



## **ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**

**Tuesday, 12 March 2024**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>TRANSFER OF BUILDINGS ON HILBRE ISLAND</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE</b>

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to the transfer of buildings on Hilbre Island to the Hilbre Community Land Trust on a 30-year lease at a peppercorn rent.

This report supports delivery of the following themes in the Council plan 2023-27:

- Working together to protect our environment; and
- Working together to create safe, resilient and engaged communities.

The matter affects the Hoylake and Meols Ward and is not a key decision.

### **RECOMMENDATION/S**

The Environment, Climate and Transport Committee is recommended to approve the transfer of the buildings on Hilbre Island as identified in this report to the Hilbre Community Land Trust for a 30-year lease at a peppercorn rent.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 To enable the buildings on Hilbre Island to be operated by a Community Land Trust which will attract investment and increase activities.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 The Council could retain control of the buildings, however, due to the tidal nature of the islands and the listing status of the buildings, the maintenance presents a challenge. As such, this proposal represents an opportunity for the Trust to support the maintenance of these assets.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 Hilbre Island is the largest of a group of three islands off the coast of Wirral and is primarily accessed, subject to tides, from West Kirby. It is popular with visitors and is a local nature reserve. It is also classed as a site of Special Scientific Interest and a Ramsar site. The island houses a number of buildings most of which are owned by the Council and used primarily by the Friends of Hilbre Island and Hilbre Island Bird Observatory. Some of the buildings are grade II listed but are mostly in a poor condition.
- 3.2 The British Art and Design Association (BADA) is an arts organisation that aims to advance public education and appreciation for excellence in arts and is a registered charity. BADA initially approached the Council with a proposal to use buildings on Hilbre Island as a centre which would provide a suite of studios that would allow artists to stay and produce work inspired by the island's unique location. BADA has also worked with the Friends of Hilbre Island (FoH) and the Hilbre Bird Observatory (HiBO), both of which have a significant presence on the island and have developed a joint proposal for the buildings on Hilbre Island.
- 3.3 The three organisations have now developed a business plan, attached as appendix A to this report, which would include the creation of the Hilbre Islands Community Land Trust which would comprise membership of the three organisations. The Trust would look to utilise the Telegraph Station, Telegraph House, Fog Cottage and Day Room, Buoy Master's House, workshop and store. To assist in the attraction of grant funding the Trust would eventually require a 30-year lease. The heads of terms of the proposed lease are included at appendix B. The lease would be at a peppercorn rent but would require the Trust to be responsible for maintenance of the buildings along with all outgoings.
- 3.4 The business plan sets out a 2-phase approach. The first phase would involve a short-term lease which would enable the Trust to fund raise and undertake a scheme of basic works to enable their occupation. The second phase would follow the grant of planning permission and listed building consent for the necessary investment in Fog Cottage and Telegraph House. This would also require the Trust to secure significant grant funding for which they would develop a fund-raising strategy.

- 3.5 Initially, the Trust would be funded by subscriptions from the three organisations. In addition, BADA proposes to generate income mainly through a membership scheme which allows access to the island's studio for 10 months of the year. It proposes aiming at local educational institutions based on its own experiences. This income would be supplemented by other events and courses.
- 3.6 A transfer to a community group would be an extremely challenging proposition because of the nature of the buildings and the location. BADA, however, has worked with the other organisations to develop a joint business plan which would see the phased improvement of the properties, subject to securing grant funding.
- 3.7 In 2018 the Council commissioned an Options Appraisal Report by Amion consulting and Lambert Smith Hampton to understand the potential and options for securing the future of Hilbre Island. The report recommended that the Council considers a managed decline of the properties or at least maintaining the status quo. It further went on to suggest that consideration be given to community asset transfer. From the report it is clear that any commercial opportunities on the island would be extremely limited. Given the nature of the buildings and activities of the groups currently present on the island, the potential to offer the opportunity for wider transfer would be unlikely. The approach from BADA and the collaboration with those groups seems to present an opportunity to attract investment in the buildings.

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The transfer of these properties would divest the Council of the running costs of these buildings.

#### **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 When disposing of asset, including by long lease, the Council is obliged to obtain the best price reasonably obtainable under s 123 of the Local Government Act 1972. However, given the recommendations of the options appraisal there is little likelihood of the properties having any commercial value. As such, the transfer would represent a passing of liabilities and represents market value.

#### **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 There are no IT or staffing implications arising from the disposal of this land.

#### **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 Should the properties not be transferred to the Trust, the Council would continue to maintain the properties but probably only to a basic standard.
- 7.2 There is a risk that the venture may not succeed and the buildings would be returned to the Council, however, transferring the properties on the proposed phased approach gives the trust a better chance of developing its proposals.
- 7.3 The business case attached as an appendix includes the Trust's risk assessment.

#### **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

8.1 The proposal was presented to the Hilbre Island Management Committee on 29 August 2023 and received unanimous support.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no direct equality implications arising from the report.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 Hilbre Island is an important location for visitors and for habitat. A transfer to the Trust, which will include members of HiBO, will continue to monitor bird numbers.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 The transfer of these properties is hoped to enable the Trust to secure funding to maintain and improve these buildings.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 - Business Plan  
Appendix 2 - Heads of Terms

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Options Appraisal

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

This report is being considered by the Environment, Climate Emergency & Transport Committee in accordance with Section (e) of its Terms of Reference.

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>