

Item 4

KEY DECISION

REPORT TO CABINET

27 SEPTEMBER 2007

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEISURE SERVICES

Portfolio: Leisure and Culture

Cobblers Hall Re-development

1 SUMMARY

Since 1991, the sale of land for development purposes within the Cobblers Hall area of Newton Aycliffe has realised for Sedgfield Borough Council in excess of £36m.

The 2000 development brief confirmed that the Borough Council would benefit from the full land value, that no section 106 monies would be sought from developers, but significant investment in the area would be made by the Council for sport and informal recreational purposes as the development site approached completion.

In November 2006, Cabinet noted the report written by LDA Consultants into how the areas shown at appendix 1 could be developed, but asked for public consultation to be conducted.

This report to Cabinet reflects those findings and provides recommendations to progress the scheme.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- Subject to a satisfactory outcome of discussions with Great Aycliffe Town Council regarding their contribution towards on-going revenue costs, that Cabinet agree to commission a “design and build” project team.
- That a sum of £800,000 be allocated towards the project from the Council’s Major Regeneration Initiatives programme.

3 DETAIL

In 2000, the Cobblers Hall development brief was written which confirmed the importance of allocating public open space in the Northern and Western areas of Newton Aycliffe. The brief stated that a third of land to be developed should remain as open space or for recreational use. It also identified the provision of playing pitches sufficient to serve the whole of the area known as Cobblers Hall. There was a firm commitment that as the Cobblers Hall development site approached completion, the Council would invest in these areas from the significant resources that were to be raised from land disposal.

At this time, it was suggested that consideration be given to providing for football, (to Northern League Standards), rugby and tennis.

An audit of existing provision of different types of open space, set against PPG17 has highlighted the Horndale football pitches as being of poor quality and the Borough's Play Strategy adopted by Cabinet on 2 November 2006 cites the Horndale and Byerley Park areas as needing investment to improve the quality of fixed play sites. More recently, the Open Space Needs Assessment adopted by Cabinet on 21 June 2007 states how much residents appreciate high quality, well maintained open space.

LDA Consultants in their June 2005 study concluded that the open space in question was an important gateway to the Town which is underused albeit valued highly by local people.

In November 2006, Cabinet gave due consideration to the Consultant's report and concluded that the scheme in principle was worthy of support subject to the outcome of further public consultation.

Officers within the department, together with help from local Elected Members, developed a consultation programme the findings of which are referred to in section 5 of the report.

4 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since 1991, Sedgefield Borough Council has been able to generate £36m from land sales, in the Cobblers Hall area.

Given that LDA were suggesting an investment of around £1m to realise their proposals, which incidentally included for significant works to the existing pedestrian underpasses, which are not included in current proposals, it may be appropriate to allocate £800,000 towards this project.

This will fulfil the Council's commitment to reinvest in the area in line with the 2000 Development Brief and on the back of the extensive consultation process that has recently been undertaken.

A sum of £800,000 has been based on the value of constructing new changing rooms with car parking facilities, improving drainage to existing soccer pitches, creating more junior sized pitches, building new fixed play areas, introducing soft landscaping and appropriate street furniture.

The scheme falls within the definition of regeneration i.e. bringing underused land back into public use, and is able to be accommodated from the Council's Major Regeneration Initiatives funding provision.

The revenue implications of any new development work clearly need to be carefully considered to avoid additional financial pressures being applied to existing revenue budgets.

The proposals for the Cobblers Hall site will generate some additional costs in respect of ground maintenance, play area maintenance and changing room management and maintenance.

In order to mitigate future revenue cost to the Borough, discussions have been held with Great Aycliffe Town Council to establish their willingness to take over the responsibility for maintaining the development area subject to a transfer of the land from the Borough to the Town Council on agreed terms.

Clearly there will need to be firm agreements in place between the Borough and Town Council before final project scope and designs are agreed and before the physical project commences.

The plan attached identifies the area to which this proposal relates. There will be a requirement of some off-site infrastructure works, landscaping and improvements to the "Moor" at the north of Burn Lane which will be the subject of a further report.

5 CONSULTATION

What was clearly missing from LDA consultant's report in June 2005 was the extensive public consultation necessary when considering project costs of this nature. Cabinet requested officers to conduct consultation which was robust enough to provide a base from which to advance the project.

Between January 2007 and July 2007 a mix of consultation methods was conducted which included, 5 separate public meetings, written questionnaires, visits to schools, a meeting of Great Aycliffe Town Councillors. Altogether around 1700 responses were gathered and evaluated.

It is clear that:

- The education sector would like to be involved as part of the design and implementation team.
- Local residents really value this open space and would like safe road crossing points.
- There is a significant lack of high quality playing pitches in the area.
- New changing accommodation to service the playing pitches are required.
- People want to be able to use the space informally for walking, cycling, sitting and relaxing.
- There are concerns around vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

6 CONCLUSION

After evaluating all the research data, a series of conclusions may be drawn from the public feedback which would form the basis of instructions to a design and build team who would see the project through to completion.

- There is a clear need to construct new and improve existing senior and junior soccer pitches.
- A new changing pavilion should be built.
- School children should be able to use the area during curriculum time as a valuable outdoor resource.
- Safe crossing routes are necessary.

- A number of fixed play sites are required.
- The area should have adequate seating, landscaping and planting to enable people to stay and relax.
- Improvements to signage are required to recognise its important role as a gateway to the town.

7 OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 Links to Corporate Objectives/values

Among its corporate ambitions, Sedgefield Borough is striving to make its environment one which is attractive to residents and visitors alike.

This significant area of open space located within Cobblers Hall should serve as an important gateway to the Town and onwards towards its industrial quarter.

Newton Aycliffe is reported to be the fastest growing town within the County of Durham and Cobblers Hall is one of the reasons for this.

An investment in the proposed site would send out a clear signal about the Borough's ambitions as Cobblers Hall nears development completion in its entirety.

As part of encouraging healthy lifestyles, bringing a significant area of public open space into use by a greater proportion of residents will add to the critical mass of facility provision in Newton Aycliffe.

From both a structured sport and informal recreation perspective, the Cobblers Hall project will contribute towards each of the Healthy and Attractive ambitions of the Council.

7.2 Risk Management

The extensive public consultation has inevitably heightened awareness and expectations regarding the Borough's proposals to invest in this area of Newton Aycliffe subject to Cabinet's approval.

There are further and more formal discussions required to take place with Great Aycliffe Town Council regarding management and maintenance responsibilities of any future asset developments on site. In order to ensure that the project does not require a significant increase in the Borough's revenue costs, agreement with the Town Council for them to take on the management and maintenance costs on the site will be essential.

7.3 Sustainability

Arising from the Consultant's findings, and communicating with many local residents, is the depth of feelings towards sustaining a significant piece of open space for their future enjoyment.

The process of taking the project forward should include putting the community at the heart of that process to further support the sense of ownership and value that they have for the area.

The direction in project delivery given to a design team will reflect our findings.

7.4 Crime and Disorder

All elements of the project design must be assessed against agreed criteria for planning out potential for criminal damage and anti-social behaviour. However, it is felt that by ensuring the whole community have a real stake in the process, this sense of ownership and respect will be reinforced.

7.5 Human Rights and Social Inclusion

The opportunity exists within the project to ensure special interest/needs groups are engaged in the design and implementation experience not simply as consultees. The uniqueness of what could be the project process should help in making the journey as important as the finished product.

7.6 Health and Safety

Due consideration will be given to all health and safety issues in the design through the procurement stages to project completion, methods of use by the public and future management of the site.

7.7 Procurement

The Council's procurement procedures will be adhered to in all aspects of project delivery.

No other material considerations have been identified.

Background Papers: LDA Consultants Report – July 2005
Cobblers Hall Development Brief 2000
Sedgefield Borough’s Play Strategy – November 2006
Open Space Needs Assessment – June 2007
Cobblers Hall Cabinet Report – November 2006

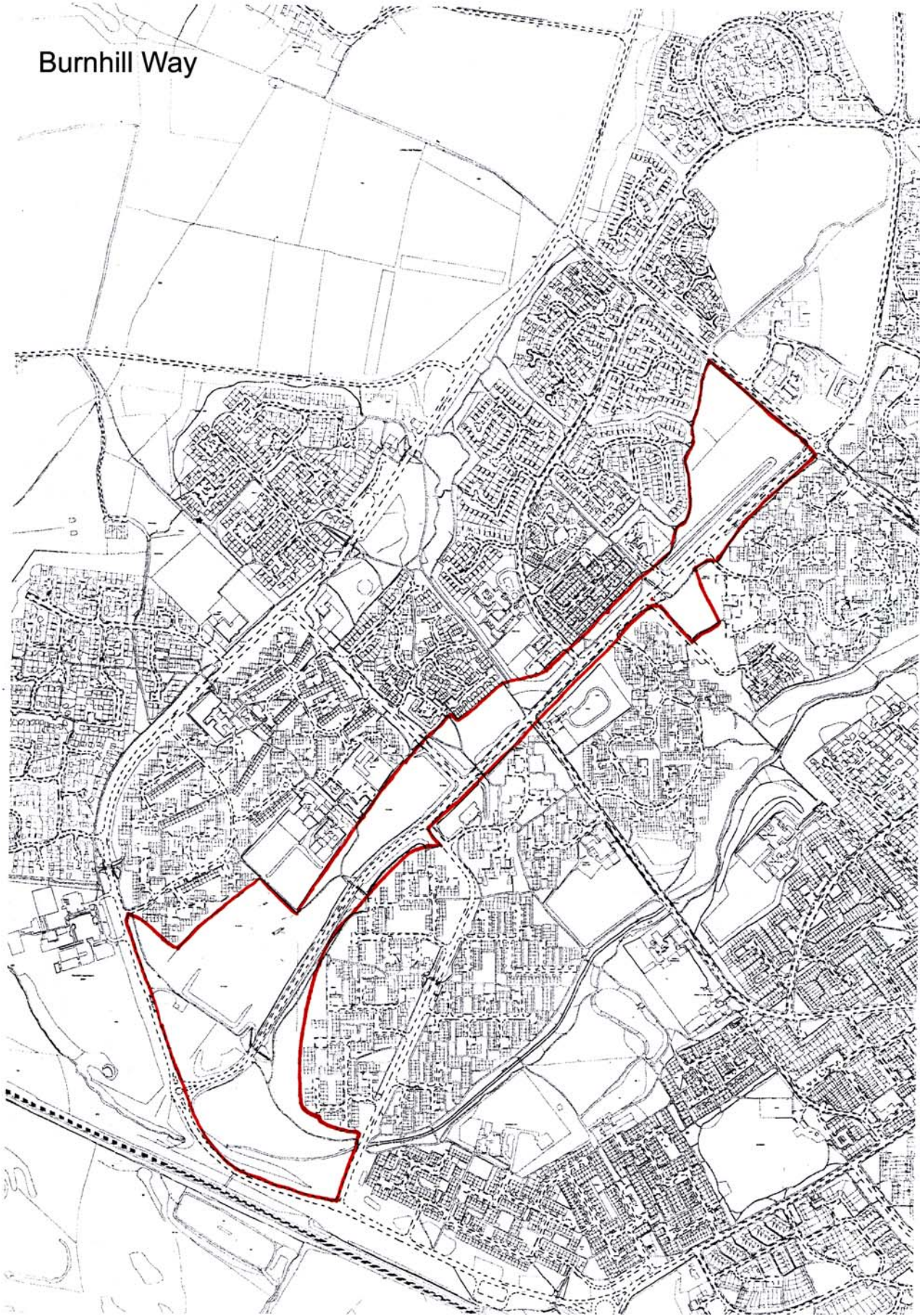
Contact Officer: Phil Ball
Telephone No: (01388) 816166 ext 4386
Email Address: pball@sedgefield.gov.uk

Ward(s): All
Key Decision Validation:

Examination by Statutory Officers

	Yes	Not Applicable
1. The report has been examined by the Councils Head of the Paid Service or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The content has been examined by the Councils S.151 Officer or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The content has been examined by the Council’s Monitoring Officer or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The report has been approved by Management Team	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Burnhill Way



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