
WOODBURN NURSERY, SALUTATION ROAD, DARLINGTON

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Stephen Harker
Efficiency and Resources Portfolio**

Responsible Director – Paul Wildsmith Director of Resources

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To consider declaring the site of Woodburn Nursery surplus to operational requirements and to seek authority to dispose of it.

Summary

2. Woodburn Nursery produces plants for the Council's use and sale to other public authorities. A large proportion of the Nursery's turnover is plants for sale to other councils, but most of that is already grown elsewhere in leased premises. Nubeck Nursery, a training and employment facility for people with learning difficulties is also based at the property.
3. Woodburn Nursery presents an opportunity to secure a capital receipt for the Council, although an extended marketing period may be necessary in order to attract the level of purchaser/developer interest required. The selected purchaser will then require an acceptable planning consent and section 106 agreement, prior to completion.
4. To secure a capital receipt at the earliest possible date, a resolution declaring the site surplus to requirements is now required.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that :-
 - (a) The site of Woodburn Nursery be declared surplus to operational requirements and authority to dispose of it be granted.
 - (b) The Director of Resources be authorised to proceed to market the site and complete a sale as and when market conditions permit.

Reason

6. The recommendations are supported to achieve a Capital Receipt for the Council's MTFP.

Paul Wildsmith
Director of Resources

Background Papers

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Guy Metcalfe : Extension
PB

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	There are no health and well being issues.
Carbon Impact	There are no sustainability issues.
Diversity	There are no diversity issues.
Wards Affected	Hummersknott.
Groups Affected	Nubeck Nursery day service.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	There are no issues adversely affecting the Community Strategy.
Efficiency	A capital receipt from the sale of the land would contribute to the Council's MTFP.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

7. Woodburn Nursery, the “property” indicated on the **attached plan**, is owned by the Council and extends to some 1.82 ha (4.5 acres). It is an operational property used, in conjunction with off site rented facilities for the production of plants. There are a few permanent buildings with the majority of structures being poly-tunnels.
8. Nubeck Nursery, a Council training and employment facility for People with Learning Difficulties is also based at the property along with Street Scene and Forestry and Cemetery operations. In addition to providing plants for the Council’s floral displays through the sale of plants to other public bodies the property provides a small income through a trading surplus.
9. The property offers a substantial residential development opportunity in the west end of Darlington and potential capital receipt. The production of plants, and provision of a base for Nubeck, could be re-established at another location, if required.
10. A Business Case for the Council to continue to grow plants has been prepared by Building Services and this shows that the service can be continued through leasing facilities elsewhere in a way which minimises risk, maximises flexibility, avoids the need for capital investment in reprovision and still makes a profit for the Council. Given the prolonged timescale for completing a sale it is considered important that the property is declared surplus at this time in order that the process of sale can be started.
11. It is envisaged the selected purchaser will make obtaining an acceptable planning consent a condition of purchase. The property is within the urban area therefore in planning terms its development is not a strategic matter, but a complex Section 106 planning agreement will likely be required thereby potentially extending the period until the sale can be completed.

Possible Relocation of the Nursery

12. If it is decided to continue to grow plants, relocation of the Nursery will need to be co-ordinated with the growing season. However, it is not necessary to vacate the property prior to marketing or to provide vacant possession on completion, but relocation will need to be co-ordinated with the successful purchaser in due course.

Nubeck Nursery

13. The current day service at Nubeck Nursery will be subject to a full review in line with the next phase of day service modernisation. This review will again include the views of key stakeholders, notably those who use the service and their carers. The provision of a base for Nubeck could be re-established at another location in the Borough, if required.

Planning Comment

14. This urban brownfield site was identified as a potential housing allocation in the LDF Accommodating Growth Issues and Options Report, published in November 2010. The consultation document suggested that the site had a capacity for 15 dwellings, equating to

about 8 dwellings per hectare. Development at this relatively low density would be likely to be larger family houses. There are some listed dwellings adjacent to the site, the site and setting of which will need to be taken into account in designing a development scheme. Also, there are highway issues around the access into and out of the site, though these are considered not insurmountable.

Asset Management

15. The property is currently Operational but its function is not location specific and could be re-provided elsewhere if considered desirable. Sale of the property would allow the release of significant capital and contribute to the Council's MTFP requirements in line with good Strategic Asset Management practice.

Outcome of Consultation

16. No formal consultation has taken place regarding the proposed disposal of the site but there will be opportunity for consultation through the planning process.