Leader's Office Name

PO Box 21, Archway Road Address

Huyton Prescot

Knowsley Knowsley

L36 9YU L

Dear Councillor Moorhead,

**Formal complaint about implementation of Knowsley Parks and Green Spaces Review**

I am writing to submit a formal complaint about the Knowsley Parks and Green Spaces Review, and specifically about the proposal to include King George V Memorial Playing Fields Prescot (known locally as Browns Field) and the play area as sites for disposal for development.

As a local resident I am very concerned about the loss of this highly valuable and much used green space. If this happens I believe it would have a profound effect on Prescot as a town, impacting negatively on wider regeneration efforts and on the health and wellbeing of the present and future local population. This is an irreversible decision which in my view will have terrible consequences for Prescot and for Knowsley as whole, as many of the park’s users come from beyond Prescot.

I would like to point out that I am aware of the financial constraints the Council is under, due to cuts in central Government funding and I understand that the Council has to explore ways to sustain discretionary services in light of this. The work and recommendations of the Knowsley Independent Parks and Green Spaces Review to create a Knowsley Parks Trust and sustainable funding were in themselves sensible as an approach. However I am also aware that in 2015 KMBC transferred all maintenance responsibility to the Town Council in accordance with leases held on the sites. Therefore KMBC incur none or very little of the maintenance costs in relation to leased sites.

My complaint relates to the process beyond the submission of the Review Board’s report, and the decisions that have been made since. In my view, these have disregarded the Review Board’s recommendations on a number of crucial factors, in particular on public consultation and engagement and on the process of site selection. The outcome of this is that the proposals that have been made and the very hasty selection of 17 sites for disposal do not follow either the letter or the policy intent or the Review Board’s proposals. They are also contrary to the Council’s Cabinet’s own decisions on this matter.

My specific complaints are:-

1. Before selecting sites for disposal, the Council did not explore alternative funding opportunities beyond the scope of parks and green spaces in the review, which the Independent Review Panel recommended and the Cabinet decision agreed. In my view, using receipts from economic and housing developments over a 15 year period to fund an endowment is a much better and more acceptable policy solution than disposing of parks and green spaces.
2. There was no public consultation on the selection of the sites for surrender despite this being expressly recommended by the Independent Review Panel and by the Panel’s chair Gideon Ben - Tovim in his covering letter to you.
3. Inadequate time and care was taken in the site selection, which the Review Panel proposed should be considered and refined process (as well as consulted on). This has led to the process being technically flawed and has produced a perverse outcome of proposing the sale of some of the parks and green spaces most valued by communities and users – including KGV Prescot and play area.

In the criteria ranking across all factors, these ranked 89th and 90th of the 161 sites and therefore, in following the Council’s own published selection process, it is not clear why or how the decision to include these within the selected sites was reached. If it is the case that the decision was made due to the sites value to developers, this is not consistent with the agreed approach, and suggests that the council considers value to developers as a greater priority than value to communities. Disposing of some of the Borough’s best used parks was clearly not the intent of the Independent Review Board in its suggestion of site selection criteria or its final recommendations.

1. The decision to exclude Green Flag Parks from selection was understandable but failed to recognise that other parks with high levels of community use without green flag status provide as much if not more value to local communities and to the Borough’s offer as a whole. This is in my view definitely the case for KGV Prescot and the play area, and it was confirmed by the Council’s own assessment of usage levels.
2. A major determining factor was not taken into account in the decision-making process in relation to KGV Prescot - the protection in perpetuity of KGV Prescot by Fields in Trust and the site’s charitable status. This information, which relates to the site’s heritage and value as well as the feasibility of disposal, was not made available to decision makers as was the case with other sites where various forms of constraint to development were identified and used as arguments against selection.
3. No opportunity has been given to consider local ownership and management as an option which in the case of KGV Browns Field, a site maintained by the Town Council, seems to be a viable option alongside the local Friends Group for KGV Browns Field and Carr Lane Woods.
4. The Council’s plans to mitigate the loss of KGV Prescot by developing Carr Lane Woods for football and play are highly inappropriate and threaten the natural habitat.

To resolve my concerns, I would like the Council to:-

1. Fund the costs of the endowment over 15 years by using capital receipts from housing and economic developments – ideally avoiding loss of any parks and green spaces. A good way to show how growth can directly benefit communities;
2. Carry out thorough and meaningful community consultation on the selection of any parks and green spaces identified for disposal;
3. Ensure that any selection process of parks and green spaces for disposal ensures selection of only sites of low value and low use by communities;
4. Remove KGV Prescot and play area from the list of sites for disposal to reflect its high level of value to the community and its users, as confirmed by the Council’s own assessment;
5. Work with Prescot Town Council and Friends Group to establish a local management arrangement, which celebrates KGV Prescot, capitalises and celebrates its protected status and enables it to continue to play a major part in the life and regeneration of Prescot.
6. Leave Carr Lane Woods in its naturally beautiful state.

Yours sincerely,