

Briefing Note

Title: Future of Old Fallings Adventure Playground

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Intended audience: Internal Partner organisation Public Confidential

Purpose or recommendation

To seek the views of scrutiny on declaring Old Fallings Adventure Playground surplus to Council requirements and recommend the site be developed for housing by Wolverhampton Homes (HRA), subject to public consultation and Cabinet (Resources) Panel approval.

Overview

Old Fallings Adventure Playground was managed by the Play Service until recently and over the last few years and more recently in the last four months has been subjected to extensive vandalism. This has resulted in the Play Service ceasing their operation and delivering their service in an outreach manner. The building is therefore vacant and as this building has become a health and safety risk (due to vandalism) and would require significant investment, it is recommended to declare the asset surplus and develop for housing.

Background and context

The Old Fallings Adventure Playground (consists of two buildings) managed by the Play Service has been subjected to extensive vandalism over several years. This has left the older Peach Tree building unusable and the newest building in a state of disrepair. The buildings were previously rented to various groups, however, now stand empty.

The new building was vandalised on 25 February 2018 and at present is unusable. All groups have been cancelled and the building has been securely boarded. Corporate Landlord have assessed the damage and have determined it would require extensive repairs.

The outdoor climbing equipment has been removed due to health and safety risks and the two buildings are currently costing Corporate Landlord c£15,000 per annum to run.

Play Service

It is the intention of the Early Intervention service to continue to offer a 'play provision', as data demonstrates that it is a service that engages well with many young people and children across the City by way of offering play opportunities in open spaces. During the period April 2016 – April 2017 the Play Service engaged with approximately 15,000 young people and children. The Play service has always targeted the most deprived areas of the city and will continue to offer access to play experiences.

Retaining two full time playworkers to complete outreach play work across the city would have a positive impact for all wards. This was demonstrated in Ashmore Park where play workers engaged with young people in the evenings in a local park. The impact was immediate and a request for more sessions has been made. It is the aim of the Early Intervention service to mirror this across the city depending upon need. Staff will be based within a Strengthening Families Hub. The full time

playworkers continue to engage with young people across the city despite the closure of the Old Fallings adventure playground.

Groups based at Old Fallings Adventure Playground

The main user of the site outside of the Play team activities was a voluntary group who supported families of children with additional needs. During the period of closure, the group have relocated their activity to other venues in and outside of Wolverhampton. The group have met with council officers and expressed a desire to retain their service delivery within the Wolverhampton area. This has led to officers facilitating meetings of the group with a well-established disability charity within Wolverhampton, Include Me Too. This group are currently seeking premises within the city to develop a bespoke offering to children with disabilities and the two groups aims a closely aligned. Agreement has therefore been agreed that the groups will work to achieve the desired aims and the council would support this where required e.g. support with finding suitable premises.

Proposal

A number of options have been considered including making good the two buildings in order to attract income generation through room rental. However, the rental income would not cover the investment expenditure and running costs of the building.

Community Asset Transfer has also been considered but community groups have been disconcerted by the level of vandalism and the maintenance requirements for the two buildings and grounds.

It is therefore proposed to declare the Old Fallings Adventure Playground surplus to Council requirements. It is proposed to appropriate to Wolverhampton Homes / HRA for housing development (subject to further cost and viability investigations). This proposal is subject to public consultation which is due to take place mid-September 2018.

The site has a minimal value due to condition and location of the site. The two buildings require demolition, there is pond requiring remediation and access would need to be via the HRA Garage site for any new housing development. It is therefore understood that the most appropriate use for this site is for affordable housing through appropriation.