



**Cabinet**

**Tuesday, 8 February 2022**

**Edwalton Golf Course Strategic Review**

## **Report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services**

### **Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Business and Growth, Councillor A Edyvean**

#### **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1. This report provides an update from the previous report to Cabinet in March 2021 on Edwalton Golf Course (EGC) and recommends a way forward for what is a significant asset for the Council.
- 1.2. In March 2021, Cabinet resolved to acknowledge the feedback from the Communities Scrutiny Group, which included that the endorsement of a golfing need at EGC be accepted; and the utilisation of £0.05m of 2020/21 project in-year budget efficiencies be allocated to undertake further detailed technical risk assessments of the site, and thereafter a further £0.25m for further master planning work, assuming the risks identified are not prohibitive so that a realistic and deliverable masterplan can be achieved for the site.

#### **2. Recommendation**

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:

- a) acknowledges the detailed technical assessments that have been undertaken for the par 3 course which conclude that the site could represent a good option for residential development subject to planning, although Cabinet direction is that it is retained at the present time as an important community facility;
- b) acknowledges that there is likely to be sufficient housing supply in Rushcliffe to 2038 without the need to allocate this site within the Greater Nottinghamshire Strategic Plan but that it be included in a pipeline of potential sites for future consideration as part of the Local Plan process should the requirement for further sites arise, to be considered concurrently with the site as a community facility;
- c) endorses further detailed design assessments for the driving range business case over the next period to establish if a standalone driving range could be delivered to provide a betterment to the golfing offer on site; and

- d) explores opportunities for ecological improvements and bio-diversity net gain on the main 9-hole course through improvement management and partnership working in line with the Council Climate Change Strategy objectives.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendation**

To ensure that the Council's EGC asset continues to deliver maximum value for money for taxpayers across the Borough, whilst providing appropriate community infrastructure and the right level of leisure provision.

### **4. Supporting Information**

#### **Technical Assessments**

- 4.1. Following Cabinet approval to undertaken detailed technical assessments of the EGC site in line with the Knight Kavanagh and Page (KKP) recommendations, officers procured several technical assessments of the current par 3 course to better understand the opportunities and constraints of the site for potential redevelopment.
- 4.2. The technical assessments provided input on the landscape, flooding and drainage, highways and transport, ecology, and topography of the par 3 course to provide a high-level indicative masterplan.
- 4.3. The masterplan identified that given its location and proximity to services, the site was featured in the Nottinghamshire Strategic Plan Growth Options Document as a "Potential Development Site" under reference R11.1 and was confirmed to be both "Suitable" for development and a "potential area for strategic growth" by the accompanying Growth Options Study conducted by AECOM. As a result, Rushcliffe Borough Council submitted representations to the Growth Options Consultation promoting the site for residential use in March 2021.
- 4.4. The technical assessments exercise identified a number of potential constraints within the par 3 site which include the presence of a number of trees and vegetation, overhead electricity cables and Gamston Brook, which cuts through the centre of the site. These reports have confirmed that the site is within Flood Risk Zone 1 and will not affect statutorily designated sites from an ecological perspective – options to underground the electricity cables is also a possibility.
- 4.5. The Highways Report has confirmed that "there are no known transportation or highways concerns as to why development could not be supported within the Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan" whilst the Landscape Report states that due to the site being "already developed", the proposed development will only have a "minimal effect" on the wider landscape character".
- 4.6. The site, therefore, is considered to represent a good option for residential development from a planning perspective and could be included in a pipeline

of potential sites for future consideration as part of the Local Plan process should the requirement for further sites arise.

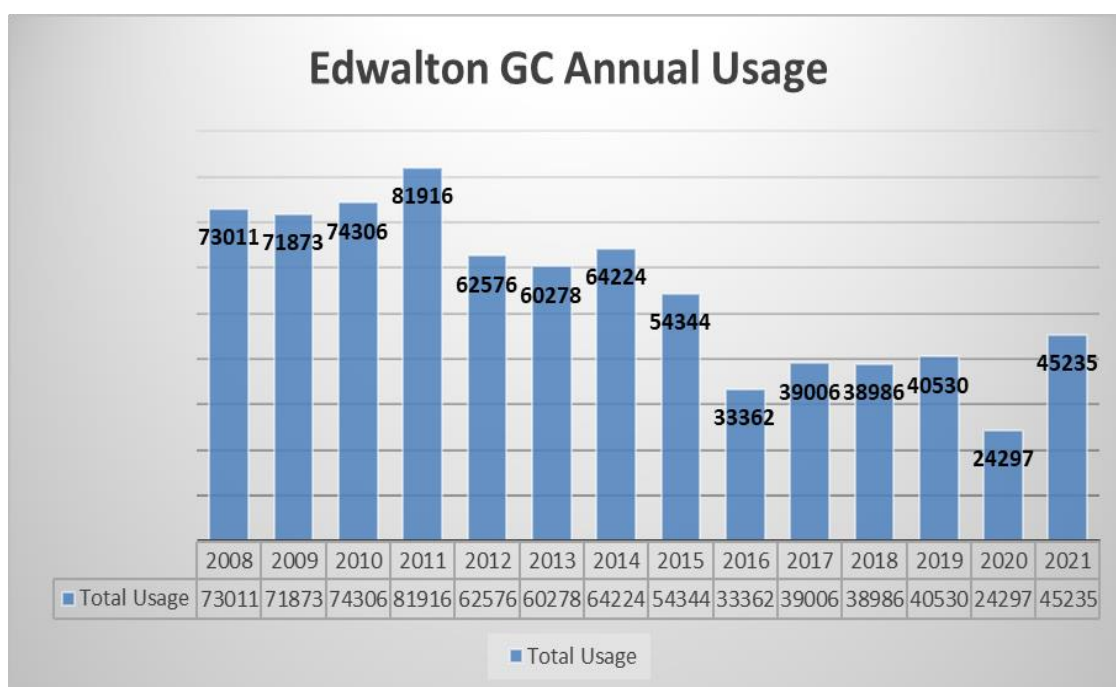
### **Planning Implications**

- 4.7. In the current adopted Local Plan, the EGC site is “safeguarded” – not allocated for housing but could become available in the future if it was required to meet Rushcliffe’s housing allocation.
- 4.8. The Council is one of four authorities currently preparing the Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan, which will cover the period to 2038 and will, within Rushcliffe, replace the 2014 Rushcliffe Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy. It is expected that based on current housing needs there is likely to be sufficient housing land supply to meet requirements to 2038 without the need to allocate this or other sites within the Strategic Plan (subject to major housing allocations being delivered such as at Fairham and Gamston).
- 4.9. Whilst this is the latest position, the requirement for new housing land will change over time and new sites are likely to be needed in the future. Given its existing “safeguarded” designation, there is merit in the site continuing as a potential housing site option for future consideration as part of the Local Plan process should the requirement for further sites arise.

### **Golf Usage**

- 4.10. In March 2021, Cabinet endorsed the feedback from the Communities Scrutiny Group which included the endorsement of a golfing need at EGC. This was considering the KKP needs assessment and particularly in relation to the 9-hole main course demand.
- 4.11. Whilst the needs assessment suggested that the facility should be retained in some form the golf course has been running at a significant loss (around £44k on average over the three-year period 2017-2019). This is despite many initiatives including improvements to the clubhouse facilities, enhanced marketing and events, signage, and investment in the golf simulator. Pre-Covid usage had been declining for several years.
- 4.12. However, since the easing of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions there has been a rise in golf participation at EGC (and across the country) with many clubs seeing people return to the sport in addition to new participants. This was further aided by golf being one of the first sports to be allowed to be played when ‘lockdown’ restrictions were eased. The table below shows the decline in golf at EGC over the period and the recent increase since the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Table 1: Edwalton Golf Centre Usage**



- 4.13. The recent increase in participation has also seen an improvement in the financial losses from the site and the £44k on average losses over the previous three years period has decreased with the course now broadly breaking even.
- 4.14. It is noted that the increases in golf participation and revenue position have come about via an extraordinary set of circumstances and it is not yet known whether this will be a positive legacy as a result of Covid. It does have the potential to retain, and increase the number of users, providing facilities improve and there is a high-quality golf offer.

**Driving Range**

- 4.15. The KKP Feasibility Study identified a new 15-20 bay modern driving range would enhance the golfing offer on the site and should also raise the profile of the retained 9-hole standard course if the par 3 Course was to be redeveloped.
- 4.16. If the redevelopment of the par 3 site is not to be progressed there remains the opportunity to develop the driving range feasibility findings to detailed design stage. This will establish if the driving range element could be delivered within a remodelled par 3; to provide a betterment to the golfing offer on site and to further improve the revenue position and future viability of the site. Further due diligence regarding the financial case will also be undertaken to introduce a much improved and complimentary driving range to the existing golf offer. This work has been delayed due to a lack of availability of consultants.

## **Ecology and Biodiversity**

- 4.17. The main 9-hole course includes several features of ecological value including established woodland, ruderal habitats, and scrub within the 'rough', especially to the west of the site adjacent to the churchyard of Church of the Holy Rood, Edwalton, three ponds supporting populations of Great Crested Newts are also present and remnant ridge and furrow features.
- 4.18. The Golf Club Committee members with the support of the Wildlife Trust and the operators Glendale have indicated their desire to undertake projects such as woodland diversification and enhancement, rough enhancement, rewilding, and pond management which all would add ecological value and biodiversity net gain and should be developed as part of an Ecological Management Plan in line with the Council's Climate Change Strategy objective.

## **5. Alternative options considered and reasons for rejection**

- 5.1 The Council could undertake to do nothing further with the site and retain the status quo. This is rejected as further work would indicate other options will provide better value for money for Rushcliffe residents.
- 5.2 The Council could dispose of the par 3 course for housing – this is rejected as currently there is no housing need.
- 5.3 The Council could re-wild all aspects of the course, in doing so, under current planning regulations, this may prohibit any future housing development and effectively writing a potential future significant capital receipt. Furthermore, it will cost more to maintain the site and any further loss of the course could result in a worsening of the golfing offer.

## **6. Risks and Uncertainties**

The Council could submit the site for consideration as part of the Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan Consultation but given that there is likely to be sufficient housing supply in Rushcliffe to 2038 without the need to allocate this site it would likely be rejected and, therefore, would not be a prudent use of Council resources at this time.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1. Financial Implications**

- 7.1.1. There remains £20k of the £50k original budget for the technical risk assessment, which can be utilised for further due diligence work and the business case in relation to the driving range at approximately £5k, the remaining underspend in 2021/22 would be allocated to re-wilding at £5k per annum over the next three years.
- 7.1.2. The £0.25m allocated for further master plan work of the site is no longer required and will increase the Council's 2021/22 revenue

budget efficiencies. It should also be noted that the potential net-capital receipt from developing the par 3 part of the site is estimated at £10m.

## 7.2 Legal Implications

There are no immediate legal implications arising. Future changes of use for the site/development will be subject to planning approval.

## 7.3 Equalities Implications

No equalities implications at this stage but any review would consider the equality and diversity requirements of the residents of the Borough.

## 7.4 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

There are no immediate Section 17 implications at this stage.

## 8. Link to Corporate Priorities

Quality of Life	EGC is an underutilised asset and changes to its use is likely to improve the quality of life.
Efficient Services	Currently EGC is at best breaking even and in the recent past loss making and therefore effectively subsidised by the existing leisure contract and is an inefficient use of Council resources. Future plans for the site should look to address this.
Sustainable Growth	Potential alternative use of EGC should be considered in the context of the growing size of population of the borough and its leisure needs
The Environment	It is accepted that EGC is a large green space and a 'lung' within Rushcliffe. Any alternative use of the asset will have to sensibly consider environmental issues. Opportunities for ecological enhancement should be incorporated in the future management of the site in line with the Council's Climate Change Strategy commitments

## 9. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:

- a) acknowledges the detailed technical assessments that have been undertaken for the par 3 course which conclude that the site could represent a good option for residential development subject to planning, although Cabinet direction is that it is retained at the present time as an important community facility;
- b) acknowledges that there is likely to be sufficient housing supply in Rushcliffe to 2038 without the need to allocate this site within the Greater Nottinghamshire Strategic Plan but that it be included in a pipeline of

potential sites for future consideration as part of the Local Plan process should the requirement for further sites arise, to be considered concurrently with the site as a community facility;

- c) endorses further detailed design assessments for the driving range business case over the next period to establish if a standalone driving range could be delivered to provide a betterment to the golfing offer on site; and
- d) explores opportunities for ecological improvements and bio-diversity net gain on the main 9-hole course through improvement management and partnership working in line with the Council Climate Change strategy objectives.

<b>For more information contact:</b>	Peter Linfield Executive Manager - Finance and Corporate Services Tel: 0115 9148439 plinfield@rushcliffe.gov.uk
<b>Background papers available for Inspection:</b>	Cabinet Report 9 March 2021 - Edwalton Golf Course Strategic Review  Communities Scrutiny Group Report 28 January 2021- Edwalton Golf Course Strategic Review  Cabinet Report 14 January 2020 Edwalton Gold Course Update  Cabinet Report 13 June 2017 – Concluding Report of the Edwalton Golf Course Strategic Asset Review Member Group
<b>List of appendices:</b>	