



# West Lothian Council

## COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

### LAND AT WATSON PARK, ARMADALE

### REPORT BY HEAD OF PROPERTY SERVICES

#### **A. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To inform members of development opportunities at Watson Park, Armadale and to seek approval in principle for these proposals to be developed further.

#### **B. RECOMMENDATION**

Council Executive is asked to authorise that:

- 1) Further detailed investigation of these opportunities should be taken forward;
- 2) Detailed site investigations on the council owned land should proceed;
- 3) That informal consultation be carried out with key stakeholders, including Armadale Community Council, Armadale Sports Association and SportsScotland;
- 4) a planning application for the proposed retail development and relocation of park facilities should be prepared and submitted and that supermarket operators be approached seeking notes of interest in the council owned site; and,
- 5) a further progress report on these matters is brought back to the Council Executive at an appropriate time.

#### **C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

<b>I Council Values</b>	Making best use of our resources  Being honest, open and accountable
<b>II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)</b>	The proposals require to be assessed against the relevant policies in the West Lothian Local Plan.  Statutory consultation under the Education (Scotland) Act will be required to determine the location of the proposed primary schools.  The planning application for retail development may need to be notified to Scottish Government.
<b>III Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)</b>	Possible capital receipts and new school and leisure facilities.  Cost of site investigation works is £140,000. There will be costs associated with preparing a

planning application.

Developer contributions towards the cost of the new schools will be required in accordance with the requirements of the Finalised West Lothian Local Plan.

#### **IV Consultations**

Local Area Elected Members; Senior Officers; Planning Services.

Contents of this report endorsed by the Development and Transport PDSP at its meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2008.

### **D. TERMS OF REPORT**

#### **Background**

The land at Watson Park shown by a heavy black outline on the attached plan, extends to approx. 9.6Ha (23.7 acres), is owned by the Council, and is currently mostly used for leisure purposes. These uses include playing fields, a bowling green, sports changing facilities, a five a side football pitch, a gravel BMX track, a children's play area and car parking. The land is very well located close to the town centre, the swimming pool and community centre.

The present facilities are of variable quality and much of the land is poor. The council's Open Space and Sports Facilities Strategies identified the need for improvements and a sum of £100,000 has been identified for design, drainage and access road upgrade and a sum of £370,000 has been identified towards the provision of an additional pitch and an extension to the existing pavilion to provide accommodation for two teams.

Adjacent land (Colinshiel ) is allocated in the West Lothian Local Plan for mixed use development. The predominant land use is likely to be housing. Part of the land at Colinshiel which is allocated for mixed use is owned by the council but the majority of the allocated land is in private ownership. The West Lothian Local Plan indicates that a masterplan should be prepared for the Colinshiel/Watson Park area. This requires the co-operation of all the landowners but despite the council's best efforts, it has not been possible to achieve consensus among all the parties on how and when the masterplan should be prepared. It is unlikely that such agreement will be reached in the short term.

New housing development in Armadale will require new denominational and non-denominational primary school provision. The new denominational primary school will also support planned housing development in Blackridge and Westfield. The council's Development Control Committee is minded to grant planning permission for large scale housing developments in Blackridge and Westfield (subject to the developer contributions being secured through section 75 agreements) and so there is now a need to progress proposals for a new denominational primary school to serve these proposed developments. It is intended that one new non-denominational primary school and one new denominational primary school be provided on a single campus in the north of the town using as many shared facilities as possible. This approach is consistent with the council's approved supplementary planning guidance on co-location principles. The local plan requires one further non-denominational primary school to be provided in Armadale and it is proposed that this is located in the southern part of Armadale to serve planned new housing in that part of the town. It is envisaged that a suitable site for this school will be secured through the planning process.

Investigations into identifying the most suitable locations for the new single campus non-denominational and denominational schools in the north of the town have been completed and have identified part of the existing Watson Park as the most appropriate location. The site is owned by the council and can be easily accessed from North Street. Thus the council has control over the timing of the site being released for development. Other potential sites have been discounted because of size limitations, location, mineral stability of the ground or doubts about the deliverability of the proposed school campus on land in private ownership when there is no agreement on bringing forward masterplan proposals for the Colinshiel/Watson Park area.

### **Current Position**

In identifying this location as the most suitable for the new schools, it follows that this also requires a reassessment of the existing playing fields and associated facilities to best meet the needs of both the new schools and the local community. The opportunity has therefore also been taken to consider how the existing land uses can be improved, added to or changed to create a higher quality of provision for the expanding town making the best use of council land. It is understood that much of the council land at Colinshiel which is allocated for mixed use is not suitable for building because the ground contains extensive areas of peat. It is further understood that ground conditions at Watson Park, which is shown as open space in the Finalised West Lothian Local Plan, are more suited for building.

The attached plan indicates what may be possible in terms of new land uses within Watson Park although this is only indicative at this stage.

The location of the joint campus school is shown at the north west corner of the land next to which is a proposed new bowling green, a new MUGA and two new football pitches. This layout of improved facilities clearly requires the realignment of existing ones and in doing so it also releases land for other forms of additional development. This also provides an opportunity for generating critical financial support for the new developments being proposed.

The land areas shown as E,F and G ( Colinshiel ) is developer owned mixed use land which, when developed predominantly for housing, creates some of the demand for the two new primary schools.

Sites B1 and D ( Council Land ) offer potential for the allocation of land for housing development while site B may have potential for a new supermarket serving Armadale. The attached plan shows a possible first phase development comprising a supermarket development and the relocation of the existing recreation facilities.

The council commissioned a retail capacity study for West Lothian and separate report on this subject was endorsed by the Development and Transport PDSP at its meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2008. Amongst other things, the report indicates significant retail leakage from Armadale, mainly to Bathgate, suggesting that there is scope for new supermarket provision in Armadale. If Armadale is to get a new supermarket then it may be appropriate to promote the Watson Park land so that the capital realised can be recycled into the new community facilities we are providing. It should be noted, however, that other landowners consider their sites to be suitable for a supermarket in the Armadale area. Achadon Properties Ltd has already submitted a planning application for a retail development on 7.2 acres at Lower Bathville. EWP has also submitted a planning application for retail development on land adjacent to the proposed new rail station at Armadale and Greystones has submitted a planning application for retail development at Heatherfield Roundabout. It is known that other sites are also being considered by interested parties. Any planning application for retail

development would need to be supported by a retail impact assessment and assessed against relevant planning policies, including the sequential testing of locations.

In terms of the land values these proposals could generate for the council, the housing sites B1 and D have been valued at £1.13 million while the supermarket site at B has been valued at £1.5 million ( if the retail impact assessment restricts the size of retail as expected ). All of these figures assume a relatively pessimistic view of ground conditions and have been reduced by 20% to reflect anticipated ground consolidation works.

Construction Services currently have a tender for site investigations ready for acceptance and the cost of proving all of the ground in Council ownership is £140,000. Before letting that contract officers need guidance from Members on whether this package of proposals should be investigated further. If it is not to be, then Construction Services can reduce the scale and cost of the Site Investigation works to cover just the land needed for the new schools and playing fields.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Watson Park offers sufficient land for a mix of new schools, leisure facilities, social housing and perhaps retail development. If considered appropriate, the retail and housing elements could make significant financial contributions towards the cost of the other facilities.

Construction Services need to place a contract for Site Investigations, even if it is just for the proposed schools and playing fields, and a decision is needed on whether it is worthwhile to investigate the entire site for a scheme of the scale outlined above.

If the proposals are supported in principle, then officers will carry out consultations with key stakeholders and also prepare a planning application for the retail part of the proposal so that the merits of this as a possible supermarket site could be assessed and considered alongside the planning applications for competing retail developments now lodged with the council. Under normal circumstances, a planning brief for all the council land would be prepared in advance of a planning application being submitted.

In this instance, however, there is a need to progress quickly and submit a planning application for the retail development element. Other planning applications for retail development in Armadale have already been submitted which drives the pace for this process. It is also important that the council proceeds in a way that does not pre-judge the statutory consultation in relation to school provision, hence a planning brief or a planning application for the entire site is not being prepared at this stage.

Any statutory consultation carried out in relation to school location would be reported to the Education PDSP and the Education Executive.

Local Elected members have commented on the above. They recognise the need for this site to be part of the considerations for a supermarket for Armadale but stress the need for other locations to be afforded an equal opportunity for assessment as there are strengths and weaknesses in most of the competing sites. They also emphasise the importance to the town of the open space facilities provided by Watson Park and any proposed changes will require proper and full consultation and efforts made to maximise open space benefits. Car parking and the importance of the Town Walk were also identified as key issues to address.

It should be emphasised that approving the principle of this at this stage does not mean that all elements of the development are certain to happen. There are competing

interests elsewhere in Armadale for the retail element which can only be resolved using the correct planning process.

Approval is required from the Council executive on whether these proposals are supported to allow the next steps to be taken to test whether they can be delivered.

Finally, the Development and Transport Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2008 considered a report in very similar terms to this one and resolved to note:

- 1) the contents of that report and agreed that officers commence site investigations at Watson Park, Armadale; and
- 2) that a further detailed report be then forwarded to the Council Executive for approval.

## **F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES**

Papers held in Property Services files

Report to Policy, Partnership and Resources Committee on 25 October 2005, "West Lothian Open Space and Sports Facilities Strategies.

Report to Policy, Partnership and Resources Committee on 20 June 2006, "Co-location Principles"

Report and minute from the Development and Transport PDSP – 11<sup>th</sup> December 2008

Appendices/Attachments: Site location plan

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Date: 26<sup>th</sup> January 2009