

EXTRA ORDINARY MEETING OF THE NORTH LUTON AREA BOARD**3RD AUGUST 2016 at 8.00 p.m.**

PRESENT: Councillor Garrett (Chair), Councillors Campbell, R. J. Davis and Lewis

23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (REF: 1)

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Green, Pedersen, Rowlands, Worlding and Young.

24. PETITION – LAND AT WHITEHORSE VALE, LEA MANOR (REF: 5)

Officers from Fixed Assets presented the report (Ref:5) in response to a petition from local residents regarding the Council's consultation on the proposal to re-designate an area of surplus land at Whitehorse Vale, Lea Manor, for the purpose of the development of Housing and to fund improvements to school sports facilities.

He highlighted the key grounds of the petition as expressed by local residents as below:

- That the residents were not robustly consulted with
- That the identified site is not surplus
- That the residents wish to develop a neighbourhood Plan or be involved in identifying areas they feel are a local asset or treasure

Addressing the key grounds of the petition, Officers from Fixed Asset explained that the process in which the consultation was conducted was quite robust. They explained that the consultation strategy was jointly prepared with the Council's consultation team through the following avenue;

- Leaflets detailing the proposed consultation were prepared and distributed to 1200 households around the site, within a mile radius of the site
- The consultation was published by Luton line on 29th May
- Details of the consultation was placed on the consultation portal on the Council's website on 1st June to enable online access for comments and views of local residents
- Two consultation events to seek further comments from the local community was held within the community at the Library in Marsh Farm on 15th and 16th June

The was informed stated that due to the current shortage of housing in Luton, and the significant and increased demand for housing, the Council had proposed that a 1.3-acre site adjoining the playing fields at the Whitehorse Vale be used for new residential properties.

Officers further explained that in order to change the use of the surplus land, which represented around 15 per cent of the total, site, the consent was required from the

Secretary of State for Education under Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. If permission was granted in addition to meeting the much needed housing needs in Luton, proceeds from the sale would be used to fund specific capital projects aimed at improving and enhancing facilities at local schools. Officers further informed the Board that the existing facilities around the site, which included a running track and football pitches, would be reconfigured to ensure that there would be no loss of provision.

In response to questions regarding publication on Luton line and evidence that the consultation leaflets were actually delivered to 1200 properties, the Officer explained that officers liaised with the Council's Communication Department and received guidance on the best medium to advertise.

In response to questions on the results of the consultation and whether there was any support for the proposals, Officers explained that the consultation was still live and that information would be available at the conclusion of the consultation.

The Chair of the North Luton Area Board then called on the lead petitioner, Tony Gamble, Chair of the Tenants Advisory Board in Marsh Farm to present reasons for the petition. Challenging the process of the consultation, he stated that local residents were dissatisfied and unhappy with the process of the consultation.

He disputed some of the information reported by Officers and stated that the Luton line newspaper for the month of July was published on the 24th of July and not 29th as stated by the Officer. He further highlighted the reasons why local residents were not happy with the process of the consultation; he stated;

- The Council's Consultation portal was not live for a while and members of the public were unable to gain access to the online consultation portal
- Local residents requested Officers to extend the consultation – period to 6th of August to fall on the same day with the Marsh Farm festival. He stated that this would have been good opportunity to seek views and comments from people; however, this request was refused.
- The Consultations in June had concluded at 6.00pm. They were held during work time, during the day when most people were still at work and therefore most people were unable to put their views or comments forward.
- Also Council staff responsible for the consultation left the consultation venue prior to 6.00pm with no one to attend to residents who had left work a bit early to comment on the consultation. Local residents were later informed that officers left the consultation venue before 6.00pm due to low turnout.
- The localism Act, empowered communities to set up or constitute a Neighbourhood Plan so that communities would have the right to identify assets of value or treasure.
- This proposal would impact on the regular community events held yearly due to lack of space
- Annual Fireworks event held in the community would be impacted on by this decision.

Responding, Councillor Shaw, Portfolio holder for Housing explained that there were a number of families and children in bed and breakfast waiting to be moved to real home. He stated that he had responsibility to provide suitable housing and address the acute lack of housing in Luton.

Also responding to the grounds of the petition, Officers explained their role as Council Officers and the need to work and engage with residents and to come to a reasonable conclusion on this matter.

Councillor Campbell stated that with the high levels of poor living and health and wellbeing in some communities in Luton, the Council should not be building on green spaces. He encouraged residents to challenge the proposal to prevent the Council from taking away yet another piece of land.

Responding to a question, about the number of houses proposed to be built on the site, Officers explained that the application was ahead of the application for planning permission and response from the Secretary of State. The number of houses to be built would then be subject to further consultation. A planning application would then be submitted at a later stage.

One local resident stated that the Council's local plan was clear about the criteria by which open spaces could be converted and this project did not meet the Council's own criteria as stated in the Local Plan. He stated that, that piece of land was irreplaceable and of value to the local community.

With regards to the expected benefits from the sale of the land, Officers stated that where the land is relevant to a playing field, every penny would be ploughed back into schools.

It was suggested that a special meeting of the Board be convened at the conclusion of the Consultation to feedback on the outcome and proposals for implementation.

There was a general consensus by Members of the Board that immediate action should be taken to stop the sale of the land.

Resolved: (i) That Officers be requested to report back to a future meeting of the Board on the outcome of the consultation and further proposals to build on the land prior to the application being sent to the Secretary of State for approval of the proposal;

(ii) That the Executive be requested to support the decision of the North Luton Area Board and to note as follows:

- (a) **To Note the overwhelming opposition by local residents and Members of the North Luton Area Board, to the proposal to re-designate any part of the land at Whitehorse vale, Lea Manor, Marsh Farm;**
- (b) **To Support the plan for local residents of Marsh Farm community to constitute a Neighbourhood Plan and be involved in identifying areas that they feel are a local asset or treasure;**
- (c) **To support the registration of the Site at Whitehorse Vale, Lea Manor as an Asset of Community Value;**
- (d) **To Note that if the proposal to re-designate the Land at Whitehorse Vale, Lea Manor, was approved by the Executive, that Elected Members of the North Luton Area Board would write to the Secretary of State**

urging him or her not to agree to the re-designation of any part of Whitehorse Vale, Lea Manor;

- (e) To Note that the North Luton Area Board resolved to grant the extension of the consultation from 5th August 2015 to midnight on Monday 8th August 2016 to enable more residents to have on line access to the Council's online portal and to contribute more robustly to the process.**

(Note: The meeting ended at 8.05 pm)