

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Lifelong Learning and Culture
2.	Date:	22nd May 2012
3.	Title:	Herringthorpe Leisure Site – communications in respect of the decision to lease a section of the site
4.	Programme Area:	Environment and Development Services

5. Summary

This report provides a response to three separate but related communications which are focused on the Council's decision to enter into discussions with Rotherham Rugby Club regarding the lease of a section of the Herringthorpe Leisure site for the development of rugby and other sport and recreation activities.

Recommendations

- 1) The Cabinet member supports the conclusion that relevant sports clubs were consulted as part of the formal consultation process and notes the objections to the Council's decision to lease a section of the Herringthorpe Leisure Site.**

2) Proposals and Details

Three separate but related communications have been received through different channels concerned with the Council's decision to lease a section of the Herringthorpe Leisure Site for the development of rugby and other sport and recreation activities.

Communication A

This is in the form of an 'e-petition' which includes the statement 'No to Proposed Junior Rugby Enclosure on Herringthorpe Fields' and has 15 signatories.

Communication B

This is in the form of a petition, although the list of names and addresses appear to be recorded in the same handwriting. This was received in March 2012, along with a covering letter addressed to 'The Chief Executive'. The letter reads as follows:

'Please find enclosed copies of 730 residents objections to the principle of any commercial enterprise on Herringthorpe Playing Fields.'

Communication C

This is in the form of a petition and was received in March 2012. It identifies names, signatures, addresses and where applicable membership of a sports club. The forms are addressed to the Chief Executive RMBC and are headed with the following statement:

'I'm a member / supporter of a sports team who regularly uses pitches on Herringthorpe Playing fields on the proposed site for leasing to Rotherham Rugby Club. I wish to declare that I have not been consulted about this proposal and do not agree to the leasing of an area of the field to private clubs for their sole purpose at the expense of other users who have used the field unhindered for over 100 years. The proposal will result in the loss of approx 3 hectares / 7 acres of prime playing space which represents a major proportion of the field suitable for sport.'*

**Figure supplied by RMBC planning.'*

The forms identify a total of 182 names and 24 different sports clubs. 105 names are identified as members of a sports club and 77 names are from people who appear not to be members of sports clubs.

In addition to Communications A, B and C a handwritten letter has also been received. The letter does not contain an address or signature. It outlines a perception of the consultation process and supports the view that sports clubs were not consulted

Response to the communications

Communications A and B express an objection to either the lease of a section of the Herringthorpe Leisure Site to Rotherham Rugby Club Limited or to the principle of any commercial enterprise on Herringthorpe Playing Fields.

Communication C expresses an objection from members and supporters of sports teams to the lease of a section of the Herringthorpe Leisure Site to Rotherham

Rugby Club Limited and along with the handwritten letter states that sports clubs have not been consulted.

All objections to the potential lease have been noted.

With regard to the consultation, this was conducted between 1st April and 31st August 2011 and targeted local residents, regular site users, the two local area assemblies and ward members from the surrounding wards. The process consisted of a press release, a leaflet drop to households surrounding the affected area, a dedicated website and an email post box, backed up by a postal mail box and advice facility. In addition a meeting was held on 14th June at the town hall hosted by Cllr Dodson, Chair to the Rotherham South Area Assembly and attended by Cllr Currie Chair of Wentworth South Area Assembly, along with ward members from the affected wards.

At the time of the consultation 18 different sports clubs were identified in the Green Space Service booking records as regular users of the pitches at Herringthorpe Playing Fields. The consultation focused on regular users during the 2010-11 season but did take account of usage during the 2009-10 season. Letters (Appendix A) were sent to the representative of each of the clubs identified as regular users, at the contact address they provided as part of the pitch booking process. The letters informed the clubs of the proposal and of where they could send any comments they may have. All consultation feedback was collated by the Green Spaces Service and reported to the Council's Cabinet on 19th October 2011.

Analysis of Leisure & Green Space pitch booking records suggests that of the 24 different sports clubs identified in Communication C, 5 have used Herringthorpe Playing Fields between 2009 and 2012. Of these 5 clubs, 3 have been regular users (minimum of 32 bookings over the 3 years) and 2 have not been regular users (maximum of 3 bookings over the 3 years). However it is difficult to be certain about the usage of all of the clubs identified in the petition because of the way some of the names are identified (e.g. 'Rother', 'Rotherham' and 'Rotherham Town'). Therefore, as far as it is possible to determine from the information provided, 3 of the 24 sports clubs identified in the petition have used the playing pitches at Herringthorpe on a regular basis and they were all sent a letter as part of the consultation process.

Individual supporters of sports clubs were not consulted with directly as this would not have been practically possible. However it is possible that they could have been made aware of the proposal by the representatives / members of the sports club they supported or via the range of publicity that was put out as part of the consultation process.

It is worth noting that in the event that Rotherham Rugby Club decides to proceed with the proposed lease and once there is agreement on the Heads of Terms, there will be a need to advertise the proposal to lease and to consider any objections to the disposal of the land under Section 123 of the Local Government Act, 1972. This was noted in the minutes of the Cabinet report on 19th October 2011.

Cabinet Report 19th October 2011, Resolved: - That subject to advertising and considering any objections to the disposal of the land under Section 123 of the Local Government Act, 1972, the proposal from the Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd. to lease

an area of Herringthorpe Playing Fields at Herringthorpe for the exclusive purpose of rugby development subject to appropriate mitigating actions (as outlined) being implemented be approved.

Summary

The communications express objections either to leasing a section of the Herringthorpe Leisure site or to the principle of any commercial enterprise, and these objections are noted.

In addition, Communication C and the handwritten letter state that sports clubs have not been consulted. As far as it is possible to determine from the information provided, 3 of the sports clubs identified in Communication C were regular users of the playing pitches at the time the consultation was undertaken and they were all sent a letter informing them of the proposal to lease a section of the site. Therefore the relevant sports clubs appear to have been consulted as part of the formal consultation process.

8. Finance

N/A

9. Risks and Uncertainties

As stated above it is difficult to be certain about the usage of all of the clubs identified in Communication C because of the way some of the names are identified (e.g. 'Rother', 'Rotherham' and 'Rotherham Town').

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

N/A

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Cabinet report 19th October 2011

Contact Name:

Steve Hallsworth, Leisure & Community Services Manager, Streetpride, EDS, 01709 822483, steve.hallsworth@rotherham.gov.uk