

## Agenda Item

Executive Board

01 September 2010

10/1010



### Proposed Multipurpose Sports Pitches Facility at Tower Cross, Honiton

#### Exempt Information

Para 3 Schedule 12A information relating to the finance or business affairs of any particular person

#### Summary

Honiton Development Trust is seeking the Council's assistance in the realisation of its proposal to develop a multipurpose sports pitches facility on land owned by the Coombe Estate at Tower Cross, Honiton. These matters have been the subject of informal discussion with the Coombe Estate which appears willing to enter into negotiations over the disposal of the land. However, the Honiton Development Trust does not have access to the financial resources necessary to enable it to acquire the Tower Cross land and has requested the Council's assistance. These matters have been considered in some detail by the Asset Management Forum who feel that in the light of existing demands on the Council's capital programme, it is unlikely that the funding necessary to assist the Trust could be made available. There is a potential delivery mechanism but it would require Honiton Town Association Football Club to be willing to relocate to the new facility thereby freeing up their existing ground for development to obtain capital receipt to fund the land acquisition. The Council is being asked to progress this proposition.

#### Recommendation

1. That the Board consider whether or not the Council's professional and capital funding resources should be made available to the Honiton Development Trust to enable it to progress its ambitions for the development of a multipurpose sports pitches facility at Tower Cross Honiton.
2. That authority be given to enter into negotiations with Honiton Town Association Football Club to establish their willingness to relocate to the proposed sports complex at Tower Cross.

#### a) Reasons for Recommendation

The Honiton Development Trust has requested the Council's assistance and there is no funding within the Council's Capital Programme to progress this proposal.

#### b) Alternative Options

The Trust is exploring other possible sources of capital funding but these appear to be focussed on the delivery of sports facilities after the land on which they are to be developed has been secured.

#### c) Risk Considerations

Honiton Development Trust is incorporated as a company limited by guarantee and is therefore able to hold land either leasehold or freehold but to date, has little direct experience

of on-going property management. There is a risk that the Council could be portrayed negatively in the press by those who suggest the Council is forcing the Football Club to move. The reality is the Council will not be able to force the Club to move against their will and this proposal is predicated on the willingness of the Club to move to improve the provision of sporting facilities in the town.

**d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations**

No funding for this proposal is currently available in the Council's Capital Programme.

**e) Date for Review of Decision**

Honiton Development Trust are keen to progress their plans for Tower Cross at the earliest opportunity.

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**1 Main Body of the Report**

- 1.1 In June 1999, the Council acquired ten acres of land at Hayne Lane Gittisham, from the Coombe Estate and a further 2 acres of land from a [REDACTED] to form a significant land holding immediately to the West of the Heathpark Industrial Estate, in Honiton. The land was acquired for recreational use (sports pitches) but has been let back to the Coombe Estate under a grazing licence, for most of the time it has been in the Council's ownership. Discussions have taken place with sports clubs in the Honiton area and other potential recreational end users but the land's topography and location has frustrated attempts to bring it into a permanent recreational use.
- 1.2 In the light of this, the Honiton Development Trust suggested it might be possible for the Council to acquire some 20 acres of Coombe Estate land at Tower Cross, Honiton for use as sport pitches by means of a 'land swap' (linked to the Council's land in Hayne Lane). Discussions with the Coombe Estate and independent advice from King Sturge, suggests that viability and planning issues in relation to the Council's Hayne Lane land will not be easily resolved. Accordingly, a simple 'land swap' is unlikely to provide the means by which the Tower Cross land could be acquired.
- 1.3 Honiton Development Trust hopes that sports pitch facilities at Tower Cross can be acquired in time for the Olympics in the summer of 2012. They have suggested that by substituting the rental costs the Council incurs at St Rita's Honiton (sports pitches), it might be possible to fund sufficient borrowing to enable it to commit to the outright purchase of the Tower Cross land. Unfortunately neither the timetable nor the rental payable at St Rita's, works in their favour. There is no opportunity to break the lease on the St Rita's land before autumn of 2012 and until 2012 the rental payable is not more than £6,500 per annum.
- 1.4 The Trust has also suggested that the Mountbatten Playing Fields, which are located between Honiton Business Park, Ottery Moor Lane and the A30 Honiton By-pass, might have the potential to underwrite the costs of purchasing the Tower Cross land. The Mountbatten Playing Fields consisting of 5.88 acres is owned by the Council and leased to Honiton Town Association Football Club. The lease is for 28 years commencing on 03 July 2002 and expiring on 02 July 2030. If the club was willing to relocate to Tower Cross, along with the Cricket and Rugby Clubs, their current site could have redevelopment potential for residential development or as a possible extension to the adjoining business park. However, it is not yet clear whether or not the club is willing to countenance such an arrangement and even if it was, whether any future requirement for flood lighting facilities at the Tower Cross site would be acceptable to the Local Planning Authority. Advice to date, is that floodlights in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are not generally acceptable.

- 1.5 The agents acting for the Coombe Estate have indicated the Estate's willingness to enter into separate negotiations on the Tower Cross land. However, they point out that the land is the subject of a secure agricultural tenancy and that the cost of purchasing the land must therefore not only reflect its enhanced recreational value but also, the cost of a compensating their tenant.
- 1.6 These matters were considered at a meeting of the Asset Management Forum on 19<sup>th</sup> April at which Honiton Ward Members were invited to be present. It was acknowledged that Council's ability to progress significant capital investment in the Tower Cross proposal in the current economic climate is very limited. It was therefore suggested that these matters should be referred to the Executive Board to establish whether or not the Council is able to assist the Honiton Development Trust in the realisation of their plans to develop additional sport facilities in the town.
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### **Legal Implications**

There are no legal issues requiring comment at this stage. The Council have not entered into any commitment which would involve financial compensation

### **Financial Implications**

There is no provision in the current capital programme which is fully committed until 2013/14. As the project does not fall under either the statutory or Health and Safety criteria, it is unlikely it would score sufficiently to be eligible for capital funding

### **Consultation on Reports to the Executive**

The issues raised in this report were the subject of discussion at a meeting of the Asset Management Forum on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2010 to which Honiton Ward Members were invited.

### **Background Papers**

- Minutes of the Asset Management Forum 19<sup>th</sup> April 2010
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Karime Hassan Ext 2735  
Corporate Director

Executive Board  
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