

GAUTBY ROAD PLAY AND COMMUNITY CENTRE, BIDSTON

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the expression of interest received for community asset transfer relating to Gautby Road Play and Community Centre in Bidston and recommends that the North Birkenhead Development Trust (NBDT) be invited to proceed to the next stage.

2. Background

- 2.1 Cabinet, at its meeting of 15th January 2009 made decisions on a number of its assets as part of the Strategic Asset Review. In the case of Gautby Road Play and Community Centre, Members resolved that it be transferred to community management, where the community expresses an interest, within a two year period. On 19th March 2009, Cabinet expanded this resolution so that Community Asset Transfers are offered first to those Centres where there are established and viable Joint Management Committees.
- 2.2 The Community Asset Transfer Policy requires that transfers are approached on a consistent basis. Accordingly, interested parties submit initial expressions of interest in a standard format so they can be appraised and a recommendation made as to which applicant(s) should proceed to a second stage. The second stage would require a much more detailed response to be submitted including a business plan.
- 2.3 Gautby Road Play & Community Centre, shown highlighted on the attached plan, is located in Gautby Road, Bidston, overlooking the model boating lake. Understood to have been built shortly after the Second World War as a drill hall for the local Territorial Army regiment, it became a play and community centre in 1974. It is currently operated by the Gautby Road Play and Community Centre Joint Management Committee which operates the premises for a range of activities which include an IT suite, nursery facilities and sports hall.
- 2.4 The Joint Management Committee (JMC) is keen to retain the facility but has been clear that it would be unable to operate the premises in a viable and sustainable manner. The JMC has explored a number of other potential avenues for transfer, including a number of possible partners. Whilst a number of groups and companies had shown interest in the premises, none were able to commit to long term support of the running of the premises. Under these circumstances, the Joint Management Committee has advised that it is not able to proceed with a transfer.
- 2.5 In accordance with the Community Asset Transfer policy, the property was advertised in the local press with expressions of interest being invited by 31st March 2010. The exercise attracted one expression of interest from the North Birkenhead Development Trust. This has now been considered by a panel comprising representatives from the

Regeneration and Law, HR and Asset Management Departments, and was measured against a scoring matrix which considered the Organisation, Skills, Resources and the benefits of the proposal to the community.

- 2.6 The North Birkenhead Development Trust owns and manages the St James Centre, Laird Street, Birkenhead and its proposal for Gautby Road is as a result of its need to meet its expansion requirements. As part of this expansion NBDT will continue and develop the existing community activities in Gautby Road Play and Community Centre. The proposal was scored at 65% which reflects that it is a good overall bid and is therefore recommended to progress to the second stage of the process.
- 2.7 In 2009 the Council undertook an audit of community facilities across the Borough. The audit identified 56 facilities within the Bidston and St James Ward, of which 23 facilities offer space for hire by community groups at varying rates. The proposal from the Trust shows that the Centre is in an important location for the local community and offers a range of services and facilities which should be retained for the benefit of local people as they are complimentary to other facilities in the area. The Centre provides some of the better quality community space in the locality and will compliment the Trusts existing facilities at the St James Centre, which should be demonstrated in the stage two submission.

3. Financial implications

- 3.1 In line with the community asset transfer policy it is recognised that buildings may need essential repairs works to make them suitable for a range of community uses and that groups taking over an asset may require some additional funding towards running costs. It is intended that any approved costs will be funded through the Community Fund administered by Wirral Partnership Homes.

4. Staffing implications

- 4.1 The council currently employ a janitor to operate these premises. The Council will manage the staff under existing HR policies.

5. Equal Opportunities implications/Equality Impact Implications

- 5.1 None arising directly from this report.
- 5.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken in respect of the Community Asset Transfer process.

6. Community Safety implications

- 6.1 None arising directly from this report.

7. Local Agenda 21 implications

- 7.1 None arising directly from this report.

8. Planning implications

- 8.1 The site is allocated as Primarily Residential Area in the Council's Unitary Development Plan and lies within the regeneration priority area identified in the Council's Interim Housing Policy. The continued use of the site for community use would be consistent with these designations.

9. Anti-poverty implications

- 9.1 None arising directly from this report

10. Human Rights implications

- 10.1 None arising directly from this report

11. Social Inclusion implications

- 11.1 None arising directly from this report

12. Local Member Support implications

- 12.1 The property is located within the Bidston and St James Ward.

13. Background Papers

- 13.1 None

14. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 14.1 That the North Birkenhead Development Trust be invited to submit detailed proposals in accordance with stage two of the Community Asset Transfer process.

Bill Norman

Director of Law HR & Asset Management.