

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET - 14 JANUARY 2010

DIRECTOR OF LAW, HR AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

LISCARD HALL, CENTRAL PARK, WALLASEY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the situation regarding the site of Liscard Hall, together with its ancillary outbuildings, and propose options for their future retention and development.

2. Background

2.1 At Cabinet on 16th October 2008, Members were presented with four possible options regarding how the site of Liscard Hall and its ancillary outbuildings might be treated.

2.2 Those options were:

Option 1

- To leave the cleared site of the Hall to become absorbed into Central Park as an additional grassed area.

Option 2

- To expose the external and basement walls as features to show the original structure and physical footprint of Liscard Hall.

Option 3 and 4

- To look at whether the site could be redeveloped in isolation or in a larger scheme that would include the existing depot buildings.

2.3 Cabinet resolved that officers be authorised to explore the viability of Option 3 and/or Option 4 in order to try and procure a beneficial use of the site of the Hall and its environs and report back to a future meeting.

2.4 Subsequently, the matter was considered by the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12th January 2009. The Committee was advised that, when the retrospective application to demolish the Hall had been determined, the merits of the approved options would be addressed in light of any suggestions or recommendations made by the Secretary of State for the Environment through English Heritage.

3. English Heritage's Observations

3.1 Retrospective Listed Building Consent to demolish was granted on 9th October 2009. English Heritage was consulted as part of that process and advised as follows:

3.2 *"With regard to the options being considered for the site of the former Hall, we suggest that some level of interpretation is undertaken that allows visitors to Central Park to make sense of the landscape and buildings associated with the former Hall. It may be possible to encourage adaptive re-use of these extant buildings."*

3.3 It went on to make two further recommendations regarding the future of the cleared site and the ancillary buildings, as follows:

1. *That the site of the former Liscard Hall is interpreted in the landscape context of Central Park in terms of presenting the visible remains and providing information displays.*
2. *That the adaptive re-use of the extant associated buildings is encouraged.*

3.4 Initial observations in respect of these recommendations are:

1. There are no visible remains of the Hall itself as the site of the building has been grassed over. Also, the Cabinet did not wish to pursue the Option for exposing the external and basement walls to show the physical footprint of the Hall.
2. The original concept for the development of Liscard Hall and its outbuildings was to see all the buildings brought back into beneficial use. Now, in the absence of the Hall itself, the recommendation to encourage new uses for the associated depot buildings is welcome.

4. Future Proposals - The Site

4.1 The erection of any new building on the former site of the Hall will have to satisfy demanding planning criteria. This is because, as the Hall has been demolished, the Council's planning policies applicable to a designated Urban Greenspace will apply to the cleared site. UDP Policy GR1 – The Protection of Urban Greenspace, states:

On land designated as Urban Greenspace, facilities for visitors, sport or play will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the proposals would not:

1. *prejudice the continued use of the site for open air recreation; or*
2. *prejudice the visual amenity, landscape character or nature conservation value of the site*

Development for other purposes on land designated as Urban Greenspace, other than for the re-use of existing buildings, will not be permitted unless alternative provision of equivalent community benefit is made available.

4.2 In these circumstances, a new build Visitors Centre with a café and toilets might be considered appropriate, or the provision of some sports or play facility on the land. Alternatively, if no new build can be achieved for whatever reason, then a landscape treatment scheme to enhance and improve the appearance of the cleared site could be preferable. The Council's Park Ranger for Central Park has reported fly tipping on the land, which needs to be prevented.

4.3 In the case of a Visitors Centre/Café, with the facilities mentioned previously, there are strategic, operational as well as financial implications.

4.4 **Strategically** - In the Central Park Management Plan, produced before the Hall was destroyed, one of its objectives was "To develop the visitors centre into an excellent information and interpretation facility, forming the heart of the park". However, this was not envisaged to be achieved by converting the Hall, nor building on its site. Also, future investment in buildings and facilities that serve the Park will be determined as the Parks and Countryside Services Procurement Exercise (PACSPE) progresses.

- 4.5 **Operationally** - there is the small café in the walled garden that is run by the Riverside Peoples Centre, which provides supervised assistance and activities for people with learning difficulties.
- 4.6 **Financially** - the Council has no budget to progress a scheme of this nature and it is considered unlikely that it would be an attractive opportunity to the private sector, given the likely level of construction costs against the potential revenue income generated. Members will recall that neither of the applicants who submitted schemes to refurbish the Hall proposed a café/Visitors Centre.
- 4.7 A Multi use games area (MUGA) could be constructed on the site but this would appear incongruous next to the Rose Garden and at odds with the recommendations of English Heritage. There is also a newly constructed MUGA near St John's Church, which means there is no need for an additional one in this location. A skateboard park or tennis courts might also be a possible use on the site.

5. Preferred Option

- 5.1 The prospects of constructing a new building with a sustainable use on the site of the Hall are extremely limited. However, the condition of the site of the Hall could be substantially improved by a landscaping scheme linking it better with the Rose Garden and protecting it against the spread of unauthorised access from the original Hall car park. There is also the opportunity to either upgrade the car park or further discourage vehicles in the park by closing it off altogether. A landscape scheme could also help interpret the site by the use of appropriate features, such as using different vegetation or any reclaimed material from the Hall, in support of the recommendations made by English Heritage.

6. Future Proposals - The Ancillary Buildings/Depot

- 6.1 English Heritage has confirmed that these buildings are Grade II listed in their own right and not solely part of the original listing of Liscard Hall. As such, appropriate schemes that lead to the protection, conservation and enhancement of listed buildings, are more likely, on balance, to be considered favourably in planning terms.
- 6.2 The difficulty, in this case, arises from the poor condition of all the buildings. Whilst the buildings are adequate, at present, for depot purposes, they will require substantial expenditure to bring them into any type of alternative beneficial use. Accordingly, redevelopment options for these buildings are likely to be of limited interest to the private sector, particularly in current adverse economic conditions.
- 6.3 The planning advice is that securing a long term viable future for the listing building is one of the main objectives in UDP Policy CH1. Uses such as a suitable arts and crafts facility where goods are made on the premises and sold as ancillary to the main business are likely to be considered favourably. Any use of the buildings would have to be sympathetic and complementary to the buildings on site and Central Park, as a whole.

7. Consultation

- 7.1 The Liscard Hall Steering Group, which comprises Local Members, Friends of Central Park and Community Representatives was actively involved in formulating the guidance that was included in the original Development Brief for the refurbishment of the Hall and outbuildings.
- 7.2 Accordingly, the Group was consulted at a meeting on 8th December 2009, where possible options for both the site of the Hall and the outbuildings were discussed.
- 7.3 The Group raised a range of technical and operational issues, which will be addressed separately, or at the time when potential schemes for the site and the outbuildings are capable of being implemented.
- 7.4 However, there was a consensus in the Group as follows:
1. That the site of the Hall should be landscaped and that the car parking area should remain.
 2. That any scheme to interpret the history/former presence of the Hall should examine the possibility of removing or lowering certain of the remaining boundary walls to reduce opportunities for anti social behaviour. Also the Group confirmed that it did not wish to see any residual foundations exposed.
 3. That any conversion or refurbishment works to the outbuildings should include public toilet provision for the Park and a Visitors Facility that would contain historical information about the Hall.
 4. That any new operational use of the outbuildings would complement, and not compete with, the activities of the Riverside Centre currently conducted from the café and the walled garden.
 5. That any refurbishment proposals seek to improve security of the buildings in the centre of the Park and the walled garden.
- 7.5 The Liscard Hall Steering Group has also consistently expressed a desire to see some kind of Community use promoted from both the Hall, when it stood, and the outbuildings. To that end, officers are continuing to look at other operational services that might complement the existing café facility, that could be suitably relocated to the depot buildings.

8. The Insurance Claim

- 8.1 The Insurance claim has now been settled in the sum of £117,810. After subtracting demolition costs and other associated expenditure a net figure of £80,000 remains. The payment is in recognition that the Council has suffered a loss and there are no restrictions on the use of this sum. It could be used to restore/enhance the site of Liscard Hall and its outbuildings.
- 8.2 There will be a cost associated in relocating the existing depot operations from Central Park to alternative premises, if a suitable use is found for the buildings.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1 The £80,000 from the insurance settlement could be used to improve the site of the Hall and to try and secure a new use for the outbuildings.
- 9.2 The estimated immediate backlog maintenance for the depot buildings is approximately £120,000.
- 9.3 The financial implications relating to the operations of the depot will be dealt with as part of the PACSPE project.
- 9.4 Central Park has been listed as a possible site to receive Play Builder funding, which is a Government grant, in 2010/2011. There is an allocation of £50,000 to improve play facilities for children aged 8 – 13.
- 9.5 Officers will explore opportunities to obtain any external sources of Grant funding available, which might assist in supporting the proposals for the site and/or the outbuildings.

10. Staffing implications

- 10.1 None arising out of this report

11. Equal Opportunities implications

- 11.1 None arising out of this report.

12. Community Safety Implications

- 12.1 A scheme to improve the site of the Hall and secure an appropriate use for the depot buildings, should improve public safety in the centre of the park

13. Local Agenda 21 implications

- 13.1 None arising out of this report

14. Planning implications

- 14.1 Central Park is designated as Urban Greenspace in the Unitary Development Plan and any future planning application for development at the former Liscard Hall site would be assessed against Policies GRE1 and GR1 'The Protection of Urban Green Space'.
- 14.2 Facilities for visitors, sport or play can be permitted under the terms of this policy but other types of development could only be considered if suitable compensatory measures can be put in place to provide equivalent community benefit elsewhere. This normally requires provision of open space elsewhere in the area. Policy GR1 also allows for any existing buildings to be converted for other suitable uses.
- 14.3 As the main listed building has been demolished, the case for any substantial enabling development has diminished and, any other enabling development would have to be proportionate to securing their long-term future under the terms of Policy CH1.

14.4 There is a statutory requirement to determine applications in accordance with the Development Plan unless it can be demonstrated that material considerations indicate otherwise.

15. Anti-poverty implications

15.1 None arising out of this report

16. Human Rights implications

16.1 None arising out of this report

17. Social Inclusion implications

17.1 None arising out of this report

18. Local Member Support implications

18.1 This report will be of interest to Ward Members in New Brighton, Wallasey, Liscard and Seacombe.

19. Background Papers

19.1 None

20. RECOMMENDATIONS

20.1 That officers arrange for the preparation of a landscape scheme for the site of the Hall.

20.2 That the Liscard Hall Steering Group be consulted on any landscape scheme produced.

20.3 That officers continue to explore options for the use of the outbuildings.

20.4 That the Insurance settlement be ring fenced for future expenditure required to landscape the site of the Hall and to help secure an appropriate alternative use for the outbuildings.

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