Meeting with Bidwells

Date: 5th October 2020

Time: 11:00

Venue: Virtually by Zoom

Attendees: Giles Dobson – Bidwells

Jack Hawkesworth – Bidwells

Brian Cox – Save Great Denham Golf Course and Urban Gap Group

Jim Weir - Ward Cllr

The meeting started with a statement from Jim Weir regarding the understanding that Bidwells were acting in their client’s best interests and confidentiality was of course understood. Both Brian and I understood as having extensive experience in business and how objectives for clients had to be constantly reviewed and returns maximised. Indeed, Brain knew more than most as the Managing Director of a £3billion turnover UK organisation serving a global market. It was agreed that all adversarial communications of the past be put to one side and a more in-depth look at wider and broader options in a spirt of mutuality.

Brian then made the point at some length and depth that it would really help the community understand why the actions were being taken if more transparency could be given as to why the offer of an alternative operation to run the golf course had not been debated or engaged with fully.

Giles explained that landowners in these uncertain times want to avoid as much as possible a single income stream and therefore the more diverse the portfolio the more secure income levels would be. Jim explained that was fully understood and was indeed a sound business practice. However, what we had to consider was not just a bottom line, or secure income streams, as representatives of the community but the wellbeing and vitality of the community.

Giles went on to explain in some detail the various operations that the land could be expected to provide. We all know of the planned nursery option for the club house. We all know of the purpose to turn the Greenkeepers Compound into a business base for one or more operations. Strip grazing of sheep within moveable electric fence arrangement was another. Also mentioned was the opportunity for some land to become a community facility – which could generate income under the Governments “public money for public good”. Subsidies are also available for land left as open public space, although the detail for this is not yet available.

Brain and I then asked them to consider some options we could put forward that could provide and match any income levels that could be achieved. They asked us to list the options and explain how they might work

* + Keep the golf course and lease to a not for profit operation at a lease rental that maximises and matches income you could derive from other uses
  + Sell all the land and buildings to a community charity
  + Sell all the land and lease the buildings to a community charity
  + Sell half the land (comprising holes 1,2,3,4,8,9,10,11,16,17,18, and buildings to a community charity
  + Lease half the land and buildings (comprising holes as above)

Brian then went on to explain how income generation might work through a not for profit charity with perhaps some subsidised aspects from sections of the community. Giles explained that our offerings on the first option would land them back in the same place as now and therefore no diversification. This being the case would not be considered. They did however think there may be a slim possibility that the last two options may have merit. It was suggested that they would still want the club house as this would meet their diversification objective and suggested that we may wish to consider building another. We also discussed the possibility of leasing a small part of the building alongside the nursery option.

Obviously, this has still to be digested by Bidwells and related to their clients. Brian and I stated we would flesh out these options in more detail and send to them. Giles explained he didn’t want to raise any false hope but would look at what we proposed seriously.

We then talked about the community facility in more detail and discussed the various options. Brian did point out that this could still fit quite comfortably with a couple of the options we put forward.

In the hiatus that would follow closure, even supposing that any of our proposal would be taken up, it would take weeks if not months to put in place, so the conversation then switched to concern regarding security. Jack stated he was in discussion with security consultants and was himself visiting the site on Tuesday (tomorrow). Some form of barricade would be in place to close off the club house car park and perhaps bunds and concrete blocks and barriers around strategic parts of the course.

Meeting Closed 11:45.