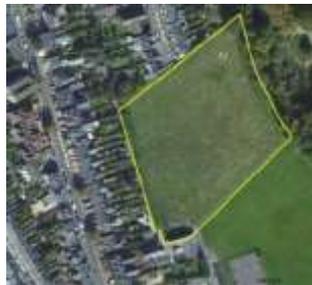




Great news for local community, land protected by Cirencester Town Council.



Councillor Joe Harris, Martin Conyers, Estate Services Manager, Will Masefield, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, local residents and Friends of City Bank



Cirencester Town Council's bid for land at Purley Road has been accepted by Gloucestershire County Council.

The land will now be used for the wider benefit of the community, saving it from potential commercial sale and inappropriate development.

In preparing a business case, the Town Council liaised with members of the public, local community groups and key stakeholders and explored various land based options for future use.

With a proven track record the Town Council is widely recognised for its work on land management; adopting an inclusive approach to working with the community and stakeholder partners in ensuring that open spaces across Cirencester are managed in a sympathetic and appropriate way in terms of their history and archaeology.

It will be several months before the land is formally transferred, with a range of options that the Town Council will explore in more detail with key stakeholder English Heritage.

A management plan for the future of site will be prepared shaped around four key themes:

- Education and Interpretation;
- Community and Social Enterprise;
- Wetland Crafts and Skills;
- Land Management and Biodiversity.

Town Councillor David Henson said: "As one of the Ward members and a nearby resident myself, I am delighted by this outcome. This is a perfect example of Cirencester Town Council listening to the views of local people, recognising the strength of public feeling and engaging with the community to put together this successful bid. We will now see this land preserved as a valuable green space for the benefit of present and future generations, which is obviously great news."

Local County Councillor Joe Harris said: "I'm thrilled that GCC have accepted the Town Council's bid to purchase the land, I spent time lobbying the County Council to try and find a solution where the land remained in public ownership for the benefit of local people and to hear that they've taken this on board is great news."

"It was clear from the feedback we received that locals didn't want to see just another housing development and that this is an important open space in Cirencester. The Town Council have a great record at maintaining and enhancing green spaces so I'm really looking forward to seeing what they can do for this area."

Editorial Note:

The site lies within the heart of Roman Cirencester and buried archaeology relating to the Roman Town is well preserved. Excavations on adjacent land uncovered preserved buildings of significance. The Oxford Archaeology report, dated September 2013 which was commissioned by Gloucestershire County Council provides further evidence of known and potential archaeology at the location of this site.

Cirencester was, during the Roman period, a regional capital and became the second largest town in Roman Britain, outside of London. Therefore the archaeology at this site provides an important evidence base for potential research on the development and decline of the Roman town and more broadly Roman Britain.

The site is a scheduled monument, which is protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 and as such the respective Secretary of State has a duty to ensure that monuments of such national importance are preserved for future generations.

The land at Purley Road and Victoria Road lies within the Cirencester South conservation area with historic war and railway related features.

Four themes that will shape the management plan for the future of the site are:

- Education and Interpretation;
- Community and Social Enterprise;
- Wetland Crafts and Skills;
- Land Management and Biodiversity.

Under education and interpretation it is proposed to have interpretation boards and a network of paths leading to an outdoor education facility to raise awareness of land within an historic context but also how important open spaces are for health and the environment – to learn about plants and wildlife and to gain respect and appreciation for our surroundings.

Under community and social enterprise we would provide raised bed opportunities for growing plants, flowers and vegetables. The Town Council already works in conjunction with a number of groups for example Phoenix Gardeners, Community and Friends groups, who are keen to see the public realm improved and enhanced. There is no current provision in the town for growing plants for these projects, storing materials and offering a training facility. Linked to this is the requirement for additional allotment plots and community growing projects which could deliver social enterprise alongside wider community health benefits and environmental improvements. Also to recycle green waste materials which could then be sold to gardeners/allotment holders with the money being re-invested on-site.

Under wetland crafts and skills we would seek to establish a base for storing community facilities relating to flood control and prevention such as sand bags, booms, emergency supplies, pipework etc. Along the river corridor, growing trees and plants to improve habitats, biodiversity and upstream attenuation measures. Making materials to improve the river, for example coir rolls, willow and hazel hurdles and spillings for revetment work, as well as bird, bug and bat boxes from locally sourced materials. Whilst also improving the meadow to encourage wild flowers. Taking hay cuts and supplying 'wild flower seed rich' hay to others to create new meadows.

Linking with the aforementioned education facility we would seek to establish an outdoor classroom on wetlands/ river corridors. Also the site provides an urban base for courses on dry stone walling, habitat creation, craft workshops, archaeological surveys and wildlife monitoring.

The site is a key entranceway into City Bank and the land also naturally lends itself to providing a valuable training resource in conservation skills and horticulture.

Under land management and biodiversity, access through the site would be improved along with appropriate boundary fencing and gateways with a focus on specific areas being developed to encourage biodiversity and sustainable natural habitats for wildlife.