

GEDLING CHARITIES INDEPENDENT PANEL

PROPOSALS FOR KING GEORGE V RECREATION GROUND, ARNOLD

Introduction

The Panel was established by the Gedling Borough Council to provide a source of external independent advice on decisions that it would make where the Council acts as trustees to a charitable organisation.

The Council, as trustee, was considering whether it would be in the best interests of the charity known as King George V playing field at Arnold (King George V) to release part of the field from the charitable registration in exchange for another piece of recreation land which would then become subject to the registration as a charity. The land proposed to be substituted was an area of recreation land between George Street and Charles Street in Arnold (George Street).

The Council was very clear and open that the reason for this proposal was the Council, as local authority, would then look to use the land released to build a new leisure centre to replace the existing Arnold Leisure Centre in the town.

The Panel's remit was therefore to consider whether the proposed land swap was in the best interests of the intended beneficiaries of the charity.

Four members of the Panel met to consider the proposal:

- Jo Bradley
- Lesley Rhodes
- Stephanie Roberts
- Rev. Phil Williams

The Process

1.1 The Panel heard from Keith Tansley the Council's Head of Leisure and Community Services. He outlined the proposals for the land exchange and the current value, layout and relative positions of King George V and George Street.

1.2 He was questioned by the Panel; in particular as to

(i) Car Parking

The Panel were told that any new leisure centre built on King George V would provide for additional parking on site. Any additional car parking at George Street would be accommodated at Arnold Hill Park.

(ii) Effect on current provision at King George V

The current use of King George V for football and cricket would continue as now even if the new leisure centre were approved.

The Council had plans to refurbish the play facility and to provide additional seating.

(iii) What would be gained from the swap

- (a) a greater area of protected open space with more pitches
- (b) monies for refurbishment of facilities on site

(iv) Impact on open space locally

The Panel were told that the last survey of open space within the Borough showed that locally there was an over provision of open space.

The proposal for the land swap would increase the amount of open space protected by charitable registration.

2. The Panel undertook a site visit to both King George V and George Street.
- 3.1 The Panel had the benefit of a valuation report prepared by Herbert Button and Partners. The report was dated September 2010 and was prepared for the Council, as trustees, by an independent qualified surveyor.
- 3.2 The report showed that there was very little difference between the financial value of the two areas of land to be exchanged. The George Street site would be a suitable replacement for the facilities lost from King George V being able to provide approximately level space which already is used as a football pitch.
- 4.1 The Panel considered that it was important to conduct a robust consultation exercise in order to gather opinion from those people who were meant to benefit from the purposes of the charity. In order to do this the following processes were undertaken:
 - (i) consultation letters were sent to all residents within a five minute walk of King George V and George Street, including the schools and businesses in the immediate vicinity
 - (ii) posters were displayed in the town centre and near to or on both sites
 - (iii) a press notice was issued which was published in the Evening Post
 - (iv) a public display of the proposals was put up in the Church Hall in the market place with an opportunity to leave comments
 - (v) a web page for the Panel was set up with the facility to make comments electronically
 - (vi) an information pack was put together for anyone requesting further information

- 4.2 The consultation period was during January 2011 but any responses received up to February 14th have been considered.
- 4.3 In total 249 responses were received to the consultation. Of these 181 were opposed to the proposal and 40 were in favour. The balance was made up of people seeking further information, or expressing opinions that were not clearly for or against.

5. **Conclusions**

- 5.1 The publicity for the consultation sought to make it clear to the public that the Panel were not consulting about the proposal to build a new leisure centre. The Consultation was to seek views on whether the land swap would be in the best interests of the charity.

Many respondents however expressed views on the impact of a leisure centre built on King George V. Many of the concerns expressed related to traffic and parking issues and the loss of 'openness' of King George V. Even though the siting of the proposed leisure centre was not part of the consultation the Panel believe that the comments are relevant to the extent that the building would impact on the use of the remainder of the field. It is the view of the Panel that a leisure centre built on King George V would detract from the openness and attractiveness for casual recreation and play on the field.

- 5.2 Other comments referred to the distance of George Street from the town centre, compared with the distance to King George V, the comparative ease of access and the public awareness of the George Street site.

The Panel consider that George Street is an acceptable replacement for a land swap in terms of land area, facilities, terrain and value. It does however have reservations with respect for its accessibility from the town both on foot and by car and its value as an 'open' area and for these reasons conclude that the amenity value of George Street is less than the land that would be surrendered at King George V.

- 5.3 The two preceding paragraphs deal with the majority of issues raised by objectors. In addition concerns were raised with regard to a change to the historic value of King George V and the purpose of the original endowment; the Council's motives and any possibility that it might benefit financially from the swap; and potential uses for the land released if the leisure centre build did not proceed.

Whilst the Panel has some sympathy with some of the views expressed it does not consider that these substantially influence the decision as to whether the swap would be in the best interests of the beneficiaries. It should be clear that the Council has made the Panel and the public aware that King George V was its preferred site for a new leisure centre as part of its town centre re-development proposals. The information from Mr Tansley, however, was that it is not its only approach to regeneration in the town.

5.4 Those responses in support of the proposal saw a benefit to the community of a new leisure centre and an increase in protected recreation land.

6. Recommendation

1. For the reasons set out above, the Panel recommends that the proposal for the exchange of land at King George V Recreation Ground and George Street Recreation Ground does not proceed.
2. During the consultation some members of the public raised the issue as to whether George Street already enjoyed protected status as a charity. We have investigated this point and are satisfied that it does not, however we would recommend to the Council that it consider whether it should now be protected.