

APPENDICES

HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE

DATE: 13th JULY 2004

REQUEST TO PURCHASE LAND

LOCATION: LAND ADJOINING 19 TANHOUSE LANE HALESOWEN

(As shown hatched on the plan attached)

BACKGROUND

An application has been received from the owners of 19 Tanhouse Lane Halesowen to purchase the Council owned land adjoining 19 Tanhouse Lane, Halesowen.

The land is controlled by the Directorate of Housing and was originally laid out as a play area. It is now disused and has an area of hard standing. Some years ago it was arranged for young offenders to clear the site and work was carried out for it to be used as an informal "kick football pitch" by local young people. Some work was undertaken with parents and children in the area who agreed that if the site was cleared up they would look after it. However, an unruly element soon returned to the site and it has now deteriorated.

The applicants advise that youths congregate on this land, causing nuisance by unsociable behaviour such as squealing, shouting etc during the early hours of the morning (1.00 am to 2.00 am). Hypodermic needles are left by their fence together with other rubbish, e.g., mattresses, part of bikes, litter, etc. The youths have already set fire to the trees on the land adjoining, which in turn set their fence on fire. The applicants' car has also been damaged by stones thrown from the land. This is causing extreme distress to the applicants and the quality of their lives is deteriorating as a result. They have therefore asked to purchase the land in order to improve the security of their property and to rid the area of this extreme anti social behaviour.

COMMENTS

The relevant Council Directorates have been consulted regarding this matter and objections to the sale of land have been received from the Directorate of Housing, the Directorate of Urban Environment and the Directorate of Law & Property.

The Directorate of Housing are well aware of the problems within the area of land and a recent inspection has shown the site in a deplorable state. They have in the past tidied up the site by clearing rubbish away and cutting back trees and bushes. They have consulted with the Estates Management Board of the Tanhouse Estate who would not wish this large area of open space to be disposed of and although they are keen to find a solution to the problems, do not support its disposal to the applicant.

The Local Police Community Support Officers have met with the applicants and have tried to engage with the youths allegedly causing the nuisance to try and manage the situation.

The Directorate of the Urban Environment consider that the application should be refused and advise that the land is a designated playground and Policy 11 of the adopted Unitary Development Plan states that there will be a general presumption in favour of retaining and improving areas of value for children's play. They would not therefore support any disposal of the site but would seek to identify alternative treatment of the site to minimise the anti-social behaviour.

Whilst it is apparent that there is anti-social behaviour occurring on the site, and that the play area does not meet current criteria for provision of children's play areas, this does not necessarily prove that the site is not of value for children's play or open space. Unless the potential loss of the play area can be compensated elsewhere, then it is advised that the site should not be sold. It is considered that the sale of the land would not necessarily solve the problem of anti-social behaviour in the area.

It has been suggested that if the close boarded fencing to Tanhouse Lane were removed it would open up the site and give natural surveillance from Tanhouse Lane. There is currently no play equipment on the site and only broken slabs/bricks on the surfaced play area.

It is therefore recommended that the Directorate of Urban Environment be instructed to undertake an assessment to define public/private space and set the context for potential environmental improvements to resolve the problems and that in conjunction with the Directorate of Housing, the improvements be implemented.

PROPOSAL

That the Area Committee advise the Lead Member for Housing to refuse the application to purchase the land, but request that the Director of the Urban Environment undertakes a wider assessment of the area to identify improvements which could be made to enable the problem to be solved and that his Directorate liaise with the Directorate of Housing to implement those improvements identified.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Letter(s) from the applicant.
2. E-mails and memos from the Council Directorates.

Contact Officer:

Gill Hudson, Property Manager, Ext. 5311