



West Lothian
Council

COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

ALMONDVALE PARK STUDY, LIVINGSTON

REPORT BY HEAD OF PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to advise the Council Executive of the outcome of consultation on the Almondvale Park Study, Livingston and to advise of development opportunities within the park.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council Executive:

- notes the contents of the report;
- supports the release of site 3 identified in the Almondvale Park Study for development;
- agrees that a planning brief, complementary to the surrounding park area, be prepared for site 3 identified in the Almondvale Park Study for development, should the council decide to move forward with site disposal;
- agrees to remitting the Head of Operational Services to investigate all possible funding streams for delivery of park improvements and report the outcome back to the Environment PDSP at a future date; and
- agrees to remitting the Head of Operational Services to investigate the potential of developing partnerships with local groups and expanding the remit of these groups or the setting up of a dedicated group for Almondvale Park and that progress be reported back to the Environment PDSP at a future date.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs; being honest, open and accountable; making best use of our resources; and working in partnership.
II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	<p>The study is a requirement of the West Lothian Local Plan (WLLP). The local plan was adopted by the council on 13 January 2009. The local plan was exempt from SEA requirements.</p> <p>There are no SEA, equality, health or risk assessment issues associated with the study.</p>
III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	The Head of Planning and Economic Development was remitted to progress the Almondvale Park Study on behalf of the council.

IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators	<p>Preparation of a development plan for West Lothian is a statutory requirement. Local authorities are required to review and update such plans at least every five years.</p> <p>A requirement of the West Lothian Local Plan was that the council undertake an independent study of the river corridor between the Civic Centre and the Almond Valley Bridge to consider environmental improvements and how these could be funded. The study was also to explore how limited development within the area might contribute to meeting environmental objectives and make the area safer and more welcoming. A further requirement of the local plan was that any master plan proposals arising from the study were to be the subject of public consultation.</p>
V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	<p>Outcome 6: We live longer, healthier lives.</p> <p>Outcome 10: We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the services we need.</p> <p>Outcome 12: We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations.</p>
VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	<p>Allocations were made from within the Planning Services budget for 2010/11 to support preparation of the study and the appointment of consultants to undertake the study on behalf of the council.</p> <p>The study highlights two development sites within Almondvale Park. These receipts are already included within the overall receipts programme for the council required to fund the five year capital investment programme agreed by Council on 29 January 2013. As these are included in the council's capital budget assumptions they are therefore not available to fund any proposed park improvements.</p> <p>There is some money in the capital programme for use by Operational Services. The Open Space and Sports Facility Planned Improvements block budget is £1.9 million and is available in the financial years 2015/16 to 2017/18. This budget is allocated on a needs basis and is for planned improvements for open spaces throughout West Lothian.</p> <p>There is at present no specific provision in the capital programme for implementing the potential new projects highlighted in the study. However, a budget of £150,000 has been approved for park improvements in 2014/15. A</p>

decision on how this budget will be allocated will be made following public consultation with the opportunity to incorporate projects highlighted in the study.

Some of the possible works relate to maintenance that can be funded from existing revenue budgets.

The potential for grant funding as detailed in Figure 62 of the study could be explored and could include National Lottery and Scottish Arts Council funding and funding through charitable trusts. The funding opportunities identified would not necessarily require the council to match fund.

VII Consideration at PDSP

The Almondvale Park Study was the subject of a report to the Livingston South Local Area Committee (LAC) on 23 September 2011. The LAC agreed that the outcome of public consultation on the study be reported to the Environment PDSP prior to consideration by the Council Executive. In consultation with the Chairs of the Environment and Development & Transport PDSPs it was agreed that the report would be more appropriately considered by Development and Transport PDSP as the need for the study is identified as a local plan requirement and the study has highlighted that there is some development potential within the study area. The Development & Transport PDSP met on 18 April 2013 and agreed that the report be forwarded to the Council Executive with a recommendation of approval

VIII Other consultations

Finance and Estates Services, NETS and Land Services, and Housing, Construction and Building Services were involved in the preparation of the study. The council's Landscape Architect and Urban Designer, the council's Flood Risk Officer and Outdoor Education staff were also consulted.

The council's Head of Operational Services, Head of Finance and Estates, and the Estates Manager have been consulted in the preparation of this report and are happy with the terms.

All Livingston local members were invited to a site walkover of the study area on 17 January 2013. Four members attended.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D1 BACKGROUND

The West Lothian Local Plan (WLLP) establishes a framework for development in the area to 2015 and beyond and makes reference to the Almond Valley corridor (land to the east of the Civic Centre) - policies ENV 21, COM2 and COM2a together with paragraphs 10.14a – 10.14d refer. The council has already approved a package of environmental, landscape and footpath improvements for part of the linear riverside walkway alongside the River Almond as part of the Civic Centre development (planning application 1303/05 refers). Any recommendations for environmental improvements arising from the Almondvale Park Study would be in addition to these. The study area covers the corridor between the Civic Centre and the Almond Valley Bridge (B7015) (Almondvale Park). A location plan is attached as Appendix One. Atkins were commissioned to undertake the study, a copy of which can be viewed at: <http://coins.westlothian.gov.uk/coins/submissiondocuments.asp?submissionid=12362> Copies are also available from Committee Services.

D2 STUDY FINDINGS

The study findings were reported to the Livingston South Local Area Committee on 23 September 2011.

The study concluded that there is no sense of arrival to the park, access routes are in poor condition and act as barriers to movement and there are too many entrances which, although increasing permeability, also weaken the general sense of arrival; lighting, seating and litter bin provision is inconsistent, signage is vandalised and lacking at strategic points. In addition, vegetation is overgrown in parts and obscures inter-visibility creating problems for surveillance and safety.

In terms of strengths, the park is in a central location acting as a green corridor and is well located by public transport. As part of the River Almond corridor it provides an attractive natural asset. However, there are opportunities to develop lesser used areas of the park.

In addition, the study identified possible funding bodies to carry out improvements. The study identified redevelopment opportunities on areas which are currently under-utilised, however should these sites be sold, the proceeds would be applied to the general services capital programme receipts target and could not be earmarked for park development. The development sites are on Howden South Road and extend to approximately 0.83 hectares (site 3) and 1.05 hectares (site 4) as identified in Figure 64 of the study.

The Council Executive should note that site 3 formed part of a submission to the "Call for Sites" exercise in 2011 as part of the West Lothian Local Development Plan (submission reference EOI-0158). The EOI submission was withdrawn from the LDP process by the Council Executive on 28 June 2011. The site identified in the Almondvale Park Study covers a smaller area than that of the EOI submission.

D3 CONSULTATION AND PUBLICITY

The study was the subject of public consultation over a nine week period commencing on 26 January and ending on 18 March 2012. The consultation was undertaken jointly by Planning and Economic Development and NETS and Land Services.

All community councils in Livingston were contacted, a dedicated web page set up to allow submission of comments online and four drop-in events were held at the Civic Centre, Howden Park Centre and the shopping centre at Almondvale – The Centre - during February 2012.

In addition, the webpage and display/feedback sessions were publicised through some 250 letters sent to the residents of neighbouring streets to the park (including businesses). Park interest groups (e.g. skateboarders) and neighbouring green space groups were also contacted. General publicity was organised through the council's Corporate Communications team – via the council website, Facebook, email alerts, intranet and local press. Councillors for the Livingston South ward (where the park is situated) were also contacted.

The consultants made nineteen recommendations for park improvements, including development options. Interested parties were invited to comment on these and indicate those that they would most like to see being carried out. They were also invited to give a view on how improvements should be funded, including disposal of land to offset improvement costs. A total of 82 responses were received.

D4 CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Park Improvements

By far the top priority for improvement is to convert the existing amphitheatre into a natural play area for the park, i.e. use the natural topography of the area to create play space.

Other priorities include lighting and decorating underpasses to make them feel safer and more welcoming, creating plazas for socialising (with permanent outlets to buy snacks), creating a boardwalk and interpretation boards for informal learning about local wildlife, moving the cycle path away from the road to make it safer and to encourage cycling, opening up an events space for community events, and new planting along the riverbank to increase the wildlife value of the river edges.

Further suggestions include re-instating the putting green and the canoeing jetties on the river, to installing relatively low-cost features such as a permanent orienteering course. There were also suggestions on using the River Almond to generate electricity – the council does have a Renewables Strategy, which can be found at:

<http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/media/downloadaddoc/1799514/1842967/renewables>

A major consideration is the continual, regular maintenance of the area to keep it looking good and to address/deter vandalism, and to keep it open to ensure a feeling of safety. Car parking is also a big concern as the car parks in the area are already overflowing. The local wildlife is also an important issue for many people, with suggestions for increasing biodiversity and building a wildlife interpretation centre staffed by countryside rangers.

As the majority of the proposals are almost directly south of Howden Park, the idea of linking Almondvale Park with Howden Park to create a larger Town Park for the centre of Livingston was also suggested. A summary of the comments received is attached as Appendix Two.

Funding of Park Improvements

A financial cost will be attached to any of the improvements suggested by the consultants, some of which can be achieved through existing budgets e.g. general tidy up and clearance of vegetation and through partnership working e.g. with the Community Payback team. Other improvements are more costly for example, creation of public spaces and access linkages.

The project brief only required the consultants to identify funding sources for the environmental improvements set out in Figure 57 and sections 12 and 13 of the study. NETS and Land Services have since been contacted to provide indicative costs for the environmental improvements and have advised as follows:

- traditional play area improvements - around £50k;
- bespoke works such as shelters, grassy mounds collaborative artwork, play equipment, seating & planting - at least £100k.

Further costings would require the input of a quantity surveyor which, in itself would have financial implications.

A number of funding mechanisms to deliver improvements ranging from a lottery funding application, development of community partnerships, and the sell-off of council assets have been identified. Interested parties were asked to indicate their preferred choices for how the improvements should be funded. These have been scored and the overall results are shown in Appendix Two. The preferred choice for funding is to develop partnerships with local groups and seek funding for specific projects within the park.

The Council Executive is asked to note that proposals suggested in the study accord with the terms of the Council's revised Open Space Strategy of 2010 which advised that the use of the park area be re-evaluated to enhance and provide a much more functional and cost effective use for the area and that the park be redeveloped to re-engineer a more formal parkland setting to add value through creation of formal walkways, additional tree planting and other features to distinguish its character from that of the Almond district park.

Development Opportunities

In relation to disposal of land, those responding to the consultation indicated that development should be in keeping with the surroundings. The areas identified for possible development are relatively flat, easily accessible and form natural extensions to existing built up areas. The consultants also advised that these areas were of low amenity grassland where the parkland environment was further reduced by visual/noise impact of adjacent roads.

The Council Executive is advised that development site 3 is detached from the main park by virtue of road infrastructure i.e. the Howden South Road, Howden Bridge and Livingston Bridge. Any development platform would require to be set back from the River Almond thus maintaining in part a landscaped edge at this end of the study area. These elements would be incorporated into a planning brief, prepared to ensure that any development complemented the park. An aerial photograph of the site is attached as Appendix Three.

D5 SITE WALKOVER WITH LOCAL MEMBERS

All Livingston Members were invited to a site walkover on 17 January 2013. Four members attended and were generally supportive of the need to make more of the park and improve on the environment. Members were advised of the potential two development sites (sites 3 and 4) and indicated that site 3 provided a better opportunity for development than site 4. There was some concern over development of site 4 given proximity to the A899 and the small size of the site.

Potential access points to both sites have since been investigated by Transportation who advise that an access to site 3 can be provided from the B7015. No access however, can be provided to site 4 due to issues of forward visibility and proximity to the toucan crossing on the Almond Link Road. Site 4 also provides the Sustainable Urban Drainage System for the Link Road.

D6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The results of the consultation indicate that there is broad support to undertake park improvements. The favoured option to fund these is to develop partnerships with local groups and seek funding for specific projects within the park. Such partnerships already exist in the Almondvale area through, for example, the Craigshill Greenspace Group and DEEP.

The establishment of such a group will allow for further investigations to be made on funding sources as a broader range of grant funding may be available through community led initiatives. The formation of a community group could allow for funding through the Landfill Tax, a report on which was considered by the council's Environment PDSP on 16 August 2012. It is also suggested that a strategic outline business case could be prepared by the Head of Operational Services to support delivery of park improvements at a future date.

In the interim, it is recommended that a series of tidy up measures be implemented within the park subject to availability of funding within existing budgets and that the council's Estate's Manager be asked to explore further the sale of site 3.

Should the council agree to pursue the disposal of site 3 as identified in the study, a planning brief would be prepared prior to marketing of the site. The brief would be the subject of consultation with interested parties. The proceeds from the sale of any site would be applied to the capital programme's general receipts target and therefore could not be earmarked for park improvements. Once funding sources for environmental improvements to the park were fully explored, the council can then consider the scale of park improvements that can be implemented.

E. CONCLUSION

Preparation of the Almondvale Park Study is a requirement of the West Lothian Local Plan. The study has been the subject of extensive consultation resulting in preferred options for moving park improvements forward including the development of site 3 which has been identified as being detached from the main park area.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

West Lothian Local Plan, January 2009.

Almondvale Park Study, May 2011.

Report to Livingston South Local Area Committee, 23 September 2011.

Report to Development and Transport Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel (PDSP), 18 April 2013.

Appendices/Attachments: Three.

Appendix One: Site plan of the Almondvale Park Study area

Appendix Two: Summary of public consultation on the Almondvale Park Study

Appendix Three: Aerial photograph of site 3, Almondvale Park

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