

Executive Report

Ward(s) affected: Shalford

Report of Head of Community Services

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Date: 19 March 2019

Sale of Land to the rear of Guildford Rowing Club

Executive Summary

The Executive is asked to approve the sale of land and the diversion of a footpath to the rear of Guildford Rowing Club, Shalford Road, Guildford, to Guildford Rowing Club on terms set out in this report, at below market value.

Reasons for Recommendation:

- To secure the sale of land, which will release a capital receipt,
- To improve the facilities offered by Guildford Rowing Club.

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to gain approval from the Executive for the sale of land to the rear of Guildford Rowing Club to Guildford Rowing Club at below market value.

1.2 As the land area is greater than 0.2 hectares, Executive approval is required.

2. Strategic Priorities

2.1 This proposal assists with the delivery of the new Guildford Health and Wellbeing Strategy by facilitating the creation of modern state of the art facilities for the local community.

3. Background

3.1 The Council has previously sold off the land where the current Rowing Club is located, back in February 2012. Since then, the Club has grown and now wishes to build a new modern facility on this site and expand on to adjacent land, which is currently in the ownership of the Council.

- 3.2 The new Clubhouse is needed as the old Clubhouse was constructed in the 1950s and there are no accessible toilets or changing facilities or suitable training areas. Currently, the Club's fleet of boats, including their lottery-granted specialist adaptive (disabled) boats, has outgrown the Clubhouse and are stored outside. Facilities for supporting young and adaptive talent are at the core of the project. The new facility will provide up to date indoor training facilities, accessible changing rooms and toilets, indoor storage for specialist equipment and a site designed for inclusive access with gentle gradients, extra turning space and safe surfaces. The Rowing Club plans to develop the new Clubhouse bringing its facilities up-to-date and creating a sports club accessible to all, and benefiting the local community. The Club enjoys successes at both amateur and international level, with Olympic rowing gold medals won in both Beijing and Rio. Rachel Morris MBE, a current member, recently won Gold at the Rio Paralympics. The Club has over 200 members, including 100 juniors and an adaptive (disabled) rowing squad of both adults and juniors with a range of disabilities, which has grown through the help of volunteers over the past decade.
- 3.3 The Club obtained planning permission for a replacement Clubhouse building in September 2016. The plan attached as Appendix 1 illustrates the additional land required by Guildford Rowing Club to enable the construction of the new facilities.
- 3.4 The land required by the Club forms part of Shalford Watermeadows, which are situated within a flood plain. As such, the proposed new building has been designed to accommodate the changing conditions within this environment and has the ability to flood and allow water to move unimpeded through the structure.
- 3.5 A small section of footpath runs across the land the Club hopes to acquire. This is shown green on the plan in Appendix 1. In order to construct the new facility, the footpath will need to be relocated to the position shown blue on the plan. This was referred to in the officers' report in respect of the proposed development by the Rowing Club. It was noted in the report that:
- (i) the footpath is not a public right of way and
 - (ii) relocation of the footpath can be dealt with as part of the sale of the site to the Club.
- 3.6 It is proposed that the footpath relocation works along with tree and fencing works be carried out by the Council with the cost being met by the Rowing Club. The costs are estimated to be in the region of £8,000 plus VAT.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The land has been independently valued at £12,000 for a one off premium, by a professional valuer. The Property Review Group reviewed the proposed transaction and it was agreed to recommend the Council reduce the premium to £8,000 on the basis of social economic and environmental benefit the new facility would bring. As this does not represent best consideration under the terms of the Local Government Act 1972, the Executive must decide whether to agree to sell the land at this proposed undervalue.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The land that is to be sold is held as open space land and section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires the Council to advertise its intention to sell the land in a local newspaper for two consecutive weeks and to consider any objections received. This should be done before any final decision is taken on the disposal, so that proper consideration is given to the responses that are received.
- 5.2 Generally, the Council cannot dispose of its land for a consideration less than the best that can be reasonably obtained in the market, except with the express consent of the Secretary of State. However, the government recognises that there may be circumstances where a local authority considers it is appropriate to dispose of land at an undervalue where it is satisfied that the circumstances warrant such an action.
- 5.3 Specific consent is not required for the disposal of any interest in land that the Council considers will help it to secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area and where the undervalue is below a sum of £2 million. Officers consider that these provisions apply to this proposal.
- 5.4 The Council should comply with usual and prudent commercial practices, including obtaining the view of a professionally qualified valuer as to the likely amount of the undervalue.
- 5.5 The preparation of the sales transfer will be undertaken by the Council with all reasonable legal and surveyor's costs being paid by the purchaser.

6. Human Resource Implications

- 6.1 There are no human resource implications to consider.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 Currently, the land is achieving no income and is a maintenance liability for the Council. Agreeing to sell the land to Guildford Rowing Club will release a capital receipt and further help contribute to the offering provided by Guildford Rowing Club.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: A plan of the site and proposed sale area.