



Borough of Oadby & Wigston

Full Council

11 December 2007

Assessment of Open Space and Recreational Facilities: Appointment of Consultants

Report of: Director of Community Services Report Number:
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NON-EXEMPT

This report is likely to be considered while the meeting is open to press & public

Summary:

The Borough Council is required to carry out an Open Space and Recreational Facilities Assessment to serve as essential evidence in support of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy and Allocations Development Plan Documents.

Recommendations:

- (1) An exception be made to standing orders to enable the appointment of a consultancy which is not the lowest tenderer and that Consultant A referred to in the Report be so appointed, subject to satisfactory references.

Level of delegation: Council

Wards affected: All

Comments of Statutory Officers:

Head of Paid Service:	Consideration should be given to the inclusion of the required Needs Assessment within this proposed piece of work.
Proper Officer for Financial Affairs:	Included in the report.
Monitoring Officer:	None received.

Appendices Attached:

Impact Assessments:

Health:	The Assessment will ensure the Local Development Framework has a positive impact on health.
Environment:	The Assessment will ensure the Local Development Framework has a positive impact on the environment.
Community Safety:	The Assessment will help to ensure the Local Development Framework has a positive impact on community safety.
Human Rights:	All those with an interest in the Borough will have numerous

opportunities to comment on and influence the preparation and content of the Local Development Framework.

Equal Opportunities: The Local Development Framework will seek to ensure that developments will be accessible to all.

Risk Assessment: No impact.

Commentary:

Background

1. A Report went to Policy Committee on 22 March 2007 and approval gained to appoint consultants to carry out an Open Space and Recreational Facilities Assessment.
2. It was outlined within the Report that £10,000 had been budgeted to carry out the assessment

Opens Space and Recreational Facilities Assessment

3. Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) requires Local Authorities to prepare Open Space and Recreational Facilities Assessment in order to provide evidence in support of policies to be prepared and contained in Local Development Framework Development Plan Documents (DPDs). This Assessment will need to inform the Councils Core Strategy and Allocations DPDs.
4. The following extract from PPG17 sets out more information on Open Space and Recreational Facilities Assessments.
5. *To ensure effective planning for open space, sport and recreation it is essential that the needs of local communities are known. Local authorities should undertake robust assessments of the existing and future needs of their communities for open space, sports and recreational facilities. Assessments will normally be undertaken at district level, although assessments of strategic facilities should be undertaken at regional or sub-regional levels.*
6. *As a minimum, assessments of need should cover the differing and distinctive needs of the population for open space and built sports and recreational facilities. The needs of those working in and visiting areas, as well as residents should also be included.*
7. *Local authorities should also undertake audits of existing open space, sports and recreational facilities, the use made of existing facilities, access in terms of location and costs (such as charges) and opportunities for new open space and facilities. Audits should consider both the quantitative and the qualitative elements of open space, sports and recreational facilities. Audits of quality will be particularly important as they will allow local authorities to identify potential for increased use through better design, management and maintenance.*
8. *Assessments and audits will allow local authorities to identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in their areas. They form the starting point for establishing an effective strategy for open space, sport and recreation at the local level (tied into the local authority's Community Strategy), and for effective planning through the development of appropriate policies in plans.*
9. Good quality assessments and audits, leading to clear strategies supported by effective planning policies, will provide vital tools for resolving the potential conflicts that arise between different uses and users of open space, sports and recreational facilities. The

Government expects all local authorities to carry out assessments of needs and audits of open space and sports and recreational facilities in accordance with the paragraphs above.

10. The Borough Council already have a 'Preliminary Assessment of Open Space and Recreational Facilities' which was carried out by Baker Associates in 2003 alongside the Urban Capacity Study. It was intended that this document would form a basis for a further study to be carried out at a later date when the LDF process reached the appropriate stage. The preliminary study will provide a good starting point and will mean that on this occasion and update and extension of that report is required, rather than a full assessment from scratch.
11. In addition to providing evidence in support of the LDF, the Assessment will also provide a useful tool for the Council when considering Section 106 Contributions in respect of planning Applications.

Appointing consultants

12. The Borough Council invited a number of consultants to submit quotes to carry out an assessment. Quotes received were higher than anticipated and it is proposed that the work is carried out over two financial years (2007/08 and 2008/09) to accommodate this.
13. Four consultants were shortlisted and interviewed the week of 19 November 2007. The preferred consultants are referred to as 'Consultant A' and 'Consultant B'. These consultants were not the cheapest options: Consultancy A were £30,415 and Consultancy B were £35,600. It is felt that the final output which would be achieved by appointing either consultant would offer a higher standard and quality assessment which can be used not only by the planning department but other sections within the authority. It is feared that a cheapest option would not provide a fully compliant PPG17 Study which is the ultimate aim of the Assessment and would require greater support/resources provided by Borough Council Officers.
14. An impact of a non-compliant PPG17 Assessment could be that the Assessment would not be a sound evidence base document at a Local Development Framework examination which could lead to a Local Development Document being rejected by an independent inspector.
15. The current workload of the Forward Plans Team means that limited resources would be available to be put into the assessment and so it is essential that a competent consultancy team is appointed which can carry out a lot of the work independently. Geographical Information Systems (GIS) is also a key element of this project and therefore it is essential that the appointed consultants can carry out the majority of the GIS work themselves. This would limit amount of resources the Borough Council would have to provide from the Forward Plans Team and GIS/Gazeteer postholder.
16. The benefits of appointing the preferred consultants are as follows:
 - Worked previously with neighbouring authorities.
 - Consultant A: Blaby District Council, Leicester City Council, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.
 - Consultant B: Harborough District Council.
 - High level of competency in Geographical Information Systems (GIS).
 - Consultant A would develop a database linked to Arc View GIS which can be updated by the Borough Council after the assessment has been completed. This will be useful not only to the planning department but also sections such as client services and leisure.
 - Consultant B would carry out a similar exercise using an access database and linking it to GIS.

- Consider sites outside the Borough boundary.
 - Consultant A would also consider sites outside of the Borough boundary which residents may use (for instance, Knighton Park).
- Both consultants would not have a site size threshold would be included; this means that all sites would be considered.
- Both consultants have identified a high level of public consultation which would be of a high standard consistent with the Borough Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

17. In short, it is felt that the appointment of either consultancy would result in a good quality Assessment that is fully PPG17 compliant which can be used by a number of Borough Council Departments. Both consultants demonstrated through the interview process that they would be able to compile the assessment without significant staff resources provided by the Borough Council.

18. The provision for the cost of the assessment will be included in the budget estimates to be considered by Development Control Committee on 17 January 2008.

19. At the time of preparing this report references are still being sought for both consultancies. Subject to satisfactory references it is proposed that Consultant A, the cheapest of the two preferred consultants, be offered the contract.

Background Papers referred to in compiling this report: Preliminary Assessment of Open Space and Recreational Facilities