

MARCH – ESTOVER ROAD SITE – DECLARATION SURPLUS

To: **General Purposes Committee**

Date: **27th January 2015**

From: **Director of Finance**

Electoral division(s): **March North**

Forward Plan ref: **2015/031** *Key decision:* **Yes**

Purpose: **To approve the disposal of assets exceeding the Director of Finance's delegated limits.**

Recommendation: **General Purposes Committee is recommended to:**

- a) **Authorise the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Chairman of the General Purposes Committee, to establish an alternative use for the Estover Road site, and to enter into any appropriate Agreements, which may include disposal (by sale or by lease), or development by the Council.**

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The Estover Road site in March is not required for operational delivery by the County Council, and has been held as a strategic site for a number of years.
- 1.2 An opportunity has arisen within the Fenland Local Plan to seek planning consent for development and to dispose of the site, for which the site needs to be confirmed as formally surplus to the council's requirements.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The site is currently used as playing fields and informal open space. It was let for a number of years to the Estover Playing Fields Association. The lease has expired but the Association continues to manage the playing fields, although they do not pay any rent.
- 2.2 The County Council has been promoting the site for inclusion in the Fenland District Local Plan since it was identified as a site for disposal. The site was included in the latest Core Strategy for the Local Development Framework as part of a draft allocation for 450 homes for North-East March. The allocation was withdrawn from the plan in 2013, but the Inspector's report in 2014 confirming that the Local Plan was sound, also confirmed that the opportunity to bring forward unallocated sites of up to 249 dwellings was an important and integral part of this Local Plan's approach.
- 2.3 The Estover Road site was not formally allocated for any other use.
- 2.4 There is significant local opposition to the development of the site on the basis of concern about the loss of playing fields and amenity to adjacent residents, from individuals, residents and from March Town Council. Much of the opposition appears to stem from dissatisfaction with the outcome of the Local Plan, and these issues have been widely reported in the local press.
- 2.5 The site has been registered as an Asset of Community Value by Fenland District Council following an application by the Town Council. As a result, before the County Council would be able to sell, or lease the site for a period in excess of 25 years, it must notify Fenland District Council of intention to sell, upon which the Town Council as applicant, and other 'Community Interest Groups' will have 6 weeks in which to register an interest in making a proposal to acquire the site, and if so, a total of 6 months in which to submit their proposals. The County Council must consider any proposal but is free to then dispose of the site to any party, and on any terms, it sees fit.
- 2.6 The Town Council has also expressed its intention to bring forward a Neighbourhood Plan, part of which would include an express designation of public open space for the Estover Road site. A Neighbourhood Plan will be subject to full public consultation and representations before it can be adopted, and designation would not necessarily ensure availability of the land for the allocated use without agreement of the landowner.
- 2.7 Discussions have been held with the Town Council, and the Town Council has confirmed that it does not support development on part of the Estover Road site to enable funding of improved sports facilities and playing fields on the remainder.

- 2.8 Two reports on sport provision in recent years have suggested that the use of the existing playing fields in their current condition is unsustainable, and the site and facilities are poor quality. Proposals for development of approximately half the area would allow for some of the proceeds of sale to be invested in the reduced area, but would deliver a new Sports Hub including significantly improved sports pitches, multi-use areas, changing facilities and car parking.
- 2.9 Ongoing discussions are being held with the Football Association and Sport England, who would also be involved as consultees to any planning application.
- 2.10 The current intention is to submit a planning application for development of sufficient housing to fund infrastructure and sports facilities, and generate a receipt for the County Council. Should planning consent be granted by the District or on appeal, the net receipt will be in excess of the delegated threshold for officers to authorise the disposal of the site.
- 2.11 Should planning consent be granted the Council proposes to grant a long lease of that part of the site allocated for the sports facilities at a peppercorn rent. This would also facilitate the securing of grant aid for further enhancements if desired. The term would exceed the length provided for in the delegation to officers for disposals at less than best value, and would require a further decision from General Purposes Committee.
- 2.12 The Council needs to press ahead with its own application, as it is likely that only 249 units would be allowable on unallocated sites in North East March, and as and when granted these will be counted on a cumulative basis. Once consents in this area of March reach 249 units, there will be no current planning justification for development on the County Council's site.
- 2.13 If planning consent is not granted at this juncture, it is proposed that the council will continue to hold the site as a strategic landholding, and manage its use in the short to medium term through short term agreements if possible.

3. MAIN ISSUES

- 3.1 The Council's Constitution provides that the authority for all property transactions rests with the General Purposes Committee, but there is an agreed delegation to the Director of Finance to exercise that authority for transactions where the capital value is less than £500,000.
- 3.2 The value of the whole site with an acceptable planning consent for development will exceed the Director of Finance's delegated limit.

4. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

4.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

Housing development will generate employment opportunities, provide affordable housing and contribute to the growth of the town.

4.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives

Capital receipts and revenue savings can reduce the financial impact of budget pressures on front-line services, including helping people live healthy and independent lives. In addition, the proposals provide for significant improvement in local sports facilities

4.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

Capital receipts and revenue savings can reduce the financial impact of budget pressures on front-line services, including supporting and protecting vulnerable people.

5. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Resource Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

5.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

5.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

5.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications

Detailed engagement and consultation with the local community and local and national interest groups will be undertaken as part of any planning application for development of the site.

5.5 Localism and Local Member Involvement

The local County Council Member for March is aware of the proposals for redevelopment of the site, and will be kept informed of progress.

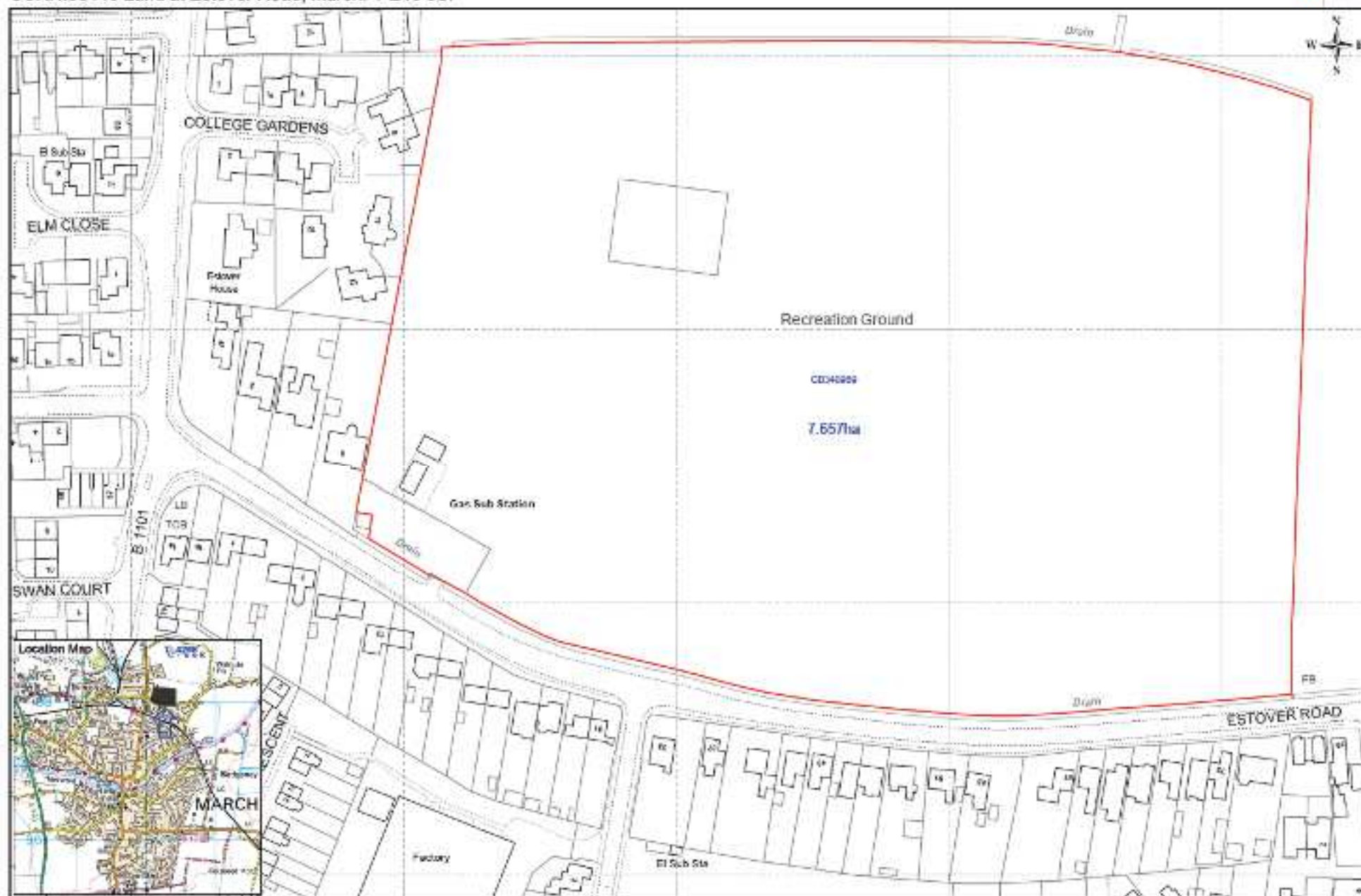
Group Leaders have been consulted on the proposal to declare the site surplus to requirements.

The local community including District and Town Council Members are aware of the proposals and will be consulted in detail as part of the planning process.

5.6 Public Health Implications

The proposals provide for significant improvement to local sports facilities and the long lease coupled with high quality of what will be created will help to ensure the long term sustainability of the facility.

Source Documents	Location
Fenland LDF plan	http://www.fenland.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=10010&p=0
A Review into the football facilities and participation levels in and around the town of March, Fenland July 2012	available via e mail from stephen.conrad@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Sports Facility Review- March Fenland July 2014	As above



Scale (1:1000) 1:1000
 Date: 08 September 2014
 By: [illegible]
 File: \\GCC.Cambridge.gov.uk\GIS\Red\PE158SF\USRN:00149 Land at Estover Rd, March.docx (Job No:2808)

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