



Petitions Committee

13 March 2015

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| Report title | Open Ground Rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street, Heath Town | |
| Cabinet member with lead responsibility | Councillor Peter Bilson Economic Regeneration and Prosperity | |
| Wards affected | Heath Town | |
| Accountable director | Nick Edwards, City Assets | |
| Originating service | Housing | |
| Accountable employee(s) | Jane Trethewey | Section Leader – Housing Development Tel 01902 555583 Email Jane.trethewey@wolverhampton.gov.uk |
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| Report to be/has been considered by | n/a | |

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Committee is recommended to:

1. Support on-going discussions regarding improvements to the existing Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) on the Heath Town Estate.
2. Support the inclusion of the open ground to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street for re-development in support of the Heath Town Regeneration Project, subject to the outcome of site surveys and further consultation.

Recommendations for noting:

The Committee is asked to note:

1. The proposed work planned to upgrade the MUGA by working with residents.
2. That further consultation with residents on play facilities for the estate will take place.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To consider the issues raised in the petition against the re-development of open ground to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street, for new housing as part of the Heath Town regeneration proposals, to support the financial viability of that project.
- 1.2 The petition states that this field is used by Heath Town Football Club for training sessions during the summer. Petitioners would like to see this area retained and upgraded for sporting activities to be used by local young people.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The petition states that local residents do not wish to see this open ground developed for housing and would like it to remain for use by community and youth groups for football and other sporting activities. As part of the Heath Town regeneration project, consideration is being given to upgrade the existing MUGA situated on the Heath Town Estate for use by Heath Town Football Club, and by existing and new residents. The upgrade and improvements are expected to be delivered through the section 106 developer contributions. The potential for funding from Sport England to support this upgrade is also being explored.
- 2.2 The Heath Town Masterplan has been developed and consulted on over an 18 month period with several revisions taking place along the way through resident feedback and comments from employees on the Heath Town Project Team. Following initial soundings with the Heath Town Tenant and Resident Association (TRA), and a written consultation with properties neighbouring the site, the open ground at the rear of Inkerman Street was considered for inclusion in the overall masterplan boundary, to support the financial viability of the Heath Town regeneration project. This forms part of the report to Cabinet on 11 March 2015, with a recommendation to include this site in the development proposals.
- 2.3 The latest update of the overall Heath Town regeneration scheme includes a number of additional sites that have been brought in to the scheme. This is on the basis that there is a need to increase the overall quantity of development land for the Heath Town regeneration to support the financial viability of the project. These sites, including the open ground to the rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street, have previously been declared surplus for individual disposal. However by consolidating these sites, there is an opportunity to kick start the project and progress development on some of the cleared sites.
- 2.4 Initial consultation with the Heath Town TRA and immediate neighbours of the site did not reveal objections to this site being re-developed. On this basis, this area was included as part of the regeneration proposals to support the viability of the overall project.
- 2.5 A number of site surveys have been commissioned across the proposed development area including the open ground rear of 36-62 Inkerman Street. The results of these surveys will influence the final decision on what can be delivered on this and others sites.

The proposals across the estate will be reviewed once more detail is available on ground conditions. Survey results are expected in eight to ten weeks.

- 2.6 The site was initially identified as it was not used well, as evidenced by its current condition and resident concerns about fly tipping and anti-social behaviour. Subsequent discussions with the Police Secure By Design Officer support these concerns about the site location and lack of natural surveillance. It was during the last consultation exercise held on 4 December 2014 that it was brought to the Heath Town Project Team's attention that the area was in fact being used by a local football team and a petition was formally lodged to the Council later that month.
- 2.7 Although it is not marked out for any specific sport at present, the Council has been advised that currently the open ground is used in good weather by Heath Town Football Club which runs two teams led by a volunteer. There is an under 8's (9 players) and under 17's (20 players) team. There is an ambition of the club to start recruiting for an under 12's and under 14's team which they hope to do in the near future.
- 2.8 The club believes there is an established and growing community use for this facility for which they have identified no local alternative readily available. Some local residents see this as a positive contribution for the local community that helps to prevent anti-social behaviour and combat local youth gang culture.

3.0 Details of the petition

- 3.1 In December 2014, a 315 signature petition was submitted to Wolverhampton City Council by a member of the Heath Town TRA. The petition is against the re-development of this area and proposes that the open ground is retained for use by local youth for sporting activities.
- 3.2 The open ground is not marked out for any specific sport, is currently unlit and is undrained, causing it to be water-logged in wet weather, particularly in the winter months. The area would require further investigation before it is upgraded to establish if it is suitable for sporting activity. Depending on the results of any investigatory works, work to remediate and upgrade the ground may require significant funds.
- 3.3 There is an existing MUGA on the Heath Town estate which is laid out for basketball, tennis and football. Historically the football club had organised training sessions on this games area but ceased to do so as they experienced a number of injuries to younger children on the existing hard surface. The football club organisers initially proposed that an investment in the MUGA to improve the surface might provide a compromise solution allowing them to make better use of it as an alternative to use of the grassed site.
- 3.4 As part of the Heath Town Regeneration Project, the upgrade of the MUGA is being considered together with consolidating existing play provision into one area and installing a new Green Gym facility. Recent resident consultation has been very positive regarding the option of bringing together different outdoor play and fitness equipment into one main area which can be managed and maintained more effectively. Residents living in the

immediate vicinity of the existing MUGA will be consulted further on the option of improving this facility and adding further play and exercise equipment in this area. More targeted consultation with MUGA users will also be organised to establish that this facility meets the needs of the existing community and if not, how it can be improved.

- 3.5 Recent meetings with colleagues from Parks and Communities have looked at a range of options to upgrade the existing MUGA surface. Discussions have also taken place to look at examples of new play areas for small children and outdoor green gym equipment which have been installed in areas across Wolverhampton. Employees will work closely with the Heath Town TRA and residents of the wider Heath Town estate to ensure that any new equipment that is installed meets estate requirements.
- 3.6 In order to progress this element of the project, employees will meet to discuss specifications and commission detailed drawings to see what facilities can be accommodated in the space surrounding the existing MUGA. Once a design specification has been drafted, this will then be used to consult residents.
- 3.7 Employees attended the Heath Town TRA meeting on 19 February 2015 along with the petition organiser, to update members on information that had been received so far from meetings with Parks and Communities colleagues. Issues raised by the petition were discussed. There is concern about the planned proposals for the green space area and further consideration is required to progress this element of the project. Whilst members expressed a desire to support positive estate regeneration proposals, the TRA voted to retain this open ground for local use.
- 3.8 The Heath Town TRA were also concerned with over development in the current proposals. Officers explained that the current regeneration proposal still has potential for minor amendment before it is finally fixed for procurement, given that survey work is still in progress, and consultation will continue up to this point. There are also potentially areas where currently proposed housing may be taken out of the plans, due to site level issues, and the unresolved issues around the MUGA where additional play equipment is being considered.
- 3.9 Further work is required to review alternative options for improving sports, fitness and play provision on the estate. Employees will be consulting with residents to further test opinion around the best use of this open ground, taking into account all the resident concerns outlined above, as well as the overall financial viability of the Heath Town regeneration proposals.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.2 Costs for the surface upgrade of the existing MUGA surface have not been finalised. A specification and design for the addition of a small play area and green gym will also need to be confirmed once consultation has taken place and this has been agreed with residents. It is expected that this work will form part of the section 106 agreement with the developer delivering new housing across the estate.

4.3 The existing MUGA is managed and maintained by Wolverhampton Homes. Discussions will need to take place regarding the additional revenue resources that will be required for any new equipment that is proposed for installation. Opportunities to secure funds from a development partner for use in covering revenue costs for maintenance of the MUGA will be explored. [CF/27022015/L]

5.0 Legal implications

5.1 There are potential health and safety issues that may arise if the equipment is not maintained to a sufficient standard. An arrangement will be put in place whereby regular checks are taking place to ensure safety of the equipment. [RB/02032015/K]

6.0 Equalities implications

6.1 An equalities analysis has been developed for the Heath Town Regeneration Project. This will be updated as the project progresses through the different phases of the scheme. It is anticipated that any upgrade to the MUGA is likely to be delivered in Phase two or three of the project. Resident consultation will assess local needs and how these can be accommodated within the refurbishment of this area.

7.0 Environmental implications

7.1 It is anticipated that the upgrading of the MUGA will attract more users to this area of the estate and this will require better management of the equipment and potentially look at restricting opening times to reduce disruption to neighbouring residents.

8.0 Human resources implications

8.1 This work will be managed within existing departments and teams.

9.0 Corporate landlord implications

9.1 The open ground at the rear of Inkerman Street has been included in the re-development proposals for the Heath Town Project. If this does not go ahead and the site is excluded, this will have implications on the capital receipt for the Housing Revenue Account.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

10.1 Heath Town Regeneration – 26 March 2014, 11 March 2015 – Cabinet

Seeking authority to declare property surplus to requirements and approval of the disposal strategies – 9 September 2014 – Cabinet (Resources) Panel

Seeking approval to progress the disposal programme including the approach to public open space – 9 December 2014 – Cabinet (Resources) Panel