

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

THURSDAY, 19TH MAY 2016 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: H E Dyke (Chairman), R Bishop, N Gale, J A Hart, A T Hingley, M Rayner, C Rogers, S J Walker, S J Williams, G C Yarranton.

Observers

Councillors: S J Chambers, M J Hart, V Higgs, N Martin, S Miah, F M Oborski MBE, T L Onslow, J A Shaw.

OS.78 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: J R Desmond, K Henderson, D Little.

OS.79 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor R Bishop was a substitute for Councillor K Henderson. Councillor J A Hart was a substitute for Councillor D Little. Councillor G C Yarranton was a substitute for Councillor J Desmond.

OS.80 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

OS.81 Exempt Information

Decision: Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of “Exempt Information” as defined in paragraphs 2, 6 and 7 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

OS.82 Sale of Stourport Sports Centre – call in request

The Committee received a report from the Chief Executive on the call in request for the sale of Stourport Sports Centre.

A call in notice was received on Friday 13th May relating to the decision taken by the Leader of the Council that was published on 10th May 2016. The Chief Executive provided the Committee with some background information.

Agenda Item No. 4

The sale of Stourport Sports Centre was part of the business case for the provision of a new leisure centre for Wyre Forest which was approved in October 2013. The associated car parks will have no operational use or value once the Sports Centre is closed. Stourport Sports Centre will close on 2nd July 2016 and it is in the Council's best interests to seek a disposal of the site to align with the closure. This would avoid any costs attributed to owning a non-operational site which might be subject to void business rates, operational costs and in particular security costs.

The Council ran a competitive process to appoint a firm to market the Site. Savills were appointed and began soft marketing testing in November 2015. Active marketing commenced in February 2016. Best and final offers were invited from interested parties by 15th April 2016. Four offers were received and the best offer – which was the one accepted by the Leader's decision - was considerably higher than the others received.

Issues had been raised by Stourport Boat Club through one of the ward Councillors regarding access to the Boat Club. A letter was sent to them on 12 April and copied to the ward Councillor confirming that any rights of way over the site for the benefit of adjacent land users, including the Boat Club, would be preserved and protected as part of the transfer of the land.

The reasons for the call in notice were dealt with in turn.

OS.83 Full Explanation of the reasoning behind accepting a purchase offer significantly lower than our valuation.

The Chairman invited Cllr J Shaw, who had signed the call in notice, to speak. He advised the Committee that the call in was to give all members the opportunity to examine the decision which has been taken by just one member of the Council. He acknowledged that the decision taken by the Leader of the Council was within his remit to do so.

The Chief Executive explained to the Committee that the Council was not in a position to disclose who the purchasers are as they had requested confidentiality. Once the sale has been formally agreed their identity will be disclosed.

The Director for Economic Prosperity and Place advised the Committee that the original valuation was based on the land being used for housing development but, at the point of sale, no recognised housebuilders made an offer.

The Leader of the Council informed the Committee that he was also disappointed that the final offer was not at the level that was originally expected.

Savills had advised the Council to accept the highest offer that was received as it is a not a large site and has flooding and access issues and the offer made was unconditional.

OS.84 Concern over access arrangements for the various sports activities on the riverside.

The Chief Executive had already covered this issue in his introduction to the report.

Members were concerned about parking arrangements when there were popular sports fixtures taking place.

The Chief Executive advised members that this was not raised as an issue for the call in. It would not make economic sense for the Council to retain these car parks for a few events per year. If this sale proceeds, the car parks will be removed from the Car Parks Order and the Council will look at new signage to alternative car parks in the town.

A Member was concerned that the new owner may obstruct access for the Boat Club, Cricket Club, etc. The Chief Executive reiterated that the rights of way that are enjoyed by the clubs at the moment will continue to be in force with the new owners.

OS.85 Concern over the security of the site, post-sale

The Chief Executive confirmed that this was alluded to in the report of 6th May 2016 and the responsibility for the security of the site post-sale would be the responsibility of the new owner thus saving the local taxpayer the cost of securing the site.

Members discussed the current occupation of part of the site and whether we would be able to sell the site with vacant possession.

The Chief Executive advised members that this was not raised as an issue for the call in. He confirmed that all reasonable steps were being taken. We are aiming to deliver vacant possession and would hope to complete the sale by 3rd July. Councillor F Oborski left at 6.50pm.

The Leader of the Council advised that he had attended several meetings with officers who are working hard to try and resolve this issue. He informed members that, if they would like any further information, they do not need to call in a decision. Whilst we are hoping to complete the sale by 3rd July, legal processes need to be followed and nothing is definite until contracts have been exchanged.

Cllr N Martin left at 6.54pm.

It was proposed by Councillor Williams and seconded by Councillor Hingley that the Committee should endorse the decision, which was taken in the best interests of the residents of the Wyre Forest. This proposal was carried by 7 votes to nil, with two abstentions and one member not voting.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 6.56pm.