

WHPC Meeting: Extraordinary Meeting 19<sup>th</sup> March 2025

Agenda Item 25/123

Title: Proposed Purchase of Land at Higher Metcombe

### **Purpose**

For the Parish Council to consider submitting a bid to purchase some land for sale at Higher Metcombe.

### **Background**

Since its inception, West Hill Parish Council has been keen to procure some open space land for recreational purposes for the residents of West Hill. Amongst potential uses of such land could be:-

- Playing field for the West Hill Wasps junior football team and other possible users.
- A dog walking area.
- A community orchard.
- An Adventure Playground
- Community events
- Any other uses that the community may consider to be beneficial.

There have been few opportunities to buy suitable land. Most land that has become available in West Hill has been prioritised for housing development or is unsuitable for the recreational purposes envisaged by WHPC.

A site in Higher Metcombe has become available for sale. The site is 5.9 acres of reasonably flat land currently used for agricultural purposes and the owners are inviting interested parties to submit bids in excess of £60,000. Whilst the site is not ideally located, being at the extreme southern end of the village and not within easy walking or cycling reach of most of the village, it is the only realistically suitable and available area of land that is currently available to purchase.

The Council is therefore requested to consider whether to submit a bid to purchase the land. The closing date for submission of bids is Midday Friday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

### **For Consideration**

At the ordinary meeting of the Council on 4<sup>th</sup> March the Council was advised that the Council has powers to procure land and has the financial resources to submit a bid in accordance with the conditions in the invitation to tender.

The Council acknowledged that as a Public Authority proposing to spend a substantial sum of public money on such a purchase it is essential to demonstrate due diligence before submitting a bid. The due diligence should include amongst other factors:-

- A professional valuation of the land
- A local authority search to identify any encumbrance on the land and any restrictions on future use
- A desire on the part of the community to make such a purchase
- Community consultation regarding the future use of the land

- Consideration of potential future costs.

The Council agreed that the Finance Working Group should progress the due diligence investigations and approved expenditure for professional fees. The Council in confidential session also discussed the financial resources available to the Council and the value of a bid that could be submitted.

The very tight timescales and the need for the Parish Council to approve submission of a valid bid have been problematical. There has not been sufficient time to organise a formal public consultation about the procurement of the land but there has historically been considerable expression of public desire to have some recreational space for the village. The procurement of land at a price near the valuation price is low risk as the land could be resold if a future public consultation determined that the land is not wanted by the village residents. Missing such a rare chance to submit a bid to buy suitable land however would be a missed opportunity and therefore the balance of risk is such that the Council should consider whether taking this risk is justified.

In order to carry out other elements of the essential due diligence the Finance Working Group requested a surveyor to carry out a valuation of the land and also requested our solicitors to carry out local authority searches. The results of these investigations will be reported to the Council at the extraordinary meeting.

### **For Decision**

The Council has already been advised that the procurement of such land is within its powers and that the Council has the financial resources to submit a compliant bid. The Council now is requested to consider in the light of the investigations into the land value and the searches:-

1. Whether the valuation affects the value of the possible bid discussed in confidential session at the ordinary meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> March.
2. Whether the results of the land searches should prevent the Council from submitting a bid for the land.
3. Whether, in the absence of a formal public consultation, the balance of risk is such that the Council should submit a bid for the land.
4. Whether to submit a bid and whether any conditions should be attached.

### **Next Steps**

If a bid is submitted and is successful a formal public consultation should be undertaken to determine the use of the recreational land.

F Pullman  
Chairman WHPC  
12<sup>th</sup> March 2025