

Committee: FINANCE AND RESOURCES

Date: 8 February 2008

Report WOOD LANE CAR PARK, GRASSINGTON

Purpose of the report

1. To present Members with further information concerning the Authority's car park at Wood Lane, Grassington, and in particular its potential as a site to provide affordable local housing.

Strategic Planning Framework

2. The information and recommendations contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework, and in particular its objective 'to manage all aspects of the Authority's business so as to make the most effective use of our resources' (Best Value Performance Plan 2007/08), and 'to investigate options and decide on the future of Castle Bolton, Wood Lane and Linton car parks and toilets'.

Background

3. At the meeting of this committee on 3 December 2007, Members considered a paper examining the future of the Wood Lane Car Park site, and agreed that "subject to an appraisal of all options for further use of the site, including the appropriateness of the site to provide affordable local housing, Grassington Wood Lane Car Park be retained for the time being" (minute 74/07c).

4. This report provides more information on this issue, following discussions with the Planning Officer and with the Craven Rural Housing Officer. Other options for the site are also considered.

OPTION 1. Disposal to provide local affordable housing

5. Alongside other local authorities, the National Park Authority is likely to come under the national requirement to review its property portfolio with a view to releasing appropriate land for housing. In this context, the Craven Rural Housing Enabler (CRHE) and the Area Planning Officer have been approached, and their advice is as follows.

(i) Feedback from the Craven Rural Housing Enabler

6. The suitability of the site for affordable housing was discussed with the CRHE, who noted that the housing need in Grassington over the five years from 2005 had been estimated at 65 units, but that, to date, only 8 units have been built, and there is a significant backlog in satisfying demand (source: Housing Need Survey carried out by David Cumberland Housing Regeneration Ltd, 2005). The CRHE believes that the site could offer an opportunity to contribute towards the affordable housing needs identified by local residents, but identified two issues:

- **The size of the site.** For a housing scheme in such a rural location to be viable for a Registered Social Landlord (RSL), there would need to be a minimum of units accommodated on the site.
- **Cap on Housing Corporation Funding.** RSLs are only permitted to purchase land for £5k per plot, so if only two units were accommodated on this site, the maximum that an RSL could pay would be £10k for the full site, a figure that would be less than the market value of the site. Whilst the Authority can dispose of land at less than its commercial value it must be satisfied that, in doing so, the disposal is likely to contribute to the achievement of its objectives. In this instance, such a disposal would appear to meet the first objective of the 'Housing' section within the Local Plan, 'to help meet the housing need of the local community, having special regard to their need for affordable housing' (paragraph 4.4, Yorkshire Dales Local Plan 2006).

7. Subsequent feedback from Home Housing indicates that two social housing units could be accommodated on the site.

(ii) Feedback from the Area Planning Officer

8. Discussions with the Area Planning Officer (APO) responsible for Grassington, have confirmed that the site lies within the development boundary for Grassington and, given the size and layout of the site, considers that it would be suitable for housing (either open market or affordable housing). The APO believes that it would appear possible to develop the site with either one open market house or a pair of semi detached houses, one of which could be open market and one of which should be an affordable house, and that the site could be developed without detriment to the amenities of nearby residential properties.

9. Local plan policy H1 is the relevant policy regarding housing on this site. This states that "where the development is for two or more dwellings the National Park Authority will seek to negotiate the provision of up to 50% affordable housing to meet a defined need". In the APO's view, if one of the houses was to be local affordable housing, it should be subject to the normal restrictions relating to this type of property within the Park.

(iii) Discussion and conclusion

10. The site does offer some potential to meet local affordable housing needs and, whilst there are covenants as to where any building could be constructed on the site, in the view of Home Housing's architects, these are not sufficiently restrictive to preclude the building of residential accommodation. This does not mean that such accommodation would necessarily receive planning approval, since it may not be possible to develop a design for the site that dealt with the physical and legal constraints, delivered the required accommodation and met relevant planning conditions.

11. There are also two other matters that members may wish to consider when discussing this option:

- Grassington Parish Council has indicated that they believe the need for residents parking for access to the local amenities is a higher priority than affordable housing. This point was also made by a Member at the 3 December meeting, with concern expressed about the loss of an amenity for elderly and less mobile residents wishing to visit Grassington. Feedback from planning surgeries suggests that there are a number of Grassington residents hold the same view, and the Authority can anticipate a substantial number of objections to any planning application for housing on the site.

- The Parish Council may have concerns as to why this site was not taken into consideration when they were searching for sites a couple of years ago and they also may feel that they have had enough Affordable Housing development at the moment, since the Gars End Lane development has only just been completed. There have been issues with the occupation of the latter, which has seen at least one of the houses being offered to a person currently residing outside the Park. This despite the housing association, at the time of the application, assuring the authority, Parish and objectors that there was a great need in Grassington and that the houses would be for local people.

12. In conclusion, this option suggests that the site be retained as a car park for the time being (it is currently operated at minimal cost), and then be considered for a social housing development once firm proposals are received. At that point, a decision will be needed that balances the need for affordable housing, as identified by the local community, with the demand for residents parking close to the centre of Grassington, identified by the same community.

13. In the meantime, whilst this option delivers no clear 'National Park' objectives, it does at least have the advantage of reserving a future option of local housing.

14. The committee is asked to give approval to officers for further developing proposals with Home Housing, if this option is selected.

OPTION 2. Sell to Grassington Parish Council for a minimal fee

15. It is our understanding that the Parish Council would consider buying the site, but only at a nominal fee. This would remove care of the site from the Authority's responsibility, and a small amount of maintenance cost that goes with that responsibility. However, those costs are arguably offset by a proportion of 'parking permit' income, since the car park is 'permits only'. There is therefore no clear benefit to the Authority in this option.

16. As noted in paragraph 6, disposals of land can be at less than commercial value where the Authority can demonstrate a link to its purposes and objectives. It is not clear how this requirement is met by this option, which is also likely to have some cost, particularly in officer time.

Conclusion

17. This option does not offer any advantages, and is not recommended. Furthermore, by disposing of this site in this manner, the Authority would lose control over any future potential that the site might have.

OPTION 3. Lease to Grassington Parish Council

18. It is our understanding that the Parish Council would consider leasing the property, but only for a minimal rent (and not necessarily a 'market rent', subject to such being identifiable). Depending on the terms of the lease, this could be regarded as a disposal for less than market value.

19. If a commercial rent were agreed, this could require a significant increase in parking charges for current users, unless the cost of parking were to be subsidised by the Parish Council. For indicative purposes, the car park can accommodate between 12 and 15 cars, and, being occupied by 'permit holders' only paying £30 a year each, could be argued to generate about £400 a year at the moment. If charged at the Authority's normal day rate of £3.20, the total income (assuming at least 12-15 cars a day used it) would be in the order of £16,000. These figures are

very general, but do indicate an order of magnitude between the different scenarios. Note that the Authority does not operate a ticket machine for the site, as all spaces are invariably occupied by permit holders.

Conclusion

20. This option does not offer any advantages; potential lease income is, in reality, unlikely to be significant and so would not offer a material benefit once officer time costs had been incurred. Although this option is not recommended, it is potentially relatively 'neutral' in terms of advantages and disadvantages if it were to be compared with the Authority owning and running the Wood Lane Car Park indefinitely (and with no other use for the site in view).

OPTION 4. Retain the property in its current use and ownership

21. No change to the current situation.

Conclusion

22. This option is effectively the same as option 1.

RECOMMENDATION

23. Members are requested to consider the options presented in this report.

Paul Drake
Project and Estates Officer

28 January 2008
Background documents: None