

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (LEISURE)
TO THE EXECUTIVE
2ND SEPTEMBER 2005

Development of Mably Way Open Space, Grove

1.0 Introduction and Report Summary

1.1 This report details the progress made in order to develop the Mably Way open space. It recommends the development of the site and the transfer of the land to Grove Parish Council with them taking on the full maintenance responsibility for the site. A plan of the site showing the layout of the pitches will be circulated at the meeting.

2.0 Recommendations

The Executive approve:

2.1 *The development of the Mably Way open space and approve the release of the capital sum identified in the 2005/06 budget.*

2.2 *The transfer of the land to Grove Parish Council via a 25 year lease at a peppercorn rent where the Parish take on the full responsibility for the maintenance of the site.*

3.0 Relationship with the Council's Vision, Strategies and Policies

- (a) The report relates to objectives A, C and G of the Council's Vision
- (b) The report relates to the cleaner, greener, safer and healthier environment priority
- (c) The report does not contradict any Council policies

4.0 Background and Supporting Information

4.1 The District Council acquired 4.82 hectares of public open space in February 2002 through a Section 106 Agreement relating to the development of the new Health Centre at Mably Way Grove. The land is covenanted. This covenant restricts the use of the land to being laid out as a garden or used for purposes of recreation in its reference to the Open Spaces Act 1906.

4.2 The site was handed over to the District Council but there was no commuted sum for the development of the agricultural land for public recreation, as it was envisaged that the site would be planted with trees by the Forestry Commission at no cost (and with little maintenance costs) to the Vale. The area has been identified in the Local Plan as an important open space to be retained between Grove and Wantage.

4.3 The Executive agreed in May 2004 to the development of two football pitches and associated landscaping/tree planting as identified in the attached plan. The scheme involves the planting of trees and shrubs to add to the amenity value of the land and for it to fulfil its role in contributing to the strategic green gap between Wantage and Grove. The planting scheme is to be funded entirely via a grant from the Forestry Commission.

4.4 The Executive requested a further report covering the following points:

- i) The outcome of negotiations with Grove Parish Council for capital and revenue contributions towards the scheme or a separate but linked scheme.
- ii) Negotiations with other parties (e.g. the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust to protect the canal route, the Health Centre regarding the car parking, sports clubs regarding changing accommodation).
- iii) The need for a pull-in area/lay-by for coaches.
- iv) The possibility of lorry and coach parking in the Wantage and Grove area being located on this site.

4.5 Parts iii and iv were addressed at the Executive of June 3rd Members noting the covenant covering the transfer of the land to the Council precluded such a use, the land designated for public recreation.

4.6 In respect of point i, negotiations with Grove Parish Council have progressed. The Parish Council have indicated that they are happy to enter into a 25 year lease with a peppercorn rent for the provision of the identified scheme. This would mean that the District Council would develop the land using the capital sum identified in the 2005/06 budget and transfer the land under a lease to the Parish Council to maintain and operate for the period of the lease. The Parish has previously indicated that it cannot contribute capital to this scheme.

4.7 Negotiations with other parties, point ii, can be reported as follow:

- a) The Wilts and Berks Canal Trust have been consulted regarding these plans. They have indicated that they are happy with these proposals.
- b) The Health Centre has been approached concerning the use of their car parking facilities at weekends to facilitate pitch use. Officers have indicated that this would be a possible but it would have to be go before the centre's management committee, the next one being in October.
- c) Grove Rugby Club have a responsibility under their lease to provide access to changing accommodation for the resident football clubs. Currently, demand for both rugby and football changing accommodation out strips supply. The Rugby Club have produced proposals to extend and refurbish their clubhouse to better meet these needs. A grant application to supply this project has been received and Officers are discussing the proposals with the Club.
- d) In addition the football clubs have sought and obtained planning permission for separate changing accommodation to the south of the Grove Recreation Ground. No further progress has been made with that project as yet. Clearly consideration has been given to the changing accommodation needs of this area and the development of further buildings is likely to be progressed in the near future.

4.8 Should the Executive approve the leasing of the land to the Parish Council then heads of terms would be drawn up and agreed with the Parish Council with a view to completing a lease prior to commencement of any works on site. This would then allow a tendering exercise to be carried out for the development works. These works would be planned for the spring of 2006.

5.0 **Options**

5.1 In making this land available for public recreation and meeting a demand for football pitches the Council has the following options:

- a) develop the recreational open space and maintain it at the Council's cost
- b) develop the recreational open space and have the maintenance carried out by the Parish Council
- c) not develop the land.

5.2 The Section 106 Agreement and related covenants covering the land allow the Council to develop it for public recreation. Some development of the land for this purpose is desirable. The least cost option based on this would therefore be option B identified above, having discounted option C.

6.0 **Conclusions**

6.1 The Council has a desire but no obligation to provide recreational open space on the Mably Way site. The proposals identified contribute to reducing the deficit in sports pitches in the area and continues to provide a green gap between the two towns. An agreement with Grove Parish Council to maintain the land under a lease is the most cost effective means of delivering this scheme.

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Background Papers: None