



Petitions Committee

Minutes - 13 March 2015

Attendance

Members of the Petitions Committee

Cllr Val Evans (Chair)
Cllr Alan Bolshaw
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal
Cllr Arun Photay (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Daniel Warren

Councillors in attendance

Cllr Peter Bilson

Employees

Laura Gilyead
Sangita Kular
Jane Trethewey

Graduate Management Trainee
Housing Strategy/Development Officer
Section Leader

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies for absence**
Apologies were received from Councillor Judith Rowley.
- 2 **Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3 **Minutes of previous meeting**
Resolved:
 To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2015 as a true record.
- 4 **Matters arising**
There were no matters arising.
- 5 **Schedule of outstanding petitions**
Resolved:
 To receive the update.
- 6 **Open Ground Rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street, Heath Town**
Lead petitioner, Fortune Sibanda, explained that the open ground to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street had been used by Heath Town Football Club (HTFC) for a couple of years and contributed immensely to the development and wellbeing of children in Heath Town. He explained that he went to the Heath Town Regeneration Project consultation on 6 December 2014 to explain that the land is used by the football club.

The lead petitioner explained that the land was not included in the original plans for the area. He explained that the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) was discussed at the meeting however this was not suitable for football as the hard surface has resulted in injury to players. Local residents would like the MUGA to remain but also for the open ground to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street to be developed, with better lighting and drainage, so that it could be used in winter. The coach of HTFC explained that if the club were to train elsewhere, it would cost a lot of money. The lead petitioner explained that HTFC would be willing to take over the land to develop it for the team and the community to use.

Jane Trethewey, Service Lead for Housing Strategy and Development, explained that the land to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street was not part of the original proposals but was added to ensure there was enough volume of development for the project to be viable. She explained that the Council had spoken with the Heath Town Tenant and Resident Association prior to including this land in the proposals, however they were not aware of the football club using the land until the lead petitioner attended the consultation on 6 December 2014 and so the designs were drawn up. The Service Lead for Housing Strategy and Development explained that the state of the land to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street and the cost of development will be assessed before a final decision can be taken to take the project further.

The Service Lead for Housing Strategy and Development explained that the Council had undertaken a lot of consultation with residents of Heath Town and had received far more support than objection to the proposals. After reviewing the petition, the Service Lead for Housing Strategy and Development noted that only 63 signatures were from the Heath Town estate itself.

The Service Lead for Housing Strategy and Development explained that the MUGA did deserve further development if a decision to build on ground to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street is taken, and discussions had taken place around finding a solution to improve the area and to address prevention of potential injury. She explained that a CCTV camera at the MUGA showed the area was well used, mostly by footballers.

The Service Lead for Housing Strategy and Development acknowledged the work of HTFC but did not want to rule out the possibility of the development of the open ground to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street immediately. She explained that the Housing Strategy and Development team would like to continue consulting and developing proposals for the estate.

Cllr Bilson commented that the recommendation of the report reflects the importance of on-going discussions with residents and shows there is a commitment to provide adequate facilities for young people on the estate.

The lead petitioner commented that the regeneration of Heath Town is an overdevelopment of the area, and services in Heath Town will suffer because of it. He explained that the initial consultation suggested that 60 houses would be built however there were plans now for 300 new houses. This would bring more people into the area simultaneously reducing the space for children to play. He explained that residents of Heath Town felt ignored and want the Council to consider the services being reduced in the area.

The Service Lead for Housing Strategy and Development explained that the project cannot guarantee but fully intended to install a play area and green gym equipment next to the MUGA regardless of the plans for the land to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street. She explained that at this relatively early stage, the plans are very simplistic and do not contain detailed proposals. The Council intended to set the principle and strategy of the project before consulting with residents around the detail.

The lead petitioner commented that residents were concerned that the land to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street would be taken away. He explained that there were no discussions around the development of the MUGA at the initial consultation but there were objections to the land to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street being developed for houses.

The Service Lead for Housing Strategy and Development explained that discussions took place with the petitioner around other options for open ground users in the area, and that improvement of the MUGA arose from this exchange. She said it was highlighted that the MUGA does not suit all residents and the Council always look at objections and suggestions after consultation takes place.

Cllr Gakhal asked the lead petitioner how many community events had taken place on the open ground to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street. The lead petitioner explained there had been quite a lot, more than ten.

Cllr Gakhal commented that Heath Town is quite fortunate to have other open spaces in the area. The coach of HTFC explained that the club could use another area however it would cost more to use this space and there may not be time available for the training of the club.

Cllr Photay noted that regeneration is important for Wolverhampton but it is also important to protect green spaces in the City. He commented that the development of the land to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street would create an income of £400,000 and so asked if there were any other spaces available that would generate a similar income.

The Service Lead for Housing Strategy and Development explained that all other available areas on the Heath Town estate had been investigated. She explained that the regeneration of the Heath Town estate would be expensive as it would include re-routing district heating piping and electricity supplies but this would be beneficial in the future through the addition of new homes and a better appearance for the Heath Town estate.

Cllr Photay recommended that the development of the MUGA was included in the project with a focus on retaining green spaces and facilities for children.

Cllr Warren noted that, if it was affordable, the MUGA should be improved.

Cllr Bolshaw enquired about the site survey of the land to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street. The Service Lead for Housing Strategy and Development explained that the land has never been developed and so the Council would undertake a survey of the area to ensure development is viable.

The lead petitioner asked about the result of the Cabinet report, Heath Town Regeneration, on 11 March 2015. Cllr Bilson explained that Cabinet deferred authority of the development of the land to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street to the Petitions Committee and so a decision about this space has not yet been made.

Cllr Bolshaw asked what level HTFC played at. The coach of HTFC explained that the team were in the Bilston league.

The lead petitioner noted that the local primary school also used the land to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street.

The Service Lead for Housing Strategy and Development explained that there had been a lot of change in the area over past years which did not connect to the proposals.

Resolved:

1. That on-going discussion regarding improvements to the existing Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) on the Heath Town estate be supported.
2. That the inclusion of the open ground to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street for redevelopment in support of the Heath Town Regeneration Project, subject to the outcome of site surveys and further consultation, be supported.
3. That the proposed work planned to upgrade the MUGA by working with residents be noted.
4. That further consultation with residents on play facilities for the estate will take place.
5. That a further report be submitted to the Petitions Committee in September 2015 or earlier, after the land to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street has been surveyed and financial viability has been assessed.