



## **Full Council Meeting**

**Date: 21<sup>st</sup> September 2023**

**Number: FC075 – To consider the proposal to engage with MSDC regarding the potential purchase of the playmeadow with a view to converting this to a new allotment site, and converting the existing allotments to burial ground**

### **1. Introduction**

Over the past 10 years or so, the site known as the 'playmeadow' on Courtmead Road has been the subject of several planning applications issued by MSDC and 2 judicial reviews to prevent these from being allowed to proceed.

The site was most recently sold 2 years ago at auction, however the purchaser withdrew once they became aware of the ongoing and numerous issues related to this site.

As the Parish Council is coming towards the end of its burial capacity at the nearby burial ground, it would be beneficial to consider making a request to MSDC to discuss the potential purchase of this site in order to increase our burial capacity for another 20-30 years.

### **2. Findings**

An informal conversation with a local estate agent has suggested a reasonable valuation of the site without planning permission to be in the region of £200,000. However, when looking at Farmers Weekly<sup>1</sup>, the data from 2021 suggests a price per acre of £10,734-£9,364 for arable land, and £8,433 - £7,537 for pasture.

If the Parish Council were to agree to try and purchase this site from MSDC, it would be necessary to consider how much we would be willing to pay. To this end, we completed a high-level mapping of the increased burial capacity this would provide, on the basis that the allotments were moved to the 'playmeadow' site.

This would be necessary for 2 reasons; 1 you cannot get permission for a burial ground to be placed next to a residence, and 2 there is a watercourse running between the allotments and the 'playmeadow' and the Environment Agency specifies that there must be 30 metres between running water and burials.

Furthermore, in order to resolve how much to pay for this site, I reviewed our burial income and expenditure over the past 5 years:

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<sup>1</sup> [Find out average farmland prices where you live - Farmers Weekly \(fwi.co.uk\)](https://www.fwi.co.uk)

2022-23	£82k
2021-22	£73k
2020-21	£67k
2019-20	£51k
2018-19	£66k

Our maintenance costs are currently at approx. £47k per annum, including grave digging.



FIGURE 1 CUCKFIELD CEMETERY, ALLOTMENT SITE & 'PLAYMEADOW'

On this basis, if for example we purchased the site for £200,000, at a conservative net income of approx. £35k we could cover the expenditure of the land within approx. 10 years.

A Public Works Load Board loan over 10 years would currently be charged at approximately 5.34% interest<sup>2</sup>. This rate varies on a daily basis.

A conversation with the neighbour of the 'playmeadow' suggests they would be amenable to this proposal for use of the land.

### 3. Recommendations

These numbers are very high level. Until we proceed with the detailed analysis to expand the cemetery we will not have more reliable data to work with. Furthermore, we

<sup>2</sup> [Current PWLB Standard Fixed Interest Rates \(dmo.gov.uk\)](https://www.dmo.gov.uk/interest-rates)

need to consider what to do about the watercourse and whether it would be beneficial to enclose it within pipework if possible, to expand our burial capability.

This does demonstrate that there would be a benefit in opening a conversation with MSDC to discuss whether they would be interested in negotiating a fee to purchase this site from them. Should we be successful, this would preserve the views within this area of the village forever.

Name: Sam Heynes

Title Clerk

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> September 2023