



# PRESCOT TOWN COUNCIL

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25th April 2018

Dear Cllr Moorhead

## **Shaping a new future for Knowsley Parks**

Thank you for your response of 3<sup>rd</sup> April. The Town Council has considered this carefully and I have enclosed in the attached appendix a detailed response to your specific points.

It is clear from the content and tone of your letter that we are clearly some way apart in our perspectives on this matter. However, this submission to you is again offered in a spirit of collaboration, and the Town Council has a specific proposal to make that can help us find common ground to move forward in a mutually beneficial way.

In summary to your response, I have to say that having offered a considered, reasoned and constructive submission to you on 1 March which has support across political parties, the Town Council is disappointed that:-

- a) This did not lead to a comprehensive consultation process with the Town Council as your Cabinet report of 28 November committed to. There has been one closed meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2018 between officers and some Town Council members and since the Town Council's submission to you there has been no response or contact at all on this matter before the end of your planned consultation period. We cannot consider that to be comprehensive consultation and we do not believe that is helpful to the collaborative management of this situation.
- b) Your response does not provide a full and adequate answer to the points that the Town Council raised and is at odds with the Council's own recommendations on the parks issue and your previous steer on precept levels.

Fundamentally, your response does not provide a clear answer as to how specifically, using the approach recommended by the Independent Review Panel and agreed by KMBCs Cabinet on 28 November, KGV Prescot came to be included on the list of 17 sites. The only conclusion we can make is that KGV Prescot has been selected arbitrarily solely based on the site's value to developers, which is completely contrary to the basis of the agreed site selection and criteria ranking process. You

have also not addressed the question of why KGV Prescott's Fields in Trust legal protection and charitable status was overlooked in your assessment, when other similar protections and constraints to development were raised as key considerations across other sites. This is a major factor which I am sure you will agree should have been taken into account. In our view, had its implications been properly considered we would not be engaged in a debate about KGV Prescott at all.

- c) That your response seemed dismissive of the concerns of Prescott residents about this issue, and questioned the value of KGV Prescott to the local community. I can assure you that there is a great deal of local concern about the potential loss of this longstanding community asset. As to its value, your own assessment and description of the site provide the evidence that KGV Prescott is a very well used facility and there is in fact a clear development plan for it, developed by the Town Council which we would still like to pursue. The Town Council would therefore suggest you revisit your position on this, and not underestimate the strength of local feeling.
- d) You have chosen to characterise the Town Council's response as concerned only with Prescott rather than taking a Borough wide perspective. In fact, though our direct mandate is only for Prescott, our response fully acknowledged the Borough wide concerns. It proposed a set of measures which, fundamentally, would ensure that the process unfolded in the way that the report of the Independent Review Panel and the meeting of Cabinet on 28 November recommended – a consultative, engaging and transparent process that limited the loss of valuable green space in Knowsley yet enabled KMBC to meet its strategic objectives. This was an issue the Town Council members considered specifically when agreeing the last submission and it requests that you correct this perspective and positioning of the Town Council, which is both inaccurate and unhelpful.

As an overall view of the current position, the Town Council has serious concerns that although KGV Prescott has been included on the list of 17 sites in a way that has not been explained or adequately justified, the Town Council is now being asked to construct the solution to this problem, which is plainly not one of its making.

This includes a proposal to borrow over 50 years a £5m price tag you have placed on the site, including increasing the local precept by 19%. All this for a site that is already maintained by the Town Council and at a cost to Prescott residents. On reflection, I am sure you will agree that this is likely to be highly contentious and politically embarrassing at a Prescott, Knowsley and national level. It is also likely to be damaging to the process of regeneration of Prescott, which we are all working hard to achieve.

At this point, given our respective positions, I would suggest that we need to take stock and acknowledge that if we were to lose KGV Prescott that this will have a profound effect on the town in terms of its offer and its regeneration, with negative impacts on community relations and political governance of the Town. It is that serious, and as political leaders we are responsible for the outcome, which will have long - term impacts.

**In light of this the conclusion of the Town Council is that we need to find common ground and work together to find a cross - party political way forward here.**

We believe that central to this is the development of KGV Prescott as a multi - sports community facility, honouring the memory and achievements of Sylvia Gore MBE, details of Sylvia's considerable achievements and strong connection to KGV Prescott . Sylvia's family are also highly engaged and supportive of this approach with the Friends Group for KGV Prescott & Carr Lane Woods. Berkley Junior Football Club, an FA Charter Standard

Community club who play at KGV Prescott are also very keen to be at the centre of this development.

This vision includes a Sylvia Gore pavilion, an inspirational venue with space for changing facilities, community cafe and also education and community health provision, for example working on issues such as loneliness and social isolation and mental health. The site would offer facilities for football, cycling, walking and play, including the existing multi use games area.

We see potential for this as thriving local social enterprise, consistent with the intentions of the Independent Panel's review on community engagement. The development could potentially use the existing Masterplan for KGV Prescott as a base.

Our own work to shape this proposal and engagement with expert advisers and stakeholders regarding viability gives us confidence that it is likely to generate investment and support from football and other sports governing bodies and funders. It would also be considered positively by Fields in Trust, subject to Trustee approval.

In the position we are in, which does not seem likely to be easily resolved between us, the Town Council believes that this presents a real 'win – win' opportunity which would enable us to work together to realise this ambition. We are certain that this would make a hugely valuable contribution to Prescott's regeneration as a well as creating a significant asset for the Borough.

In this context, the Town Council would be happy to discuss the viability of purchase of KGV Prescott, but at a price that reflects its intended end use, and the leverage of investment into the Borough and social value that such a development would achieve. This approach is a comparable scenario to KMBC's recent sale of land in Kirkby to Liverpool Football Club.

The Town Council is also happy to discuss how through a wider approach to the use of capital receipts and developer contributions this proposal can prevent impact on other areas of Knowsley. This reflects our previous submission that made clear that the Town Council wants to play its part in the achievement of the Borough wide strategic objectives regarding parks and green spaces.

I would ask that you give the merits of this proposal serious consideration and that we arrange a meeting to discuss how we can take this forward – starting with securing political consensus between us.

Yours Sincerely,

Cllr Stephen Pimblett

Leader of Prescott Town Council

## Appendix 1 – Town Council response to specific points raised in KMBC letter of 4th April 2018

### 1. Funding cuts

**KMBC:**

It is important to remind you and the Town Council's Members of the challenge we face. The stark reality arising as a direct consequence of continuing central Government funding cuts is that by 2020 the Borough Council's budget will have been cut by half (around £100m per annum) since 2010. The cuts to Knowsley Council's budget have been harsher than anywhere else in the country.

The impact of the Government's cuts is that we simply do not have enough money to maintain facilities and services in the ways which we once did. By law, we have to make sure that statutory services are in place. We are absolutely clear that our residents very much value local parks and open spaces – but the plain fact is that we are not required by law to maintain them (i.e. it is not a statutory service), and therefore the Government isn't giving us the money to do that.

As part of our budget agreement in 2017, we - reluctantly - decided to protect other key statutory services by withdrawing the £1.3million annual budget for maintaining parks and open spaces from 2019/20. So, unless we find a fundamentally new way of funding our parks, their upkeep will cease from April 2019.

I think that you and your Members would agree with me that the worst thing we could do is simply take the budget away and give up. That would result in all of our parks and open spaces gradually falling into ruin. So the Borough Council is taking responsible and legitimate action to seek innovative ways of funding these important but non-statutory services and putting a new model in place before the funding runs out.

**Prescot Town Council:**

The Town Council are very well aware of the savage nature of public sector funding cuts, and we too have had to deal with the problem of reduced funding. As you know the support provided to the Town Council through the Council Tax Support Grant administered by KMBC has been reduced year on year and has now been completely withdrawn. The Town Council is now solely reliant on the income it receives through the precept and that which it generates through the operation of the Town Hall. Unlike KMBC the Town Council does not receive any government grants to support its activities, the simple fact of the matter is that our respective organisations have very different duties, powers, funding streams and remits, this is made quite clear in budgetary terms as the Town Council's total annual budget is circa £274,000, whilst KMBC's (as per your section 31a calculation) is £385,178,000 with only 13.4 % funded through council tax.

Our submission to you of 3 March was very clear in its acknowledgement of the financial challenges the Borough faces and supportive of the need for creative solutions, including the principle of the Knowsley Parks Trust.

We as members of the Town Council completely agree that you should not take the parks maintenance budget away and give up. However, we fail to see how this would affect either KGV Prescot or Eaton Street Park as the Town Council carry out the maintenance of these sites with the exception of the 8 to 13 years play spaces. These elements of the parks have been left out of commission or poorly maintained for some time even whilst the 1.3 million budget has been in place, particularly the soft surfacing and climbing tree at KGV Prescot, these issues have remained unaddressed for over 18 months. So, we have no disagreement on the challenging environment and need for action. What is an issue at this stage is the way in which the process has been managed and the impacts of this, which for Prescot are massive.

It is the Town Council's clear view, expressed in its submission of 3 March and confirmed here, that the inclusion of KGV Prescott is not in fact legitimate or correct, even in accordance with the process recommended by the Independent Review Panel and agreed by Cabinet on 28 November. It is a course of action that we believe would have a major negative impact on Prescott and this course of action is therefore not acceptable to the Town Council.

## 2. Prescott focus

### **KMBC:**

I recognise that your Town Council is not responsible for the full range and complexity of local government services or indeed exposed to the same financial pressures as the Borough Council. I also understand why your efforts are focused solely on Prescott....

The recommendations of the Knowsley Parks and Green Spaces Review Board are intended to tackle this Borough-wide strategic challenge. In deciding if and how to take them forward, the Borough Council must follow the same principles and tackle the challenge as a Borough-wide matter. Prescott Town Council's proposals are focused solely on protecting one particular site - Brown's Field - from development and therefore pay little regard to finding the necessary strategic Borough-wide solution. Whilst I appreciate the collaborative spirit in which they are offered, they do not work as an alternative solution for the Borough of Knowsley.

### **Prescott Town Council:**

We disagree with your characterisation of the Town Councils response as concerned only with Prescott rather than taking a Borough wide perspective. In fact, though our direct mandate is only for Prescott, our response fully acknowledged the Borough wide concerns. It proposed a set of measures which, fundamentally, would ensure that the process unfolded in the way that the report of the Independent Review Panel and the meeting of Cabinet on 28 November recommended – a consultative, engaging and transparent process that limited the loss of valuable green space in Knowsley yet enabled KMBC to meet its Borough wide strategic objectives. This was an issue the Town Council members considered specifically when agreeing the last submission and it requests that you correct this perspective and positioning of the Town Council, which is both inaccurate and unhelpful.

## 3. Concerns of local community and users of KGV Prescott

### **KMBC:**

I acknowledge that you have taken account of representations from "residents of Prescott", "users of ..... Brown's Field", and "a Friends Group", but I see no evidence that these representations necessarily reflect the views of a majority of Prescott residents.

### **Prescott Town Council:**

The tone and content of your response seems dismissive and questioning of the concerns of Prescott residents about this issue. I can assure you that there is a great deal of local concern about the potential loss of KGV Prescott as a longstanding community asset and I would suggest that none of us involved in this process should underestimate that.

It would be helpful if you could provide an indication of what you would consider to be a 'majority representation'. If for example this was aligned with your perspective of community support in the consultation for the parks review in which you have taken the views of 2,500 residents from a total population of around 146,000 this would equate to 1.7%. A similar sample in Prescot would be around 340.

We are aware that there has been significant mobilisation of the local community and park users and we are aware that a very substantial local petition will be submitted to you soon. I am sure you will have also received a lot of complaints to the Council about this issue, there has been a lot of media interest as you know. You will also no doubt be aware this will be a major issue on the doorstep in the current local election campaign. The Town Council would therefore suggest that you revisit your position on the strength of feeling in the local community, and that we should not misjudge or underplay this major factor.

#### 4. Consultation on site selection

**KMBC:**

I do not agree that there has been "no public consultation". The Borough Council has already explained in quite some detail the method which was used to identify the 17 sites for potential surrender. We identified those sites in direct response to calls from the community for early information on the names of the parks which could be surrendered.

The early identification of these sites also allows Council officers to test the assumptions made in the development of the Business Case (for example, is there sufficient interest in developing the sites?).

We are now receiving significant public feedback on the list of sites, and all of that feedback is being taken on board as part of the work I mentioned above to develop the business case.

Prescot Town Council was fully briefed at relevant stages during the Review Board's research and subsequently in respect to the Borough Council's decisions in this regard. Information has been available for your Members to understand the context of these decisions and so that they might be able to explain the rationale for it.

The Borough Council will also conduct public consultation on any development plans for Brown's Field as part of any future land appropriation and planning application process

**Prescot Town Council:**

The Town Council's response was very clear in saying that there was no consultation on the site selection process, despite this being expressly recommended by the Independent Review Panel. This statement is correct, and your answer does not address the point. The public consultation did not address the process of selection of sites.

It would be helpful to know what you mean by 'calls from the community' for early information on the names of parks which could be selected' as this is not clearly explained in your response or anywhere else in the process.

In any event the recommendation to the Council from the review panel was very clear and we cannot see any reasonable or legitimate justification for selecting the sites a) without any consultation (even with local elected members) b) prior to the whole process and selection criteria being agreed and c) through a tabled resolution to make a key decision of the Council that was not in the public domain for the requisite 28 days.

Town Clerks were invited to one meeting in which KMBC officers explained the reasons behind the Boards decision, at no time were individual sites discussed. The Town Council's representative on the Board was effectively gagged by the Chair of Board when he determined that all works and discussions undertaken by the board should remain confidential until the conclusion of business.

It is clear to the Town Council that in decisions of this nature there is a legitimate expectation that local communities should be engaged and consulted, rather than thrown into a state of turmoil and concern. The Council has recently agreed and celebrated a new approach to citizen engagement through 'Better Together' and this does not seem at all consistent with that.

## 5. Selection of sites for sale

### **KMBC:**

The 17 sites were identified on the basis of an impartial assessment in accordance with the strategic parameters set by the Council and the recommendations made by the Board (which were in turn informed by the 2,500 people who responded to the Board's public consultation exercise).

While you say that "KGV Prescott" is one of the "most valued" parks in the Borough, there was no established Friends Group prior to the list of sites being published. There is no evidence of community-led initiatives at the site or of any improvement projects similar to those which are in place in many of the Borough's other parks. At the same time, the size and location Brown's Field offers an attractive location for housing development. The Council's published site selection methodology shows that clear importance was placed on balancing the community, environmental, and development financial values of each site. My comments above will therefore explain how the exercise balanced these factors and reached the conclusion it did in relation to Brown's Field.

### **Prescot Town Council:**

Your response on this crucial issue is vague and does not explain specifically how, according to the site selection criteria suggested by the Independent Review Panel and agreed by Cabinet on 28 November KGV Prescott was selected. This is a crucial point and so requires a lot more clarity and explanation.

You say that you have balanced the factors to come up with the selections, but you have not shown how this has been done in accordance with the agreed process nor shown this relative to other sites in a way that would suggest KGV Prescott should be selected. The criteria were explicitly expressed rather than factors to be considered and balanced e.g.

- Selecting sites that have limited recreational value in terms of their use for sports and formal leisure
- Selecting sites that have limited community use in terms of informal leisure use (e.g. walking, relaxation, play)
- Selecting sites that have little or no historical value or cultural significance

In fact, as KGV Prescott and the park were ranked 89<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> in your ranking table, scoring highly for community and recreational use and on other factors, it seems clear to us that KGV Prescott has been selected solely based on its value to developers. You have confirmed this in your response.

This is clearly not a balanced approach – it is the application of an arbitrary weighting to one factor which was not part of the agreed process.

All we can see from the papers produced and your explanation is that what has happened here is that you have proposed and agreed an approach to the selection of sites, remaining within 10% of the spatial quantity of parks which has not proved to be feasible. You then seem to have abandoned the process agreed by Cabinet (intended to be fair and transparent) and selected sites on an unexplained and un-agreed basis to produce a perverse outcome which was not the intent of the whole process at all.

The two most extreme examples of this are KGV Prescott and Court Hey Park, both, from your own evidence gathering and assessment, well used, well - valued parks that are vital to their local communities and indeed assets to the Borough. Court Hey is of course also a Green Flag park, yet still included for selection, just another example of the process problems here.

Beyond this, according to your published documents, the application of judgements for and against site selection shows clear inconsistencies, with factors taken into account for some sites but not others where they clearly also apply. It is not in our view a clear and defensible assessment process, and certainly not to justify major decisions such as the loss forever of KGV Prescott.

Our suggestion was that you acknowledge the limitations of the agreed process and seek to ensure that you find a solution that ensures that only parks with low community value might be lost, in accordance with the agreed criteria. Our submission made clear that was not proposed solely to exclude KGV Prescott from selection, but to deliver the process the Independent Panel and Cabinet agreed. You have chosen not to do this, which is clearly a diversion from the agreed approach.

As to the value of KGV Prescott, your own assessment and description of the site in reports and papers relating to the selection process provide the evidence that it is a very well used facility – scoring top marks for community and recreational use - so it is not clear why you now appear to contradict that.

There is indeed a site improvement plan, as in 2013 our Town Clerk worked in partnership your Greenspace Officers and the local community to develop a Master Plan for the site. Since that time the Town Council have continued to make inroads to delivering the master plan by carrying out preparatory works in order to inform a detailed planning application. This work has only been hindered by the difficult financial circumstances we all find ourselves in, a position, which you will surely appreciate.

Links have also been made with funding bodies capable of supporting the funding requirements of delivering the master plan in the context of the fact that it has been established that the site has played an important role in the development of women's football as Sylvia Gore the first ever England Women's Captain and goal scorer broke through discrimination barriers to play football on KGV Prescott and begin an historical ground-breaking career in Women's Football. This is a unique circumstance to KGV Prescott that should be celebrated, and not consigned to the annals history as another lost memory.

There is now an established Friends Group who are very active in their work to improve the park and have already generated a lot of positive community activity including litter picking and social events. I understand they have written twice to your officers seeking engagement and support for improvement ideas, but their correspondence has not been acknowledged. It would be helpful if you could address this.

So, in fact, your comments in your letter do nothing to explain the selection of KGV Prescott, but in fact provide more evidence that it should never have been selected according to the agreed process. This is notwithstanding the omission of the legal protection of the site, covered below.



## 6. Fields in Trust protection and charitable status

### **KMBC:**

Knowsley Council is aware of the Fields in Trust interest in Brown's Field and has been in communication with that organisation over the status of the site. Further dialogue with Fields in Trust will take place.

### **Prescot Town Council:**

You have not provided an answer to the question the Town Council raised which was about the fact that the legal protection was overlooked and therefore not taken into account in the site selection process, as they had been on other sites. Political decision makers were not aware of this constraint, which is a key factor.

To be clear, Fields in Trust have more than an 'interest', the site is legally protected by Fields in Trust in perpetuity and also has charitable status. Fields in Trust disposal policy clearly states that:

- New replacement land must be provided of an equivalent size, to serve the same catchment area and to be as accessible to the public
- The landowner must apply the proceeds of any sale to provide the replacement land
- Fields in Trust may seek payment of a premium to release the land and Fields in Trusts's costs and professional fees in the matter must be met
- As the site has charitable status, the requirements of the 2011 Charities Act and the Charities regulations 1992 must be followed. This includes the disposal being in the best interests of the Charity - as you'll realise, that's hard to show here.
- Any change must follow a process called a 'change request', which requires very specific conditions and issues to be addressed, including those related to the views of the local community and users.

Both Fields in Trust and the charity trustees would need to agree to release the site from their protection which is clearly a major constraint that quite simply, you have failed to take into account or provide to decision makers. In our view, in any reasonable, objective assessment this factor and its historical and current status should be more than enough to ensure it was not included in the list of sites proposed for sale.

This is clearly a major omission and process flaw, and our request is that you now take this issue properly into account and work with the Town Council and Fields in Trust to develop a positive way forward for KGV Prescot.

## 7. Access to other parks

### **KMBC:**

With regard to your reference to "one of only two parks", there are a number of other public green spaces in close proximity to Brown's Field, namely:-

- a) Carr Lane Woods and Stadt Moers Park (within a 10-minute walk); and,
- b) Eaton Street Park, Prescot School, Henley Park, KGV Playing Fields (Huyton), Sawpit Park, McGoldrick Park, Huyton Wetlands, Two Butt Playing Fields, Windy Arbour Playing Fields (within a 30-minute walk).

**Prescot Town Council:**

Carr Lane Woods offers a completely different amenity to KGV Prescot and cannot be classed as the same, this is also true for Stadt Mores Park which in truth is more than a 10-minute walk away at 27mins 1.3 miles (as per google directions on foot) and has poor natural surveillance.

Eaton Street Park provides a different amenity to that of KGV Prescot.

Prescot School is not public open space, the facilities are behind locked gates and only available at a cost, as are those at Lord Derby Playing Fields which are in another area outside the Town.

Henley Park (30mins 1.5 miles), Sawpit Park (37mins 1.8 miles), McGoldrick Park (39mins 1.9 miles), Huyton Wetlands is within a 30min walk but is a very different amenity, none of these sites are in 'close' proximity and none offer the same amenity as KGV Prescot.

The fact that other sites exist does not make them viable alternatives, as they are either at capacity or chargeable. KGV Huyton is already full, the Town Council are contacted on a regular basis by teams enquiring about the use of Browns Field as all other sites are at capacity. Facilities at KGV are also chargeable. Browns Field pitches can be used for free. Other sporting hubs at Two Butt Playing Fields and Windy Arbour Playing Fields, are at capacity so do not provide any alternative. Furthermore, none of the alternatives offer the same amenity or are free of charge, which then provides a barrier to healthy activity. Two Butt lane is 37mins/ 1.8 miles away whilst Windy Arbour is 40mins / 1.9 miles away, neither of which are in Prescot and clearly beyond what you consider to be reasonable at more than 30 mins walk. Is it reasonable to expect a group of 10 years olds to walk 2 miles outside their local area for a game of football? The country and particularly the more deprived areas (which Knowsley is) are faced with an obesity epidemic as it is, the erosion of public open space can only contribute further to this.

With the exception of Eaton Street Park all other sites are outside Prescot and not really in safe walking distance for children. Eaton Street or Henley Park do not offer the same provision as Browns Field and the likelihood is that children living close to the other sites are already using them, therefore it is those using Browns Field who are most disadvantaged, would you ask your children to walk two miles to for a game of football?

Unfortunately, residents in Knowsley have deeply ingrained territorial boundaries that mean there is almost no chance of them accessing the other public open spaces outside their own township, many of which do not provide the same amenity as KGV Prescot.

**8. Mitigation at Carr Lane Woods**

**KMBC:**

We are currently assessing the potential for enhancing Carr Lane Woods so that it could provide some of the football and other recreation features currently provided by Brown's Field. The new housing development at Prescot Park will also include new public green space. Any new housing development on Brown's Field would require the re-provision of one hectare (equivalent to one full-size football pitch) of new parkland/play area on the site. In addition, any such new housing development's boundaries would be appropriately landscaped to retain good visual amenity.

**Prescot Town Council:**

Any regular user or visitor to Carr Lane woods would tell us that the development of this natural wooded space in the way you have outlined is completely inappropriate and damaging to its current value in terms of amenity and bio - diversity of the site. This would likely require the removal of many mature trees which provide the specific character of this site and would impact on protected species as highlighted in our second

correspondence of the 28<sup>th</sup> March, which provided a detailed bio diversity report indicating the importance of this site in these terms. This in its own right would be a highly controversial and unpopular proposal, and certainly not one which the Town Council would support as viable mitigation.

## 9. Town Council ownership and ongoing maintenance

### **KMBC:**

The aim of the current proposals is to develop a model which means that the Borough Council no longer has to spend £1.3million per annum on maintaining parks and open spaces. Your suggestion doesn't take us any closer to achieving that objective, and I am unclear why you appear to think that this is a solution to the problem.

### **Prescot Town Council:**

The point here is about exploration of options, rather than the 'Hobsons choice' that was presented at the outset and the option of enabling some green spaces to continue with perfectly feasible, viable and funded arrangements for maintenance could and in our view should have been considered.

The Town and Parish councils across Knowsley have been responsible for the maintenance of leased sites since 2015 when KMBC withdrew its maintenance of all leased sites across the borough and demanded that the provisions of our lease agreements be upheld, in that the Town Councils should shoulder the maintenance burden for all leased sites as the borough council could no longer afford to do so. At that time the conditions of the land leases were enforced under threat of legal action by KMBC. Each of the Town Councils across the borough have indeed taken the financial and contract management responsibility for their respective leased sites. So, when it comes to leased sites KMBC have very little maintenance responsibility and associated cost. Any other view point is simply misinformed and untrue and fact is that none of the leased sites will fall into ruin as they are not maintained by KMBC, in the case of Prescot our leases run until July 2090 some 72 years from now. In our correspondence to you on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2018 we enquired about the cost of maintaining other public open space in Prescot such as Carr Lane Woods, your response states that you did not understand the purpose of this question. Its purpose was to ascertain if the Town Council could work with KMBC to shoulder additional maintenance responsibility therefore reducing the overall annual maintenance costs to KMBC, on that basis can you answer the question? This is the 'direct contribution' you refer to in point 11 below.

## 10. Use of capital receipts

### **KMBC:**

You suggest that the Borough Council should explore alternative funding opportunities, but the only suggestion which you then make in that regard is that the Borough Council should use its own money.

I have explained above why the Borough Council is not in a position financially to sustain the maintenance of the Borough's parks and open spaces. With regard to our capital receipts, a Capital Monitoring Report to our full Council meeting on 7 March 2018 (you can access a copy via our website) confirmed that we do not actually have any unallocated capital receipts. All of our forecast receipts have already been fully allocated to investments

previously agreed including Prescot's Shakespeare North Playhouse, improvements to schools and school playing fields, regeneration of our town centres, and enabling evening economies in Kirkby and Prescot. Indeed, Prescot is already the beneficiary of £40m of investment in and around the town centre. I am sure that you are not calling for us to cancel those investments.

If any additional capital receipts are realised in future years, we will need to direct them towards efficiency and sustainability projects, without which key statutory services will collapse.

**Prescot Town Council:**

Although your response seems to show some surprise at this suggestion, in fact this was not initially the Town Council's, as it was proposed by the Independent Review Panel and then agreed specifically by the Council's Cabinet on 28 November. If the Council has since closed down that opportunity then that is an option to limit the loss of parks and green space that it has chosen to remove, again contrary to the agreed process. Notwithstanding that, over a 15-year period, it should still be feasible to consider the opportunity to use capital receipts to contribute to this challenge. Our suggestion was that particularly in a Prescot context given the optimism and ongoing developments, this can be an option to consider.

You mention the existing planned investment which we are all aware is vital not just to Prescot but to the whole Borough's future prospects. Our position is that rather than seeing KGV Prescot and these important developments as things that have to be traded off against each other as your response intimates, they should be seen as complementary parts of Prescot's regeneration and its future offer as a place, for existing and incoming residents and firms. This is a vision we believe we should all aspire to and which we would like to discuss further, as highlighted in the covering letter.

**11. Proposal that the Town Council buy KGV Prescot for £5m**

**KMBC:**

In terms of alternative funding sources, I note that there is no suggestion in your letter of Prescot Town Council making any direct contribution. I do not see any reason why this should not be considered. We estimate that the total potential housing growth in Prescot in the next five years will be approximately 1,500 Band D properties. This will increase the Town Council's Tax Base significantly, generating significant and completely uncommitted extra precept income for your organisation. This level of increase in the Tax Base, together with a Council Tax precept increase of around 19% (which could be phased), would be sufficient to cover the estimated costs of borrowing £5m (over 50 years) to purchase Brown's Field from Knowsley Council.

Of course, if you were able to make savings in your existing budget, that would assist in either reducing the amount to be borrowed and/or the repayment term, or reducing the necessary precept increase.

The Town Council has a clear opportunity to take action itself to protect Brown's Field and I urge you to consider it. I would be happy to arrange for this Council's officers to assist you in evaluating this idea. Information about borrowing from the Public Works Loans Board can be found on their website.

**Prescot Town Council:**

In your response you state that Prescot Town Council has made no offer of a 'direct contribution'. Given that the entirety of the matter is about the future 'maintenance' of the borough's green spaces, is the Town Council's continued maintenance of KGV Prescot not a contribution to the overall problem of maintaining the borough's green spaces. The Town Council also seek to continue its maintenance obligations at Eaton Street Park a further 'direct contribution' to addressing the overall costs of maintenance across the borough. I am surprised you fail to recognise this as a direct contribution to the problem of maintenance of parks, I'm not sure how else this offer could be perceived.

On Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2018 our Town Clerk attended a meeting with yourself, a number of your cabinet members and senior officers, together with representatives from other Town and Parish Councils across the borough. In that meeting the representatives of the Town Councils were provided with a breakdown of the likely increases to be imposed by KMBC and other precepting authorities, these combined increases totalled 12%. Your cabinet member for resources then suggested that the Town and Parish Council's should exercise restraint when considering it's required precept increase for the year. At this point we think it is also important to point out that this request came after a cut in our funding of 8% imposed by KMBC (who had an option to make this cut over a longer period of time, over three years not two, a consideration the Town Council asked you to make in 2016, therefore lessening the impact on the Town Council's which you choose not to do). This action of asking the Town Council to exercise restraint after imposing an 8% cut in their funding could be seen as somewhat hypocritical, particularly when you decry the cuts you receive and then follow the same course of action by passing them on to others.

Your suggestion that the Town Council should borrow 18 times its current annual budget to purchase a piece of 'protected' publicly owned land is very surprising. The notion that borrowing costs could be met using taxation levied on residents within the town (one part of the borough) is in stark contrast to your request of the Town Council to be mindful of other increases from precepting authorities as per the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2018. The residents of Prescot are also residents of Knowsley so again it surprises us to hear you suggest that they should be further financially disadvantaged by increasing the precept by **19%**.

We the elected members of Prescot Town Council also have serious reservations regarding your calculations for 'potential' 'estimates' for future housing. Anecdotal information received informs us that Prescot Park would now only account for circa 600 properties, as this is by far and away the largest site within the town, we would be very interested to know exactly where you believe the additional 900 properties would be located.

Also as a professional organisation do you really recommend that the Town Council should submit a business case to the Public Works loan board that relies on incomes from 'potential' 'estimated' housing development, I'm sure you realise that this is as close to gambling with the public purse as you can get, how do see the town council meeting the payment requirements should the 'estimated' 'potential' housing not materialise, this does not demonstrate a prudent approach to lending. It is also in stark contrast to KMBC's position on population increase within the town, as the figures you use in relation to the community governance review predict an overall increase in the number of voters to be circa 500 surely an increase of 1,500 properties within the Town would create at least 1,500 more voters even if they are all single individuals. The Town Council would respectfully request a map of the town indicating exactly where these 1,500-band d equivalent properties would be built.

We are also sure you agree that a financial commitment on such a scale would need to be agreed by a referendum, this may not be the case legally, but to commit our residents to repaying a debt over the course of 50 years is likely to be an unheard of action for a Town or Parish Council, particularly as monies raised through sale of the publicly owned would then be used to maintain sites outside the area from which they are derived,

this would also create a situation where it is likely to be perceived as Knowsley Council selling publicly owned land in Prescott to the people of Prescott so that it can spend the money elsewhere, would KMBC cover the cost of such a referendum?

By the same token suggestion have KMBC considered funding the trust through borrowing and taxation? a separate parks taxation would potentially spread the costs of borrowing evenly across the borough and not specifically in one area, containing higher land values?

Given your suggestion that this would be appropriate for Prescott we can only assume you believe this would be appropriate for all Knowsley residents. An annuity loan of £40 million from the public works loan board at 2.94 % would require annual payments of £1,532,044 over the same 50-year period. This figure divided by Knowsley's current band d equivalent of 35,093 would require an additional levy of £43.67 per annum. This figure would obviously reduce as the number of band d equivalent properties across the borough increases. In addition to this any increases in the value of the fund could be used to make early repayment on the principle amount. Any sales of those sites deemed to be of low community value would reduce the overall borrowing requirement with corresponding reduction the tax levy requirement.

Were the Town Council to borrow as you have explained above the additional tax implications would exceed the £43.67 required from a borough wide levy. Discounting 'potential' 'estimated' incomes as has been done in the calculations above the borrowing requirement of £5 million requires an annual repayment of £186,780 which divided amongst the current number of band d equivalent properties 2,957 requires an additional levy of £62.17 per year. Even when taking into account the 'known' new development at Prescott Park (which cannot be fully relied upon until complete and inhabited) the tax levy would still need to be around £52.51 some £9 more than a borough wide levy. These additional levies represent an increase of 78% and 66% on the current precept levied against a band d equivalent property in Prescott (£79.55) and is some way in excess of the 19% you have stated. This proposal places a huge and disproportionate financial burden on residents of Prescott, is this really a course of action you would support, without applying it other areas?

## 12. Alternative proposals - a way forward

### **KMBC:**

The value that Brown's Field offers to the endowment is significant and your proposal is clearly unviable unless Prescott Town Council has a proposal for replacing this value with an alternative source of funding. If you do have a constructive suggestion, please let us know. For example, we can arrange for an independent valuation of the land to take place if the Town Council wishes to acquire the site.

### **Prescot Town Council:**

The Town Council has serious concerns that although KGV Prescott has been included on the list of 17 sites in a way that has not been explained or adequately justified, the Town Council is now being asked to construct the solution to this problem, which is plainly not one of it's making. Therefore, given the shortcomings in your process, your tone and position in seeing the solution to this issue as one the Town Council must produce is one we would ask you to revise.

**However, in light of the current position the conclusion of the Town Council is that we need to find common ground and work together to find a cross - party political way forward here.**

We believe that central to this is the recent information that the Town Clerk provided regarding the development of KGV Prescott as a multi - sports community facility, honouring the memory and achievements of Sylvia Gore MBE. Sylvia's family are also highly engaged and supportive of this approach with the Friends Group for KGV Prescott & Carr Lane Woods. Berkley Junior Football Club, an FA Charter Standard Community club who play at KGV Prescott are also very keen to be at the centre of this development.

This vision includes a Sylvia Gore pavilion, an inspirational venue with space for changing facilities, community cafe and also education and community health provision, for example working on issues such as loneliness and social isolation and mental health. The site would offer facilities for football, cycling, walking and play, including the existing multi use games area.

We see potential for this as thriving local social enterprise, consistent with the intentions of the Independent Panel's review on community engagement. The development could potentially use the existing Masterplan for KGV Prescott as a base.

Our own work to shape this proposal and engagement with expert advisers and stakeholders regarding viability gives us confidence that it is likely to generate investment and support from football and other sports governing bodies and funders. It would also be considered positively by Fields in Trust, subject to Trustee approval.

In the position we are in, which does not seem likely to be easily resolved between us, the Town Council believes that this presents a real 'win – win' opportunity which would enable us to work together to realise this ambition. We are certain that this would make a hugely valuable contribution to Prescott's regeneration as well as creating a significant asset for the Borough.

In this context, the Town Council would be happy to discuss the viability of purchase of KGV Prescott, but at a price that reflects its intended end use, and the leverage of investment into the Borough and social value that such a development would achieve. This approach is a comparable scenario to KMBC's recent sale of land in Kirkby to Liverpool Football Club.

The Town Council is also happy to discuss how through a wider approach to the use of capital receipts and developer contributions this proposal can prevent impact on other areas of Knowsley. This reflects our previous submission that made clear that the Town Council wants to play its part in the achievement of the Borough wide strategic objectives regarding parks and green spaces.