites identified to be pursued swiftly it is proposed that the Assistant Director Assets & Environment be authorised, in consultation with relevant officers and Members, to agree similar leases.

Land off A45 London Road, Daventry

- 2.13 The Council holds the freehold interest in approximately 0.7 ha (1.8 acres) of low-grade agricultural land located off the A45 London Road Daventry. It is approximately one mile from Daventry town centre. This site forms part of the EC9 Daventry Southeast Gateway being a much larger site of circa 33.8 ha (16.7 acres) which was allocated by the Daventry District Settlements and Countryside Local Plan (Part 2) in February 2020. This Local Plan policy is intended facilitate economic development and regeneration for Daventry and enhance employment opportunities through the provision of business uses up to 10,000m² per unit.
- 2.14 Ownership of most of the site is held by four landowners who have employed a local agent to market it. These have worked collaboratively, originally with DDC, and now WNC, to promote and actively market the combined landholding. The Council's interest is referenced in the marketing whilst retaining its distinction from the consortium. However, as its land is an integral part of any development it has been agreed that the consideration from the disposal of the complete site would be apportioned based on gross equalisation. This is considered to fairly reflect the value of each landowner's part in the whole.
- 2.15 The site has been actively marketed. A large number of offers were received, with the agent recommending seven developers for shortlisting. These have been chosen, primarily, as their scheme aligns with the Local Plan and represents the best financial return available. The selection process has not yet been concluded. However, a decision is needed from Cabinet at this stage to approve the disposal of land as the Council needs to be able to react to the process moving forward and meet the delivery timescales of the other landowners.

Land off Warwick Street, Daventry

- 2.16 The Council owns the freehold of land on Warwick Street in Daventry. The land was held by Daventry District Council (DDC) as part of its Town Centre Vision (TCV) redevelopment aspirations. The land was considered suitable for a range of uses including residential and was at one point subject to an Agreement for Lease between the prospective master developer (Henry Boot Developments Limited, itself under a development agreement with DDC) and McCarthy Stone, which specialises in retirement apartments. However, due to changes in the economy the overarching development agreement was terminated by agreement and the agreement with McCarthy Stone allowed to expire. Subsequently the site has become overgrown and currently offers little for the town in the way of amenity.
- 2.17 The Council has now received an unsolicited approach from McCarthy Stone. It wishes to acquire the Council's land measuring circa 0.33 Ha (0.74 acre) and as shown in more detail in the plan below. McCarthy Stone is proposing to develop a retirement living

development scheme on the site, comprising a mix of one and two bedroom units, together with associated communal areas and parking.

- 2.18 The unconditional offer of £700,000 that has been put forward by McCarthy Stone is at a value where it is considered unlikely that another market participant may bid higher. This is however being evaluated through an independent Red Book valuation undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced RICS Registered Valuer.
- 2.19 This report therefore seeks authority from Cabinet to proceed with the disposal off market to McCarthy Stone, substantiated by the independent RICS Red Book valuation.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that authority is given to the Assistant Director of Assets & Environment to:
- 3.1.1 Transfer the assets listed within Appendix A to the relevant parish councils on the basis set out in the report.
- 3.1.2 Consider, in consultation with the Finance Portfolio Holder and the Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste Portfolio Holder, any objections to disposals of open space following publication of the intention to dispose required by Section 123(2A) of the Local Government Act 1972 and either proceed with each affected disposal or cease that disposal.
- 3.1.3 Offer the freehold of each shop listed in Appendix B for transfer to the current tenant at the price established by a current Red Book valuation commissioned by the Council from an independent consultant, and if that offer is accepted to proceed with the disposal. Any disposal is to contain a restrictive covenant (or similar) to ensure that the ground floor of each property currently used for retail remains in commercial use.
- 3.1.4 Following the completion of a 'best and final' offer process, negotiate and agree terms for a lease and agreement for lease for a battery energy storage facility (BESF) on the Council's land at Booth Meadow, Northampton as set out in the report, and enter into any documentation required to implement this.
- 3.1.5 In consultation with the Finance Portfolio Holder agree terms for the disposal of land off the A45 London Road, Daventry as set out in the report, and enter into any documentation required to implement this.
- 3.1.6 Dispose off-market the land off Warwick Street, Daventry as set out in the report.
- 3.2 It is further recommended that:
- 3.2.1 It is noted that investment will be required to replace the income provided by the estate shops in accordance with budget item 2223-B6-019.
- 3.2.2 The Assistant Director Assets & Environment is authorised, in consultation with the Executive Director Finance, Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer, and

- the Finance Portfolio Holder, to authorise and agree terms for lettings for BESFs similar to those proposed for Booth Meadow, and that the Constitution be amended accordingly.
- 3.2.3 Cabinet acknowledges the competitive bidding process for the land off the A45 London Road, Daventry that has been undertaken by the other landowners is suitable to achieve best consideration from the disposal.

4. Reason for Recommendations

Overview

4.1 It is sensible for the Council to review its estate and ensure it delivers the best overall value, taking policy and financial considerations together, to the residents of West Northamptonshire.

Parish council transfers

- 4.2 The Council has received several requests from parish councils to transfer various parcels of public open space useful to their local communities from the Council to them.
- 4.3 It is considered that such assets are of purely local benefit and as such are better managed by those closer to them.
- 4.4 Strategic interests would be protected by the Council having retain rights to re-acquire land or rights over land for £1 if it was required for infrastructure or if the parish council wished to dispose of it.
- 4.5 As these transfers are proposed to be for the sum of £1, the disposals would be at less than best consideration. This is justified by the community benefits from local control and management of the sites, which would be protected by restrictions on future use.

Northampton Estate shops

- 4.6 To meet the Council's obligation not to dispose of freeholds at less than the best consideration reasonably obtainable.
- 4.7 Whilst respecting 4.6, to maximise the opportunity for existing tenants to purchase shops they currently operate.
- 4.8 To seek to protect the commercial function of these shops given its importance to the local communities they serve.

Booth Meadow Proposed BESF and other Potential BESFs

4.9 To secure the best financial return for the Council from the Booth Meadow BESF proposal.

- 4.10 To maximise the opportunity to secure BESF at other locations within the Councils portfolio.
- 4.11 To maximise the opportunity for the delivery of a BESF at Booth Meadow and in other locations, in the interests of sustainability, carbon reduction, and removing barriers to development from constraints in electricity supply.

Land off A45 London Road, Daventry

- 4.12 The land is surplus to requirements and was being held with longer term development aspirations in mind. The site has been actively marketed jointly with the other associated landowners. The disposal would fulfil the objectives of good estate management.
- 4.13 The redevelopment of the Site would see a key strategic area of Daventry developed which would align with the proposed West Northamptonshire Spatial Vision, Strategic Plan Objective 13: Economic Advantage.
- 4.14 To generate a capital receipt for the Council in the short term, which would be difficult to obtain if it were not included as part of the larger development opportunity.
- 4.15 To comply with the obligations on the Council to obtain the best consideration reasonably obtainable in a freehold land disposal.

Land off Warwick Street, Daventry

- 4.16 The land is no longer required by the Council and its disposal would fulfil the objectives for which it was originally acquired and held. The disposal would fulfil the objectives of good estate management, and provide a means for the land to be put to beneficial use
- 4.17 To generate a capital receipt in the short term.
- 4.18 To comply with the obligation on the Council to obtain the best consideration reasonably obtainable in a freehold land disposal.
- 4.19 To support the strategy set out in the Daventry Town Centre Vision 2035.

5. Report Background

Overview

5.1 The Council owns a large and varied estate. This calls for ongoing management to ensure it is delivering the best outcomes for the residents of West Northamptonshire, in line with the Council's vision and goals. As a result of ongoing work, a number of areas

where disposal of parts of the Council's land would be beneficial have been identified. Most of the proposed disposals outlined below are freehold, but one is leasehold.

Parish council transfers

- 5.2 West Northamptonshire Council is the freeholder of a large amount of land within the communities which is held for local social, recreational, and community uses.
- 5.3 Both Northampton Borough Council (NBC) and Daventry District Council (DDC), and latterly WNC itself, have concluded that such assets tend to be more suitable for ownership and management by the communities that they serve. Both NBC and DDC transferred some such assets to parish councils. In July 2021 WNC Cabinet approved a further series of transfers, which are underway. This has tended to be a slow process because of the nature of the land and the legal questions raised about aspects of title.
- 5.4 There are a number of further requests for transfers from parish councils, either made before vesting day or after it. Included within the list of proposed assets to transfer (Appendix A) are several assets where requests for transfer were made prior to vesting day which for various reasons it was not possible for WNC to previously consider their suitability for transfer. The parish councils concerned were invited to refresh their interest in the assets within their parish in early 2022 and additional sites were identified.
- 5.5 The proposed transfers have been discussed with relevant internal stakeholders. No reasons to prevent the transfer of these assets to the parish councils where identified. These transfers are considered likely to have a positive effect on the communities they serve. Through ownership, the relevant parish councils would be able to proactively manage the social and recreational use of these sites, and to invest in them, to maximise the benefit to the community.
- 5.6 Prior to any transfer each site would be examined with the relevant parish council to ensure there is clarity over responsibilities, for example over boundary features. It is possible that following such examination a parish council may withdraw its interest, in which case the transfer process would cease.
- 5.7 Of course, it is important that the wider strategic interests of West Northamptonshire continue to be protected, and that the land is used for the intended purposes.
- 5.8 It should also be noted that Council has an environmental services contract inherited from NBC which runs until June 2028. All the assets listed with Appendix A are areas of land which the Council maintains through this contract.
- 5.9 Taking these issues into account the proposed terms of transfers are as follows:

- 5.9.1 That WNC will continue to provide grass cutting and services where there are existing contracts until those contracts come to an end or WNC and the parish council otherwise agree, but there after the parish council will assume this responsibility (unless something else is agreed in the meantime).
- 5.9.2 The parish councils will take on all other responsibilities for the land on completion.
- 5.9.3 Drawing on previous experience at NBC and DDC:
 - a) There would be a restriction on title in favour of WNC limiting the use of the land to suitable social, recreational and community purposes (as applicable in each case).
 - b) WNC would have a right of pre-emption should the parish council wish to dispose of the land or no longer require the land for its permitted use.
 - c) WNC would have the right to acquire land, or rights over land, reasonably needed for the provision of infrastructure. This right may be limited or excluded where justified, for example where a building was present on the relevant land.
- 5.9.4 The transfers would complete for a nominal fee of £1, again in line with the previous transfers.
- 5.9.5 Each party would bear their own professional fees including legal and estates costs.
 - Northampton estate shops
- 5.10 NBC had substantial property holdings that had been acquired over many years. These holdings included several community shops which were developed as part of housing development schemes mostly from the 1960s onwards. The main purpose for these community shops is to serve, and thus be of benefit, to the local communities in which they are situated.
- 5.11 On 4th March 2020 NBC Cabinet considered a report entitled in the Cabinet Report entitled Disposal of Community Centre Shops and agreed to dispose of several community shops to the existing tenants. In June 2020, NBC commissioned a Red Book valuation of the assets and commenced negotiations with the tenants or their appointed professional advisors. While discussions progressed, no offers were received which met the assessed market value of the properties. No sales were therefore completed prior to vesting day.
- 5.12 Following vesting day, discussions continued on several assets, most notably on the Hill Shop at Hunsbury Hill which was the subject of a WNC Cabinet decision on 13th July 2021, following a report entitled Various Freehold and Leasehold Assets Disposals. The sale of this property has now completed. A decision was made to pause any disposals while the Council reviewed its approach and budgetary position. Following the review, the disposal of the community shops was considered by the Capital and Assets Board (CAB), which

concluded that the sales programme should continue. This is reflected in the Council's 2022-23 budget (item 2223-B4-002), on the basis that alternative income-generating assets should be secured in their place (item 2223-B6-019).

5.13 Formal Cabinet approval is therefore sought to proceed with the disposals.

Booth Meadow proposed battery energy storage facility

- 5.14 The Council owns freehold land adjacent to Booth Meadow House, Northampton which amounts to approximately 1.75 Ha (4.3 acres) and is open unused ground at present. The wider site is currently used by as:
 - An office and store for the Library Service (Main Building).
 - Vehicle storage and associated welfare facilities for KierWSP which currently manages the Council's home to school transport service.
 - Overnight storage and associated welfare facilities for UNO Buses.
 - General storage for surplus mobile classrooms and other items.
- 5.15 The Council has received several unsolicited approaches from BESF operators who identified land at Booth Meadow House as a suitable BESF site given its proximity to local electricity infrastructure, and more specifically an electricity substation that has capacity which could be utilised for such a proposal.
- 5.16 BESF provide a way to ensure that the electricity network is resilient at time of significant demand. In essence, the BESF operator will purchase electricity when supply is at its cheapest (generally at night) and then sell it back to the grid when demanded. The surplus created between the purchase rate and the sales rate enables the operator to meet its costs and also pay the landowner (in this case the Council) a rent.
- 5.17 Such a facility provides additional resilience to the electricity network, which is particularly helpful in managing intermittent sources of supply such as wind, or the differences between steady baseload supply such as nuclear against variations in demand. Thus, it should help reduce any barriers to development in the area from electricity supply constraints, as well as supporting the transition to a low-carbon electricity grid.
- 5.18 The equipment is expected to be located within 20ft (6m) shipping containers and placed on shallow concrete slabs. These units would be approximately 2.9 meters in height. They would be screened by new vegetation installed by the operator. Typically, there is a 7m screen of shrub and tree planting which includes a diverse mix of native species. It is estimated that the site could enable 50MWhr of storage using approximately 0.40Ha (1.0 acre) of land. This is roughly equivalent to powering 6,000 homes for a day.

- 5.19 To move the process forward, an operator needs to apply for formal grid capacity to assess connection costs and to undertake a viability study. This requires a landlord consent letter to be obtained. Once an application is made, the grid capacity is allocated to the operator, meaning that this is a "first come, first served" process.
- 5.20 While a letter of consent would not create a contractual obligation for the Council to proceed with any transaction, the Council needs to be able to better understand the financial proposals from each party before a consent letter should be provided. Giving consent to one operator will essentially exclude the others (due to the grid allocation) from progressing a proposal for the site.
- 5.21 It is likely that once an operator has completed its initial viability it would seek to enter into an agreement to cover the period of planning and implementation. Once complete, it would likely require a lease with a term of around 40 years. The annual rental could be substantial but is not stated in this, open, report to avoid prejudicing the competitive process.
- 5.22 In practice the Council would want to secure its own position, so it is proposed that it would enter into an agreement to lease with the operator which provides the best financial proposition. This would bind the Council to provide the letter of consent following which the operator would be bound to apply for the grid capacity, planning permission and any other necessary consents. If these were secured the operator would then be required to take the lease and implement the scheme.

Other potential BESF sites

- 5.23 The attractiveness of any site as a BESF will depend on its proximity to suitable electricity infrastructure which has surplus capacity. As capacity is allocated on an application basis, any landowner within the vicinity of that infrastructure could look at the creation of a BESF on their site. Capacity is allocated on a first come first served basis, and as such it is important that the Council can react quickly to any identified opportunities. (In the case of Booth Meadow, the Council is the only landowner with suitable land, so this issue did not arise.)
- 5.24 It is therefore proposed that the Council implements a process to enable it to respond quickly to any future BESF opportunities. The delegation recommended would support this process, so enabling the Council to maximise any future opportunities and limit the impact of competition from neighbouring landowners who may also be able to support such a facility.
- 5.25 It should be noted that in such cases the need to compete against other potential sites may mean it is not possible to run a competitive process for providers, or only an abbreviated process, so as to avoid losing the entire opportunity to host a BESF on the Council's land.

Land off A45 London Road, Daventry

- 5.26 The Council holds the freehold interest in approximately 0.7 ha (1.8 acres) of low-grade agricultural land located off the A45 London Road Daventry. It is approximately one mile from Daventry town centre. This site forms part of the EC9 Daventry South East Gateway being a much larger site of circa 33.8 ha (16.7 acres) which was allocated by the Daventry District Settlements and Countryside Local Plan (Part 2) in February 2020. This Local Plan is intended facilitate economic development and regeneration for Daventry and enhance the employment opportunities through the provision of what where then described as B1 (b, c), B2 or B8 uses (broadly, manufacturing, storage, and distribution), or uses ancillary thereto, up to 10,000m² per unit.
- 5.27 Ownership of most of the site (excluding the Landmark Hotel and the Autogreen vehicle recycling site, and the Council's land) is held by four landowners who have employed a local agent to market it. These have worked collaboratively, originally with DDC, and now WNC to promote the site. The Council's interest is referenced in the marketing whilst retaining its distinction from the consortium.
- 5.28 As the Council's land is an integral part of any development it has been agreed that the consideration from the disposal of the complete site would be apportioned based on gross equalisation. This means that the value for the whole site is divided by the total area and then multiplied by the area of each landowner's land to calculate the value it is to receive. This allows for the fact that within any development some land is used for purposes not directly generating income e.g., roads or landscaping but this is still essential for the overall scheme to work. In this case the Daventry Wood site was excluded from equalisation as it is not developable. This approach is considered to fairly reflect the value of each landowner's part in the whole, including the value of the Council's land.
- 5.29 Following marketing of the site the deadline for offers concluded on 29 March 2022. This resulted 17 offers being submitted ranging from £10,251,000 to £35,100,000 on either a conditional or unconditional basis. Discussions are ongoing regarding the details for the highest offer received. However, the process followed to date is in line with the Council's obligations to achieve the best consideration reasonably obtainable.
- 5.30 The landowners are looking to conclude a sale of the site as soon as practicably possible, and as such the Council will need to be able to react to their, potentially tight, timescales. The recommendations within this report would allow the Council to do this, helping to ensure that it is able to maximise the value of its asset.

Land off Warwick Street, Daventry

5.31 The Council owns freehold land adjacent to Warwick Street, Daventry which amounts to approximately 0.33 Ha (0.74 acre) being an unutilised, overgrown area of land. It was

- previously the site of the Daventry Vauxhall garage. It was previously held by DDC for redevelopment and is identified in the Daventry Town Centre Vision 2035 for a residential block, designed to match the scale of buildings opposite.
- 5.32 The prospective purchaser, McCarthy Stone, is a leading developer and manager of retirement communities, with a significant market share. McCarthy Stone buys land and then builds, sells, and manages high-quality retirement developments. They have built and sold more than 58,000 properties across more than 1,300 retirement developments since 1977. McCarthy Stone have developed extensively in Northamptonshire with schemes in Northampton including Wardington and Westonia Court. The offer is made on the basis McCarthy Stone does not require any external funding.
- 5.33 While the site is one that the Council would be seeking to bring forward for development in the short term, it is not currently actively marketing the site. McCarthy Stone had previously considered the site and had entered into an agreement for lease with DDC's nominated town centre developer (Henry Boot Developments Limited). Due to changes in the economy the overarching development agreement was terminated by agreement and the agreement with McCarthy Stone allowed to expire. However, due to this history McCarthy Stone does have a pre-existing knowledge of the site and any constraints that may exist.
- 5.34 McCarthy Stone has now submitted a direct unconditional offer for the freehold interest in the site. The value of this offer (£700k) is deemed to be at a level that is more than the value that the Council could reasonably achieve should the land have been released to the market.
- 5.35 The disposal would be subject to a restriction limiting the use of the land to that of McCarthy Stone Retirement Living apartments. This restriction would only remain until the development was complete and first residential unit brought into use. In the event of a suitable planning application being refused and appeal being unsuccessful and with the consent of the Council, acting reasonably, the restriction would cease to be in force in order not to sterilise the land for future development.
- 5.36 In order to confirm the best considerations an independent RICS Red Book Valuation has been commissioned. The report confirmed that in its current condition without the benefit of planning consent for redevelopment the Land has a value of £555,000. If it is assumed planning permission had been granted for the intended use the value would rise to £740,000. However, there are significant costs and time associated with the obtaining a planning permission, which coupled with the current economic outlook arguably represent a material degree of risk. Nor is the Council well-placed to apply for planning permission and then sell the site, since it does not know in sufficient detail what bidders might wish to construct. Consequently, the offer received is above market value and represents the best consideration reasonably obtainable.

6. Issues and Choices

6.1 The Council has the following options.

Parish council transfers

- 6.2 (1) Retain the land. This is clearly possible, but would not offer the opportunity to increase community ownership and control, with the benefits this brings.
- 6.3 (2) Dispose of the land without controls. This is also possible, and should secure the community benefits sought. It may, however, lead to the loss of open space and other community assets. It may also prevent WNC from securing the interests of West Northamptonshire more widely.
- 6.4 (3) Dispose of the land with the proposed controls. This appears to achieve the best overall mix of benefits, whilst mitigating the risks involved.

Northampton estate shops

- 6.5 (1) Retain the properties. No further specific actions would be required. This would doubtless cause some dissatisfaction from the tenants. It would also be contrary to the expectations of the 2022-23 budget.
- (2) Dispose of the properties to existing tenants at whatever prices can be achieved. This may well involve disposals at under value. These may not be achievable in light of the Council's legal obligations (see legal implications) and would seem hard to justify. Other tenants would not receive similar benefits, and other retailers would not receive any benefit. The Council's taxpayers would have, in effect, have subsidised a few private individuals.
- 6.7 (3) Disposal of the properties on the open market. This would maximise the chance of quick and market value disposals. However, it would decrease the chances of consolidating ownership and occupation.
- 6.8 (4) Disposal of properties to current tenants at market values. This is the proposed course of action and appears to best balance the desire to offer existing tenants the chance to invest in their own businesses with the Council's duties to its wider residents.
- 6.9 The Council also has choices about what to do with the disposal receipt. The decision expected by the budget is that the receipts would be ring-fenced for re-investment to secure an alternative income. The other option would, clearly, be to not do that, but (for example) to reduce future capital borrowing requirements. Given the budget position and the benefit from income generation ring-fencing is recommended.

Booth Meadow proposed battery energy storage facility

- 6.10 (1) Do nothing. The land could continue to be used for storage of school mobile classroom and other ancillary items. While the land has historically been well utilised for this purpose, the need has significantly reduced and as such this is unlikely to be required. The Council would not also receive any income from the site and would retain the maintenance obligations.
- 6.11 (2) Apply for planning permission for conventional development and seek to sell the land with the benefit of a permission. This is something that has been considered in the past. However conventional development is difficult in this location. In addition, development of part is likely to be complicated because of the other occupiers of the site.
- 6.12 (3) Apply for planning permission and electricity network access for a BES facility itself. Whilst this is theoretically possible the Council does not have expertise in this area, and would need to choose to make the investments required if a return was to be obtained. This approach may therefore delay or prevent a beneficial use being made of the land.
- 6.13 (4) Select one of the operators to pursue the necessary permissions and if successful build and operate a BES facility. This option should deliver the facility relatively quickly and with minimal requirement for Council engagement.
- 6.14 There are sub-options for option 4 relating to the way the operator is selected. However, it is considered that the approach identified above is most likely to result in the best financial return to the Council.
- 6.15 The area of land that is proposed to be used at Booth Meadow House is currently undeveloped grass land utilised for the storage of surplus school mobile classrooms and other associated items. Demand for this use is low. Other than the storage use, the proposed BSEF should not have any impact on the other users of the site. While the proposal may restrict the continued use of the site for storage, and the Council could decide not to enter into any agreement on that basis, the benefits derived through the rental income are considered to outweigh loss of provision.
- 6.16 By approving option 4 the Council should be able to generate a significant level of income from an area of the Booth Meadow House site that is currently a maintenance liability. Such an approach would therefore support the effective use of the Council's assets, maximising the value of its assets and support the creation of a sustainable and stable electrical network.

Other potential BESF sites

6.17 As outlined above, the surplus capacity available at any given sub-station is allocated on a first come first served basis. These may well be in areas where there are multiple

landowners and therefore competitors to host a BESF. To maximise these opportunities, the Council needs to be able to react swiftly to future requests and ensure that it is in a position to commit to proposals quickly so as not to lose out to proposed schemes on land owned by others. The recommendations as set out in this report would support this.

Land off A45 London Road, Daventry

- 6.18 (1) Do nothing at this time At present the Council's land offers little benefit either from a financial or economic perspective to the Council. It is currently held on a tenancy at will to an adjoining landowner (one of the other landowners in the consortium) at a peppercorn fee for storage. Therefore, its future even for this use is limited should development proceed.
- 6.19 (2) Agree to the proposed disposal If the Council's interest was included as part of the larger development, its disposal would assist in the realisation of a capital receipt likely to be more than what could be realised if the land was disposed in isolation. In addition to obtaining a significant capital receipt the inclusion of the Council's land would assist and facilitate the development of one of strategic sites in area which would align with one of the objectives of the Council as set out in the Settlements & Countryside Local Plan. The development would also result in inward investment, job creation and economic growth.
- 6.20 It is therefore concluded that proceeding with a disposal alongside the landowner consortium (option 2) represents the best option for the Council.

Land off Warwick Street, Daventry

- 6.21 (1) Do nothing. The Council could continue to hold the site within its asset base in its current use. However, this offers no amenity value to the town centre or the Council's objectives and would be a continuing management liability. Furthermore, this approach would be contrary to principals of good asset management where a redundant asset should be disposed to generate a capital receipt that the Council can deploy for other purposes.
- 6.22 (2) Market the site for development. While it is likely that there will be interest from the wider market, the offer that has been put forward by McCarthy Stone is considered to exceed the value that could reasonably be expected from an open market disposal. The McCarthy Stone offer is unconditional but their agents where clear that if the Council proceeded to market, the offer received would be resubmitted but would be conditional on planning permission being secured. Thus, a certain receipt would be substituted for an uncertain, and potentially lower, one. It is not possible for the Council to be absolutely certain that a competitive bidding process would not result in a higher value being obtained, but it appears unlikely.

- 6.23 (3) Proceed with the unconditional offer received as it is considered to represent best consideration and would be supported by the independent Red Book valuation. The proposal is also considered to align with the strategic aims of the Council.
- 6.24 On balance the option to proceed with the disposal to McCarthy Stone (option 3) is recommended. This would deliver on a number of useful outcomes and has no obvious disadvantages.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

Resources and Financial

Parish council transfers

- 7.1 The community facilities are held on the Councils asset register with a nominal capital value, reflecting the existing use. Maintenance costs are generally charges to special expenses for the parish concerned. It is not therefore envisaged that this proposal would have a significant adverse financial impact on WNC
- 7.2 As highlighted previously in this report, the proposed transfer of these properties is proposed to be subject to the continued use of the asset for community purposes. The transfers of these assets would be at a nil or nominal value to reflect this use. As noted above, this would represent a disposal at less than best consideration. This is deemed appropriate on the basis that the disposals contribute to the promotion or improvement of environmental and social welling-being in the areas where the assets are situated.
- 7.3 It is proposed that each party will pay their own professional fees, which include legal and estates costs.

Northampton estate shops

- 7.4 In general, disposal of land and buildings reduces the Council's liabilities and costs. In some cases, as would apply here, such a disposal would also reduce the level of income that the Council receives.
- 7.5 The current revenue implications of each proposed disposal are given in the table below

Shop	Current Rent, £ pa
Unit 1 Blackthorn Bridge Court	10,000
Unit 2/3 Blackthorn Bridge Court	44,000
Ecton Brook Road Post Office	7,500
Ecton Brook Road Supermarket	12,000
Olden Road Supermarket (Premier)	15,400

Shop	Current Rent, £ pa
Unit 2 Walledwell Court	10,350
Unit 3 Walledwell Court	12,500
Unit 1 Lings Local Centre	8,500
Unit 2 & 3 Lings Local Centre	17,500
Unit 1 Farmhill Road	10,250
Unit 2 Farmhill Road	11,000
Unit 1 Prentice Court	13,100
Unit 2 Prentice Court	7,500
Total	179,600

- 7.5.1 The properties are generally significantly overdue for rent reviews or lease renewals, at which the rent would be assessed. As such, the total market rent is likely to be significantly higher than the total given above. These rent reviews and lease renewals are currently being progressed, as this is useful in establishing the true market value for sales, or if any shops end up being retained is necessary.
- 7.5.2 The original valuation report which was undertaken in 2020 indicated that the collective value of the community shops listed above was £3,462,500. Given the length of time that has passed since this original valuation was obtained, a new valuation of each shop is needed.
- 7.5.3 The budget expects (item 2223-B6-019) that alternative income-generating assets are developed or acquired. This would obviously have a cost. There is also likely to be some delay between receipts being received and new sources of income coming on stream.
 - Booth Meadow proposed battery energy storage facility
- 7.6 It is envisaged that each party will be responsible for meeting its own legal costs. Where possible, the Council would seek to recover these costs, or a proportion of them, from the operator.
- 7.7 As stated earlier in this report, the land which is proposed to be used for the BESF is used by the Council for storage, does not generate any income, and is a maintenance burden on the Council. By agreeing to the proposal, the Council may be able to generate a significant rental income. While this will be the subject of a competitive bidding process, and dependant on allocated capacity, the rental income should be significant.
- 7.8 The arrangement would make a valuable contribution to Savings and Efficiencies item 2223-B6-019, which calls for increased income from the Council's property of £144k pa.

Other Potential BESF sites

7.9 The proposals should maximise the opportunities to make a financial return from the Council's assets. The amounts involved cannot be stated at this stage.

Land off A45 London Road, Daventry

- 7.10 The expected consideration to the Council is being confirmed. However, based on the offers tendered the consideration received would be significantly more than the current formal asset value.
- 7.11 Any transfer of legal title would be addressed by the Council's own legal services team working with legal representatives for the other stakeholders. It is expected that each party would bear its own costs.

Land off Warwick Street, Daventry

- 7.12 Each party would bear its own costs, but the vendor would pay a contribution of up to £3k towards the Council's legal costs.
- 7.13 The disposal of the land would result an in-year capital receipt of £700,000.

Legal

General

- 7.14 The Council has the power to disposal of the land outlined in this report, except for the land at Warwick Street, Daventry (on which see the specific section below) under section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 (the '1972 Act'). This provides that the Council in exercising its power is free to dispose of its land as it may determine subject to a duty (under sub-section 2) to dispose of it for the best consideration reasonably obtainable unless the Secretary of State otherwise consents, and subject to further duties in relation to disposal of open space (see below).
- 7.15 The Secretary of State has issued the General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 (the 'General Consent'), which permits land disposals at less than best consideration that can be reasonably obtained where the Council considers that a disposal at less than best consideration will help it to secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, social, or environmental well-being of its area. This is subject to the under-value not exceeding £2 million. Under-values above £2m require specific consent.
- 7.16 Any disposal of land at less the best consideration is also a form of subsidy. The giving of subsidy is subject to restrictions.

- 7.17 Apart from the parish council transfers, all the proposed disposals are designed to be at full commercial value. Accordingly, neither the Section 123(2) nor the subsidy control provisions should be of concern in those cases.
- 7.18 Where the disposal of open space is concerned, section 123(2A) of the 1972 Act requires the Council to advertise its intention to dispose of open space in a local newspaper for two consecutive weeks, to allow a reasonable period for representations from the public to be made to the Council, and to consider any objections arising. This procedure is required to be followed in advance of any final decision to dispose of the open space land.

Parish council transfers

- 7.19 The land proposed to be transferred to parish councils is open space. Accordingly, the requirements of section 123(2A) of the 1972 Act will apply. The report contains proposals to ensure that these are complied with.
- 7.20 The disposals would also be under-value. It is considered that, in each case, the disposal would contribute to the promotion of improvement of environmental and social well-being in the area and therefore is authorised by the General Consent. The land values would be within the £2 million limit applying to such disposals.
- 7.21 It is considered that under-value transfers to parish councils, being transfers between public bodies and not involved in commercial business, would not breach any subsidy control requirements.

Northampton estate shops

- 7.22 It is proposed to meet the Council's duty to secure the best consideration reasonably obtainable by means of a 'Red Book' valuation.
- 7.23 As noted in 6.6, if the Council proposed to dispose of the shops at less than the best consideration reasonably obtainable this would require the Secretary of State's consent, potentially by means of the General Consent. Should the Council wish to do this, it would need to be satisfied that the terms of the General Consent were met and the decision was otherwise justified. As this course of action is not recommended these issues are not explored further here.
- 7.24 For a restrictive covenant to be enforceable the party seeking to enforce such a covenant must have retained land which is (a) sufficiently definable (b) capable of being benefited by the covenant at the time it was imposed and (c) continue to benefit from the covenant at the time enforcement is sought. The community centre shops all form part of larger areas of land which are at present retained by the Council. On that basis the restrictive covenant proposed is both able to bind successive owners or occupiers and is capable at present of being enforced by the Council.

- 7.25 However, under section 84 of the Law of Property Act 1925 a person with an interest in freehold land subject to a restrictive covenant can apply to the Upper Tribunal (Lands Chamber) (the 'UT') for a restrictive covenant to be discharged or modified. There are a number of grounds on which a restrictive covenant can be released or modified. These are, in summary:
- 7.25.1 Changes in the character of the property or the neighbourhood or other circumstances of the case which the UT may deem material, the restriction ought to be deemed obsolete.
- 7.25.2 The covenant either (a) does not secure to persons entitled to the benefit of it any practical benefits, or (b) is contrary to the public interest, and (in either case) money will be an adequate compensation for discharge or modification of the covenant and the continued existence of the restrictive covenant would impede some reasonable user of the land.
- 7.25.3 That the persons entitled to the benefit of the restriction have agreed, either expressly or by implication, by their acts or omissions, to the same being discharged or modified.
- 7.25.4 The proposed discharge or modification would not injure the persons entitled to the benefit of the restriction.
- 7.26 The implications of these matters are discussed further under Risks.

Booth Meadow proposed battery energy storage facility

7.37 It is proposed (as per 3.1.4) that there is a best and final offers process. Whilst the Council cannot necessarily refuse an offer received outside of such a process it should help achieve the highest value and thus achieve the best consideration reasonably obtainable.

Other potential BESF sites

7.38 The process proposed is designed to achieve the best consideration reasonably obtainable in circumstances where the Council may be competing with other landowners. In such a case a suitable record will need to be kept demonstrating the decision-making logic.

Land off A45 London Road, Daventry

7.39 The process undertaken in conjunction with the other landowners is designed to secure the highest financial value for the land, taking into account amount, certainty, and speed of receipt. As such, it should achieve the best consideration reasonably obtainable.

Land off Warwick Street, Daventry

7.40 As the former Daventry District Council previously resolved to hold this land for planning purposes (town centre development) the Council can only dispose of the land under

- Section 233(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (the '1990 Act'). The Council is free to dispose of its land in any manner and subject to such conditions as may be considered appropriate provided that in so doing it achieves one of the following:
- 7.40.1 The best use of that or other land and any buildings or works which have been, or are to be, erected, constructed, or carried out on it (whether by the Council or by any other person).
- 7.40.2 The erection, construction or carrying out on it of any buildings or works appearing to the Council to be needed for the proper planning of its area.
- 7.41 In this case, the first seems the most appropriate. The proposed retirement living complex would deliver a range of benefits for the area, as set out in the body of the report.
- 7.42 Similarly to Section 123(2) of the 1972 Act, section 233(3) of the 1990 Act requires the Council to achieve the best consideration it can reasonably obtain, unless the Secretary of State consents to an under-value disposal.

Risk

Parish council transfers

7.43 There is a risk that the parish councils taking on these assets could cease to use them for community uses. As described above, this risk is proposed to be managed by restrictive covenants and through provisions allowing the Council to re-acquire the land if a parish council wishes to dispose of it, or ceased to use it for the permitted purposes.

Estate shops

- 7.44 The principal risk associated with these transactions relates to value. The original NBC Cabinet decision directed that the assets should (where possible) be sold to the tenants. As no marketing is required for this approach, the value of the asset has to be determined by means of a valuation. Whilst no valuation can offer an absolute certainty that a market operator would not have bid more, they are an accepted tool for these purposes.
- 7.45 There is also a risk that shops remain on the Council's portfolio the if current tenants did not wish to offer a fair price for them. That would be managed by continuing to let the affected shops out.
- 7.46 Where shops are sold, there is a risk that the new owner, or any subsequent owner, may seek to maximise value by changing use, either to a different form of commercial use or to a residential or other use. The proposed restriction on use offers some protection against this, but it does not prevent a change to another commercial use (for example, shop to hairdresser or office), and the law means it may not survive permanently; there

are provisions to apply for an outdated restrictive covenant to be removed or varied. Nor can the restriction require the owner to actually operate a shop; the unit could be left vacant. (It would in theory be possible to apply a positive obligation to operate a shop under Section 33 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 but this is not considered practical.)

Booth Meadow potential battery energy storage facility

7.47 The main risk in relation to the Booth Meadow BASF propose is that a change in circumstances means that the site is no longer, or is less, attractive to operators than it currently appears. The mitigation to this risk is to run the process as quickly as possible consistent with it being run property and effectively, and seeking approval via this report to enter into a subsequent agreement for lease.

Other Potential BESF sites

- 7.48 The main risk associated with the establishment of other BESFs is likely to be one of timing. If the Council is not in a position where it is able to respond quickly to identified demand, it may lose the opportunity to neighbouring private landlords who are able to commit to proposals more quickly. This risk can be mitigated through the recommendations within this report.
- 7.49 The Council's ability to demonstrate best consideration may be affected by the nature of these transactions. It is likely that the Council will need to respond to a request from a specific operator, who may also be in contact with neighbouring landowners. In such a situation it is possible that the Council would not have the time to run, or the operator would not wish to engage with, a competitive bidding process.

Land off A45 London Road, Daventry

7.50 The level of risk to the Council would be dependent on the detail successful offer. Offers have been made on an unconditional or conditional basis. At present the highest offer has been made on an unconditional basis. However, there are concerns as to how the scheme is to be financed and the timeframes associated with this, so it is possible this may change.

Land off Warwick Street, Daventry

- 7.51 The transaction carries minimal risk for the Council as it involves payment up front for an unconditional sale.
- 7.52 A risk in terms of the Council's objectives is that the developer for some reason might not proceed to develop the site. However, having paid £700k and being in the business of developing retirement living complexes, it is unlikely the developer would not proceed. It

- is possible that significant economic disturbance might cause a delay in development, but that is likely to apply to any form of development on the land.
- 7.53 A further risk is that the developer is not successful in acquiring the planning permission for their intended use and cannot proceed with their proposed development. Subsequently, it would need to approach the Council to release the restrictive user clause which the Council, acting reasonably, would need to accept. However, it is considered that this risk is minimal due to the planning history of the land and the aspirations for which it is held.

Consultation

- 7.54 In relation to the parish council transfers, no external consultation has been undertaken, but the statutory public space disposal process would apply. Given the nature of the transfers, it is considered they are unlikely to raise opposition.
- 7.55 In relation to the land off the A45 London Road, Daventry, the Council's predecessor, DDC, consulted on the Daventry District Settlements & Countryside Local Plan which allocated this site for development.
- 7.56 In relation to the land off Warwick Street, DDC previously consulted on the use of this land for this type of use as part of the preparation of the Daventry Town Centre Vision 2035, which was subsequently adopted by both DDC and Daventry Town Council. As the land is not public open space the requirements of Section 233(4) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to give notice and invite objections prior to disposal do not apply.

Climate Impact

- 7.57 In relation to the parish council transfers, the transfer of the land is unlikely to have any material impact on the climate. The reservation of rights to re-acquire land or rights over land for infrastructure should mean that if the Council needed to put equipment supporting sustainability through land transferred to a parish council it could do so without undue difficultly.
- 7.58 Disposal of the estate shops would mean they no longer fell within the Council's estate and therefore its commitment to secure carbon neutrality by 2030. However, given their small scale this impact is likely to be low.
- 7.59 The provision of BESFs is helpful to supporting the transition of the UK electricity grid to low- and zero-carbon forms of generation.
- 7.60 The sale of the land of the A45 London Road, Daventry would enable development which is likely to have a climate impact. However, whilst the Council has goals to secure net zero it is not practical to prevent all development whilst the steps to achieve this are

put in place. Even if the Council refused to dispose of its land (contrary to its own local plan policies) it is likely development would still take place, albeit in a sub-optimal form. Therefore, it is considered that climate impacts do not suggest the disposal should not proceed.

7.61 In relation to the Warwick Steet, Daventry site, developing residential accommodation for older people at the edge of Daventry town centre is likely to somewhat reduce the need for motorised travel. The new building would also be built to modern standards of insulation and energy efficiency. As such, the proposal should have a modest beneficial impact on the climate.

Community Impact

- 7.62 In relation to the parish council transfers, the land being owned and managed by local parish councils should help with the proactive management and recreational use for these sites. This should build community spirit and pride, and reduce potential for anti-social behaviour.
- 7.63 In relation to estate shops, whilst the intention is to secure, if possible, sales to the existing tenants this may not be possible. Even if it is the outcome, there is nothing to prevent the ownership and occupation of the shops being split in the future. Therefore, securing the retention of these shops as such largely relies on the proposed control over use. As noted above, this is not a complete protection.
- 7.64 The Booth Meadow potential BESF site does not appear likely to have any appreciable impacts on the community. The nearest residential uses are at the cabins at the Billing Aquadrome. It does not appear likely that the BESF would adversely affect them. Any potential issues would be addressed through the planning application process.
- 7.65 By proceeding with the disposal of the land off the A45 London Road, Daventry and off Warwick Street, Daventry the Council would be facilitating in the realisation of the economic development and regeneration of the Daventry area whilst realising significant capital receipts for areas of land which as they stand offer little towards the goals of the Council. The disposal of the Warwick Street site would support the delivery of retirement accommodation for a potentially vulnerable sector of the community, with residential accommodation close to Daventry Town Centre and associated amenities.

Communications

- 7.66 When opportunities are to be presented to the market for offers, this will be communicated openly and transparently. This should maximise the likely returns to the Council.
- 8. Background Papers None.

9. Appendix A – Proposed Transfers to Parish Councils

No.	Site	Proposed transferee
1.	Augusta Avenue Badger Run	East Hunsbury Parish Council
2.	Bridleway LDS Saffron Close	East Hunsbury Parish Council
3.	Frosty Hollow Open Space	East Hunsbury Parish Council
4.	Granary Road East Open Space	East Hunsbury Parish Council
5.	Granary Road West Open Space	East Hunsbury Parish Council
6.	Penvale Road Tree Belt	East Hunsbury Parish Council
7.	Pyghtle Open Space	East Hunsbury Parish Council
8.	Stanford Way Open Space	East Hunsbury Parish Council
9.	Stonepit Open Space	East Hunsbury Parish Council
10.	Thames Road Open Space	East Hunsbury Parish Council
11.	Aquitaine Close Public Open Space	Duston Parish Council
12.	Bramhall Rise Public Open Space	Duston Parish Council
13.	Brockwood Close Public Open Space	Duston Parish Council
14.	Clipston Way Public Open Space	Duston Parish Council
15.	Hardlands Road Public Open Space	Duston Parish Council
16.	Newton Road Public Open Space	Duston Parish Council
17.	The Rose Garden, Main Road	Duston Parish Council
18.	Beaune Close Open Space	Duston Parish Council
19.	Cheddar Close Open Space	Duston Parish Council
20.	Kenilworth Close Open Space	Duston Parish Council
21.	Sandy Lane Open Space (Alsace Close)	Duston Parish Council
22.	The Green, Weggs Farm Road	Duston Parish Council
23.	Wenlock Way Open Space, known as	Duston Parish Council
	"Haydown Green"	
24.	Westbury Close Open Space	Duston Parish Council
25.	Berrywood Road Allotments	Duston Parish Council
26.	Bants Lane Allotments	Duston Parish Council
27.	Triumph Gardens Open Space	Duston Parish Council
28.	Duston Wildes Open Space	Duston Parish Council
29.	Open Space off Curtlee Hill/Villa Way	Wootton Parish Council

Appendix B – Proposed estate shop disposals

No.	Site
1.	Unit 1 Blackthorn Bridge Court NN3 8QH
2.	Unit 2 Blackthorn Bridge Court NN3 8QH
3.	Unit 3 Blackthorn Bridge Court NN3 8QH
4.	Ecton Brook Road Post Office, Ecton Brook Road NN3 5EN
5.	Ecton Brook Road Supermarket, Ecton Brook Road NN3 5EN
6.	Olden Road Supermarket (Premier), Olden Road NN3 5DD
7.	Unit 2 Walledwell Court (Standens Barn Supermarket) NN3 9TW
8.	Unit 3 Walledwell Court (Sapranos) NN3 9TW
9.	Unit 1 Lings Local Centre, Billing Brook Road NN3 8NQ
10.	Unit 2 & 3 Lings Local Centre, Billing Brook Road NN3 8NQ
11.	Farmhill Road Supermarket (Unit 1) NN3 5DS
12.	Farmhill Road (Unit 2) Takeaway NN3 8NQ
13.	Unit 1 Prentice Court NN3 8XR
14.	Unit 2 Prentice Court NN3 8XR