

Report: Proposed Disposal of Public Open Space at Allhallows, Honiton

Purpose of Report

To inform the Council of matters relating to the proposed disposal by East Devon District Council of most of the Allhallows Public Open Space.

The disposal has to comply with the Local Government Act 1972 Section 123

(2A) A principal council may not dispose under subsection (1) above of any land consisting or forming part of an open space unless before disposing of the land they cause notice of their intention to do so, specifying the land in question, to be advertised in two consecutive weeks in a newspaper circulating in the area in which the land is situated, and consider any objections to the proposed disposal which may be made to them.

The proposal is to grant an exclusive lease of public open space for two rugby football pitches for fifty years. The required notices have been published however these provide less detail and less publicity than is the case with a change of use planning application.

Background

The East Devon Open Spaces Study 2012, the East Devon Open Spaces Review 2014 and the Honiton Playing Pitch Strategy 2017 show that there is a shortfall in the amount of land that should be available for sports pitches and for public open spaces in Honiton.

The Allhallows land was part of the Allhallows School sports field mainly used for football and cricket until the school moved to Rousdon in the 1930s. Mrs Juanita Phillips, then Mayor of Honiton, leased the field from the school's trustees so that it could be available to the public until it was bought by Honiton Borough Council with considerable financial support from The National Playing Fields Association (NPFA); the playing field was officially opened in 1939.

The arbitration price paid by Honiton Borough Council was £3,123 made possible by the grant of £2,250 from the NPFA towards the purchase and laying out and equipment costs. The NPFA is now known as Fields in Trust and the Allhallows Playing Field since 1940 is one of the public open spaces (now numbering 2,809) legally protected in perpetuity by Fields in Trust and is the only one so protected in Honiton:

One of the parks and green spaces protected by Fields in Trust in perpetuity. Because once they are gone, they are gone forever

Allhallows Playing Field, Honiton

Honiton, EX14 1NH

The majority of matters requiring our consent fall into the categories below:

- Granting of a lease for example to a local sports club
- Release or transfer of land ...

Source: Fields in Trust website.

It is not known what comments Fields in Trust made on the existing non exclusive lease or what comments are being made on the proposed granting of an exclusive lease to a local sports club.

The Love Allhallows meeting in December 2016 was well publicised and was well attended. The meeting next Monday is more important than that held in 2016 as instead of ideas, there is a definite proposal of an exclusive fifty year lease to be considered. The need for open space to exercise dogs and dogs fouling sports pitches were mentioned at that meeting with the Gissage Riverside Walk in the vicinity of Dowell Street, Oaklea, Ashleigh Road and Willowdale Close being mentioned as an alternative for some dog owners to the Allhallows Playing Field. The provision of two footbridges and adequate dog bins would make that section of the riverside walk more accessible for some dog owners.

Recommendation

Members decide, in addition to whether or not to comment on the proposal, to ascertain whether Fields in Trust is aware of the proposal.

Roy Coombs
Councillor with Special Responsibilities for the Environment
Vice Chair Green & Open Spaces Committee