

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO CABINET

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet
2.	Date:	22nd May 2013
3.	Title:	Herringthorpe Playing Fields – proposed lease to Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd and responses to the legal notices.
4.	Directorate Area:	Environment and Development Services

5. Summary

This report presents a summary of the responses to the legal notice advertising the proposal to lease an area of Herringthorpe Playing Fields to Rotherham Rugby Club Limited, an amateur club providing training and playing opportunities for a range of ages and abilities. It also includes further responses in respect of two e-petitions that were reported to Cabinet Member for Culture & Tourism on 12th March 2013

6. Recommendations

6.1 That Cabinet approves the proposed lease of an area of Herringthorpe Playing Fields to Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd.

6.2 That Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd are requested to set up a residents liaison committee to help improve community relationships, and be a forum to raise issues such as parking and community use.

7. Proposals and Details

Summary

This report presents a summary of the responses to the legal notice advertising the proposal to lease an area of Herringthorpe Playing Fields to Rotherham Rugby Club Limited, an amateur club providing training and playing opportunities for a range of ages and abilities. The Mini/Junior section has almost 300 boys and girls taking part in 10 different age groups from 7 to 17 years old. All sections depend on enthusiastic volunteers, whose roles range from occasional help to regular team managers and coaches. The greatest difficulty that the Club has to address is the lack of facilities to sustain its activities. Due to the lack of available pitches, teams have to hire pitches for training and playing at different facilities throughout the Borough. Facilities at Dinnington, Wath, Rawmarsh, Wickersley School and Dearne Valley College have been used to accommodate the growing demands of the Club. This report also includes further responses in respect of two related e-petitions that were reported to Cabinet Member for Culture & Tourism on 12th March 2013.

Outline proposal

- Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd wish to lease a section of Herringthorpe Playing Fields to be used by their amateur teams (junior and adult) for training, competitive matches and community development purposes. The Club's requirements are for a secure site that can accommodate 3 full size rugby pitches.
- The proposal includes an investment by the Rugby Club of approximately £300,000 in fencing off an agreed area of the field, improving the playing surface and drainage, providing new changing rooms and installation of floodlighting.
- The lease would include time restrictions and require the use of the latest design in floodlighting in order to reduce impact on local residents.
- The Club would be required to develop a management plan aimed at reducing the impact of any increased car parking on the local area.
- The Club would also be required to make the facility available to other amateur clubs, and to work with the Council's Sports Development Team to organise and promote wider sport and physical activity opportunities. They would also have to make the facilities available to local schools for a variety of activities including competitive matches and finals. This community use is defined within an accompanying Service Level Agreement which will be monitored by the Sports Development Unit in Leisure and Community Services.
- The lease does not provide for the facility to be used by the Rotherham Titans.
- The Club has undertaken in its Car Parking Management Plan document which also forms a part of the Service Level Agreement which sits alongside the lease agreement, to use off site parking at the adjacent Clifton Lane site.

In addition, the following concerns have previously been raised by members of the public and were reported to Cabinet on 19th October 2011:

- 1 Loss of amenity – loss of access to the pitches for casual use by walkers, and by children and young people for informal games. Access will be prevented by the proposed fencing.

Comment: Of the existing green space that makes up the Herringthorpe Playing Fields over 90% remains unaffected by these proposals. There will be little loss of amenity. (The footprint of the old Leisure Centre is not included in this calculation but the Athletics Stadium is)

- 2 Visual – Fencing and lighting will be visually intrusive. The fencing will break up the open nature of the fields and the lighting will shine through household windows at night time.

Comment: Modern fencing of this type blends into its surroundings and it will not be intrusive. The fencing is a condition of funding from the RFU. Lighting will be on during the earlier part of the evening only. The lighting columns would be situated a minimum distance of 52.7 meters from the nearest housing on Badsley Moor Lane and 62.5 metres on Badsley Street South.

- 3 Wrong Location – Some local residents would prefer to see the facility located at the other end of the site where the old leisure centre was situated.

Comment: Cabinet has allocated this area for development.

- 4 Traffic – residents have said that they are concerned about the problem of additional parking on local streets which are already congested, particularly on match days.

Comment: The Club has undertaken in its Car Parking Management Plan document (which also forms a part of the Service Level Agreement which sits alongside the lease agreement) to use off site parking at the adjacent Clifton Lane site.

- 5 Inadequate Facilities – the lack of toilet facilities will cause problems on site if the facility is developed.

Comments: The Club has indicated that it is willing to build toilet facilities into its proposals for the site.

Comments from those in support of the proposal included the following;

- The proposed facility would provide a permanent base for amateur rugby for all ages in Rotherham. Any initiative to support quality sport at a local level should be supported.

- The council cannot afford investment in quality provisions. The development of the sports pitches by the Club should be applauded at a time when budgets are tight.
- Decent Rugby facilities for the junior and amateur game are long overdue - this proposal adds value to the local area. Schemes that encourage young people (and senior teams) to participate in sport have to be welcomed.
- Promoting exercise encourages healthy lifestyles. Rugby is an excellent way to keep fit while instilling morals and values.

Replies understood to be in response to the legal notice

There were 5,619 signatures recorded on forms which had the following statement on the header: *'We the undersigned object to the leasing and / or disposal of land on Herringthorpe Playing Fields by Rotherham Borough Council to Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd.'* This was handed to the Authority on 22nd February 2013.

There were also 63 separate letters and forms submitted in general opposition to aspects of the Rotherham Rugby Club Lease Proposal.

There were 1,147 signatures recorded on forms which had the following statement on the header: *'We the undersigned, fully support the major investment planned by Rotherham Rugby Club on a section of Herringthorpe Playing Fields to promote the playing of amateur rugby union by the young people of Rotherham, through club, schools and community use in partnership with the Council's Sports Development Team.'* This was handed in to the Authority on 15th February 2013.

There were also 177 separate letters and forms submitted in support of the Rotherham Rugby Club Lease Proposal.

e-petitions

In addition to the advertisement of the legal notice, two e-petitions were hosted by the Council's Democratic Services Team. These were reported to the Cabinet Member for Culture and Tourism on Tuesday, 12th March, 2013 and recommended for referral to Cabinet for information.

The first e-petition which ran from 13/11/2012 to 25/12/2012 containing the names of 25 people states:

'We the undersigned petition the council to refuse to lease and/or dispose of land on Herringthorpe Playing Fields to Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd Herringthorpe Playing Fields were opened by the Right Honourable George Lansbury M.P, where in declaring the fields open for ever, he paid tribute to the Council for bringing to the services of the community all the amenities that a community needs.....'

The fields were devoted to the service of all, and he had great pleasure in declaring them open for ever."

The second e-petition which ran from 07/12/2012 to 18/01/2013 containing the names of 118 people states:

'We the undersigned urge the council to approve the proposed lease with Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd to provide decent facilities to be developed for amateur rugby. Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd want to provide decent facilities at no cost to the council. Please support us and help the club develop facilities that the entire town can be proud of.'

It is therefore recommended that in light of the identified responses the Cabinet determines whether the proposed lease of an area of Herringthorpe Playing Fields to Rotherham Rugby Club should proceed.

8. Finance

The lease would be granted at a nominal rate in line with the Asset Transfer Policy. The Club is responsible for securing the funding for the development. An offer of funding by the Rugby Football Union is likely, through a combination of grant and an interest free loan, to be guaranteed by the Club's members. This funding would be subject to satisfactory planning approvals and lease agreements being in place. There are no financial consequences to the Council for this development.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

N/A

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The proposal has the potential to contribute to the Council's stated vision in respect of enjoying 'a healthy and active life' and in terms of the following statements relating to 'what we want to achieve':

- 'More people are physically active and have a healthy way of life'
- 'People enjoy parks, green spaces, sports, leisure, and cultural activities'

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Report to Cabinet, 23rd March 2011, Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd.

Report to Cabinet Member for Culture & Tourism, 12th March 2013, e-Petitions.

Report to Cabinet 19th October 2011, A report to summarise the consultation carried out regarding rugby development on Herringthorpe Playing Fields

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