

Report to CHARITABLE TRUST COMMITTEE

Northern Roots: Accessible Boardwalk

Portfolio Holder: none

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Reason for Report

Officers are seeking the consent of the Charitable Trust Committee ("CTC") for authorisation to:

- Delegate to Council the process of approving works for the installation of an accessible path around Plot 8 as part of the Northern Roots Project.

Request and Recommendations

It is recommended that the CTC:

- Delegate to Council the process of approving works for the installation of an accessible path around Plot 8 as part of the Northern Roots Project.

Charitable Trust Committee 11 August 2026

Northern Roots: Accessible Boardwalk

1 Background

- 1.1 The Council owns approximately 160 acres of green space at Snipe Clough, known as Northern Roots ("Project Site") and the intention is for the Council working with the Northern Roots charity to regenerate the site for the benefit of people by improving their health, wellbeing and livelihoods by means of creating opportunities for learning, leisure and growing. The Northern Roots project ("the Project") is a scheme with an ambition to develop the UK's largest urban farm and eco-park at the Project Site, which is in the heart of Oldham. The Project presents a significant opportunity to further develop and establish Oldham as a green and growing town for the benefit of its residents.

2 Current Project Position

- 2.1 Work is well underway on the construction of the Visitor Centre and Forestry Hub on the land adjoining Plot 8 with works expected to be complete in the summer of 2026. To enhance the experience for residents and visitors the Council and Northern Roots have designed and are now in a position to approve works for an accessible path around Plot 8, enabling visitors to see and experience the Urban Farm as part of their visit to Northern Roots.
- 2.2 The Northern Roots scheme has various components being delivered to realise its Vision. A key element of the offer to local communities, Oldham residents and visitors from outside Oldham is the creation of an Urban Farm and associated visitor experience. The accessible path will provide a clear and inclusive route around Plot 8 so that visitors can view the growing areas, understand the purpose of the Urban Farm and experience the farm as part of the wider Northern Roots site.

The accessible path will enable the following objectives to be realised:

Accessible Visitor Experience

- A clear, legible and accessible route that enables a wider range of visitors to move around Plot 8 and experience the Urban Farm.

Urban Farm Interpretation and Learning

- Supporting visitors, schools, families and community groups to understand food growing, horticulture, land-based activity and environmental stewardship.

Managed Public Access

- Providing a defined route that allows visitors to see and enjoy the Urban Farm while helping to manage access to operational growing areas, crops and site infrastructure.

Health, Wellbeing and Recreation

- Encouraging walking, outdoor activity, access to nature and recreational use of the wider Northern Roots site.

Inclusion and Community Benefit

- Improving access for people with different mobility needs and strengthening the public benefit delivered from Plot 8.

- 2.3 The accessible path is proposed to run around Plot 8 and to form part of the wider access and visitor infrastructure for the Phase 2 Urban Farm. The current proposal includes footpath and associated fencing works to support managed access around the farm area.

Plot 8

- 2.4 Plot 8, Lees Recreation Ground, was gifted on 21 February 1911 to the Corporation to use the ground exclusively for the Municipal School in Greengate Street Oldham or for any additional secondary school or schools of a like character. The Charity Commission made an Order on 26 May 1911 that the land be used exclusively for any secondary or other school or schools, the whole of the endowment to be applied to educational purposes. An amendment followed on 3 June 1938 that the recreation ground could be used for the said elementary and secondary schools or any other school or schools.
- 2.5 In respect to Plot 8, the CTC obtained a Scheme on 10 November 2020 from the Charity Commission to amend the objects of the charitable trusts relating to Plot 8 as follows:
- “to promote for the benefit of the inhabitants of in the borough of Oldham and the surrounding area the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation of individuals who have need of such facilities by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or disablement, financial hardship or social and economic circumstances or for the public at large in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the condition of life of the said inhabitants”*
- 2.6 The Council considers the creation of an accessible path around Plot 8 for use by the public and community will enhance the use of the land for recreational, leisure, educational, health and wellbeing purposes and will enable residents and visitors to experience the Urban Farm in a managed and inclusive way.

3.0 Options

- 3.1 There are two options as follows.

Option 1 (Recommended)

- Agree to recommendation 1 and delegate to Council the process of approving works for the installation of the accessible path around Plot 8 as part of the Northern Roots Project.

Option 2

- Not to agree with the recommendation. If the CTC does not agree to the recommendation, the accessible path scheme will not be delivered. This would reduce the ability of visitors to see and experience the Urban Farm as part of their visit and would limit the public access and educational benefits of Plot 8.

4 Consultation

- 4.1 A great deal of community consultation and engagement has been undertaken by the Northern Roots charity ("the NR Charity"). A hybrid planning application FUL/348898/22 has followed and approved for a number of initiatives including:
- Community allotment
 - Visitor Centre
 - Events Building with meeting pods.
 - Learning Centre
 - Forestry Depot and Workshops
 - Ground Mounted Solar PV array.
 - Cycling and pedestrian access improvements

- 4.2 The path is consistent with the wider Northern Roots access, education, recreation and visitor experience objectives and will support public understanding and enjoyment of the Urban Farm.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 Dependent on the terms of any future lease or operational arrangement, any rental income from Plot 8 will be income to the charitable trust and will need to be spent in line with the charitable objectives of the trust. The Council will be required to account for any income and expenditure in relation to the trust to the Charitable Trust Committee and Charity Commission.
- 5.2 This report seeks charitable trustee consent to the proposed works on Plot 8. It does not itself approve capital funding or enter into a works contract. Any funding approval, budget allocation or contract instruction will be progressed through the Council's normal financial and governance processes.

6 Legal Services Comments

- 6.1 The charitable trust terms require the Charitable Trust Committee to promote Plot 8 for the benefit of the inhabitants of in the borough of Oldham and the surrounding area the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation of individuals who have need of such facilities by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or disablement, financial hardship or social and economic circumstances or for the public at large in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the condition of life of the said inhabitants.
- 6.2 The Trustees must be satisfied that the proposed use as an accessible path around Plot 8 once the works are carried out will not interfere with the charitable objects and that the benefit of those works outweigh the interruption to the public whilst the works are being carried out.
- 6.3 The proposed accessible path is intended to improve public access, recreation, leisure and educational enjoyment of the Urban Farm and wider Northern Roots site. The Trustees may wish to take independent legal advice if they consider that the recommendation is not in accordance with the charitable objectives.

7. Procurement Implications

- 7.1 There are no known procurement implications for the use of charitable land. Any works carried out to install the accessible path and associated fencing should be in line with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs).
- 7.2 If this is a new sourcing requirement, the Council must comply with the relevant procurement route and threshold requirements. Where an existing contract, framework or in-house service is available to meet the Council's specific procurement requirements and offers value for money it should be used unless there are particular circumstances which justify an alternative route to market.
- 7.3 If the works are to be delivered as a continuation or modification of an existing Northern Roots construction contract, the relevant contract modification and procurement rules will need to be considered before instruction.

8 Estates Implications

- 8.1 This report sets out the details around the creation of an accessible path around Plot 8 as part of the wider Northern Roots Project. The path will be open to the public for recreation, leisure and educational use and will support managed access around the Urban Farm.

- 8.2 At this time, it is anticipated that the path will be operated and maintained as part of the wider Northern Roots site management arrangements. Should in the future there be a desire to lease the path or the relevant part of Plot 8 to a third party, then a further report will be brought forward for consideration by the Committee where required.

9 Key Decision

- 9.1 No

10 Key Decision Reference

- 10.1 N/A

11 Background Papers

- 11.1 None

12 Appendices

Appendix 1 - Northern Roots Charitable Objectives

APPENDIX 1: NORTHERN ROOTS CHARITABLE OBJECTIVES

For the public benefit, and in particular, for the benefit of the inhabitants and of visitors to the borough of oldham (oldham) and the surrounding areas to:

- (a) provide or assist in the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the conditions of life for the inhabitants of oldham and the surrounding areas, including by the provision, maintainance, protection, improvement and equipping of the gardens, landscaped areas, woodlands, open spaces, playing fields and recreational amenity spaces within the northern roots site or operating under the northern roots brand, and by the provision of allotment facilities;
- (b) advance health by promoting participation in healthy outdoor activities including horticulture and agriculture and other land based activities and recreation and amateur sport.
- (c) promote and encourage the arts, in particular within the public parks and open spaces, and
- (d) ancillary to the above objects, to advance education in particular in: (i) the conservation, protection and improvement of the natural environment including the flora and fauna, wildlife, biodiversity and natural habitats in oldham and the surrounding areas; (ii) the conduct of horticulture, agriculture and other land based businesses (iii) the history, culture, heritage and traditions of the north west.