

WOODBOROUGH PARISH COUNCIL'S BID FOR MIDDUPS' LAND FAQ updated 24th October 2016

Q Gedling Borough Council has not given the go ahead for housing on this land, so why does the PC need to rush to buy it now?

A The land is for sale now and it may not come on to the market again. This land has been marketed as potentially suitable for future housing development and if bought by a developer, we can expect them to lobby once again for consent to build on this land in future. Gedling Borough Council's March 2015 planning policy workshop in the village found that this site was the least favoured location (of 17 considered) for new housing – the Parish Council believes that parish ownership of the land will remove concerns and uncertainty about future development here, as well as providing recreational space.

Q What percentage of people wanted this new field?

A In WPC's consultation in July 2016, 71.6% of households which returned the form were in favour of buying the field. Forms were returned by 30.6% of households. This majority view is consistent with the consultation GBC held in Woodborough in the Village Hall in March 2015 to consider the Local Plan. This was attended by 348 people. Feedback from the workshop listed as "dislikes" about Woodborough: lack of open space at either end of the village; lack of open space for children; poor sports facility; limited play equipment. The reasons for opposing housing development on this site included "should be open public space".

Q Why hasn't the PC called a public meeting so that the decision can be revisited?

A The PC has called a public information meeting for October 31st to answer questions and to listen to ideas and concerns. Before taking the decision to bid for the land the PC consulted via a door to door leaflet which gave everyone – provided that they were at their property to take receipt of the leaflet – a chance to respond. (The timetable was compressed by the need to bid according to the agents' deadline). Over 70% of responses were in favour of buying the land – a substantial proportion. A meeting can only host a limited number of people due to the capacity of the hall, and not everyone can attend public meetings, eg for reasons of work, lack of transport, childcare. The PC does not believe that a public meeting would generate a more representative decision than the consultation already undertaken, the findings of which were consistent with the feedback from GBC's workshop in March 2015.

Q Why can't this land remain as it is?

A The land is for sale, so change is inevitable. If the PC owns the land, then the community will be able to influence what happens upon it. The PC will consult the village on how this land is used. If a developer buys the land they will have the long term objective of putting houses on to the site.

Q Will the flood risk increase?

A The field will remain open and will be protected by its Green Belt status. The PC will consult with the village on how the field is used and the community will be able to influence flood mitigation measures. The PC is very aware of the flood risk and previous flooding episodes.

Q What proposals have the PC for vehicular access to the land during development and during use of facilities once developed?

A Vehicular access to the field for works will be achieved via the access off Charnwood Way (the only access available). The PC will work to mitigate concerns of the neighbouring residents during this process. The requirements for vehicular access in future will be determined by the use to which the field is put.

Q Will the precept have to rise further to build and maintain new facilities?

A The precept figure on the consultation leaflet includes estimates for development and maintenance of new facilities as well as the investment in the land. The PC will do its utmost to get grants where they are available.

Q If the parish can't afford new play equipment, how can it afford the new field?

A The Parish Council elected in May 2015 has made it policy to support the replacement of the play equipment – 2 councillors are in the “GREAT” team and £30,000 has been earmarked in the budget. This marked a step change in the level of the PC’s engagement vs the previous council. The PC could – if it decided to do so – pay 100% of the cost for the new play equipment, using the precept. The likely cost is between £100,000 and £130,000. However we know that many Notts villages have been able to secure grant funding for their play areas and it would appear wise to do the utmost to get this project partly funded by grants. The GREAT team is working hard to secure grants for the project so that the parish does not bear all of the cost.

Q Why is the PC planning to borrow money over 40 or 50 years?

A The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) advises that the borrowing period “should be no greater than the period for which the expenditure is forecast to provide benefits to the council”. The PC’s view is that it is fairer to pay the loan back over an extended period, as the residents of the parish over many decades to come will enjoy the benefits of this land, and it should not therefore be paid for in full by the residents of today. Interest rates are at a record low.

Q When was the decision to bid for the field taken and how was this communicated to the parish?

A The decision was taken at the July 21st meeting and was included on the agenda (items 9, 10, 11). The discussion regarding the level of the bid was taken after the exclusion of press and public, as public knowledge of the bid would have prejudiced the commercial position of the PC. A statement confirming that the PC had resolved to bid for the land was posted on the WPC website News page on July 26th. The “best and final” offer was agreed at the August 16th meeting and was included on the agenda (item 29). The minutes from these meetings note the decisions to bid (July 21st), and then make a best and final offer (August 16th), while keeping the figure confidential. The manner in which the minute was recorded – referencing a confidential paper – is standard practice to provide clarity on the resolution without disclosing sensitive or confidential information (NALC: *Local Councils Explained*, p169).

The PC publishes its agendas 3 days before the date of the meeting, and there is a sign up facility on the homepage of the WPC website to ensure that you are notified when the agenda is available. The minutes are approved at the subsequent PC meeting and then publicised on the noticeboard, on the website and in the Newsletter. Note that the Newsletter is no longer published every month, so the best place to find all the minutes (especially if additional extraordinary meetings have been held) is on the WPC website.

Q Was a vote taken and was it recorded?

A Yes, decisions are taken by a show of hands. The vote was not recorded as no councillor requested this. (See WPC’s Standing Orders 3(p): *At the request of a councillor, the voting on any question shall be recorded so as to show whether each councillor present and voting gave his vote for or against that question. Such a request shall be made before moving on to the next item of business on the agenda.*) A recorded vote is rarely requested.

Q When is the next election for the parish council?

A May 2019. Vacancies can arise mid term, and these are advertised on the noticeboard and on the WPC website.

Q How much do we pay our parish councillors?

A Woodborough Parish Councillors are volunteers and receive no salary or expenses. Councillors are reimbursed against receipts for items bought for the PC – eg a councillor carries out minor repairs at the village hall - if he/she purchases materials these will be reimbursed against receipts but no payment is made for his/her time.

Q How does Woodborough’s precept and council tax compare with other villages?

2016/17 parish precepts	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Bestwood St Albans	12.87	15.01	17.16	19.30	23.59	27.88	32.17	38.60
Burton Joyce	59.18	69.04	78.91	88.77	108.50	128.22	147.95	177.54
Calverton	53.92	62.91	71.89	80.88	98.85	116.83	134.80	161.76
Colwick	23.31	27.19	31.08	34.96	42.73	50.50	58.27	69.62
Lambley	21.27	24.81	28.36	31.90	38.99	46.08	53.17	63.80
Linby	48.43	56.51	64.58	72.65	88.79	104.94	121.08	145.30
Newstead	27.35	31.91	36.47	41.03	50.15	59.27	68.38	82.06
Papplewick	23.72	27.67	31.63	35.58	43.49	51.39	59.30	71.16
Ravenshead	30.12	35.14	40.16	45.18	55.22	65.26	75.30	90.36
Stoke Bardolph	4.59	5.35	6.12	6.88	8.41	9.94	11.47	13.76
Woodborough	36.89	43.04	49.19	55.34	67.64	79.94	92.23	110.68
Woodborough – annual after purchase, as per consultation	53.34	62.24	71.13	80.02	97.81	115.59	133.36	160.04
<i>Woodborough 2015/16</i>	<i>27.80</i>	<i>32.43</i>	<i>37.07</i>	<i>41.70</i>	<i>50.97</i>	<i>60.23</i>	<i>69.50</i>	<i>83.40</i>

Q Has WPC considered the costs of drainage and levelling of the land?

A Yes, the increased precept on the consultation flyer included estimates for these works. The estimate included for levelling is £50,000, based on a ballpark quote obtained before the crop was harvested. The actual requirements will need to be drawn up once the plan for the field is agreed. GBC's Planning Department would also need to be consulted regarding levelling. Drainage has been estimated at £25,000 and cleaning the ditch at £1,500. One of the residents has recommended that some judicious planting be part of the plan to alleviate concerns regarding surface water run off.

Q Has WPC considered the ongoing maintenance costs for the land, or will the precept rise even further to pay for this?

A The increased precept on the consultation flyer included estimates for maintenance costs, so the precept will not have to rise even further. The detailed maintenance requirements will of course depend on the design and facilities provided, and will evolve as the field is developed. The estimate for annual maintenance (prior to the development of specific facilities) is £4,900.

Q Is it legal for a parish council to buy land in this way?

A Yes, see the Public Health Act 1875, s.164 (*Any local authority may purchase or take on lease, lay out, plant, improve and maintain lands for the purpose of being used as public walks or pleasure grounds*) and the Open Spaces Act 1906 ss9-10.

Q Will WPC be able to afford the loan repayments when interest rates rise?

A WPC can borrow at fixed rates from the Public Works Loan Board. At present, their fixed rates are between 2 and 3%. The interest rate will therefore be fixed for the duration of the loan.

Q What evidence is there that the village actually needs more recreational space and more facilities?

A More than 70% of respondents to WPC's consultation agreed with the proposal. The consultation returns included ideas for new facilities which could not be accommodated on existing space, eg a bowling green. This majority view is consistent with the consultation GBC held in Woodborough in the Village Hall in March 2015 to consider the Local Plan. This was attended by 348 people. Feedback from the workshop listed as "dislikes" about Woodborough: lack of open space at either end of the village; lack of open space for children; poor sports facility; limited play equipment. The reasons for opposing housing development on this site included "should be open public space". WPC is also planning ahead for the future needs of our growing village, to provide our children with open spaces and the flexibility to develop facilities that future parishioners will want and need. This initiative is consistent with one of Gedling's objectives to improve health and wellbeing. Gedling Borough Council's "State of Gedling Borough" Research identified that securing well designed and maintained open spaces in the Borough will provide the opportunity for people to lead a more active and healthy lifestyle.

Q Why was the consultation rushed?

A The Middups' land was marketed nationally by Savills and the timetable was set by the vendors and their agents. WPC requested additional time but this was refused. It was not ideal but WPC had to carry out its consultation quickly and determine whether to make an offer all within the month of July.

Q Only 30.6% of households returned the consultation flyer – why does WPC think that this is adequate to make such a big decision?

A The results of the consultation were debated at length at the meeting on July 12th before determining to proceed. Local issues do not engage everybody (43.7% of residents responded to the PC's consultation on the turbine; the turnout for the Notts Police and Crime Commissioner election was 21.8%; the turnout for the County Council election, Calverton ward in 2013 was 36.03%). 30.6% of 846 households does however represent a significant sample size and the result from this sample was clear support – 71.6% in favour.

Q Surely there is a better way of consulting that gets more people involved?

A It is very difficult to engage everyone. The consultation flyer was hand delivered to every door by members of the council and this gave everyone – providing they were not on holiday – an opportunity to express a “yes” or “no”. A public meeting was held as well (attendance to which is always capped by the capacity of the hall, and limited to attendees who are free that evening) and WPC also set up an online survey. A parish poll (run by Gedling's election department) also has its limitations, as no polling cards or postal votes are issued - it relies on villagers being able and willing to attend the polling station during a 5 hour window.

Q Why was the consultation leaflet so one sided in promoting the purchase?

A WPC strongly believes that this is a great opportunity to provide new facilities for our growing village for this generation and future generations, and at the same time to stop a developer from purchasing it – the leaflet therefore sought to present and explain the PC's proposal.

Q Why were 2 councillors excluded from the decision making regarding the purchase, while other councillors living close by were fully involved?

A Cllrs Smith and Boot declared a disclosable pecuniary interest and as a consequence have to leave the meeting when the Middups' land is under discussion. It is down to councillors to determine for themselves whether they have an interest, under the Code of Conduct. There is a link to this on the WPC website, on the penultimate line of the “About Your Council” page.

Q The football team has folded – why do we need a new football pitch and pavilion?

A Although the Middups' land could accommodate a football pitch and pavilion, no decisions have been made regarding any facilities on this land. There will be further consultation with the village regarding the facilities they would like to see. It is likely that one day football will return to the

village – whether on Middups’ land or the existing pitch – and encouraging participation in sport is high on the public agenda.

Q What has happened to all of the consultation sheets, which included suggestions for the field?

A They have been retained, and the suggestions will be used at the next stage of the consultation.

Q It’s our money – why can’t we know what WPC has bid for the land?

A Several groups made offers for this land, so to divulge the amount being offered by WPC would have compromised the commercial position of the council in making its offer. At least one other bid came from a group within the parish – so confidentiality was (and still is) essential. The amount paid will be published on completion.

Q Why do you not have a firm, costed plan for the land in place?

A In its consultation flyer, WPC committed to consulting further with the villagers to understand which facilities they would like to see. This process will be very important as there will be so many options to consider. WPC will also need to consult with Gedling, Highways and the Environment Agency.

Q Isn’t it foolhardy to buy the land and then work out what to do with it?

A Owning this land will give the parish the flexibility to develop facilities over many decades to come. WPC foresees no shortage of ideas. Land has historically proven to be a good investment.

Q Why isn’t WPC focussing instead on extending the village hall or redeveloping the pavilion to provide space for the uniformed groups?

A There has been plenty of discussion regarding providing extra meeting space at the village hall or pavilion, but there are no quick fix solutions here. Extending the village hall would involve losing car park space or losing a tennis court. Mrs Lynne Morgan and Mr Steven Tupper have done a lot of work to assess how the pavilion might be converted and extended, or rebuilt, to provide a multi purpose building with meeting space for the scouts. The footprint of the building would be limited by the dimensions of the cricket pitch and no additional car parking space would be available. Purchasing new recreational land may seem a diversion but will in the long term give the village far more options to develop the facilities it wants.

Q Why doesn’t WPC put its money and efforts behind the GREAT project to replace the play equipment on the Governors’ Field?

A WPC is fully supportive of the GREAT project and project team. WPC has recently worked with the Governors of the school to extend the lease on the Governors’ Field which will enable new grant applications to be made. WPC has £30,000 in its budget to contribute to the project. It would

however be inappropriate to go ahead with the replacement at the precept payer's expense without first exploring the potential grants available. Grants are available for play equipment, but not for land purchase.

Q Why has WPC agreed to pay the vendors' legal and agents' fees?

A This was part of a second phase of negotiation to secure the acceptance of WPC's bid, and was the subject of a separate resolution by the council at its meeting on September 13th 2016.

Q What will the field be called?

A WPC has agreed to call the field the "Sam Middup Field" to mark Sam Middup's long association with the village.