

**CABINET  
5 JULY 2022**

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**LAND AT BLACKWELL  
PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AND PARKLAND RESTORATION**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member –  
Councillor Scott Durham, Resources Portfolio**

**Responsible Director – Ian Williams, Chief Executive**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval for the disposal of circa 5.2 Hectares (13 acres) of land on the former Blackwell golf course. The land is shown as the hatched area on the plan at **Appendix 1** and marked 403 and has been allocated as housing development land in the recently adopted Local Plan.
2. The report also seeks approval for the funding of feasibility work to develop plans for a parkland restoration scheme (shown shaded grey on the plan in Appendix 1) and to engage the services of Esh Homes Limited to develop appropriate plans and designs for a residential planning application for site 403.

**Summary**

3. The Council is proposing to restore the historic parkland surrounding the Blackwell Grange Hotel, as shown shaded grey on the plan. Council owned land of circa 5.2 Ha (13 acres) has been earmarked for residential development in the recently adopted Local Plan, as shown hatched on the plan and marked 403.
4. Planning Officers commissioned a Heritage Impact Assessment Report in 2020. This was to provide an overview and description of the heritage interest within and around the proposed allocated site 403. The report supported the development of site 403 with consideration to layout, design and landscaping and any potential harm by the development to be sufficiently mitigated. This is what is being proposed and the sale of this land would fund the wider restoration of the parkland and retain the historic pleasure walks and landscaping features.
5. There is a former greenkeeper's building at the southern edge of site 403, off Carmel Road South, that is in a state of disrepair. Due to the condition of the building, statutory undertakers have disconnected the utility services and it is not currently capable of being safely occupied. Although the Heritage Impact Assessment Report 2020 advised retaining this building, it is not listed, and it is not in a conservation area. The former greenkeeper's

building did offer an opportunity for re-use but had limited architectural value and was located in the area of parkland that was less sensitive to change in that it was not part of the designed landscape circa 1802.

6. The intention is for Esh Homes Limited, the Council's joint venture partner, to develop the Council owned land and proposals will be brought to Cabinet in due course. To facilitate this development there are several surveys and pieces of feasibility work that will be required to be carried out on the land. The feasibility works and parkland restoration proposals will be jointly procured by Esh Homes Limited and the Council in compliance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.
7. It is intended that development of site 403 will be of the highest quality and consultations will take place with the local community and other interested stakeholders on the proposals through the planning process. It is currently proposed that one planning application would be submitted to include the residential development and parkland restoration scheme.
8. It is proposed that the former greenkeepers building is demolished in order to provide an acceptable access into the development site subject to obtaining the requisite consents. However, it is intended to preserve and integrate the salvaged stone as an architectural feature within the proposals. This would allow access into the site to open up the land for executive housing development that is needed given the Council's aspiration for growth and to capture developments of this type in Darlington. The development would fund the parkland restoration and ensure the significant historic assets on the parkland can be retained.
9. The estimated feasibility costs are identified in Part III (**Appendix 2**) of the report.

### **Recommendations**

10. It is recommended that Cabinet:
  - (a) Declares the land shown hatched on the plan at Appendix 1, marked as 403, surplus to the Council's requirements and authorises the sale of the land to the Council's joint venture partner with terms being reported back to Cabinet for consideration.
  - (b) Approves the costs identified in Part III of the report and authorises the release of funding necessary to appoint Esh Homes Limited and for the Council to undertake the feasibility and landscape work required to submit a planning application, together with demolition of the former greenkeeper's building , subject to obtaining the necessary consents. The costs to be funded from the Council's Investment Fund and will be paid back on receipt of a capital receipt from the proceeds of the sale.
  - (c) The Assistant Director – Law and Governance be authorised to execute the necessary documents to facilitate future development.

## Reasons

11. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons: -

- (a) To provide a site capable of contributing to the delivery of new housing to satisfy the Borough's housing need and to facilitate the restoration of the parkland area.
- (b) To achieve a capital receipt for the Council and increased Council Tax receipts from new homes.

**Ian Williams**  
**Chief Executive**

## Background Papers

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

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S17 Crime and Disorder	The report has no implications for crime and disorder
Health and Well Being	The report has no implications for health and well being
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There is potential for any new Building to be easily accessible by sustainable transport modes which will help ensure the carbon footprint of the development is acceptable.
Diversity	No implications
Wards Affected	Park West Ward
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	The resolutions in this report will not make changes to the Budget and Policy framework.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
Council Plan	This will help support facilitating development and economic growth for Darlington
Efficiency	The workload resulting from the recommendations in this report assumes resources at existing levels.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

12. ESH Homes Limited and the Council will undertake the necessary survey work in order that a site layout plan for the residential development on the circa. 5.2 Ha (13 acres) together with a parkland restoration scheme on the land shown shaded grey in Appendix 1 can be compiled.

13. The sale of this land is required to fund the restoration of the historic parkland and its future maintenance. Access to the residential development requires the former greenkeeper's stone building to be demolished. It is not a listed building and has not been used as such for many years as all utility services have been disconnected due to the structural condition of the building. However, it is proposed that the stone that makes up the building is preserved and integrated within the proposals.
14. The Parkland proposals will aim to retain the openness and green infrastructure functions so their relationship and importance to the character of Darlington is protected and enhanced.
15. To protect existing habitats and ecosystems the development must show a biodiversity net gain, so that the development leaves the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was before any development takes place.
16. Scheme proposals for the residential development and parkland restoration scheme will be brought back to Cabinet for consideration.

#### **Finance Implications**

17. It is proposed that the feasibility works to be undertaken by Esh Homes Limited and the Council as set out in the Part III report are to be funded from the Council's Investment Fund and repaid from future capital receipts as the site is developed.
18. The Council opted to tax on the land in July 2019 and any subsequent sales will be subject to VAT.

#### **Procurement Implications**

19. All procurement activity will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.