

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18th November 2021

RESPONSE TO REASONS FOR CALL IN

TITLE OF DECISION: Leasing of Whitewebbs Park Golf Course

DECISION OF: Leader of the Council

DATE OF DECISION LIST PUBLICATION: 22 October 2021

LIST NO: 30/21-22 KD 5177

Reasons why decision is being called in:

Lack of consultation

There has been a total lack of Stakeholder consultation. Residents and site users have been consistent in their opposition to these plans. There have been protests, petitions and detailed submissions. Stakeholders were promised sight of the final bids as part of the engagement process, this has not happened.

Response

The Council agreed to engage with Stakeholders and to provide details of the bids prior to a decision being made. There was no promise made to provide copies of the bids which are subject to commercial confidentiality. This has happened and all groups who requested engagement were advised in advance of the decision-making process and provided with details of the bids.

Delegated authority

Point 3 – “To delegate authority to the Director of Property & Economy in consultation with the Director of Legal and Governance to make minor amendments to the heads of terms and to finalise the Agreement for Lease, Lease and associated documents, including such variations that may be necessary to cover existing third-party rights affecting the site.” There are no details in the report of what might be covered by this statement, what would be considered a minor adjustment and what would be a major one?

Response

The Lease will not be entered into unless and until planning consent is granted. The outcome of the consultation around that submission and the planning decision itself may result in the need to make minor amendments to the Heads of Terms. It is not possible to prejudge the outcome of that process. Any significant changes to the site

boundary, financial offer, lease length or use of the site would be considered major changes.

Local economy and employment

Point 17- “potentially create a boost to the local economy and local employment.” Why only potentially if they are having an academy for grounds staff. Should they not, like other sites, be pushed towards employing local people.

Response

The council will encourage local employment and this will be a matter to be covered in landlord negotiations and also through planning conditions.

Greenbelt Protection

Point 18 - The property’s location in the Green Belt provides significant protection against inappropriate development. The existing Tottenham Hotspur site sits entirely in Greenbelt and has been extended and amended over the years with inappropriate development.

Response

The appropriateness of this proposal on green belt land will be a matter for consideration by planning committee in accordance with planning policy. No lease will be entered in to unless and until planning consent is granted. This decision has no bearing on or relation to the existing land leased and owned by Tottenham Hotspur.

Variety of Activity

Point 28 - Paragraph 3 states “Range of activities - There are already a range of existing leisure uses at the property, predominantly with the pay and play golf course. LBE is seeking a tenant who provides a business plan that incorporates a range of activities. Some potential activities suggested by the local community are included later in this documentation. Within the leisure proposals, LBE require applicants to demonstrate how the proposed activities will be open to a range of users.” This proposal focusses only on one activity – football and furthermore it will be a single sex provision.

Response

As set out in the report the football academy is just one part of the proposal. The report sets out details of the range of activities that will be available.

The provision of a Women’s and Girls Academy helps address the significant deficit in provision of facilities for this group both locally and nationally.

Poor financial offering

Only 35% of the scoring of bids related to the rent or premium offered. Yet, repeatedly financial implications have been cited as the main driver for looking to lease out the site. This proposal will only deliver an initial premium of £500,000 followed by an annual rental from year 6-25 of £75,000 per annum. I note the rent will be reviewed every 5 years against CPI, however the total rent received will only be circa £2,000,000 for the whole 25 year period. This is hugely undervaluing the site. Furthermore, the proposal doesn't specifically say that the up-front money is ring fenced for improvements to Whitewebbs

Response

The Council has been clear throughout that it would assess bids against a range of criteria and would not simply lease the site to the highest bidder. Stakeholders and the public have sought reassurance that this would be the case.

Higher bids were received but as detailed in the report these did not score as highly against all criteria.

The report states 'The award of the lease will generate a capital sum for investment in the park.'

Impact on Covid-19 on the bidding process

Bids were accepted in March 2020, scoring undertaken on 16th March 2020, with the intention of a preferred bidder being announced in April 2020. By the council's own admission the announcement was delayed by more than a year due to the impact of the pandemic. In this period the economy and the retail, hospitality and leisure industry has changed. The report does not address this in any way.

Response

All bidders were invited, after the pandemic began, to advise whether they wished to proceed with or amend their bids. One bid was withdrawn. This is addressed in the report.

Golf Course closed before the season so there are no contemporary financials

The decision making has taken place referencing pre-pandemic financials for the golf course. The golf course was closed prior to the lifting of restrictions earlier this year. Since restrictions have been lifted golf has seen a boom in popularity, this will fundamentally have changed the financial prospects of the golf course. For this reason, it is inappropriate for now out of date financial results to guide decision making.

Response

The decision to close the course was a separate decision which was subject to a call in.

Natural rewilding so stated costs are no longer valid

Since the golf course has been closed the site has re-wilded itself and the council is no long incurring the maintenance costs used as justification for leasing it out. Therefore, the bidding and decision-making process used for this report is fundamentally unsound.

Response

Simply leaving the area to rewild naturally is likely to result in an impenetrable area of shrubland. This summer we received several complaints that the area could not easily be accessed for dog walking, walking and running and in response to this, pathways were cut through the grassland.

Without investment new paths and bridleways will not be created and a permanent café and toilets will not be provided. Without on going maintenance existing paths and bridleways, access roads and parking areas will deteriorate. It is not correct to state that leaving the site alone will not incur maintenance costs.

Reduced public access

Marketing of Whitewebbs Public Golf Course (WPGC) - point 28 paragraph 1 – London Borough of Enfield (LBE) seeking a proposal that will, at a minimum, retain this level of public access. This is clearly not the case as areas of the park that are currently open to public access are planned to be turned into a private training facility. Documents use the term “Golf Course” and “Golf Club” interchangeably. This gives the impression that the area could only be accessed by club members, this is fundamentally not the case. The course was used by thousands of people on a non-membership basis and also for non-golf related activity e.g. running and dog walking.

Response

Prior to the closure of the course full access was limited to those who paid. Access for running, walking or similar was restricted to public footpaths and other rights of way. The proposal significantly increases they area to which the public will have unrestricted free access. This is clearly set out in the decision report.

Lack of pedigree for managing facilities

Tottenham Hotspur were given the maximum possible score for leisure experience. However, a large proportion of the plan involves woods and parklands. Tottenham Hotspur have minimal experience managing woods and parklands, therefore it is difficult to understand how they received the maximum score. In addition Tottenham’s most recent development, ‘The Tottenham Hotspur Stadium’ suffered from huge delays and cost overruns.

Response

THF were the highest scorer in this category. The criteria and assessment method have been clearly set out through the bidding process.

Issues regarding the development of a football stadium are unrelated.

No detail of community access

In several sections of the bid community access to the new facilities has been referenced, but this is not defined.

Response

This will be a matter for consideration through the planning process and will be covered by planning conditions. A Lease will not be granted unless and until planning consent is granted.

Environmental Impact

Lots of information on improvements, but nothing on exactly what work is needed to put in fencing, artificial and grass pitches. Will there be importation of soil, will there be a need for parking and paths on site such as hard surfaces. If so, this should be included in environmental impact.

Point 80 – “In order for the proposed football academy to obtain planning permission, under current adopted planning policies an application will be expected to demonstrate that the proposal has a minimal environmental impact, in both construction and operational stages.” What standard constitutes ‘minimal environmental impact’? This should be defined.

Response

This will be a matter for consideration through the planning process. A Lease will not be granted unless and until planning consent is granted.

Poor history of honoring commitments with the Council

Enfield is still waiting for nature reserve which was in their original training ground planning application. How can we be sure that all the work they are saying they would do will actually be undertaken?

Response

The nature reserve is the subject of a separate planning conditions and obligation. Tottenham Hotspur are currently working to discharge the pre-commencement conditions which would enable them to start on the nature reserve.

This proposal will be subject to both leasing requirements and planning obligations.

Equality

The plan states that a women’s football academy is of benefit to all. However, the plans provide no benefits for boys and men. It is also not clear how it benefits the residents of Enfield as beneficiaries will be draw from a wide geographical area.

Response

The Equalities Impact Assessment clearly sets out the benefits for Women & Girls. Men and Boys are already well catered for by existing similar facilities nearby and more widely across the borough.

Residents of Enfield will benefit from investment in the rest of Whitewebbs Park and investment in grass roots sports across the borough as set out in the report.

Conflict of interest

On three occasions in the last two years Members of the Council have received hospitality from Tottenham Hotspur Football Club. The Leader – Cllr Caliskan had lunch at the training ground on 13th February 2020 and 6 days later accepted match tickets. This gift was accepted just 17 days before the deadline (2nd March 2020) for bidders to make final submissions.

Response

All gifts and hospitalities are reported on the Council Website and these items have been declared by Councillor Caliskan.