

Report to the Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1st July 2015

Land Asset Disposal



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Introduction

The Council at its meeting on the 15th April 2015 resolved that a cross party scrutiny working group be set up to listen to the concerns of local residents before any green space is sold for development.

Background

Asset Management Strategy 2015/16 – 2017/18

In January 2015 Cabinet approved this Strategy. The full document is available to view on the Council's intranet or website but a copy of the key appendices is attached.

At appendix 5 of the Strategy the approved consultation process that is followed once an area of land is identified as having a better alternative use is summarised in a flowchart.

1. Aims of the Consultation Process

The primary aim of this consultation process is to identify any physical, technical or other constraints that might affect the scope/opportunity for alternative use or development being pursued. The outcome of this consultation exercise, taken together with desktop technical assessments, allows the Council as a landowner to consider the future uses of these sites. Importantly the Strategy confirms that the Town Planning processes (Local Plan and Planning Applications) should consider the appropriateness of land or property being developed or used for alternative purposes rather than the Council as landowner making potentially subjective judgements.

2. The Nature of the Consultation Process

The consultation exercise takes place over a 6 week period. This involves Ward Councillors being notified prior to the start of the process. All owners/occupiers adjacent to the site are then sent a consultation letter along with the Parish/Town Council if applicable and any known Residents Association. A notice and plan is also placed on site. Anyone who considers there are reasons why a site should not be put to an alternative use, has any views, concerns or comments are asked to correspond with the Council or their local Councillor. The views are then reported to the Cabinet for its consideration.

3. The Current Position on Land Disposals

Cabinet has previously approved the disposal of the sites listed in Appendix 1 of the Strategy and the public consultation process (as set out above) has been completed in respect of these sites.

Approval has also been granted through the Strategy to explore alternative uses of the sites listed in Appendix 2. The consultation process is underway in respect of Deans Lane, Red Street.

The sites set out in Appendix 3 are identified in the Newcastle-under-Lyme Playing Pitch Strategy 2015-2020 as having no local demand and alternative uses should be explored (subject to the approval of the Playing Pitch Strategy). Cabinet at its meeting on 10th June approved the Strategy and identified 4 sites that had not been used for playing pitch purposes for a considerable length of time and that are therefore no longer playing pitches. Three of these sites: Knype Way, Bradwell, Sheldon Grove, Holditch and Gloucester Road Kidsgrove have also been declared surplus when assessed through the current Green Space Strategy. In accordance with Asset Management Strategy, the consultation process will commence shortly in respect of the sites at Knype Way, Bradwell and Sheldon Grove, Holditch.

4. Asset Management Strategy Approval Process

Members will be aware that it is customary for this Strategy to be prepared for consideration as part of the suite of financial reports brought to Members around January/February each year.

The Strategy has been subjected to a Scrutiny review process for the past few years from both a Property and Finance/Resources perspective.

Green Spaces Strategy Review

As part of the Local Plan preparation/process the Green Spaces Strategy is currently under review and it is anticipated that this will be completed in March/April 2016. The Strategy will identify open spaces that should be preserved and it may identify further sites that are not required to meet open space needs and so alternative uses will need to be explored.

Capital Programme Investment

Members should also recall that at Cabinet in October 2014 Members reviewed the options for funding the capital investment required for the period 2015/16-2018/19 and resolved that as a first resort, the Council would seek to fund its future known capital programme needs through the annual asset management process by identification of land or property in its ownership that is capable of, and appropriate for, disposal. The Council's Capital Strategy identifies that the current estimated funding requirement for the next 3 years is approximately £14.5m. It is estimated (subject to planning permission being granted, there being no significant abnormal costs and the sites selling an open market value) that the capital receipts likely to be generated in respect of the sites listed in Appendices 1,2 and 3 of the current Asset Management Strategy is in the region of £16m.

Questions/Issues to be addressed

1. How do members envisage that any scrutiny working group will interface with the various Cabinet Panels that are being established to address capital programme expenditure and income?

2. How do members envisage that any scrutiny working group will both influence and enable delivery of future Asset Management Strategies (including the identification of future sites for disposal)?
3. What do members consider need to be the key terms of reference?
4. Is it anticipated that this group would review the previously-approved disposals (Appendices 1, 2 and 3 of the current Asset Management Strategy)?
5. Do Members consider they have sufficient information in order to balance private interest with the wider public interest?
6. Are members satisfied with the consultation arrangements set out in the current Asset Management Strategy?

Outcomes

1. Confirmation of the approach to consultation including Member involvement.
2. Greater clarity and understanding of the corporate need for an effective asset rationalisation process to meet service needs and to fund the capital programme.
3. Recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the Asset Management process (including rationalisation)

Conclusions

Members are requested to review the current consultation processes and to identify how a cross party working group could be involved in any enhanced process.

Relevant Portfolio Holder(s)

Town Centres' Business and Assets

Local Ward Member (if applicable)

Not applicable – all wards

Background Materials

Cabinet Report – Newcastle-under-Lyme Playing Pitch Strategy 2015-2020
Playing Pitch Strategy 2015-2020

Appendices

Asset Management Strategy 2015/16-2017/18 (particularly Appendices 1, 2, 3 and 5)