

APPENDIX D

PROPOSAL REGARDING COMMUNITY USE

The proposal for community use from a Ward Member can be summarised as:-

St Ann's Mills

Longer term use for leisure/community purposes in connection with the proposed Kirkstall Valley Park (KVP) and the West Leeds Country Park (WLCP). A long term, full repairing lease, for the lowest possible rent is requested by the Kirkstall Valley Park Group. Uses might include canoeing, fishing, walking, cycling and natural history pursuits. In particular an aspiration for a white water canoeing facility on the river Aire is stated. This might involve using boulders from the nearby forthcoming Kirkstall Hill excavation to create the obstacle course in the River Aire. The St Ann's Mills building could be used for canoe storage and repair, changing accommodation, refreshment, garaging and for a wildlife visitor/interpretation centre. There might also be space for community groups.

In the short to medium term the proposal is to use the buildings as a Community Punishment Centre, providing free labour to develop the KVP and WLCP. This would build upon the current Home Office scheme which operates further down the valley at Burley Mills Allotments, but would also explore new ways of treating offenders. In good weather the offenders would work outdoors in the park supervised by Home Office staff and in bad weather they would work indoors building park furniture etc. They would also receive teaching in basic literacy and numeracy as well as specific employment skills. Some of this may be provided by the FE Colleges.

As the park approaches completion Community Punishment would undertake a phased withdrawal from St Ann's Mills leaving predominantly leisure uses on the site. The claimed benefits of the proposal are that it utilises free labour. Materials and other costs may, it is proposed, be met from S106 agreements with local developers.

Abbey Mills

The proposal here is to retain the buildings in Council ownership, leave the existing tenants in situ, and carry out minor repairs with a view to creating a possible mixed use development. This might include some incubation units and sheltered accommodation for frail, elderly or mentally or physically disabled people. The intention would be to carry out a redevelopment which 'washed its face' in financial terms but would not necessarily generate any significant profit. The proposals are stated to generate low car usage.

Officer Comments on Community Use

The proposal builds upon the KVP and WLCP proposals which are supported in principle by the Council. However, there is no option appraisal provided which supports the view that retention of Abbey Mills and use of St Ann's Mills or Community Punishment (and subsequently leisure uses) is the only and best way to deliver the parks and leisure facilities. There may be other ways of providing accommodation which are more appropriate. From a planning perspective mixing community and industrial units on the site at St Ann's Mills creates a number of difficulties.

While indications of informal discussions with potential partners are given there are no formal letters of support offering resources accompanying the proposals. These would be required from the Home Office, West Yorkshire Police, the Environmental Agency, and the FE Colleges amongst others.

The proposals for the buildings differ from the officer proposal in one fundamental way. The officer proposal seeks a full restoration of both sets of buildings to a high specification. This has been the Council's asset management philosophy for some years now where major refurbishment is undertaken. The existing problems at Abbey Mills and St Ann's Mill result from the minimalist approach taken to building maintenance in the past and officers do not believe that to continue with such an approach in the case of these two sets of buildings is in the best interests of the residents of Leeds. The community based proposal suggests limited investment in the buildings on the basis that they are essentially fit (in their current condition), for the purposes proposed.

Recreation Services currently has visitor attractions at both Armley Mills and Kirkstall Abbey, less than a mile east and west of St Ann's Mills respectively, and has no aspiration to operate a visitor/interpretation centre at St Ann's Mills. While the Kirkstall Valley Park Group may have an aspiration to manage such a facility the impact upon other visitor attractions would need to be considered.

It is acknowledged that it has been difficult for the Ward Member to fully develop his proposals without access to professional and technical resources, and that consequently desirable, accurate financial information is not available for his preferred option, and there is certainly not enough information to carry out a detailed discounted cash flow comparison of this option with those others of the Council. It is suggested therefore, that at this stage, Members may wish to limit their consideration of the proposal to whether:-

- (i) The service aspects of the proposals are desirable in terms of the Council's key objectives and, if so:
- (ii) Whether Executive Board wishes to instruct officers to explore ways of delivering these service benefits in Kirkstall, either on the lines proposed by the Ward Member, or through other means.