

CABINET

7 MARCH 2017

TRANSFER OF COUNTRYSIDE RANGER SERVICE TO MEDWAY NORSE

Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Howard Doe, Deputy Leader and Housing and Community Services Councillor Adrian Gulvin, Resources
Report from:	Richard Hicks, Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation
Author:	Tim England, Head of Safer Communities and Greenspaces

Summary

This report recommends the transfer of the Countryside Ranger Service, to the Council's joint venture company, Medway Norse, to enable the service to achieve savings and service efficiencies.

The report will also provide details of a proposal to dispose of the grounds maintenance depot adjacent to the Howard School, Rainham. This will arise as a result of Medway Norse moving being able to utilise existing facilities at Capstone Country Park. This report seeks delegated authority for officers to dispose of Howard School Yard, which is Council-owned.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 Cabinet agreed the establishment of the Medway Norse joint venture company at its meeting on 12 March 2013. In approving the establishment of the joint venture, Cabinet agreed to the principle of adding further facilities management (FM) services, subject to agreeing a business case for such additions. The scope of the Medway Norse Joint Venture has, over time, with the agreement of Cabinet and Norse Commercial Services, extended well beyond FM to a range of other blue collar services, including grounds maintenance, transport and waste facilities. The approval of transfer of relevant services to the joint venture remains a matter for Cabinet.
- 1.2 As the consideration payable to the Council for the disposal of the depot is likely to be over £100,000, this is a matter for Cabinet.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Greenspaces Urban Ranger function was transferred to Medway Norse in October 2016.
- 2.2 The management of Medway's two country parks and countryside estate, including Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) is overseen by the Countryside Ranger Service, with directly employed staff. However, the majority of the grounds maintenance works within the countryside estate is undertaken on behalf of Medway Council by Medway Norse.
- 2.3 Tree work is currently undertaken across a number of teams. This includes a contract novated to Medway Norse by the council which ends in June 2017. There is a budget shortfall for tree maintenance overall going forward due to savings requirements and the impact of unfunded statutory wage pressures. It is proposed to TUPE transfer the Countryside Ranger Service to Medway Norse and to upskill the operatives to undertake further elements of tree work as part of their portfolio. Service standards will be maintained as the new integrated tree team will deliver the service more efficiently to achieve the required savings.
- 2.4 This proposal would render surplus to requirement the grounds maintenance depot at Howard School Yard, Rainham, which is owned by the Council and used by the present tree contractor for a peppercorn rent. The land and buildings shown edged red on attached plan are owned by Medway Council. Subject to this report being agreed, the land and buildings will become unused and not required for Council functions.
- 2.5 There are however a range of statutory activities of a regulatory and policy nature, such as greenspace section 106 work, statutory declarations, management plans for LNRs and green flag applications, which are currently undertaken by the Service and it is not proposed that these should transfer to Medway Norse. Some resource will need to be retained by the Council to ensure that these responsibilities can be discharged.

3. Options

- 3.1 The business case which is set out in the Exempt Appendix contains a range of options for the future delivery of the services.

3.2 Countryside Ranger Service

- 3.3 Cabinet can:

- 3.3.1 Retain the service as is; or

- 3.3.2 Decide to agree the transfer of the service to Medway Norse.

- 3.4 The Council has a statutory responsibility to maintain trees to a safe condition and consequently removing the funding gap by deciding not to maintain is not a viable option.

3.5 Howard School Yard

- 3.6 Cabinet can:

- 3.6.1 Decide to grant delegated authority to allow officers to dispose of the land; or
- 3.6.2 Refuse to delegate this authority, which would mean that the land cannot be sold.

4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1 The transfer of the services from direct employment by Medway Council to Medway Norse will achieve better alignment of services and achieve service efficiencies and savings, which will provide better value for money for Medway’s residents.

5. Risk management

- 5.1 The following risks and mitigating measures have been identified.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
There are a number of functions that are currently undertaken by the Greenspaces team that should not be transferred	These include statutory, policy, fee-setting, planning and regulatory functions	Retain sufficient resource within the Council to safeguard its legal interests and responsibilities	Low
The surplus depot site becomes derelict and unused	Cabinet does not delegate authority to dispose of the site, so it cannot be sold and it becomes derelict and unused and the Council will not be able to realise a significant capital receipt	Grant delegated authority to allow the site to be sold.	Low

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 The current budgeted deficit in the tree contract is outlined in the business case (Exempt Appendix). The recommended proposal as set out in the report will mitigate the shortfall and generate opportunities to trade the service to the public and private sectors. Profits that will be shared 50/50 as per agreed existing arrangements with Medway Norse.
- 6.2 The disposal of the Howard School Yard will generate a capital receipt for the Council.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The Council is under a duty to obtain the best consideration reasonably obtainable when it disposes of interests in property, unless consent is obtained from the Secretary of State or one of the general consents applies.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the transfer of the Greenspaces Countryside Ranger function to Medway Norse.
- 8.2 Cabinet is asked to delegate authority to the Chief Legal Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources to dispose of the land as shown edged red on the attached plan, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, on the best terms reasonably obtainable.

9. Suggested reasons for decision(s)

- 9.1 To reduce costs, achieve efficiencies, facilitate development and obtain a capital receipt.

Background Papers

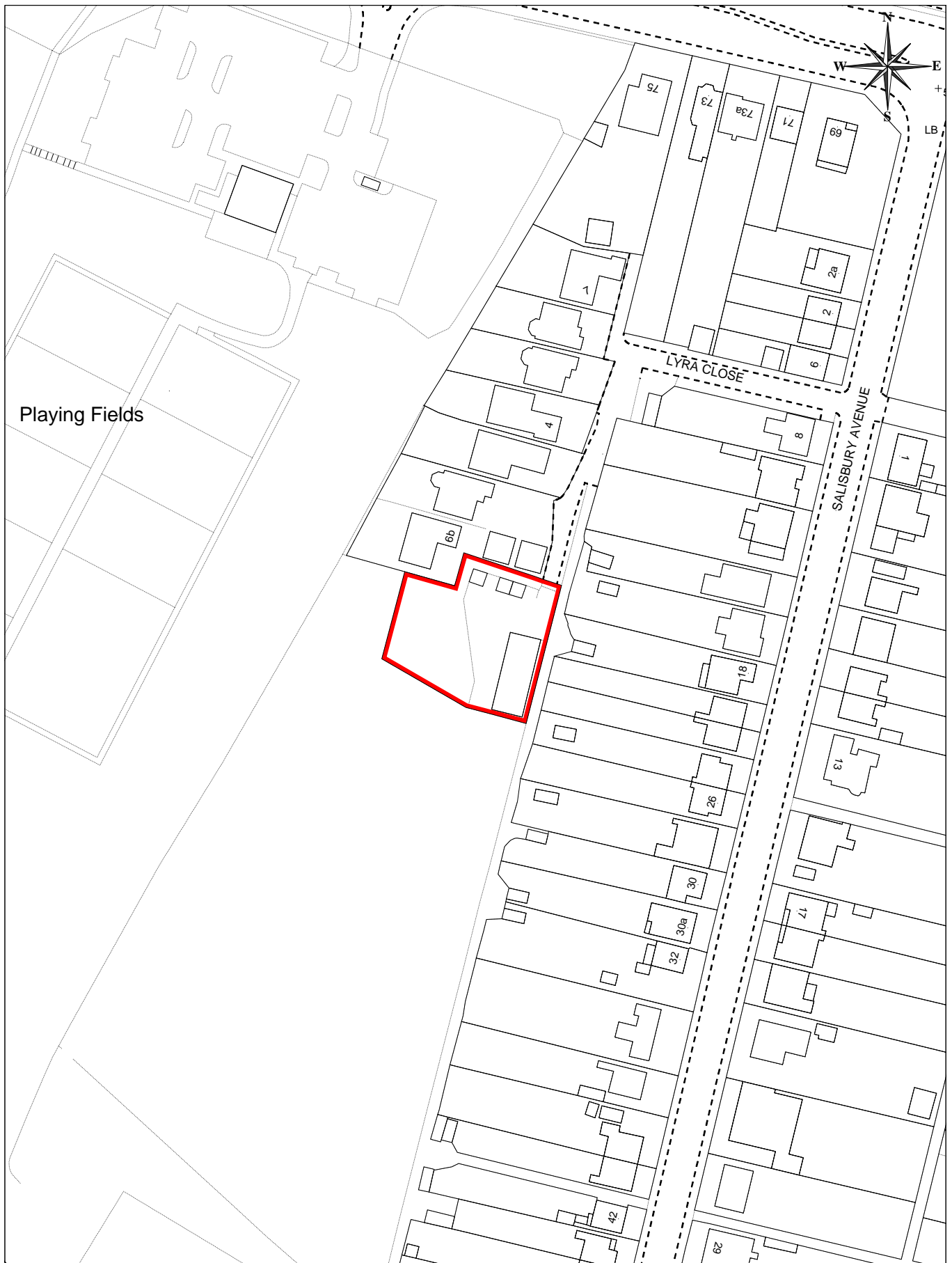
None

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – map of Howard School Yard
Exempt Appendix – business case for Countryside Ranger Service



Grounds Maintenance Depot (Howard School)
Area = 1,123 m²



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Scale: 1:1250 22/01/16

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