

11 November 2015		ITEM: 14 01104427
Cabinet		
Potential disposal of Billet Field, Stanford le Hope		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Councillor Gerard Rice, Portfolio Holder for Environment		
Accountable Head of Service: Ian Rydings, Head of Asset Management		
Accountable Director: Steve Cox, Assistant Chief Executive		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

In July 2015 Cabinet requested an update on the progress of East Thurrock United FC's ("ETUFC's") plans to purchase Billet Field in order to develop new facilities for the club's relocation. This report provides that update, recommending an amended way forward in the light of the club's progress so far.

1. Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 1.1 Notes the continuing progress of ETUFC's relocation plans.**
- 1.2 Confirms the in principle agreement to dispose of Billet Field to the club at market value as a relocation site, provided that substantive planning applications for both the housing and sporting facilities are submitted by the end of March 2016.**
- 1.3 Defers detailed discussion on the sale price and other terms until the club relevant planning applications are submitted.**
- 1.4 Agrees to formally consider the detailed price and sale conditions recommended by officers at the conclusion of negotiations.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Cabinet first considered this matter at its meeting in January 2014, and at that time agreed to the principle of disposal of the Billet Field to East Thurrock United FC, at market value, restricted for sports field use. This decision was**

made to enable the relocation of the club to the Billet in the circumstances of their privately owned ground at Rookery Hill, Corringham being redeveloped for housing. This in principle agreement required that the sale would take into account the development value enabled by the Council's land, the costs of the club's relocation and any social value generated by the new facilities. It also required that the matter be reported further to Cabinet for final approval, once negotiations were completed.

- 2.2 Acknowledging the progress made by the club at the time, Cabinet agreed to the sale for the sum of £340,000 at a following meeting held on the 9th April 2014. This firmer agreement was still subject to planning consents for both the residential development of the club's existing ground, and for the club's proposed development of new facilities at the relocation site.
- 2.3 The decision was also subject to the future agreement of detailed conditions for the ongoing stewardship of Billet Field, together with formalisation of ETUFC's proposal that they maintain, on the Council's behalf, further sports fields for community use on adjacent land known locally as the Mobil Field. The net annual cost of maintaining this neighbouring land is in excess of £11,000 and the net annual cost of the Council's stewardship of the Billet Field around £16,500; taking into account the cost of maintenance, less income received. The previous Cabinet decision therefore reflected the value of this potential revenue saving as being notionally equivalent to a capital receipt of around £300,000, in addition to the purchase price.
- 2.4 In reaching this decision Cabinet also considered the public benefit of the newly developed sporting facilities. Overall the plans presented by ETUFC were considered to represent a positive development for the community, the Council and the Club.
- 2.5 All prior consideration of this matter by the Council has been in its role as the landowner of the Billet Field. The Council's role as planning authority will not come into play until planning applications are made, and none of the discussions between the club and the Council so far should be taken as any implication that planning consents, either for a housing development at their current site, or for sporting facilities at the Billet, will be given in future.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Cabinet's current decision was predicated on the club's plans being well advanced, with the expectation of substantive planning applications for the developments to follow shortly. However, in the light of a delay of more than one year in making such applications, Cabinet was informed of the apparent halt in progress as part of a general asset management update in July 2015. At that time Cabinet requested that officers liaise with the football club during the summer, making a further report to enable Cabinet to review the position.
- 3.2 Following this liaison and a meeting with ETUFC's secretary, it can be reported that the club, in partnership with the private owner of their current

ground, are confident that they are close to concluding negotiations on a “subject to planning consent” sale of Rookery Hill ground to an established developer with a track record of house-building in the Thurrock area. Consequently they feel that the relevant planning applications will soon be submitted.

- 3.3 The club retains its ambition to establish a multi-sport community focused facility at the Billet and has been engaged in discussions with other borough wide sporting organisations with a view to progressing this vision. In this general spirit, ETUFC have already provided support and funding to enable remedial work to take place on the bowls green on the site, owned by the Council but presently leased to the Pegasus Bowls Club.
- 3.4 The club have hosted a public meeting to communicate to the community their ambitions, and to hear local views. They say it is their intention to continue to keep the local community fully informed of their plans and that they will, at an appropriate time, host another public meeting, while also keeping ward councillors informed of progress. The club have stated that in the light of matters raised at the initial public meeting they will reflect local concern in the design of the new clubhouse building and are actively looking at the inclusion of community facilities within that building.
- 3.5 ETUFC also say they are committed to liaising with other local landowners, and the Council’s highways team to minimise the impact of match day traffic, and to implement management measures to reduce the risk of fly-tipping in the local area.
- 3.6 In the light of the recent communications with ETUFC, officers acknowledge that the plans are substantive and progressing, and as was previously agreed by Cabinet, are a potentially positive development for the community, the Council and the Club. However, as is often the case with complex and inter-dependent projects of this nature, the timescale of the possible developments remains uncertain.
- 3.7 Therefore Cabinet will be requested to confirm the in principle agreement for disposal of the field provided that substantive planning applications for the respective housing and sports facilities are submitted by the end of March 2016. However Cabinet is also requested to nullify the existing agreement on a sale price; instead deferring negotiation of these detailed matters until such time as relevant planning applications are made.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 This decision is recommended in pursuit of the Council maintaining proactive management of its property portfolio following the high level principles of the asset management strategy, that property be;
 - managed strategically to support corporate aims and objectives.
 - held and managed in support of service delivery.

- used to provide Value for Money and deliver efficiencies and savings for the future.
- procured and managed in a way that minimises the impact on the environment.
- used to support the regeneration of the Borough.
- used to support the activities and development of Thurrock's communities and the Council's partners.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Formal notice under the Local Government Act 1972 was required prior to disposal of this open space being considered and the relevant notice was placed in the local press and on the Council's website in November 2013.

The outcome of this public consultation concerning the potential disposal of the open space was as follows;

- five submissions of objection, one including a petition signed by 184 people. The objections centred on fears of loss of access to the current playing fields, noise, litter, light pollution, alcohol associated nuisance, parking and traffic issues along residential roads and the potential for unsightly buildings,
- one response supporting the proposal, citing the Club's history involving the Billet site and the benefit to the local community; including improved specialist facilities, the club's delivery of recreation and coaching to youngsters, women's and disability sides and their support of charities including St Luke's Hospice.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 Management of the Council's land and property portfolio clearly has a far reaching impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and the community. The Council's overall policy intentions and corporate priorities will be kept uppermost in consideration as the strategy is implemented. The high level policy objectives of the strategy are aimed to ensure alignment with Council and community aspirations.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mark Terry**
Senior Financial Accountant

Any eventual income from the sale of this asset would on completion represent a capital receipt. It can only be only be used for capital investment

and not to fund revenue activities (although it may be used to repay capital borrowing with consequent revenue savings).

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Evonne Obasuyi**
Senior Lawyer

The Council's actions in disposing of land are subject to statutory provisions, in particular powers under section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 to dispose of land using whatever method it chooses as long as it meets its overriding duty to obtain the best consideration that can be reasonably obtained for the land. Where the land is considered to be open space, the Council is also required to give notice of its intention to dispose and consider any objections. The report indicates these requirements have been met

As the Asset Management Delivery Plan is implemented and property disposals are managed, further specific legal advice will be given to ensure that the Council is meeting its obligations and is acting lawfully and complies with the Council's Constitution..

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development and Equalities Manager

The disposal of properties in operational use and valued by the community has potential to have significant impact on members of the community and of staff. Consequently it is vital that these proposals are considered in the light of equality impact assessments to ensure that not only are adverse impacts avoided, but that the needs of those from minority groups are addressed. .

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

No other relevant implications.

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

8.1 Previous Cabinet papers referred to in this report;

- 8th January 2014;
<http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/Data/Cabinet/201401081900/Agenda/5218%20-%2020239.pdf>

- 9th April 2014;
<http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/Data/Cabinet/201404091900/Agenda/9407%20-%2020860.pdf>
- 8th July 2015;
<http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/g2558/Public%20reports%20pack%2008th-Jul-2015%2019.00%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1: Map showing the location of ETUFC's current ground at Rookery Hill, Corringham.
- Appendix 2: Map showing the location of the proposed facilities at Billet Lane, Stanford le Hope.

Report Author:

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