

# Progress Report Annual General Meeting

December 2020





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**“ A walk in these special places lifts the spirits and soothes the soul.**



# 1 Welcome from the Co-Chairs

“ This green space is invaluable for people and wildlife.



**Dear AACT members, associates and friends,**

The AACT Executive Committee would like to say a large thank you for sticking with us during a difficult but nonetheless exciting 2020. And a huge thank you to all who contributed to our fund-raising efforts to pay for a whole of Astley Ainslie site feasibility study.

Despite the difficulties of working during a Covid lockdown and the real impediment of not being able to meet with each other we have managed to achieve real progress towards our aim of securing some or all of the Astley Ainslie site.

We received funding from the Scottish Land Fund and the Architectural Heritage Fund towards employing Oliver Chapman Architects to prepare our feasibility study and business plan for the AA site. You will get a chance to comment on drafts of these studies, and the final documents will form

the basis of our Community Asset Transfer request to NHS Lothian.

We secured funds from a national Foundation towards employing a Development Manager, and have been fortunate to have the services of the enthusiastic and capable Nathan Bower-Bir in this post.

Other highlights in 2020 include the publication of a high-quality AACT journal, Leaves, which was produced and published with the kind assistance of Studies in Photography, and the production of two film features by Written in Film, Astley Ainslie Voices, which can be viewed on our website.

With a bit of luck 2021 will be an easier and more momentous year for AACT and local communities than 2020.

Akiko and Willie



## 2 About AACT

The Astley Ainslie Community Trust is a local land trust comprising residents of the neighbourhoods surrounding the Astley Ainslie Hospital. The Trust was constituted in 2018 with the aim of pursuing community ownership of the Astley Ainslie grounds when the NHS leaves the site, and our current constitution was agreed in June 2019.

NHS Lothian plans to sell the site as early as 2021, and we believe that this place has great potential to provide for a wealth of community benefits and serve the wider public interest if in community hands. We intend to use the legal tool called “community asset transfer” to acquire the site.

Through community ownership, AACT aims to build on the intention of David Ainslie’s original bequest, which recognised that healthy communities need intimate connections with land and nature. We envision a site whose landscape and uses interconnect to form a complementary, dynamic whole, with benefits for the immediate community and the wider city.

As of writing, AACT has 215 members and 37 associates as well as more than 500 people on our mailing list. As ever, please invite your family, friends, and neighbours [to join!](#)



AACT is currently organised as an unincorporated association, managed by an Executive Committee and supported by several sub-committees (Communications, Governance, Finance, Fundraising, and Feasibility Study). It is our intention that we change legal status soon, and we are engaging with lawyers to decide the most appropriate legal form for the Trust.

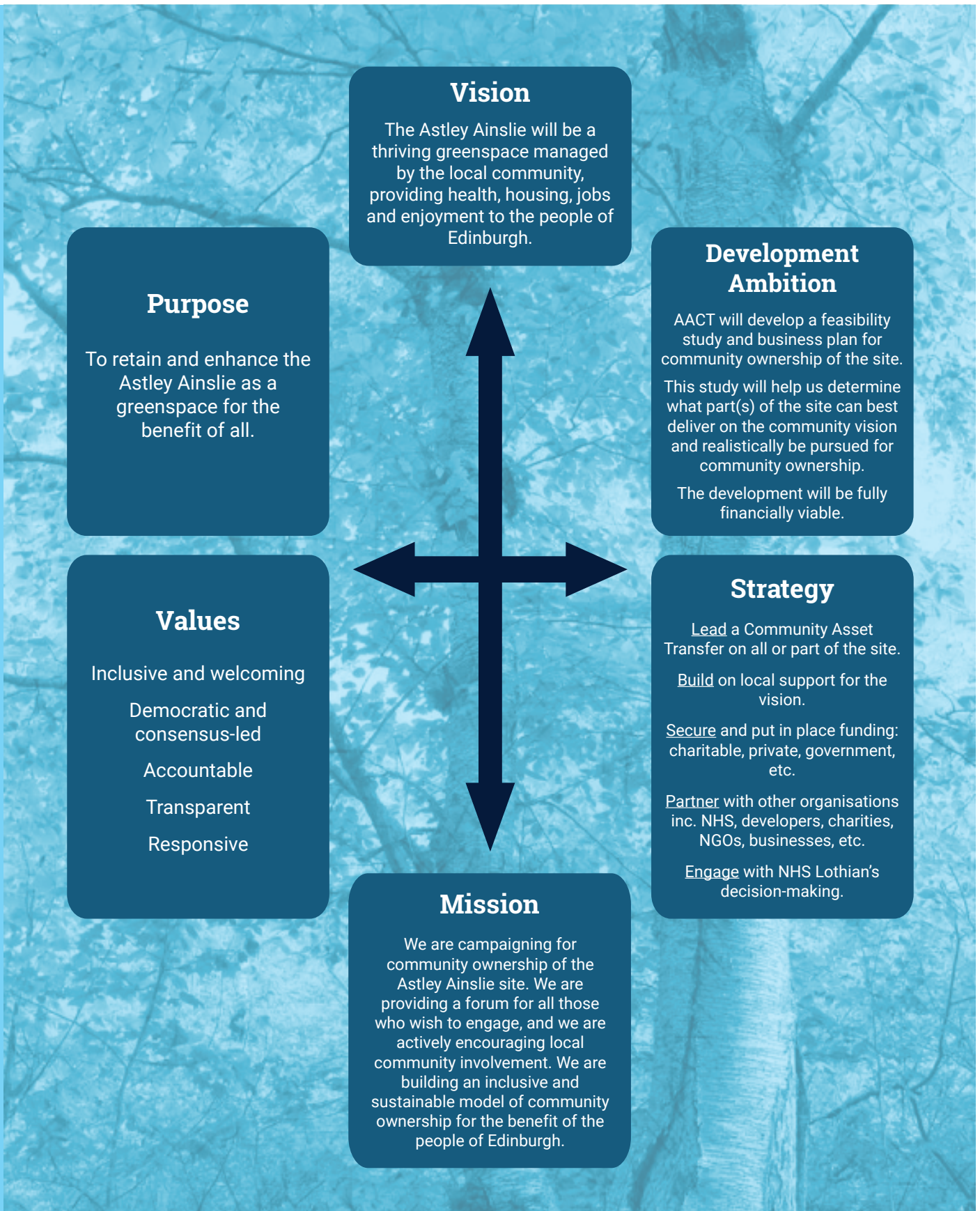
There are currently 9 members of the Executive Committee: Akiko Kobayashi and Willie McGhee (co-chairs), Mike Hall (treasurer), Julia Bouvy, Sara Stevenson, Tim Orr, Stuart Buchanan, Jonathan Silvertown, and Maggie Carson. Robin Harper OBE serves as AACT honorary chair. Nathan Bower-Bir serves as the Trust’s development manager and non-executive secretary.





# Astley Ainslie Vision Framework

how we will reach our goal



## 3 Communications

Despite the obvious difficulties of proactive communications activities during a pandemic, we have been busy getting out the AACT message in a whole range of ways.

We continue to update our members through regular monthly emails, providing information about AACT's ongoing events and activities as well as progress towards our ultimate aim of securing community ownership of the Astley Ainslie site. Members and the wider community have also been kept up to date through our website, which has recently been redesigned, and through our social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Earlier this year we collaborated with Written in Film, local Edinburgh film makers, to create a series of short films telling the stories of people who have lived, recovered, and worked at or simply enjoyed the Astley Ainslie site. These films are a great vehicle to promote the importance of the site both as a green space and as a place that has wellbeing at its heart. All of the films can be found on [our website](#).






The publication of the *Leaves* journal also gave us an excellent opportunity to spread our message. We put out a press release, built up a number of key relationships with local and national journalists, bloggers and vloggers, and ran a number of adverts in local magazines. You can read more about *Leaves* on page 11.

We have also spent time putting together an important document, our Vision Framework, which you can see on page 7. This brings together the elements of our vision, purpose, values, development ambition and strategy and presents them in a way that shows how they interconnect and how we will use the document as our guiding principle in everything we do.

**“ I appreciate the opportunity to walk from my home to the open, green spaces of the Meadows, Links and the Astley Ainslie Grounds. I want to share these special places with my grandchildren and to save them for their grandchildren. ”**

### Find us on social media!

-  AstleyAinslieCommunity
-  @AstleyAinslieCT
-  @astleyainslie



# 4 Feasibility Study Update

“ I live locally and love the space. I would like to see development on the site create a thriving community as well as preserving the natural habitat.

AACT wished to commission a Feasibility Study and Social Enterprise Plan to underpin the Asset Transfer Request to NHS Lothian for land at AAH. We set about commissioning this with the preparation of the Invitation To Tender (ITT) based partly on a template document provided to us by advisers at the Scottish Land Fund (SLF). Various drafts of the document were commented on by our SLF officer to ensure that the scope of our commission was relevant and appropriate for their fund.



OCA HS+

The ITT was released on 24th January 2020 and was open for a five week period, during which time the document was available on our website, and the opportunity was promoted widely through social media channels and through direct emails to relevant contacts. Twelve tenders were received by the closing date, with one being withdrawn before the evaluation process.

Before the tender submission deadline, a selection panel had been appointed. This panel consisted of two members of the AACT Executive Committee, two members of the wider (then) AACT Steering Group, one member of the Astley Ainslie Community Engagement Group (AACEG) and one independent community engagement consultant. Any connections to tendering teams were declared at the outset of evaluation.



Part 1: Our Approach



Part 2: Our Team



The evaluation used a standard tender assessment process which scored each tender up to a maximum of 70 for Quality (according to criteria outlined in the ITT) and 30 for Price. Furthermore, assessment panel members were each given a randomised order in which to make their assessments, and quality evaluation was done 'blind' without cognisance of the associated team fee proposal. Having first evaluated the tenders individually, the selection panel collectively agreed a shortlist of five teams to be invited to interview on 11th March 2020.

Immediately after the interviews, each member of the interview panel reconsidered their individual scores in light of the interviews. The resulting recalculation produced a clear preferred bidder, who was also the first choice of each member of the selection panel: the team led by Oliver Chapman Architects.

The preferred bidder and their tendered fee were the final pieces of information needed for our first Scottish Land Fund application, which was submitted on 18th March 2020. The SLF notified us a month later that our application had not been successful, largely on the basis that their panel would only

< Section pages from Oliver Chapman's tender document

“ It is my strong belief that these grounds are a resource which must be preserved for the benefit of our community, to promote well-being and health. The irreplaceable natural surroundings provide a unique setting for community endeavours consistent with the objectives of the donors of the land.

“ It is becoming even more evident now how important green space is for general and mental health. I strongly support the possibility of affordable/ ecologically built housing on the site as part of the plans. It is a lovely green corridor for cyclists too!

“ I get despondent/ enraged in equal part to see public land being sold off to a private developer. I wish the NHS understood the value of this place (and the Sick Kids, and CAHMS), rather than creating a huge single hospital complex at the Royal Infirmary. I think they'll learn too late... But if the NHS won't keep it, I support any community group that wishes to retain it for public good.

“ I believe the principles of David Ainslie's bequest to the citizens of Edinburgh should be maintained. The site and its rich biodiversity should continue to benefit the community.

## (Feasibility Study Update, cont'd. from previous)

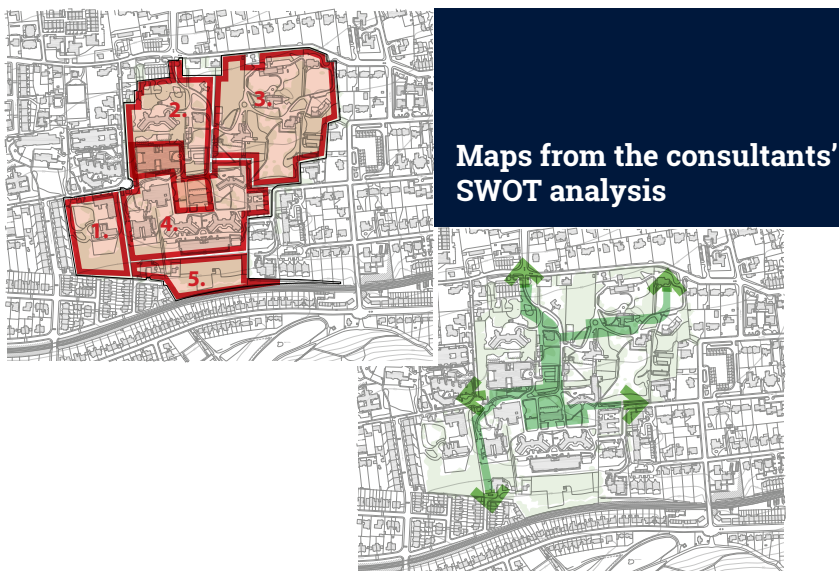
consider funding a study for part of the site. Our consultant team worked with us to turn around a second application in a very short space of time, based on an initial high-level whole site evaluation. This was submitted along with a reduced funding request on 22nd May 2020, and confirmation of funding success was received on 18th June.

In the interim, we had submitted an application to the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) for a £7,500 project viability grant, which we were awarded on 12th June 2020. This funding was not limited to any particular part of the site.

Further to this partial funding success, communication was sent out to members to explain the situation, and responses were invited on whether or not members wished to see a fuller evaluation of the whole site. We received forty responses, with a clear majority expressing a strong desire for the study to consider the full site. Following this result, members generously made donations to fill the funding gap. During this process of consultation with our members, we kept both the AHF and SLF informed.

Oliver Chapman's team was formally appointed following confirmation of the re-extended scope of the study and communication with SLF and AHF. The feasibility study sub-committee have since held regular meetings with the consultant team, and the team is nearing completion of their first report, Report 01. When the report is finished in December 2020, we will circulate an executive summary and accept from members responses to the consultants' presented findings and recommendations. We will also welcome further input on the scope of the next phase of the study.

Report 02 will focus on the more detailed aspects of our community proposal, taking into account additional stakeholder consultation, and will build a social enterprise plan around the recommendations of Report 01 and member responses.





# 5 Community Engagement



“ Thanks and congratulations on organising a great family day despite the weather! I really enjoyed myself, and it was a delight to discover these lovely grounds hidden away in the Grange.

**31 Jan 2018** Initial public meeting to present the idea of potential community ownership on the Astley Ainslie site.

**21 Feb 2018** Follow-up public meeting to start to organise into subgroups around the key themes of the emergent project.

**Sep–Nov 2018** Tree walks guided by Willie McGhee; Mindfulness in Nature walks led by Michele Hipwell (AACT). Michele and Sara Stevenson put together tree leaflets – so far we have written 6 leaflets which were made available on the website.

**6 Feb 2019** Talk for the Peace and Justice Group at The Open Door Morningside on ‘The Astley Ainslie site – an opportunity for the local community to shape future developments’.

**Mar 2019** AACT stall in front of Marks & Spencer, Morningside, with Robin Harper and stalls in various other places around the Astley Ainslie.

**Mar–Apr 2019** Series of community engagement events led by Nick Wright Planning.

City of Edinburgh Council Planners visited our event and subsequently held their own consultations as a follow-up series that built upon our engagement and findings, which can be found in the [Community Visioning document](#) on our website.

Over the past three years, we have held a raft of events to engage with our members and the local community. We look forward to a time when we can gather on the site and explore it together again. But for now, here is a list of many of the events we have held.

**6 Jul 2019** Climate Festival Stall, held on the Meadows, shared with Scottish Ecological Design Association (SEDA).

**11 Aug 2019** Nature Discovery Day led by Jonathan Silvertown and Judy Paul.

**29 Sep 2019** Cockburn Association Doors Open Day public walks in the AA grounds with Sara and Michele.

**22 Jan 2020** Cockburn Association event ‘City for sale: the Commodification of Edinburgh’s Public Spaces’ with a contribution from Michele on green spaces.

**26 Feb 2020** Member’s meeting at the Morningside United Church.

**27 Sep 2020** Cockburn Association Doors Open Day where Sara and Michele assisted in a video version of walks through the site. This was combined with the filming for ‘Creative Pick & Mix’ made by Iain Shaw and Lauren La Rose of Media Education, working with Aonghus Mitchell, for the staff and patients of the AA hospital. The programme was funded by the Edinburgh and Lothians Health Foundation.

## Community Visioning Document

The Trust has developed a vision for the future of the site based on community aspirations through a series of public events and other community engagement activities in March–April 2019. These events were funded by the Scottish Government’s “Making Places Initiative”.

The vision created from this extensive community engagement comprises several elements and can be seen in the [Community Visioning document](#). This consultation will help inform the City of Edinburgh Council’s emergent Place Brief for the site. The former AACT Steering Group worked to focus suggested potential uses for the site under these broad headings:

### THINGS TO RETAIN

- **Wildlife & Greenery** – The Trees (all of them: specimen and self-seeded), Biodiversity, Open Space, Parkland, Woodlands, Wildness, and Wildlife.
- **The spirit of David Ainslie’s bequest** – Health and convalescence.
- **History** – Memory and stories, Archaeology, Landscape.

### THINGS TO DEVELOP

- **Community hub** – A response to the high demand for community spaces in the area.
- **Health and wellbeing** – Community-led and community-based modes of delivering better health outcomes.
- **Homes** – An ambition to provide more low-cost housing through community-owned development, and housing provision for e.g. key workers.

## Community Visioning for Astley Ainslie Hospital Grounds, Edinburgh

May 2019



Nature is such an important part of what we value about Astley Ainslie that we decided to devote a whole day on the site to discovering and enjoying what nature has to offer there. With the agreement of the NHS and the help of the Kidzcare Nursery on the site, we organised a full day of events for members of the public, with a special focus on families with children. We also received the support of some 15 or so naturalists who came along to conduct a bioblitz, and the financial support of the Botanical Society of Scotland (BSS). The BSS grant covered all costs of the day and enabled us to employ Judy Paul, a professional

## Nature Discovery Day

organiser of nature events, who did a fantastic job for us. Despite atrocious weather, seemingly designed to prove that August really is the wettest month, the day’s events attracted over 100 people, including 30 children. In total we recorded 258 species on the site, including 146 plants, 50 mosses and liverworts, 23 insects and woodlice, 16 fungi and 17 birds. Although it was perfect weather for ducks, none were seen and these must belong to the hidden diversity that includes the spiders, snails and many other species that we know are to be found at Astley Ainslie. There is so much more to discover!



## 6 'Leaves' Publication



“Soul food!”  
- Linda Ramsay

Our journal, *Leaves*, was devised in response to the Astley Ainslie site – from its importance to us now and its history in the health of our city. It addresses critical issues of nature, health, wellbeing and creativity. The title comes from Patrick Geddes’s battle cry: ‘By Leaves we live’, an assertion of real life in contrast to the narrow concerns of money. We have brought together experts and enthusiasts from the fields of the sciences, health, poetry, photography and history. The purpose of the journal is to introduce the importance of the site and the splendid opportunities it offers us for future use, in terms of broad issues and both local and international models.

The editors were delighted with the generous interest of no fewer than 28 authoritative contributors, and we would like to thank:

Katharina Axemo, Patricia Ace, Christopher Baker, Stephen Blackmore, Alicia Bruce, Stuart Buchanan, Anna Crowe, Birgitta Debenham, Robin Gillanders, Mandy Haggith, Michael Hall, Alexander Hamilton, Robin Harper, Michele Hipwell, Lucy Holroyd, Roksan Hur, Kathleen Jamie, Norman McBeath, Murdo Macdonald, Pradip Malde, Alasdair Niven, Jonathan Silvertown, Donald Smith, Sara Stevenson, Iain Stewart, David Williams, and Trina McKendrick and Kev Theaker of Written in Film. The publication was designed by Ian McIlroy and printed by Allander Print Limited, who kindly reduced the cost for us.

*Studies in Photography*, the publishing arm of the Scottish Society for the History of Photography, published 700 copies without charge to AACT, which underwrote an additional 300 copies. All revenue exceeding production costs goes to AACT.

The journal retails at £10, and makes a good present, which can be posted for you by [Studies in Photography](#). You can also order a copy at [our website](#).

Editors: Alexander Hamilton and Sara Stevenson; Jane McKie (poetry editor); Robin Connelly (copy editor)

*Note: Issue number two is currently being assembled and will be available in spring.*

Stunning photography—such as *Leaf Series II* by Norman McBeath, below—can be found throughout *Leaves*.



## 7 Next Steps

We have made great strides this year towards our aim of community ownership of the Astley Ainslie site. Through private and public funders, and direct contributions from our generous members, we have funded a part-time development manager and a full-scale feasibility study and social enterprise plan.

Our consultant team is hard at work, finalising Report 01 of the study. We expect soon to publish a summary of that report, **when we will invite comments from members to inform the next phase of work.**

Once we receive feedback on Report 01, our consultants will progress with work on the more detailed phase of the feasibility study, leading to Report 02. In this phase, and in the subsequent social enterprising planning, **we will be reaching out to and working with prospective development partners towards the preparation of the asset transfer request.**

AACT last met with NHS Lothian in January 2020 at a meeting convened by AACEG, and at which CEC Planning were present. There has

been intermittent correspondence between NHS Lothian contacts and AACT/our consultants since then. AACEG will be requesting the resumption of regular meetings (online) between the relevant community bodies and NHS Lothian.

City of Edinburgh Council have initiated preparation of the Place Brief for the Astley Ainslie, which will broadly outline guidance for acceptable development of the buildings and grounds. A Landscape and Heritage Assessment is currently awaited from NHS Lothian in order to **allow CEC to progress the drafting of the Place Brief.** Target timescales for this work are not currently available.

**A next major step will be adopting a new legal form,** and the Executive Committee is consulting with lawyers to help us determine the form most suitable to achieving our aspirations.

*We have much work ahead, but together, with a common vision, we can renew the promise of this unique place.*





Image credits:

- p. 2 Martyn Wellman
- p. 3 Iain Stewart, Sara Stevenson
- p. 4 Iain Stewart
- p. 6 Iain Stewart
- p. 9 Sara Stevenson
- p. 11 Norman McBeath
- p. 12 Iain Stewart

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