



Five Acres – Project update

3rd June 2021

In March the Council provided an update on the Five Acres project which has been seeking to identify viable financial options to provide sport, leisure and community focussed development on the derelict site.

Previous soft market testing commissioned in September 2020 showed that the Covid-19 pandemic was affecting commercial interest in the site and the Council has therefore been working on options for phasing development, with site clearance and some leisure and community development in phase one and then larger scale development longer term when the economy recovers.

Earlier this year the Council undertook a feasibility study to consider reuse of the Speedwell House building at Five Acres. This curved brick built structure is newer than the majority of the buildings on site and provides the opportunity to convert and enhance an existing building to provide gym and exercise space, flexible rooms for multiple community uses and some commercial office space over three floors.

With the launch in March of the Levelling Up Fund nationally the Council sought expressions of interest from community groups, businesses and from within its own portfolio for projects which would contribute to heritage and culture, community wellbeing, the economy, education, environment or transport infrastructure within the Forest. The Five Acres project was shortlisted alongside projects from Hartpury College/University and Cinderford Town Council and will be considered by Cabinet in June for inclusion as a multiple project bid for Levelling Up Funding.

If successful the Levelling Up Fund bid would enable the Council to collaborate with West Dean Parish Council and Hartpury to convert the Speedwell House building to create a new community leisure hub, a Hartpury outreach Learning Centre, a new build four court sports hall, a 3G artificial sports pitch and we are also exploring a new eco hotel as a future phase tailored to sports teams and visitors to the area taking part in outdoor pursuits within the Forest of Dean & Wye Valley, all delivered at Five Acres. There would be a strong focus on carbon zero development and the provision of electric vehicle charging points and Ebike charging points to encourage more sustainable modes of transport.

However the outcome of the bid will not be known until the Autumn so the Council will be taking decisions in June and July to proceed with the purchase of the site and to allocate funding, based on a default position in case the bid is not successful. If agreed the Council would acquire the site from Homes England and demolish all the existing buildings, with the exception of Speedwell House which would be converted for leisure and community use.

The remainder of the site would be developed with further leisure and sports facilities and commercial development in the future once other funding can be secured or when the economy recovers and there is greater commercial interest in the site.

Should the site acquisition be agreed the Council will finalise the agreement with Homes England, who currently own the site, in late Summer and seek to commence demolition before the end of the calendar year. A Prior Notice of Demolition planning application was submitted on 1st June and this will be determined by the District Council as the local planning authority over the coming months. Detailed proposals setting out the plans for the site would be prepared and the local community consulted prior to a Planning Application being submitted for redevelopment.

An announcement will be made by the Council once a decision is reached on purchasing the site in July.