

CROMER – NORTH LODGE PARK – PROPOSED LETTING OF FORMER TENNIS COURT SITE

Summary:	<p>The aim of this report is to outline the proposals we have received for the redevelopment of the former tennis courts site within North Lodge Park, Cromer and to make a recommendation for a new lease over the land and premises.</p>
Options considered:	<p>Following a marketing campaign during the Summer of 2021 three proposals were received from external parties. These were from;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) The Friends of North Lodge Park with Cromer Town Council2) North Norfolk World of Golf consortium3) A proposal for Padel Courts from a local investor. <p>The three proposals are outlined within the report below.</p>
Conclusions:	<p>The proposal made by The Friends of North Lodge Park in partnership with Cromer Town Council is considered the most appropriate for the site.</p>
Recommendations:	<p>It is recommended that Cabinet make a resolution to proceed with The Friends of the Park in partnership with Cromer Town Council to complete a new lease over the former tennis court site and as provided in the agreed heads of terms.</p>
Reasons for Recommendations:	<p>The Friends of the North Lodge Park are a known operator to NNDC and are an existing partner in managing the Park.</p> <p>The proposal made is a joint venture with the Cromer Town Council and provides for a new changing places toilet facility to be fully funded by the Town Council.</p> <p>The proposal combines both community and income producing operations.</p> <p>The proposals are unlikely to be of concern to local residents and offers the least contentious use from a planning perspective.</p> <p>The proposal will further enhance the use of the Park whilst providing training and support for the wider community.</p> <p>The proposal for a new toilet block within the tennis court site will free up the existing toilets in the Park which, when combined with the vacant adjacent unit</p>

(formerly the children's nursery) and the existing café, will provide the opportunity to create a newly refurbished income producing property.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AS REQUIRED BY LAW

(Papers relied on to write the report, which do not contain exempt information and which are not published elsewhere)

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Cabinet Member(s) All	Ward(s) affected; Cromer
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1. Introduction

The North Lodge Park covers an area of approximately 5 acres to the east of the town centre with various pedestrian links to and from the town and with limited vehicular access off the Overstrand Road (see plan at Appendix 1).

The most recent material planning history relates to the former tennis courts site and the application to create 47 public car parking spaces and new public toilets made in 2017 which was subsequently withdrawn.

2. Current uses and tenancies

2.1

The Park is a focal point to the east of Cromer town centre for open to the air leisure uses and is largely managed under a Management Agreement by the Friends of North Lodge Park (Friends) who are a well organised formal Charity group of local volunteers that manage the flower beds, wildflower areas etc alongside those works done by NNDC grounds maintenance team.

The Friends also manage the use of various open areas of the Park upon which temporary seasonal events are occasionally held. Cromer Town Council offer the Lodge and grounds as a wedding venue.

SERCO currently use a garage adjacent to the former Croquet lawn for storage purposes and have a temporary unregulated bin storage area on the former tennis court site.

The principal buildings within the wider area of the Park are as follows;

- The North Lodge itself – owned and occupied by Cromer Town Council
- Tea rooms & toilets – adjacent to the boating pond and part leased to

- Friends of the Park at a peppercorn rent to provide the tea rooms.
- The male & female public toilets sit on either side of the former Seaview nursery/children's centre.
 - The now vacant former Seaview nursery itself adjacent to the Café, previously operated as a pre-school and childrens' play facility.
 - Collectors Cabin – currently vacant thatched former retail/catering space overlooking the Sunken Garden (19 sq.m / 205 sq.ft)
 - Bandstand – (aka The Potting Shed 44sq.m / 473 sq.ft) former bandstand now redundant and boarded up. Overlooks the former tennis courts.
 - Former tennis courts – this site is the principal subject of this report and formed the basis of the previous planning application for car parking. This square site of approximately 0.35 acres (37 metres square) is currently gated and utilised in part as a bin storage base/holding area.

2.2 The former tennis court site

The site is accessible to both pedestrian and vehicle traffic. The attached plan at Appendix 1 shows the location of the site immediately fronting onto Overstrand Road and sitting to the eastern boundary of the main vehicular access to the Park. The site is some 37 metres square which provides a site area of some 0.35 acres (0.142 Ha). The hard standing on the site is flat and currently laid to a textured and coloured tarmac being the former tennis court surface. The tarmac is in a reasonable condition. The former bandstand (aka Potting Shed) overlooks the hard standing and is a dilapidated single storey building of some 44 sq.m (473 sq.ft).

2.3 Possible uses

Given the nature of the site and its close proximity to the public highway and to the heart of the Park this land does provide a high profile location for a number of uses, subject to planning permission and other consents being forthcoming.

Earlier discussions with our planning and conservation officers have confirmed that whilst recognising that the site should be considered for an alternative use they would prefer to see a low impact – low density proposal that would complement the current use of the Park and not have an impact on the Listed Building status of the Lodge or its environs and views.

3. Proposals received

This section of the report will explore the proposals received from businesses interested in renovating the premises at their own cost in exchange for a commercial lease over the land and premises. This follows the Summer 2021 marketing campaign.

3.1 Party 1 – The Friends of North Lodge Park & Cromer Town Council in

the form of a newly create Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)

This proposal is a joint venture between the Friends and Cromer Town Council for a mixed use of the site as a community hub utilising the former bandstand; the provision of new horticultural poly-tunnels and greenhouses for horticultural training purposes and plant sales; an occasional artisan / farmers market and provision for a 'Community Shed' managed by Mens Sheds which is a national charity for supporting men through practical courses and meetings. (see menssheds.org.uk)

The Friends business plan provides for a net profit being made within 2 years and this is reflected in the rent payment agreement proposed in the Heads of Terms (see Appendix 2).

Significantly, the Friends proposal in conjunction with the Town Council provides for the proposed development of a new changing rooms toilet facility to be fully funded by the Town Council.

Importantly, if this were to progress then this would enable us to review the future use of the building housing the current public toilets, the café and former children's nursery into a more commercially viable, income producing property.

3.1.1 SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Friends are a known operator to NNDC and already a partner in managing North Lodge Park• Joint venture with Town Council• The proposal combines community and income producing operations• The plans are unlikely to be of concern to planning and local residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A lower level of private sector investment than other proposals• The informal SERCO storage facility would most likely need to be relocated
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To further enhance the use of the Park whilst providing training and support for the community• To provide a new Changing Places toilet block through Town Council funding• This proposal would allow NNDC to review the existing café and toilet block and to consider further limited investment to secure a regular property income	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provision of artisan/farmers markets may impact on current weekly markets in Cromer and on town centre traders

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To relocate vehicular traffic away from the Lodge and therefore minimise vehicular traffic in the Park 	
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3.2 **Party 2 – North Norfolk World of Golf**

This proposal is for a consortium of private investors to create a new golf academy with allied catering outlets.

3.2.1 SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private sector capital investment proposed. Creates a destination venue Offers a unique and currently unavailable offering in the town and wider region Academy links to local golf courses Sports training and strong health & well-being aspects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would attract significant vehicular traffic with no additional parking proposed – likely to cause local issues with traffic management Unknown operators and investors and track record of principal not well established New company – Governance needs to be ratified Securing planning consent could be difficult and the use contentious locally SERCO to be relocated
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for strong rental growth from profit share or phased uplifts over time Could become an exemplar academy with support from national sports bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates further catering outlet competition for existing businesses in Cromer town centre Would impact on current café use operated by Friends

3.3 **Party 3 – Private investors**

In summary the proposal is to create up to 3x new Padel Courts which is a cross between tennis and squash. The proposal will require the creation of large 'caged' courts on the site.

3.3.1 SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Padel is a growing sport with no local or known regional provision Strong health & well-being provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low income potential Unknown operator/investor – new start up with no track record Investor confidence not secured

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning use likely to be an issue given the need for large caged courts • SERCO could be accommodated on site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual impact of caged courts • No provision to invest in former bandstand building • Courts unlikely to be in regular use or provide vibrancy to the location
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages a new sport in the town 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unknown long-term sustainability of a relatively new sport to the UK

4. Corporate Plan Objectives

Financial Sustainability / Boosting Business Sustainability and Growth

The proposals provide the potential to increase rental income from currently vacant and redundant property in the Councils' property portfolio potentially creating new business in Cromer and therefore new employment opportunities along with a contribution to NNDR.

Quality of life

The proposal to re-use the premises highlighted in the report will improve the public realm and the local environs of North Lodge Park

5. Medium Term Financial Strategy

The proposals could further contribute to the Council's MTFS by creating property incomes from currently void land and buildings.

Budgets for the operating, maintenance and cleaning of the new public toilets would be required post completion. The budget for the current toilets in the Park would fall away as the premises would close.

Property Services will be involved in approving the design of the toilets to ensure consistency with other new toilet developments and to ensure that a standard specification is adopted.

6. Financial and resource implications

All subsequent negotiations will be managed by the Estates team working alongside other internal teams. In each case there would be no significant capital investment required from NNDC other than possibly the potential costs of relocating SERCO.

There may be further legal cost implications should the Council chose to externalise all or part of the consequential property legal work

7. Legal implications

7.1 Legal resources will be required to draft and complete the lease agreements

7.2 The Councils' obligation to ensure best value under S123 of the Local Government Act has been satisfied by the marketing campaign.

8.0 Risks

8.1

In progressing a chosen operator there are inevitably some risks, principally Officer time in considering, negotiating and progressing the preferred option. There is also the potential for abortive legal costs should matters be pursued and then become abortive for whatever reason.

8.2

Securing planning and Listed Buildings Consents remains a risk but this will be mitigated by early engagement with the Councils' planning and conservation teams.

8.3

A further risk is that the land and associated buildings remain undeveloped and continue to deteriorate with no positive outcomes for the town and with the potential for further criticism of the Council for not maximising asset value or potential.

9.0 Sustainability

The proposed development of the site will enable a currently redundant property to be re-used for sustainable community uses.

10.0 Climate / Carbon Impact

The recommended proposal would have a limited impact on Climate & Carbon emissions with no extra car parking requirements on the site and low impact sustainable uses being implemented.

11. Equality & Diversity

No issues have been identified. The proposed community hub and Mens Shed will help to enhance and improve community engagement.

12. Section 17 Crime & Disorder considerations

No issues of concern have been identified. As a positive outcome the regular use of this redundant area should reduce the occurrence of any anti-social behaviour which has occasionally been experienced on the redundant site albeit at a low level.

13. Communications

13.1

In principle discussions have been had with planning and conservation officers. In due course and as required conversations will be held with Cromer Town Council to consult and advise on the proposed next steps to be taken. If matters proceed then any project would be progressed by the Estates & Property Services teams working together to secure the required outcomes.

13.2

Our comms team are aware of the proposals

14. Conclusion & Recommendation

Other than occasional temporary uses the tennis court land has been redundant for many years and forms a significant yet under- utilised area of the Park.

The aim of the marketing exercise over the Summer of 2021 was to open the opportunity to a wider audience.

We have received three very different approaches to the use of the land, uses that are not easy to compare.

However, the Friends proposed use is the least contentious and would enhance the current relationship we have with them in managing the Park and they are a known operator with a good track record.

The Friends proposal would allow the Estates team & Property Services to review the use of the former Seaview children's nursery premises which combined with the existing public toilets and the current Friends café would provide a substantial property which could be re-configured and advertised for commercial uses, most likely a restaurant and café utilising the view to the front of the premises which would be enhanced once the existing landscaping had been re-configured to provide a very attractive location. The property is also under consideration for temporary housing.

The Friends have indicated to us that if they were to secure the former tennis court site then they would be prepared in due course to relocate their café to that site thus releasing their current property for refurbishment.

The outright commercial use proposed by the Golf Academy investors provides an exciting opportunity for the town but will have a significant impact on the local environs in terms of servicing and car parking in particular.

The Padel offering is more of an unknown quantity however our most recent discussions with the promoter have suggested that the investors behind the plan are not 100% committed to it.

Recent, albeit high level discussions with our planning/conservation team have suggested that the Friends proposal would be the least contentious and that the lack of any dedicated car parking provision for the proposed Golf Academy would be a critical issue. The long-term viability of Padel Courts is questionable and the operator would need a strong business case to support any planning application.

The option remains to continue with the marketing process but we do not believe that this will result in any further interest coming to the fore.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Cabinet make a resolution to proceed with The Friends of the Park in partnership with Cromer Town Council to complete a new lease over the former tennis court site and as provided in the agreed Heads of Terms at Appendix 2.

15. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Site plan

Appendix 2 – Heads of Terms agreed