



## Highworth golf course options to be discussed by councillors

Members of Swindon Borough Council's Cabinet will be asked to approve that further work is carried out on a proposal which could see part of a former pitch and putt golf course in Highworth earmarked for up to 700 homes, as many as half of which could be affordable.

In addition to housing, the proposed scheme would devote almost 60 per cent of the entire site, or 23.8 hectares, to open space, including 18.8 hectares (46 per cent) that would be retained as a publicly-accessible nature reserve/parkland. The remaining 5.07ha would be reserved as open space to complement the development, which would include children's and teenage play areas, outdoor sports facilities, general recreational areas, and allotments.

The proposal is one of three options for the former nine-hole Highworth Golf Centre that will be put before the Council's Cabinet at its meeting next Wednesday (4 June).

However, no final decision on the future of the site will be taken if councillors decide to proceed with the recommended proposal as council officers would be tasked with taking forward pre-application discussions to understand if planning could be supported to deliver a scheme.

The first option explores turning the site into a country park or nature reserve and a report from an environmental consultant has been produced, which takes into account a detailed business proposal produced by Highworth Town Council in partnership with the local community, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, the National Trust and Swindon Community Forest.

The second and third options focus on developing housing schemes on part of the site which would deliver 400 and 700 homes, respectively, and build on the proposals produced by Highworth Town Council to establish a nature reserve for the remainder of the site. Both housing options would seek an affordable housing provision of up to 50 per cent.

Council officers are recommending Cabinet approve the option with the 700 homes because it provides the maximum potential financial return for all Swindon Borough Council taxpayers, while also providing the greatest number of much-needed affordable homes, and delivering the most homes for local people.

The Council's Cabinet agreed in July last year to carry out a detailed options appraisal for the site after councillors opted not to support a motion which called for the land to be designated as the Borough's sixth country park, while also being transferred to Highworth

Town Council for £1, as it would not meet the Council's obligation to achieve best considerations under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Councillors asked council officers to ensure all the options reflected the Council's three missions to build a fairer, better and greener Swindon and the Council's duty to Swindon residents to achieve best value and best consideration as part of its decision making.

Since that time, the Council has engaged with Highworth Town Council and specialist environmental and master planning consultants to develop the three options requested by Cabinet.

Councillor Kevin Small, Swindon Borough Council's Cabinet Member for Finance, said: "It is almost a year since we asked officers to carry out a detailed options appraisal of the former golf course and we've taken our time because this is an important decision on a popular Borough-owned asset.

"Over the last year we have held workshops and meetings with the Town Council as representatives of the local community, to fully consider its own business proposal and to ensure it was reflected in the first option to turn the land into a nature reserve.

"I know that asking my Cabinet colleagues to support taking the proposal for the larger housing scheme to the next stage will be unpopular for those who regularly use the old golf course, but the Council's extremely challenging financial position means we have to ensure we make a decision that is in the best interests of all the Borough's council taxpayers, while continuing to deliver frontline services to support the most vulnerable residents in Swindon.

"If the housing option can be taken forward, it will also provide hundreds of much-needed homes for local residents. a significant percentage of which would be affordable."

Details of the proposals being considered by councillors are available [on the Council's website](#).

Next Wednesday's (4 June) Cabinet meeting will be shown live on the Council's YouTube channel.

ENDS

**Notes to editors:**

**Picture:** the entrance to the former Highworth Golf Centre, which closed in 2019

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