

Dear Fellow Residents of Widford

The Parish Council needs you to contribute to the discussion on the following project. Therefore, please contact either the Parish Clerk or the Parish Chairman by email, phone or letter with your thoughts and comments on the following proposal.

That Widford Parish Council to take out a £10,000 Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) loan in order to connect the village Allotments with a regular supply of water.

If you are a recent newcomer to the village, you may not be aware that all parish councils have a statutory duty to provide allotments for their residents if there is a declared need for them. Widford has 14 allotment plots in regular use on the site adjacent to Benningfield Road. With this proposal we hope to build on this number and make the allotments a flourishing concern. We would like to continue to foster the use of one of the few facilities the village still owns, and to encourage a wider interest from all the village in the Community Orchard that is situated there.

The present site was purchased in 1978. Unfortunately the soil in the field is mainly heavy clay, and despite extensive advertising and an increased pressure for allotment plots throughout the county, many potential plot holders have been deterred by this, and there has been a steady flow of plot holders coming for a season and then moving on to more productive ground elsewhere.

Various stratagem have been applied by successive Parish Councils to increase the use of the allotments. In 2008 the site was given a total make-over with the help of a group of community volunteers, and for a time it was possible to obtain a regular flow of water from the neighbouring stables. The stables have now closed and the new owner is not happy to continue with the previous arrangement. The Parish Council has therefore asked for quotes from Affinity Water and local qualified water engineers, so that the Allotments can be connected properly to their own supply. It would not be a cheap undertaking; however, with the grant from the PWLB spread over 15 years the Council's Responsible Financial Officer says that against currently identified financial commitments we would be able to meet the repayments without having to increase the precept in the foreseeable future.

A suggestion made at the Annual Parish Meeting in April, felt that it might be more commercially viable to move the allotments and the present site could then be sold for housing. The suggested location was the village Playing Field. Since that date, parish councillors have looked at it in considerable depth. Even if all parties were willing, the Charities Commission might not consent to alter the Playing Field's present charter, and the final cost of such a move and the alterations necessary to accommodate such a change would come to an amount higher than the loan we are presently seeking. It is unlikely that a housing developer would be interested in the present site because of the lack of any vehicular access and the sloping nature of the ground. The present site is situated on Footpath 18 leading to a designated area of outstanding natural beauty, the Ash Valley, where a change of use might very well be refused.

The Parish Council would really welcome your views by 30th June. The addresses and telephone numbers to contact councillors or the Clerk are available in the Parish Magazine or on the village website.

- **Are you in FAVOUR of this project going ahead? YES / NO**
- **The parish/town council wishes to seek the views/opinions/feedback from yourselves on this project and application. Please contact us direct by phone / email / post.**

This consultation is vital for our loan application and I therefore thank you in anticipation of your contribution to the debate.

Cllr Jill Buck
Chairman, Widford Parish Council
17 May 2019