

February 2014

Loss of Public Open Space

Summary

In September I wrote a report concerning sales by the Council of small areas of Public Open Space. The LAF was concerned about the sales of land and asked for the matter to be investigated further and a further report produced. This report that looks at two aspects of the land sales: The appropriateness of the sale and the proceeds from the sale

Recommendation

- 1) That the LAF ask to be made a consultee on sales of public open space and that two members of the LAF are appointed to examine sales and report any of significance to the next meeting.

- 2) That the LAF advise the Council that it is concerned at the incremental loss of open space through land sales. That the LAF does accept the sale of some land can provide greater benefits to the local community, and it does accept also the very difficult current financial situation. Even so the LAF would urge the Council to be cautious over sales, in that open space is good for recreation (which has been shown to reduce health and social services expenditure) and the attractiveness of the Borough, and that land lost now is unlikely to be regained in better times.

Background

- 1) Consultation over land sales. When the Council wishes to sell land it advertises the fact in the local press and seeks objections. Most of these sales so far examined (four) seem to be land that has no particular value as open space and the purposes to which it is to be put are generally of value to the local community. However, because there may be the occasional sale that is significant it is recommended that the LAF monitors these sales. It is suggested that two LAF members be nominated to receive the sale proposals and to assess each on its merits. Should a proposal be of concern then the nominated LAF member s will ask that this sale be brought to the next LAF meeting for consideration and comment. It may be necessary to place a holding objection if the next LAF meeting date is after the deadline for objections to the sale.

- 2) The previous report suggested that money from land sales be used for a fund to buy new land to be added to the Borough's open space. It is considered that in the current severe financial difficulties it is not reasonable to expect this and it is recommended that this should not be pursued for the time being. It is also considered that the Council would be very unlikely to be able to accept such a request at this time. However it is recommended that the council be advised that the LAF advise the Council that it is concerned at the incremental loss of open space through land sales. That the LAF does accept the sale of some land can provide greater benefits to the local community for example by the provision of facilities or the removal of anti-social behaviour, and it does accept also the very difficult current financial situation. Having said that the LAF should urge the Council to be cautious over sales, in that open space is good for recreation (which has been shown to reduce health and social services expenditure) and the attractiveness of the Borough. It is also of concern that open space lost now is unlikely to be regained in better times.

Richard Brooks

13 January 2014