

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member for Culture, Lifestyle, Sport and Tourism</b>
2.	<b>Date:</b>	<b>30 November 2010</b>
3.	<b>Title:</b>	<b>Transfer of Bar Park, Thorpe Hesley</b>
4.	<b>Programme Area:</b>	Environment and Development Services

### 5. Summary

The report seeks a member decision on whether to proceed with the acquisition/transfer of Bar Park, Thorpe Hesley from Sheffield City Council (SCC) to Rotherham MBC (RMBC).

### 6. Recommendations

- **That Cabinet Member confirms the Council's interest in acquiring Bar Park from Sheffield City Council;**
- **That Asset Management Department to be instructed to commence negotiations with Sheffield City Council, seeking the transfer of the freehold of Bar Park, Thorpe Hesley to Rotherham MBC**
- **Officers to assess options for managing the additional maintenance of the site when transferred, including reducing standards at other sites**

## **7. Proposals and Details**

Details of the proposed transfer of Bar Park from SCC to RMBC were given in a previous report to Cabinet Member for Cultural Services and Sport on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2010. It was explained that further progress depended on funds being identified to pay the associated legal and surveyors fees, and that an earmarked balance request had been included in the overall 2009/10 EDS Outturn Report to cover this cost.

Cabinet has now agreed to this request, meaning that funds are available to cover fees. SCC has written to confirm that they are still willing to proceed with the transfer on previously stated terms, subject to formal approval by their Cabinet.

SCC has also advised that it will not contribute to the future cost of maintaining the park, however they have confirmed that they are paying for selected urgent works in advance of any transfer, including the removal of an unsafe tree close to the children's play area. RMBC would be unable to pay for the routine maintenance of Bar Park without making savings elsewhere. In view of this, urgent work would need to be undertaken to adjust grounds maintenance schedules, including reductions in frequency of visits to both this and other sites.

The Council's current financial situation means it is unlikely that necessary capital to pay for one-off repairs would be available. SCC has provided figures showing a low level of use of the single football pitch and changing pavilion at the park in recent years. It is proposed to examine the viability of continuing to provide such facilities if the site is transferred, and to offer alternative sites in the vicinity if appropriate, this would potentially help to offset ongoing maintenance costs on the site.

The Green Space Strategy assessed the site as a 'Low Quality/Low Value Local Green Space'. The low quality score reflects the lack of investment over recent years, and the low value score comes from the fact that it is not a large site and relatively few people live within five minutes walk of it. However, it is the only green space serving the west side of Thorpe Hesley, and is therefore needed to ensure that people living in the vicinity can access a green space within five minutes walking distance, as recommended in the Green Space Strategy.

## **8. Finance**

### Professional Costs

As previously reported, these are estimated to be around £7,500. SCC has recently restated its offer to recharge RMBC for just 50% of their professional costs, subject to negotiations not becoming protracted. Financial provision has been made for this in the 2010/11 financial year.

### One-off improvements

Full details of estimated costs for essential repairs and upgrading to Bar Park were given in the report of 1<sup>st</sup> June 2010. The estimated total cost is £91,341. No RMBC capital funding has been identified to cover any of these costs and the current financial situation means that it is unlikely that funding will become available in the near future. An alternative approach would be to defer non-essential upgrades, and to close the pavilion to avoid the need for essential repairs. It is estimated that there

would be cost of around £3,000 to secure the building and to cut of services; there is no specific budget provision for this work, and it would represent a pressure on the service's premises fund.

### Routine maintenance

The current estimated annual cost for routine maintenance of the park including buildings and adjoining woodland is £9,591. As there is no additional revenue budget available to cover these costs they would need to be met by achieving savings from service budgets, for example, by scaling back maintenance standards on this and other sites,. Furthermore, it is probable that the revenue budget will reduce in future years, and this will create further difficulties in seeking to maintain the site in a reasonable condition.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

Officers at SCC have indicated their support for the transfer of Bar Park to Rotherham. However, this will not be confirmed until a final decision is taken by elected members there.

As explained above, it is currently very unlikely that the Council would be able to manage the costs of taking on responsibility for Bar Park without it impacting on management of other sites. This situation is likely to become even more difficult because of expected reductions in service budgets.

The uncertainty about both the level of revenue funding and the lack of capital funding to undertake one-off repairs could lead to further deterioration of assets, complaints and increased public liability risks. Any reduction in the provision of services at the park, for example the closure of the pavilion, is likely to lead to complaints that the Council is under-investing in the facility compared to Sheffield City Council.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

Through this matter the Council has been seeking an outcome where the local people can be actively involved in the improvement of the environment and facilities serving their community, thus supporting the Corporate Themes 'Rotherham Proud' and 'Rotherham Safe'. In doing so, the Council must have due regard for the achievement of value for money.

## **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

Report to Cabinet Member for Cultural Services and Sport, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2010.

Financial Services have been consulted on this matter.

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