

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Executive
Date: 16.03.2020
Report for: Decision
Report of: Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration

Report Title

Former William Wroe Golf Course – Options Appraisal

Summary

This report provides an update regarding the public engagement and Options Appraisal work carried out during 2019 by consultants ARUP in connection with the former William Wroe golf course. The site was previously included as an allocation for potential partial residential development in the draft Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) in 2016, a status which was removed following a decision by the Council in 2018.

The report details measures to improve the site and options for its future status.

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Executive:

- (i) Notes the Options Appraisal report produced by ARUP.
- (ii) Approves that an application be made to the Registration Authority (Planning and Development Management Committee) that the former William Wroe Golf Course site is designated as a Town/Village Green to provide additional legal protection beyond its green belt status and planning policy protection.
- (iii) Delegates authority to the Corporate Director of Place to complete and submit the application.
- (iv) Acknowledges that the designation of William Wroe as a Town and Village Green may constitute a disposal under section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 and that such a disposal would be a disposal at undervalue and approves the disposal as it promotes the social and environmental well-being of Flixton and its residents.
- (v) Approves that further work is undertaken to develop a masterplan for the William Wroe site and determine the most appropriate management and funding models.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Paul Farrand

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Background Papers: None

Relationship to Policy Framework/Corporate Priorities	The project supports the Council's Corporate Plan priorities of Health and Wellbeing; Successful and Thriving Places and Green and Connected. The project also supports the council's work in relation to its Climate Emergency Declaration.
Relationship to GM Policy or Strategy Framework	The project supports the aims of the GM Strategy, GM 5 Year Environment Plan, draft GMSF and GM Cultural Strategy relating to Natural Capital, Green Infrastructure, Climate Change and Public Health.
Financial	Future interventions at the site will be dependent on securing appropriate levels of capital and revenue funding. The estimated capital cost of delivering the high scoring interventions identified in the Options Appraisal is up to c£2.5m and potential funding sources are included at Section 6.
Legal Implications	If the site is dedicated as a town and village green (TVG), the people of the locality will have the right to use the land for lawful sports and pastimes, and it will significantly restrict the Council's ability to use the land or do anything on the land that interferes with those rights.
Equality/Diversity Implications	No adverse impacts
Sustainability Implications	The project has potential to deliver against the Council's Climate Emergency declaration and the green infrastructure, natural environment, open space and climate change policies of The Core Strategy and developing policies of the council's Local Plan under these headings.
Resource Implications e.g. Staffing / ICT / Assets	Staff resources required from Legal and Amey Property teams
Risk Management Implications	None
Health & Wellbeing Implications	The project links to the Trafford Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Sport and Physical Activity Strategy.
Health and Safety Implications	None

1.0 Background

1.1 William Wroe Golf Course closed as a municipal golf course in 2017, following which it has been accessed informally by the general public and maintained by the Council. Following the Council decision in 2018 to remove the former William Wroe Golf Course site from the draft Greater Manchester Spatial Framework as a proposed housing allocation, consultants ARUP were commissioned to co-ordinate public engagement to inform the development of an Options Appraisal for the site. A public consultation and engagement event took place at Flixton House on 14th March 2019, with 73 recorded attendees. This event was supported by an online survey which ran from 11th to 24th March, attracting 268 responses.

2.0 ARUP Options Appraisal

2.1 The Options Appraisal is structured around an assessment of the local, regional and national strategic context, a baseline physical analysis of the site and a high level SWOT analysis (see Appendix 1).

This information and the key themes emerging from public consultation have been developed into a vision for the site as *“a truly multifunctional greenspace, providing opportunities for a diverse range of activities, and a landscape where wildlife can flourish”*.

2.2 The guiding landscape principles of the Options Appraisal are summarised below:

- (i) Improvements to access and circulation - improved network/hierarchy of access routes connected to the wider neighbourhood, routes and destinations, especially in the context of the Urmston Active Neighbourhood project, Mersey Valley and town centre.
- (ii) Definition of site entrances – distinct, clear access points to create a welcoming setting.
- (iii) Connection of the north and south - create a coherent park that reads as one site with a unified identity and strong character.
- (iv) Opportunity for diverse activity - setting for varied activities such as sport, play, relaxation, food growing and events, appealing to a wide audience and energising the open space.
- (v) Enhancement to ecology and biodiversity - maintain and develop the natural setting of the park sensitively to enhance biodiversity and establish a balance between space for people and space for nature.
- (vi) Provision of visitor and community facilities - widen the offer of facilities to provide places for people to gather, meet and interact. Bring back into use existing buildings on the site.

2.3 Potential interventions, depending upon the scale of physical investment in site features and facilities, are arranged under five potential themed trails: Fitness, Play, Edible, Wildlife and Relaxation.

- Fitness – 5km walking/running/cycling circuit with potential for fitness equipment
- Play – natural play features that complement the landscape, linked to the access network
- Edible - trail with edible soft landscape features linked to orchards and growing/demonstration space
- Wildlife - trail passing through naturalised spaces including wetlands, woodlands and meadows and passing close to areas where public access could be discouraged through barrier planting and boundaries

- Relaxation – peaceful, quieter areas with seating or overlooking space for informal recreation and activities

2.4 A Vision Plan has been developed to provide a visual and spatial concept for the future potential of the site, which integrates each of the five trails to illustrate how they could bring structure and character to the space (Appendix 1 – Page 20). This plan represents the collective implementation of the prioritised options, together with their relationship to more capital-intensive features such as a visitor/volunteer centre, café and replacement railway bridge crossing.

2.5 An appraisal of site improvement measures was carried out in order to inform a prioritised potential way forward, using the following criteria:

- Delivering the vision
- Key themes from consultation
- Council corporate objectives
- Deliverability
- Cost

2.6 The appraisal exercise produced a clear set of prioritised options which can be categorised in terms of low, medium and high scoring interventions in the short, medium and long term. These options are strongly influenced by future management and funding and as such will form the basis of more detailed work once a preferred option has been agreed.

2.7 The scoring weighting means that high and moderate scoring features can be viewed as being realistic for delivery in the short term (0-3 yrs), whilst lower scoring features will require a longer term approach (3-5 yrs+).

High Scoring (20-25 points):

(i) wildflower meadows/nature trail (ii) creation of wetland areas and boardwalks (iii) access to/from Flixton Road and Church Rd (iv) installation of benches and furniture (v) creation of spaces for group activity (vi) outdoor fitness trail (vii) food growing space/edibles (viii) natural play features (ix) creation of green corridors (x) creation of glades and relaxation spaces

Moderate scoring (16-19 points)

(i) structural landscape planting (ii) reinstatement of historic orchard (iii) improved bridge crossing (iv) sculpture and sculpture trail/sculptural play

Low scoring (10-15 points)

(i) Community hub/learning resource (ii) Café/catering (iii) replacement railway bridge crossing

3.0 Site Protection Options

3.1 The Options Appraisal and work at other Council managed sites have provided a series of options for site protection, detailed in the table below.

Fields in Trust (FiT)	
Features	Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protects the space by restricting the use of the land to recreation ground in perpetuity • Involves protecting the land through a legally binding Deed of Dedication • Land continues to be managed by the Council/partner • Funding opportunities via FiT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Legal and Property input and resource required • No development other than for playing fields/recreational use is possible without consent from Fields in Trust • Following submission of the application, the Council must be in a position to sign the deed of dedication within 6 months • Any proposed removal of this status would need to be approved by Fields in Trust in line with their disposals policy
Town/Village Green (TVG)	
Features	Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protects the space by restricting use to recreation in perpetuity • Application is made under section 15(8) of the Commons Act 2006 for landowners to dedicate their own land voluntarily • The Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013 made changes to the law on registering new TVGs relating to trigger events and planning allocations/applications • Flexibility regarding development as <i>“No special permission is required if the planned works are to improve the green for visitors’ enjoyment.”</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Legal and Property input and resource required • Any proposed removal of Town/Village Green designation must be accompanied by robust supporting evidence and approved via Secretary of State after assessment of the impact on public interest. Replacement land must also be identified of at least the same area as the de-registered green • Dedication restricts use to recreation in perpetuity unless deregistered • DEFRA have confirmed that the Council can apply for Village Green status as no exclusions apply • If the site is dedicated as a Town and Village Green (TVG), the people of the locality will have the right to use the land for lawful sports and pastimes, restricting the Council’s ability to do anything on the land that interferes with those rights.

Local Green Space	
Features	Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designation through the Neighbourhood Plan and Local Plan process • Provides green belt level protection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning designation does not provide the same legal protection that FiT and TVG provide • Longer timescales due to Neighbourhood Plan and Local Plan consultation and adoption stages • Site already designated green belt and protected in planning terms

3.2 On balance Town/Village Green (TVG) designation offers the most effective means of securing additional legal protection for the site due to the less onerous implications in terms of dedication, timescale, approvals and consents for site modifications, without prejudicing the exploration of the full implications of different management and funding models.

3.3 Designation of the site as a Country Park represents an additional option for the William Wroe site. Traditionally this designation was made under the 1968 Countryside Act. Current applications are made via Natural England under a less formal arrangement and assessed against criteria including size (at least 10 Ha), accessibility, signage, amenities, facilities and community involvement. This designation is reviewed every three years. Although designation as a country park via this route is non-statutory and offers no additional level of legal protection, it is an option which could be pursued at the site once qualifying criteria have been met.

4.0 Future Management Options

4.1 In addition to dedicating the land as a Town/Village Green, there will be a requirement for the Council to develop a masterplan for the site, which will provide a framework for funding bids as well as site maintenance.

4.2 Given the site's location within the proposed Flixton Neighbourhood Plan Area as part of the application made to the Council by the Flixton Neighbourhood Planning group, the associated Neighbourhood Forum represents a group through which future local community consultation regarding the future of the William Wroe site could be conducted, should the Neighbourhood Area and Forum be designated.

4.3 The Options Appraisal report also refers to the potential for the Council to explore opportunities to work with existing or new partners to develop an appropriate model for the site's future management.

(a) Environmental Partners and Charities

Organisations such as Groundwork, City of Trees, The Woodland Trust, The Forestry Commission, The Conservation Volunteers and The Wildlife Trusts have experience of managing and sustaining environmental assets for biodiversity and public benefit and may be interested in taking on the management of the site individually or jointly through a partnership and/or management agreement or licence, with the land remaining in the Council's ownership. Further scope exists to explore opportunities to work more closely in collaboration with The Environment Agency, United Utilities and The Mersey Rivers Trust in

the context of The Mersey Valley as part of the catchment based approach to the Upper Mersey Catchment.

(b) Trust Model

This would involve establishment of a trust for the site, with a company limited by guarantee and registered as a charity, overseen by a board of trustees with appropriate cross-sector representation. An endowment could involve the buildings on site and any commercial/revenue generating opportunities available at the site. Alternatively, organisations such as The Land Trust have a track record in managing and sustaining environmental assets for public benefit.

(c) Management by the Council

This option would involve the Council working to bring additional resources into the site to fund its improvement and ongoing maintenance with the involvement of Trafford Countryside Management Partnership (TCMP) organisations such as City of Trees, The Conservation Volunteers and other partners.

4.4 Following consideration of these options, continued management by the Council and TCMP partners in the short term is recommended as the most appropriate option as Town/Village Green dedication is progressed. Trafford's Countryside Management Partnership will support community involvement, events and the exploration of funding opportunities linked to long term management models.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 Delivery of the high and moderate scoring interventions of the Vision Plan is estimated at a total capital cost of around £2.5m, accounting for construction costs, contractor fees, design and project management, contingency and inflation.

This estimated cost would cover the following interventions:

- Site preparation works
- Improved multi-user access routes
- Low key natural play and fitness trail elements
- Soft landscape works (including wetland areas and meadows)
- Low key natural play and fitness trail items
- Railway crossing enhancements
- Site infrastructure (including bins, seating, signage and interpretation)
- Entrance improvements

5.2 Depending on funding, an incremental approach may be adopted to delivering the interventions identified. In the interim, a level of maintenance will need to be delivered on the site to be determined by the Council.

6.0 Funding Opportunities

6.1 Funding opportunities exist through grant giving bodies and at the local and GM level as part of emerging initiatives around natural capital, biodiversity, sport and physical activity, climate change adaptation, public health and wellbeing. Capital and revenue funding could be sourced through developer contributions and through the emerging biodiversity net gain agenda and its requirement for long term management plans if this is made mandatory through The Environment Bill. This work has been led at GM level due to its status as The Government's Urban Pioneer, linked to The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

6.2 Greater Manchester's Natural Capital Investment Plan seeks to introduce new ways of funding and sustaining natural capital assets, the need for which was recognised through the inaugural Green Summit in 2018. The plan makes the case for greater use of a blended finance approach, moving away from traditional funding through grants and benefactors into new areas of opportunity such as habitat and carbon banking for developers and businesses and placed based models with revenue generation potential through public health prescribing.

6.3 GM level initiatives such as Natural Course and IGNITION represent further opportunities to explore potential new models and funding, whilst the site has potential in the context of The Northern Forest and GM Tree and Woodland Strategy related work.

7.0 Implications of TVG Dedication

7.1 It is possible that a voluntary dedication of the land as a Town and Village Green could be considered as a disposal under Section 123 of The Local Government Act 1972, which requires that the Council receives best value. Under the Council's Constitution, The Executive can authorise disposals at under value. This will apply to the William Wroe site.

7.2 A valuation of the site was undertaken in 2016 in connection with a Council leisure asset review, which produced a valuation of £345k based on its existing use at the time as a municipal golf course. The alternative use value of the site was considered to be nil. The William Wroe site is in the greenbelt and was removed from the GMSF as a development site showing the Council's commitment to preserve it as an asset for community use.

8.0 Next Steps

8.1 The next step is to start the application process for voluntarily dedicating the land as a Town/Village Green, which has been simplified for landowners such as the Council by removing the need for evidence and witness statements to support the case for registration, allowing completion within a short timeframe. This is estimated at between one and three months from commencement of the application to signing the declaration and the site becoming a registered Town/Village Green.

8.2 The process involves completion of the relevant sections of the application form and submission via the commons registration authority, which in this case is the Council under the terms of the Council's Constitution Part 2, Article 8. A description of the site, map and identified neighbourhood or locality need to accompany the application. The Council as registration authority through the Planning and Development Management Committee is not required to advertise the application or examine its merits and the process ends with a statutory declaration that the Council is the owner of the land and that any necessary consents (e.g. from any leaseholder or chargeholder) have been obtained. Once registered as a Town/Village Green, the land is protected, giving local people rights of recreation.

8.3 The Trafford Countryside Partnership will be used to explore the best approach for the future management of the site and in identifying potential funding sources to deliver improvement measures. This would be undertaken in close liaison with the local community and groups.

8.4 It is anticipated that following Executive decision, publication and expiry of call-in period, the Town/Village Green application and dedication will be made via Planning and Development Management Committee, with written confirmation to the Council's Town/Village Green Sub Committee. The target date for this is May 2020.

9.0 Other Options

9.1 Other options include a do nothing option, which would fail to capture the significant potential of the site to deliver against key Council and partner priorities on natural capital, health and wellbeing, sport and physical activity and climate change.

10.0 Consultation

10.1 Consultation events and survey were carried out in March 2019. Ongoing discussions have taken place with representatives of local community groups such as Save Flixton Green Belt and My Flixton Neighbourhood Planning Group in order to maintain a dialogue throughout the process.

11.0 Reasons for Recommendation

11.1 The recommendations have been made as these are considered to provide the most effective initial site protection, which be commenced in conjunction with further exploration of the various potential longer term management models outlined in the context of emerging opportunities at the local and GM level.

Key Decision (as defined in the Constitution): Yes
If Key Decision, has 28-day notice been given? Yes

Finance Officer Clearance **GB**.....
Legal Officer Clearance **DS**.....

[CORPORATE] DIRECTOR’S SIGNATURE (electronic) 
To confirm that the Financial and Legal Implications have been considered and the Executive Member has cleared the report.