

REPORT TO: Executive Board Sub Committee

DATE: 1st April 2011

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Environment & Economy

SUBJECT: Former St Michael's Golf Course, Widnes

WARDS: Riverside

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on the progress of the remediation of the northern section of St Michael's Golf Course and to outline the options for potential future site uses.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

(1) Progress on the remediation of the site is noted; and

(2) Members agree to the further exploration of the options contained in sections 3.6 – 3.10 of the report.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The original 18 hole golf course at St Michael's was closed by the Health Protection Agency in October 2004 due to contamination control issues.
- 3.2 On the 14th October 2009 the offer of funding support to the value £2,477,131 was received from The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) for Phase 1 of the remediation of the northern section of St Michael's Golf Course. It should be noted that remediation refers solely to the clean-up of the contaminated land and not the restoration of the site. On the 22nd February 2011 the Environment Agency (EA) confirmed the award of an additional £90,490 for the Phase 1 St Michael's remediation project.
- 3.3 Contractors Land and Water were appointed to complete Phase 1 which included a stream diversion, the design of a new capping and a leachate collection system.
- 3.4 Phase 2 of the remediation is the design and installation of a leachate treatment system. Aeration has been identified as a potential technique to treat the leachate and an initial trial will shortly take place to demonstrate if it is able to reduce the concentration of sulphide to concentrations that are appropriate to allow sewer disposal. Once the results are proven and the design has been signed off by the EA and also United Utilities then a Phase 2 funding application can be made to Defra. Once completed this should significantly reduce the Council's on-going revenue costs of the leachate disposal. Until this is completed the site will remain closed to public access on safety grounds.

3.5 Following the completion of the Phase 2 remediation contract the next phase will be to restore the site for re-use. Outlined below are a number of options for the site which the Council will explore further with their associated benefits and risks.

3.6 Do nothing

- The Council will need to continue with the ongoing security and fencing repair revenue costs. In addition anti social behaviour, including grass fires during the dry summer months and children trespassing on the site are likely to become an issue for the Council.
- There could also be potential legal liabilities on which advice will need to be sought
- Breach of Grant Conditions; there may be claw back of grant given that grant approval was provided to support the reinstatement of the golf course

3.7 Re-instate of the Municipal Golf Course (North side only)

- Currently there are no available capital or revenue budgets to reinstate and run the Golf Course.

3.8 Privately operated Golf Course (North side only)

- The Council has received a letter of interest from an existing local operator. The company has stated that they have an existing business model in a neighbouring authority. They have proposed to construct a driving range and 9 hole golf course with the importation of additional material.
- There are a number of significant risks associated with this approach which need to be addressed should the Council chose to pursue this option.
- However, the letter of interest suggests that there may be a commercial opportunity to explore.
- The Council would need to ensure that it is securing best value for money out of any potential arrangement and would need to test the market for competition through Due North, specifying outcomes and specification and other conditions such as discounts for children.
- The Council would also need to understand the company's business model and their future intensions. Consideration would need to be given to how any resource would be regulated and enforced, and this would require Council resources to oversee this.
- The Council would need to consult with the neighbouring authority about their experiences with the existing operators. There are risks and resource issues associated with the management of this type of facility.
- The Council would need to ensure that these proposals are acceptable to the EA and Defra in terms of the importation of further materials and the conditions of the grant funding.
- Equally, members are advised that the development and implementation of such a scheme can take a significant amount of time.
- The advantage of this option to the Council would be that there are no ongoing revenue costs for the Council regarding security and maintenance. However it is likely that resources would be needed to oversee the contract between the Council and any potential operator of the site.

3.9 Public Open Space Landmark Proposal (North side only)

- To celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the Woodland Trust has launched a £10 million Jubilee Woods Project. The project aims to see sixty 60 acre Diamond woods and 100s of Jubilee community woods created throughout the UK.
- Colleagues from the Woodlands Trust regional office have visited this site. They remain very positive about its potential as an urban woodland. The site has the potential to fall under both the initiatives. However, it was recognised that the main constraints regarding a way forward are the level of remediation to date and cost associated with a woodland scheme (potentially importation of top soil and tree planting).
- The Woodland Trust is asking businesses to sponsor the creation of these new community woods, or pledge support for the overall project. There may be some opportunities for the Council to engage locally based businesses to support the woodland.
- Further work will be required to work up a design that is acceptable to both the Woodland Trust and also the EA and Defra.

3.10 Confirmation of the intended restoration option of the site will be dependant on securing funding and also agreement from Defra and the EA who will require reassurances that the remediation works will be protected during and after the implementation of the site restoration. If the Council take the decision to commercially redevelop the site then Defra are likely to claw back their funding.

3.11 Solutions are still being sought for the south side of the Golf Course and this will require further consideration.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The remediation of St Michael's supports the Council's Urban Renewal Strategy, the Contaminated Land Strategy and Community Strategy for a Sustainable Halton.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

The Council's financial implications for each of the different options will be outlined in the next stage of the option appraisal.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The site has the potential to provide a safe environment for Children and Young People.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None noted at present

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Active participation in leisure activities such as a new Urban Woodland or Golf Course would help address the boroughs health strategy to reduce the incidence of chronic illnesses.

6.4 A Safer Halton

One of these options will provide much needed environmental improvements to this area which will be adjacent to the Mersey Gateway toll plaza area.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The options discussed will help to resolve the Widnes Waterfront programme is acting as a catalyst to attract developers and new businesses to the Widnes Waterfront area by creating an attractive, well-accessed and serviced area which provides a safe and attractive environment for employees and visitors

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

The risk implications for each of the different options will be outlined in the next stage of the option appraisal.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

Any Equality and Diversity implications for each of the different options will be outlined in the next stage of the option appraisal.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
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None.