

Report of: Director of City Development

Report to: Friends of Red Hall Playing Fields

Date: August 2015

Subject: Response to Deputation to Full Council

Are specific electoral wards affected? Crossgates & Whinmoor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity or cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If 'yes', access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

At the Full Council meeting in July 2015, the Friends of Red Hall Playing Fields presented a deputation setting out their concerns about the possible loss of public green space at Red Hall and the Council's intentions to dispose of the site for development. The deputation set out a number of desired outcomes relating to the site relating to promotion of accessible space for active and informal recreation and formal designation of the playing fields as green space.

This report sets out the Council's response to the deputation and its current position on the future of land at Red Hall.

Recommendation

The Director of City Development is asked to note the contents of this report and approve as the response to the deputation.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report sets out the Council's response to the Friends of Red Hall Playing Fields deputation to Full Council in July 2015.

2 Background information

- 2.1 Red Hall is located to the north east of the main urban area of Leeds between the A58 Wetherby Road and the A6120 Outer Ring Road. It is predominately in the ownership of Leeds City Council and comprised of three main parts – land in operational Parks and Countryside nursery and depot use, land laid out as playing fields and the original Listed Building of Red Hall, which is owned and occupied as the headquarters of the Rugby Football League.
- 2.2 Red Hall is also located within the East Leeds Extension, which is the single largest housing growth area in the Leeds City Region, with potential for around 5,000 new homes. The Council's Executive Board has received various reports since 2012 relating to Red Hall and establishing the role of the Council in enabling growth in the East Leeds Extension. The report to Executive Board in January 2014 set out the Council's leading role in delivering the East Leeds Orbital Road and its work with land and development interests to ensure the co-ordinated planning and delivery of the housing and infrastructure that will support this.
- 2.3 The Council understands that the Friends of Red Hall Playing Fields group was formed in 2013 following the completion and occupation of a new build housing site on the southern edge of the playing field land, and the consultation undertaken by the Council on the Site Allocations Plan (Issues and Options June 2013), which proposed a housing allocation for the whole site including the playing fields.
- 2.4 The group is made up of local residents seeking to protect the playing fields from future development. It's deputation to the Full Council meeting of 8th July set out its views on the social and amenity value of the land; these have also been under discussion with ward members and officers over the course of the last 2 years.
- 2.5 The deputation (attached at Appendix 1) requested a number of specific outcomes it wished to see regarding the future of the site, as follows:
- That the Council makes a commitment not to sell the playing field land and that it is retained as a large area of land for different activities;
 - That that Council formally designates the land as green space and protects the setting and historic landscape around the Red Hall listed buildings;
 - Local residents to be involved in decisions concerning the landscaping and maintenance of the playing fields;
 - The Council provides the group with support and guidance to ensure sports and recreation aspirations are protected and acknowledged in the decision-making process.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 The Red Hall playing fields have been identified for development since the adoption of the 2001 Unitary Development Plan, which allocated the land for employment uses as a 'key business park', subject to the provision of off-site highway improvements, protection of the setting of the Listed Buildings and provision of suitable replacement playing fields. The adjoining Red Hall nursery site was provisionally allocated for development in the 2001 UDP as a Protected Area of Search (PAS) for housing.
- 3.2 The land allocated for employment use extends to c.11 hectares with c.4 hectares of formal playing pitches within this. This area was previously laid out as 5 playing fields (4 football and 1 rugby league) and a 6 team changing block, but these have not been used since 2006, as a result of ongoing drainage issues that were proving too costly to address in a sustainable way. The playing fields remain in water-logged state for a large part of the year but remain capable of use for informal amenity purposes in dry periods.
- 3.3 The existing fields do not have a current green space designation or allocation in the UDP, although paragraph 74 of the National Planning Policy Framework also applies:
- Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:*
- *an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
 - *the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*
 - *the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.*
- 3.4 At its meetings in May 2012 and September 2013, the Council's Executive Board agreed and affirmed the principles of a project to relocate the Parks & Countryside Nursery from Red Hall to a site at Whinmoor Grange and the intention to dispose of the site upon completion of the relocation.
- 3.5 There is a clear service need for modern, purpose built and efficient nursery premises, given the incremental way in which the current site has been built up over the years. A new facility at Whinmoor Grange is anticipated to deliver significant land use and operational efficiencies. It was noted and agreed that the relocation of the nursery would need to be funded through disposal of the vacated site, using a proportion of the capital receipt received.

- 3.6 Executive Board also approved the principles of an Informal Planning Statement for the whole Red Hall site, incorporating the nursery and adjoining playing fields to inform further work towards future consultation on a full planning brief for residential development. The Board agreed the intent to retain and upgrade parts of the existing green space and mature planting, and to provide a setting for the Red Hall listed building.
- 3.7 The route of the East Leeds Orbital Road (ELOR) would need to pass around the edge of the whole site and require land that is currently within the operational boundary of the nursery. If the nursery were not to relocate it would require a fundamental, costly and unfunded reconfiguration of the site.
- 3.8 A proportion of the capital receipt from sale of land at Red Hall will also be required to fund this section of the ELOR, as part of the funding package for the full route around the whole of the East Leeds Extension, which will release long-allocated housing land for development.
- 3.9 The proposition for residential development of the site rather than a business park reflects changes in national planning policy since 2006 that restrict the development of out-of-centre office development. It should also be noted that since the original allocation of the site for a business park, the housing needs of the city have grown significantly in scale, requiring all identified market areas of Leeds to have sufficient land identified to deliver 70,000 new homes by 2028.
- 3.10 The principle of residential use across the whole of the Red Hall site was put forward in the Site Allocations (Issues & Options) consultation undertaken in June/July 2013 and is proposed as the allocated land use here through the Site Allocations Plan Publication Draft, with consultation on that plan to be undertaken in the Autumn of this year.
- 3.11 The sustainability impacts of each of the proposed site allocations have been considered in relative terms across the city as a whole. As an existing development allocation Red Hall was assessed as a more sustainable location for development than many others, such as those that would have been in Green Belt or in previously unallocated locations.
- 3.12 The playing fields have been considered in the green space analysis undertaken as part of the Site Allocations Plan and are assumed as being retained or re-provided so there is no overall impact on the quantum of provision. The green space analysis is undertaken at a ward level, as a proxy in the absence of a better alternative, but when assessing specific schemes is also appropriate to consider geographical proximity. Red Hall is in Crossgates & Whinmoor ward but is located at the boundary with two others and is close to Roundhay Park in the Roundhay Ward.
- 3.13 In releasing the nursery and depot part of the site for development, this will become publically accessible with amenity green space, pedestrian and cycle routes designed in to connect with the wider green space network and Public Rights of Way extending into adjoining the countryside. Access through this part of the site will make Roundhay Park more accessible, the edge of it being 0.66 miles away in this direction – the park is currently 1.5 miles away via public highway.

- 3.14 The whole Red Hall site will comprise two proposed housing allocations – one for the current nursery and depot site and one for the area currently in use as playing fields together with the ‘5 acre site’ to the north, which is currently used for storage and composting in association with the nursery.
- 3.15 The Listed Buildings and land in the ownership and operation of the Rugby Football League will remain unallocated for development.
- 3.16 Any development of the site will be required to retain a single area of green space equivalent in size to at least two playing pitches so that re-provision of formal sports use can be made in response to identified need in the wider area. For any pitches not retained on site the provisions of NPPF para. 74 would apply.
- 3.17 Any development would also need to preserve the special architectural or historic interest and setting of the Listed Buildings through buffer zones, landscaping and preservation of important views from Wetherby Road. The allocation of the land for housing would not in itself harm the Listed Buildings on the site, any impact would need to be assessed and judged at planning application stage, with planning guidance given by the Council through the brief for the site.
- 3.18 It is anticipated that a more detailed Development Brief for the site will be presented to Executive Board in the Autumn prior to public consultation, the results of which would be reported back to the Board for a decision on next steps in early 2016.
- 3.19 The site will play a critical role in relation to the wider growth area of East Leeds. There is a need to secure vacant possession of the nursery site to provide for the route of ELOR between the A58 and Outer Ring Road and to enable the subsequent disposal and development of the site to fund the costs of relocation to Whinmoor Grange. The site also needs to generate value to fund the construction of the ELOR around the edge of the site and to fund a drainage solution for the site and refurbishment of pitches, some of which will be retained on-site, some of which will need to be relocated.
- 3.20 In relation to the specific outcomes requested by the Friends of Red Hall Playing Fields, which are noted and understood, it is the Council’s view that the development principles already established for Red Hall through Executive Board and both the existing and proposed land use allocations and associated planning policy requirements for the site go some way towards accommodating the concerns raised.
- 3.21 The specific request to retain the playing fields wholly at their current extent is unlikely to be economic for the Council given the scale of financial commitments the Red Hall site needs to contribute towards, nor will it complement the strategic role the site will need to play in the wider East Leeds Extension. However this will be a matter for further consultation through the Planning Brief for the site.
- 3.22 Ward Members, officers and local residents are already engaged in discussions about the condition and maintenance of the playing fields. This engagement is welcomed and will continue through forthcoming consultation.

- 3.23 Should the Friends of Redhall Playing Field wish to expand their involvement, numerous opportunities exist for them to do so, to be facilitated by the Council. The third sector makes an important contribution to improving parks and green spaces across the city providing an estimated 29,000 volunteer days each year, equivalent to around 109 full-time equivalent staff. This includes over 50 'friends of' groups, over 50 'in bloom' groups, in addition to work placements, community payback, youth rehabilitation and corporate volunteers all of whom conduct practical work on a range of different tasks.
- 3.24 Furthermore the Friends of Redhall Playing fields could engage in the Leeds Parks and Green Space Forum. This was established in 2012 and is a voluntary organisation made up of individuals, groups and organisations. They act as a consultation body for decisions being made that affect green spaces as well as influencing policy. They aim to engage more local people in caring for parks and green spaces and to support voluntary groups that care for green spaces in Leeds as well as raise funds for the benefit of parks and green spaces and their users.

4 Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- 4.1.1 No specific engagement or consultation has taken place for this report, which responds to the deputation to Full Council.
- 4.1.2 Ward members and officers have been in dialogue with local residents about the issues raised in the deputation over the last 2 years and a series of reports about the site and its wider context have previously been brought to Executive Board. This dialogue will continue into formal consultation on the future of the site.

4.2 Equality and diversity, cohesion and integration

- 4.2.3 There are no actions or decisions to be screened in relation to this report. The issues relating to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration have been screened as part of previous reports to Executive Board on this site where decisions have been made.

4.3 Council policies and the best council plan

- 4.3.1 There are no actions or decisions to consider in this report. However the issues raised highlight the role of the Red Hall site in delivering Best Council Plan objectives for the Council to become more efficient and enterprising and in delivering sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 There are no specific resource implications raised by this report as it is for information only in response to the deputation to Full Council. All resource issues to date relating to the matters raised have been addressed in previous reports to Executive Board.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information and call-in

- 4.5.1 There are no specific legal implications raised by this report as it is for information only in response to the deputation to Full Council. All legal issues to date relating to the matters raised have been addressed in previous reports to Executive Board.

4.6 Risk management

- 4.6.1 There are no specific risks raised by this report as it is for information only in response to the deputation to Full Council. All risks to date relating to the matters raised have been addressed in previous reports to Executive Board.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The deputation to Full Council by the Friends of Red Hall Playing Fields clearly set out the group's views on the social, recreational and amenity value of Red Hall to local residents. The Council recognises the need to retain sustainable green space as part of any proposed development and the principles of the Informal Planning Statement that has been developed to date have sought to recognise this.
- 5.2 However the Red Hall site has a long-standing formal development allocation, which the Council reaffirmed through the Site Allocations Plan, by proposing an amendment of the allocated land use from employment to housing. Executive Board has previously established key development principles for the Red Hall site in relation to its key role in enabling the improvement of operational facilities for Parks and Countryside and the development of the East Leeds Extension housing growth area.
- 5.3 The Council's current position is that development of the site could be achieved whilst accommodating local residents' wishes to have access to nearby green open spaces. Although to opt to retain further greenspace over and above the policy requirement would result in alternative housing sites having to be identified and would have significant financial consequences for Leeds City Council. Consultation will take place on a Planning Brief for the site, during which there will be further scope for dialogue on these matters of concern.

6 Recommendation

- 6.1 The Director of City Development is asked to note the contents of this report and approve as the response to the deputation.

7 Background documents¹

- 7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.

APPENDIX 1: Deputation to July 2015 Full Council from Friends of Red Hall Playing Fields

My Lord Mayor and fellow Councillors, good afternoon. I am Russell Garner, chair of the Friends of Red Hall Playing Fields, and I am accompanied here by Katherine Fenton, Secretary. We are regular users of Red Hall Playing Fields - a Leeds City Council asset, in public hands since 1937 and much used and loved both for organised sport as well as general recreation.

The reason we care so deeply about Red Hall Playing Fields is that this green open space plays a major part in the life of existing community - and with thousands of houses to be built nearby at Red Hall and in the Northern Quadrant, it will play an ever more important role. It unites the community, promoting mental and physical health and well-being. It provides a safe environment for young and old alike, in the attractive heritage setting of the grade II listed Red Hall House. A member of our group has in the past year used them to manage his own health, losing four-and-a-half stones in weight. This is in no small part due to the fields being a beautiful, tranquil, and extensive open space in which to exercise.

The geographic position of Red Hall - to the north of Roundhay Park, to the west of the Wetherby Road - means that it forms part of the so-called "green wedge" out of Leeds from Oakwood Clock through to Shadwell and the countryside beyond. Other sites near to Red Hall, within this green wedge, have been safeguarded from development - despite the fact that they are not publicly accessible. But Red Hall Playing Field presents an anomaly - one that has not been recognised as such in the Site Allocations Plan. The fields are in the top three least sustainable sites allocated for housing using our own sustainability appraisal scores, and in the top two if apparent errors in the scoring were to be acknowledged.

Crossgates and Whinmoor ward is deficient in quantity in five out of six types of green space, with playing provision noted as a particular area of shortfall against Core Strategy policy G3. 80% of the 81 green sites in the East Leeds area score less than the required quality score of 7 - which council officers say is "an issue of substandard greenspace provision in the East area across all typologies". In our part of the ward this shortage will be more acutely felt with the building of several thousand houses and a dual carriageway. This will cut residents off from the countryside while dramatically reducing the fields from 11 hectares to just 3. Despite this planned reduction and their removal from greenspace allocation, to our surprise the fields are still to be considered in greenspace surplus and deficit analysis.

Today we are seeking the following outcomes:

1. We would like to see a commitment from Leeds City Council not to sell the publicly-accessible portion of the site. The then-executive board member with responsibility for neighbourhoods and planning told us "that debate is yet to be had" 16 months ago. We cannot wait any longer for that debate.
2. We ask that this site be reconsidered as a designated greenspace. It was allocated for business park development 23 years ago but the local context has since changed significantly. Red Hall House was sold in 2010, thereby separating the house from its setting. Any housing on the field would be not only damage the historic landscape but also push our ward further into greenspace deficit,

exacerbated by the arrival of many thousands of new residents in surrounding developments.

3. As local residents, we would like to participate in decisions regarding the maintenance and landscaping of the field, in ways that respect current usage, that are sympathetic to the site's history as parkland to the house and that will be to the benefit of the many new residents.
4. We would like support and guidance from officers and councillors as to how to ensure sports and recreation aspirations are protected and acknowledged in the decision-making process.
5. We want to retain this as an open, large, safe area of land so that different activities can take place at the same time - such as football, dog walking and general recreation with our children. There are no parks or gardens near us - the fields serve a dual purpose.

We understand there are pressures on the council to balance its books and increase housing stock. Our concern is that in trying to achieve its housing goals, it will reduce the community around these fields to a thoroughfare, while further damaging the quantity and quality of greenspace in a ward chronically deficient in both to levels unacceptable in the Core Strategy.

As our elected representatives you have this chance to safeguard Red Hall Playing Fields and ensure that this much-loved open greenspace is retained for present and future generations. This would be in keeping with the Leeds aspiration to be one of England's greenest and most child-friendly cities. This would be a fitting legacy for all the sporting and recreational achievements of which Leeds is so rightly proud.

We would also like to take this opportunity to publicly thank our ward Councillors and Council officers for their understanding and support. Thank you for your time.