

HEATHFIELD PARK COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

BACKGROUND

The current owners of Heathfield Park have formulated two schemes for partial development of park land adjacent to the town during their tenure. Various pre-planning studies have been done in preparation for a formal application however neither scheme has been successfully submitted - the most recent one having been shelved on the strength of perceived adverse reaction.

The Governors, parents and senior staff at Heathfield Community College (HCC) have an urgent need to improve the safety and sustainability of transport for students making the trip daily from the town to the College. A new cycle and footpath through the Park is considered the most favourable option which is likely to improve safety for those currently walking and encourage more parents to consider sustainable transport more favourably.

Alongside creating a safe route through the Park another challenge has arisen for the College, brought about by the closure of Heathfield Leisure Centre. HCC need the facilities of the Leisure Centre during school hours and have previously shared the running costs of the facility with Freedom Leisure. With effect from 17 October 2022 the entire running costs of the building are to be the responsibility of HCC, all be it that temporary financial support has been provided by East Sussex County Council (ESCC). This support is due to expire at the end of this financial year (April 5 2023).

SITUATION

Governors at HCC have approached the owner of Heathfield Park to discuss the feasibility of a path across the Park. A potential route has been explored and this is currently being costed by transport consultants, recommended by ESCC.

The owner of the Park is happy to consider this scheme within the wider context of an enabling development plan however recognises that development of any type within the Park is likely to face resistance if it is entirely motivated by commercial interest.

Against this backdrop the owner has invited the Governors to propose a scheme which balances the clear need for a financial return with the desire to enhance community facilities, whether that be in the form of access to parts of the Park or development priorities.

Clearly although HCC can be a key stakeholder in this activity, the overall challenge is beyond the capacity of HCC Governors to take on. An approach has therefore been made to the Heathfield Partnership Trust Ltd (HPT) to co-ordinate a community consultation exercise designed to understand perceived community needs and to see how many of these could be incorporated viably into a development within the Park.

Governors at HCC are also keen to see the Leisure Centre site and building potentially included in such a proposal. From April 2023 without extension of significant financial support from ESCC the Leisure Centre will become a costly burden to the College which may force staff cuts as the only means of offsetting the scale of increase we face.

The facilities as they currently exist, whilst used by the College were not designed for HCC or by HCC and if the College were starting again from scratch it is unlikely that the building in it's current form would be commissioned. If that building and the site it sits on is not going to become a financial burden to the College or the Local Authority then there is merit in considering how the site could be used in future to meet Community needs, given that it adjoins the Park currently save for the access road.

INTENTION

HPT is launching the consultation exercise from 1 November 2022.

An initial period of 8 weeks has been set aside for engaging with interested parties who either represent formally or have a stake in the Heathfield Community.

At the end of the Consultation a report will be written summarising the views of those who have participated and providing a list of consultees.

This will be discussed with the owners of Heathfield Park and if considered feasible a development proposal may then be put forward to try and meet as many identified needs as possible alongside an appropriate enabling development.

LOGISTICS AND ADMINISTRATION

During the consultation period Interested parties are encouraged to make representations to HPT and to extend the invitation to do so to organisations and individuals who might also wish to contribute.

Representations can be made in writing to coordinator@heathfield.net

Alternatively if you would like to meet and discuss the opportunity individually or as part of a collective group or organisation please email richardakarn@gmail.com and we will endeavour to field a representative to lead the discussion and listen to your feedback.

Alternatively you can call Richard on 07768 842829.

NOTE THE PURPOSE OF THE CONSULTATION IS TO IDENTIFY COMMUNITY NEEDS ONLY.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE CONSULTATION WILL NOT CONSTITUTE ACTUAL OR IMPLIED SUPPORT FOR ANY DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL WHICH EMERGES FROM IT.

BY CO-ORDINATING THE CONSULTATION HPT DOES NOT IMPLY SUPPORT FOR A DEVELOPMENT SCHEME, WE ARE SIMPLY LEVERAGING IT'S COMMUNITY CONTACTS AND RESPONDING TO AN OPPORTUNITY WHICH MAY BENEFIT THE TOWN, WHICH IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH HPT CHARITABLE OBJECTIVES.

**Richard Karn
Director
Heathfield Partnership Trust Ltd**

1 November 2022