

Whitewebbs Park update

Spurs wants 150 acres of Whitewebbs for £2million over 25years

If you have not seen the latest update on the marketing of Whitewebbs Park you can download it from here. <https://new.enfield.gov.uk/services/leisure-and-culture/whitewebbs-decision-report-leisure-and-culture.pdf>
It sets out the case for accepting the bid from Tottenham Hotspur Ltd which is a wholly owned subsidiary of ENIC, the offshore company that owns Spurs

There are so many reasons for rejecting this bid many of which have been rehearsed before.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Caliskan wants to proceed with the ENIC/Spurs bid and this decision was confirmed at a scrutiny committee meeting.

The reason given for selling off the Park is no longer valid

The initial reason given for privatising / leasing/ selling of Whitewebbs was that the golf course was losing money every year. This is hotly debated but even if we accept the Council's figures the closure of the course in March of this year invalidates the argument.

The site has reverted to open space for the people of Enfield as was envisaged in 1931 when the whole park was purchased and leased to Enfield Urban District Council for 999 years. This happened when the cricket pitch closed.

The park is now not costing any more than other parks and is drawing an income from the lease of Whitewebbs House (Toby Carvery) the mobile Café (£10,000 p.a.) and the social golf club (£10,000 p.a.). These facilities are seriously undervalued. A small London park café earns a rent of £30,000 a year plus

The old golf course offices, storage facilities, yard and car park are lying unused. What could they be earning?

Our Council tells us that it has major financial problems but it has given up large earnings from the golf course in 2021 and is letting ENIC/Spurs have this land at an incredibly low rent. Why?

The Council is seeking to generate income from its parks. The marketing exercise for Whitewebbs was a lengthy and badly managed process. Bids were to be assessed on a range of criteria including financial contribution.

The very low bid from ENIC/Spurs

The bid from ENIC, or Spurs if you prefer, has made the following financial offer:

- A "premium" of **£500,000** with nothing more to pay for 5 years. (This is mostly advance rental, not a premium. At most it is a "premium" of £125,000)
- An annual rent of **£75,000** a year for the remaining 20 years.

The total amount payable for a 25 year lease is **£2million pounds**.

The proposals are that the £500,000 will be used to repair and extend the bridleways and set up cycle tracks. There are already 4 kilometres of bridleway and just repairing the fencing would cost £200,000 or more. Repairing the surface and adding 3kms would be very expensive, leaving little for other purposes. There is no commitment to repairing footpaths, used by the vast majority of park visitors merely a statement that they would be maintained to at least the current condition i.e. muddy and uneven.

*"If these proposals are approved we will use the rental income to reinvest an extra **£100,000** a year into grassroots sport for young people across the borough."*

Cllr Caliskan

ENIC /Spurs will repair the short section of bridleway which forms the northern boundary of their pitch area

How can an average income of £80,000 a year provide £100,000 a year for sports coaching AND maintain the park?

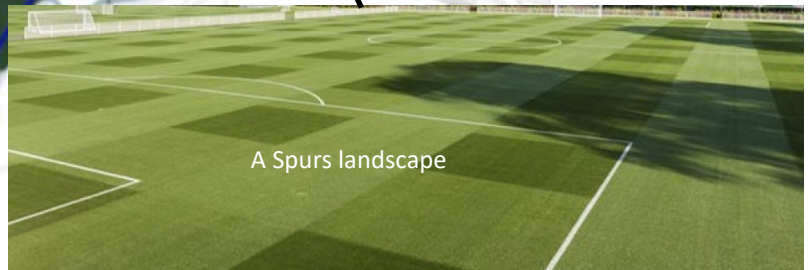
Please note Part 2 report is now confidential appendix.

London Borough of Enfield
Portfolio Report
Date: 30 September 2021
Report of: Mark Bradbury – Director of Property & Economy
Subject: Leasing of Whitewebbs Park Golf Course
Cabinet Member: Cllr Caliskan – Leader of the Council
Executive Director: Sarah Cary - Place
Ward: Chase
Key Decision: KD5177

Purpose of Report

1. This report details the marketing and evaluation process for the leasing of Whitewebbs Park and Golf Course (WPGC) and proposes the approval of an Agreement for Lease to the preferred bidder Tottenham Hotspur Ltd (THL) and subject to planning, grant of Lease.

What will ENIC / Spurs get for their £80,000 a year?



Control of all the land to the right of the red line including all the main entrance points. —

1 and 3 remain under the control of the Council

Area 2 which appears to be the southern part of the golf course will be open to public access with grass pathways cut through it. This has been made explicit in the recent document. (but for how long will this be enforced?)

Area 4 will contain the buildings and the football pitches for the training ground both Astroturf (all plastic) and hybrid (turf and plastic)

It is not clear as to what will happen to the area around the lake.

What has ENIC / Spurs committed to do for the park?

1. Restore the southern part of the golf course to 19th Century parkland and plant some trees.

It would appear that this work has been done already but not by any action of the Council or ENIC



Grasses and wild flowers on the golf course

What do we get? —remember the land was bought as open space for the people of Enfield back in 1931

- We lose access to a significant part of the land bought for the people of Enfield as open space in 1931.
- Uncertainty about future access unless the lease is rock solid and enforced by the Council for the next 25 years. There is little evidence of this Council having done any such enforcement in past years.
- We might get a better café and toilets. (Subject to planning permission)
- The Council suggests that we might get a visitor centre but ENIC/Spurs make no mention of this in their document.
- There might be improvements to the bridleway – fencing, surface, extension and some cycle tracks. That would take care of most of the £500,000 premium. (This “premium” seems to be instead of paying rent for the first five years with an extra £125,000 thrown in, but spending this on capital projects will leave nothing for maintenance)
- There is no promise of footpath improvement, just that paths would be kept at the present level as a minimum.

The promises about rewilding and tree planting appear to have come from people who have no knowledge of the park. The area along Cuffley Brook has, through benign neglect over decades, rewilded itself with trees, grasses, wild flowers animal and birdlife. In the period since March of 2021 the golf course has shown its underlying diversity. Many species of grass abound as do wildflowers. It is a hunting ground for birds of prey and bats. Trees of many types populate the course. Unfortunately the Council has allowed Cuffley Brook to become choked with Himalayan Balsam

These are the areas along Cuffley Brook that are to be “rewilded” by planting trees. A wide variety of trees, mostly native—oaks, sycamores, willows, blackthorn, hawthorn, maples, ash, holly and many others are already present in large numbers.



Natural rewilding along Cuffley Brook



The briefing document from the Council is a mish mash of previous papers and it perpetuates the misrepresentations that have been issued over the last two years.

The whole marketing process was ill-conceived and badly executed. I draw your attention to para 84.

84. As previously experienced through the marketing exercise there may be misunderstanding regarding the future of the site. A detailed communications plan will be agreed between THL and the Council, to ensure the future plans for the site are accurately and widely publicised.

This is Council speak for “We made a complete mess of the process but will continue to avoid any meaningful consultation with park users and the real owners of the land”

The Financial aspect

The Council and its senior officers have by design, by mistake or by a lack of competence sold off public land at a tiny fraction of what it is worth to the purchaser.

Will it generate useful income for the borough—no. At best it might cover some maintenance costs for the park provided that no major capital improvements are made. Building proper cycle tracks and additional bridleways will add to maintenance costs. Fences last about ten years and paths need repair. We should also factor in that Cllr Caliskan has stated that the rental income (averaged out at £80,000 a year) will be used “*to reinvest an extra £100,000 a year into grassroots sport for young people across the borough.*”

At best then this deal will result in an annual deficit of £20,000 if Cllr Caliskan is to be believed.

On the other hand it is an enormous **council subsidy** for a multi billion dollar offshore corporation

What could have happened

It is difficult to be certain as the Council has withheld the promised information about the final bidders.

Bidder A scored very highly on everything except the rental offer. As we have seen the actual rental offered is such a pathetically small amount that it loses its significance. The proposed use of Whitewebbs for rewilding, educational, livestock and community use is probably nearer to what most people would prefer (provided that it wasn’t just turned into an enormous grazing area). Much of the work would have been done by students on land management, arboricultural and livestock courses – roughly equivalent in value to the rental offered by ENIC/Spurs.

With the closure of the golf course and using the resources of the site the Council could have gained a much higher income just by adopting a businesslike approach to the existing facilities.

Café and community facilities – using a 25 year lease an enterprising business could provide these in Beggars Hollow and pay a substantial rental which would contribute to the upkeep of the park.

Redundant buildings and facilities – the old golf course offices, yard, storage facilities and parking area are available and could be leased out as business units and offices without damaging the landscape. This too would raise a substantial income for running the park.

Don’t forget that the Toby Carvery should be making a substantial payment to the Council every year and that is part of the Whitewebbs Park Estate—how much, and where does the money go?.

In short—a bad deal for the environment, the users of the park and for the people of Enfield. A fantastic deal for ENIC.

Whitewebbs Park - a summary of what has happened so far

1. A sporting activity that could be enjoyed by everyone of all ages is being replaced by a professional sporting activity limited to a narrow age range and one gender.
2. The bidder (The company that owns Spurs) is providing one recreational activity, football. There is no commitment to provide anything else.
3. The bidder has no experience of running an open space or park for the general public.
4. The land was bought for the people of Enfield 90 years ago as open space for recreation and leisure. The notion that we need public space, nature and clean air is not new. It has been around since the 1850s when cities began to grow ever larger.
5. The 1931 plan made some provision for sports facilities—tennis and cricket but if these were no longer needed the land would revert to open space (as has happened—older residents may remember the cricket pitch). The same thinking applied to the public golf course which was set up to help with the costs of maintaining the park but would go back to open space if no longer needed.
6. The Councillors are the custodians of our parks, not the owners. We are the owners.
7. The Council failed to think of the park as a whole and imposed a doomed business model on the golf course and park facilities.
8. The current marketing plan has been a disaster from the outset. Misleading and confusing information from the Council and its agents, abysmal communication with the community and confusion about the objectives.
9. The principal reason given for marketing was that the course was losing money (debatable and hotly contested by many). The course was closed before the marketing process reached the end of its first stage. It was no longer losing money, therefore there was no need to proceed further. The whole park is currently open space again, as per the 1931 lease and is very busy.
10. Remember, the Café, the Social Golf Club building (nothing to do with running the golf course) and the Toby Carvery are paying rental to the Council. They are all part of Whitewebbs Park and income from them will cover park running costs. The small café and the club house each pay £10,000 a year, so think what the Toby Carvery should be paying. The now redundant golf course buildings, yard, car park and storage buildings should provide a substantial rental if leased out - £100,000 + ??.
11. Our Council wants to let a huge offshore corporations have the park for practically nothing. WHY?
12. We are continually told that Enfield is underfunded so why is a large part of our park being rented out for an annual rent that will just cover the annual allowances of 5 or 6 councillors? (or the weekly pay of their Spurs 11th best paid player)
13. The land is worth a fortune to ENIC/Spurs—right next to their existing ground, they will save on labour, machinery, administration and many other costs. There is substantial scope for further developments on the land they will lease.
14. ENIC/Spurs will spend a fortune on construction work destroying the landscape. They will cover meadowland with astroturf and with plastic reinforced hybrid grass pitches and plant a few wildflowers as a token gesture.
15. For their £2million over 25 years they will control 150 acres of the park and all the entrances and car parks.
16. ENIC/Spurs will probably cover most if not all of their rent by sub leasing the café and the golf club house building to caterers.
17. ENIC/Spurs obligations— allow us to walk on some of the grass we own and cut a path or two through the grass from time to time. They will restore a small part of the bridleway which happens to be their northern boundary. Plant a packet or two of wildflower seeds around the plastic pitches That's all.
18. We might get a better café, we can walk on some of the grass we own, we might be allowed to park for free (or for a charge). We may or may not have access to the lake area.
19. The Council has made some very vague statements about what will happen which seem to have come from people who know nothing about the park. E.g. Rewilding areas that have already rewilded naturally.
20. The Council leader and officers think that the average of £80,000 a year rent is going to go a long way—the bridleway will be repaired and extended by 3 kms (there are 4kms already), cycle tracks will be constructed and the rental will allow the council to spend £100,000 a year on sports coaching across the borough (something wrong with the maths there) The maths and the priorities are very odd
21. This is a great deal for ENIC/Spurs but for the community, park users, the environment and the people of Enfield it is a disgrace. Our Council leaders and senior officers have devised and presided over a scheme that damages the environment, fails the community and delivers no net financial benefit to the residents of Enfield. Had our Council and senior officers been working directly for ENIC Spurs they could not have provided them with a better deal. Unfortunately they should have been working for us.

The Council has decided to go ahead with the bid. We are now waiting for planning proposals from ENIC / Spurs