

SUBJECT:	KEADBY CLOSE PLAY AREA
DIRECTORATE:	DIRECTORATE OF COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT
REPORT AUTHOR:	STEVE BIRD, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES AND STREET SCENE

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To remind the Executive that the existing funding for equipped play areas has to be prioritised, and to set out an offer that has potential to bring in external funding for one site, through a partnership agreement.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Council has had an informal approach from Hartsholme Cricket Club to consider if it would be prepared to let it 'adopt' the adjacent play area.
- 2.2 The club has a new strategy for development including much wider engagement with the local community and it believes that taking on the existing poorly equipped play area, and investing in it so as to make it an asset to visitors to their site, would both help the local community and aid their strategy.
- 2.3 The club have asked for a lease for the site, at no cost, in return for which they will invest in the site, take on its maintenance commitments, and maintain open public access.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council has a strategy for the provision of play areas, and this is now due for revision. Within this the Council has 31 play areas listed in its corporate inventory.
- 3.2 Unfortunately due to wider financial pressure on the council, it has not been possible to increase the budget for maintaining play areas beyond inflation for some time. However, whilst budgets have not been able to grow, the safety demands have continued to escalate considerably. As a result the costs have increased without extra budget provision to cover these costs, and it has been necessary to prioritise spend accordingly.
- 3.3 The effect of this is that some of the Council's play areas are now equipped with a reduced amount of play equipment, and in a few cases with no equipment at all, awaiting opportunities for investment.
- 3.4 One example of this is the play area at Keadby Close, where any available funding has been directed to the larger and much more heavily used nearby site in Hartsholme Country Park.

- 3.5 Whilst the site in the Country Park has therefore been protected, Keadby Close has gradually become less well equipped, to the extent that it currently has just one item left, and this is a simple static climbing frame.
- 3.6 Attached as appendix A is a plan of the Keadby Close site. Attached as appendix B is a photograph of the current site provision.
- 3.7 There are no prospects currently that the council will be able to find new funding for refurbishment or embellishment of this site. Subject to member reconsideration of a revised play strategy, hopefully this year, there is a real risk that, due to the ongoing financial pressures the Council faces, it may need to consider how many play areas it can maintain going forwards.
- 3.8 The alternative to the closure of some sites is that the Council will need to find new and more innovative ways to attract funding for play. This proposal is an example of one such innovative approach that could be adopted.

4. Proposal

- 4.1 The Council has been approached by Hartsholme Cricket Club (HCC) with a proposal to 'adopt' the play area, and take on the site on which it stands.
- 4.2 The club is developing a new strategic plan for its future, and is in the throes of widening the club's engagement far beyond cricket. It is now working with both Lincolnshire Cricket the adjacent Lincoln United FC, and opening the club's doors as a genuine community facility. The proposal is to create a community sports hub.
- 4.3 Its aim is to place itself at the centre of the local community and provide a social facility, thereby serving a wider need in the community and strengthening the club's base locally.
- 4.4 At this stage the club is still developing its proposal, but it has made an early enquiry as to the viability of it taking on the play area on Keadby Close, bringing the site within its boundary, then investing in the site so as to make the play area a much better facility that adds value for visitors to the social club.
- 4.5 The club has made clear that they would fund all works (except installing initial separation fencing) to bring the site up to a much better standard, and take on maintenance of the site in full. They have agreed to keep the play area with open public access (to use it you would not have to be a member of the social or cricket club or use their facilities).
- 4.6 On the basis that it would be provided so as to retain free public access, and that the club would agree to provide it in a way to meet the full requirements of safety standards, the Portfolio Holder for Recreational Services and Health has been prepared to let this offer progress within the Council for further considered views.
- 4.7 Appendix A shows the site currently occupied by HCC.

5. Strategic Priorities

5.1 Let's drive economic growth

This initiative supports the club, who are a local employer.

5.2 Let's reduce inequality

The Council's standards for play provision include consideration of access issues.

5.3 Let's enhance our remarkable place

Play area provision is a significant part of the Council's open space asset. This initiative seeks to protect and enhance existing provision, at no extra cost to the tax payer. The Council would only need to provide suitable security fencing.

6. Organisational Impacts

6.1 Finance

There are no additional costs to the council arising from this proposal beyond providing separation fencing. There would also be no income. See risks.

6.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules

Legal services involvement would be required to process the lease agreement and ensure the interests of the council were protected.

6.3 Land, property and accommodation

The transfer of a piece of land to a third party, even under lease, is classified as a 'disposal'. Therefore, should it be agreed that this site be transferred under lease, on the basis set out in this report, it would be necessary to advertise it as a 'disposal' and to consult with the public accordingly.

6.4 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights-There is no change to the pre-existing position. The Council would provide guidance to the club on these issues in relation to the provision of equipped play to ensure consistency with our policies.

6.6 Significant Community Impact – This initiative supports a proposal by HCC to engage with, and thus support better, the wider community.

6.7 Corporate Health and Safety implications – Play areas carry significant health and safety implications, requiring stringent systems and intensive monitoring. Any transfer of responsibility would be accompanied by a requirement for the club to maintain the same high standards that the Council maintains.

7. Risk Implications

7.1 (i) Options Explored

Remain as is - this offers no opportunity for investment, and risks the play area falling out of use, formally or otherwise.

Partnership with HCC - offers opportunity for investment and improvement at no cost to the Council. This is the preferred option.

7.2 (ii) Key risks associated with the preferred option.

The club may renege on its commitments to invest so the play area may not improve as planned.

The club may not maintain the play area and leave itself exposed to claims. The club may improve the site but then not be able to maintain it, leaving the council with a maintenance cost legacy.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 That Executive agree the proposal 'in principle', and authorise the Director of Communities and Environment to agree suitable terms of lease.

Is this a key decision? No

Do the exempt information categories apply? No

Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply? No

How many appendices does the report contain? Two

List of Background Papers: None

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