

Cabinet – 19 November 2008

Land adjacent to Lower Farm Primary School (Ashbourne Field)

Portfolio: Councillor Zahid Ali, Children's Services

Service: Walsall Children's Services - Serco

Wards: Bloxwich East

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1. Summary of report

The report sets out proposed arrangements for the future use of Ashbourne Field, off Ashbourne Road, adjacent to Lower Farm Primary School.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approve the incorporation of 3,155 sq metres, or thereabouts (edged in red and shaded yellow on the attached plan reference EPMS 2896/2), of Ashbourne Field, adjacent to Lower Farm Primary School, into the school site subject to planning permission being obtained.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approve the future use of the remainder of Ashbourne Field as recreational open space under the management of Greenspaces.

3. Background information

- 3.1 Ashbourne Field (off Ashbourne Road, Bloxwich), the extent of which is shown edged in red on the attached plan reference EPMS 2896/2 (**Appendix A**), is Council-owned. The Council acquired the land as part of a much wider area in 1946 for the purpose of post-war housing.
- 3.2 Whilst the wider area of land fell under the control of the Housing Committee, Ashbourne Field, including the access to it, was formally appropriated from the purposes of the Housing Act 1957 to the Education Act 1944 in 1983. Since this date, whilst the land has been used as informal open space, it has been under the control and management of the Education Service.

- 3.3 In 2005, an Application was made by a private party under the Commons Registration Act 1965 for Ashbourne Field to become a Village Green. Following a Public Inquiry in summer 2006, the Inspector recommended to the Council, as Registration Authority for Town and Village Greens, that the land should not become a Village Green. The Council, as Registration Authority, accepted the recommendations and conclusions of the Inspector's report (Development Control Committee at its meeting on 8 January 2008).
- 3.4 Following this decision a Working Group was set up, comprising Estates, Planning, Leisure and Children's Services – Serco, to consider the future use of Ashbourne Field.
- 3.5 Following an options appraisal, it is proposed that the land known as Ashbourne Field be divided into two parts, with 3,155 sq metres or thereabouts (edged in red and shaded yellow on the attached plan reference EPMS 2896/2) being incorporated into the site of Lower Farm Primary School, subject to planning permission being obtained, and the remainder being used as recreational open space under the management of Greenspaces.
- 3.6 It was reported to the Blakenall & Bloxwich LNP on 15 October that a report is going to Cabinet in November to seek approval for 75% of the Ashbourne Road playing fields to be made available for public use. It was reported that the field is current classed as education land. The LNP moved the following recommendation;
- That the proposed change in use of the land at Ashbourne Road playing fields from education to public use be supported by the LNP and that consideration be given to erecting goal posts and other play equipment for local children's youth.

4. Resource considerations

4.1 Financial:

- 4.1.1 The site related element of Lower Farm Primary School's budget would be increased to reflect the larger area of playing field area to be maintained. This funding would be found within the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) which Walsall receives from the government.
- 4.1.2 Subject to Cabinet's decision, the land to be added to the school site would be fenced to provide a secure area for the children using the additional playing field area. The cost of this work is estimated at £25,000 and Cabinet is asked to approve this budget in the report on the Education Capital Programme elsewhere on this agenda.
- 4.1.3 There would be a realignment of revenue budgets in Leisure to cover arrangements for the future maintenance of the recreational open space area of Ashbourne Field by Greenspaces.

4.2 Legal:

- 4.2.1 Some years ago, the number of places at Lower Farm Primary School was increased to 420, with 60 pupils being admitted to reception classes each year. However, no additional land was provided at that time and as a result, the site then fell below the recommended minimum size.
- 4.2.2 The site of Lower Farm Primary School is 3,155 sq metres below the minimum recommended site area set by the DCSF. Although the site meets the statutory requirement for 5,000 m² of team games playing fields, it does not meet the DCSF recommended areas for pitches (including allowance for the all-weather pitch), informal, social and habitat areas etc. Incorporating 3,155 sq metres of Ashbourne Field into the school site will bring the site up to the minimum recommended size.
- 4.2.3 The proposal to incorporate part of Ashbourne Field into the site of Lower Farm Primary School would constitute a change of use and this would be the subject of a planning application.

4.3 **Staffing:** There are no additional staffing requirements.

5. Citizen impact

- 5.1 Children attending Lower Farm Primary School will benefit from the additional playing field area for team games and other outdoor educational activities.
- 5.2 Local residents will continue to have access to the larger part of the Ashbourne Field through the proposed future use as recreational open space. However, the shape and size of the area has limitations for the scope and development of such use.

6. Community safety

Ashbourne Field is adjoined by residential properties, Lower Farm Primary School and a golf course. There is only one access point making it a very enclosed area of public open space; no boundaries are formed by roads so there is no general overview of the land by passing members of the public. Local residents have reported instances of anti-social behaviour by young people using the Field. It is likely that the future use of the Field as recreational open space would increase the level of use.

7. Environmental impact

It is considered that there would be little if any impact as Ashbourne Field would be used as playing fields by the school and as recreational open space by the general public.

8. Performance and risk management issues

8.1 Risk:

- 8.1.1 Lower Farm Primary School would be better able to deliver the PE and sport elements of the national curriculum as a result of the proposed increase in site area.

8.2 Performance management:

- 8.2.1 The site of Lower Farm primary School would be increased to the minimum recommended size in line with DCSF requirements as a result of this proposal.

9. Equality implications

The proposal addresses the needs of the school and local communities.

10. Consultation

- 1 Consultees include Estates, Planning, Leisure and Lower Farm Primary School.

Background papers

Inspector's Report 2006

Development Control Committee, 8 January 2008: Application 04/2312/VG/E1 for Village Green Status, Ashbourne Field, Ashbourne Road, Lower Farm Estate, Bloxwich.

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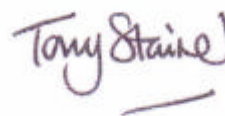
Signed:



Executive Director: David Brown

Date: 7 November 2008

Signed:



Managing Director, Walsall Children's Service - Serco

Date: 6 November 2008



Signed:

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Zahid Ali

Date: 7 November 2008

