

## Agenda item 6

For decision – Egford Lane play area and green space

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### Summary

We have been approached by a group of 28 residents asking that FTC takes on responsibility for the management and upkeep of the play area and green space off Egford Lane, by way of a transfer from Mendip District Council (MDC).

This report presents the opening letter from the residents. It then highlights various discussion points and recommends carrying on early conversations with the local community and opening discussions with MDC about the potential for the land to be transferred to FTC.

### The space

The play area and green space are located to the west of Frome close to the parish boundary, with access from Egford Lane and Leaze Road. The space is bounded by houses on all sides. The space is just over 2.3 acres (or 9,400 square metres; or 0.94 hectares) For comparison, this means that it's only slightly smaller than Welshmill and three times the size of the play area and green at Tower View (see [Appendix 6.1](#)).



The space has a fenced play area with a variety of fixed play equipment. Outside of the fencing but close-by, there's an adult football goal and a freestanding basketball net. There's lots of flat grass surrounding the play area, a mix of mature trees (predominantly along the boundary

with Egford Lane) and a combination of native hedging and mesh fencing along the site boundaries. Victoria Park and Weylands are the closest spaces that we currently look after and Egford Lane would be the most westerly site that we look after if a transfer is agreed.

### Community benefits

As shown by the letter to the Council, the potential transfer is being led by the local community and has been prompted by FTC's successful track record in taking on and managing open spaces in the town ([Appendix 6.2](#)). It's also the case that Frome's location on the eastern boundary of the county and the district means that local management is often easier and preferential; the team – including the Rangers – are all based nearby.

### Strategic gains

It's also worth noting that by taking on the responsibility for important play areas and green spaces allows the Council to deliver more strategic management of play across the town. Simply put, the more sites that FTC owns and manages, the easier it becomes to create complementary spaces and play opportunities across the town.

### Finances and the management and upkeep of the space

The strategy for Egford Lane would be based on improved care and management - by way of increased community engagement and involvement, all supported and underwritten by FTC. The daily management of the space will be through a combination of experienced Council staff—most obviously the Rangers—and accredited, specialist contractors. The play area is beginning to show its age and there will be costs to meet in the future. It should also be noted that there aren't any S106 agreements in place at the present time that could be used to improve Egford Lane. For this reason, it's felt that any discussions with MDC should include the possibility of a dowry; after all, FTC will be taking on MDC's maintenance costs.

Regardless and separate to this, FTC would also expect to see the transfer of the space fairly and properly reflected in the Special Expenses element of future Council Tax levies. Even at this early stage, it would be prudent and sensible to complete a more detailed look at the play area; the boundary fencing and the trees around the site since these are the things that will likely cost more in the future. However, the routine work around the space—grass cutting, hedge cutting, emptying bins, etc—could be taken on by the existing Ranger team and by additions to existing or let contracts.

### Freehold or long-lease?

The preference is for the freehold of Egford Lane; if not, it's recommended that FTC looks to a 99-year lease similar to that negotiated elsewhere, to include full management responsibility. We would also expect that that any lease would be at a peppercorn rent.



### Recommendations

1. Delegate responsibility to the Project Officers (Emma Parker, supported by Kate Hellard) to carry on early conversations with the local community about ideas for the space
2. Delegate responsibility to the Environment Manager to coordinate a detailed condition assessment of the play area and the treestock, agreeing that this could mean an up-front cost of circa £800 in this financial year
3. Delegate responsibility to the Environment Manager (supported by the Town Clerk) to open discussions with MDC about the possibility of taking on the freehold of the land (preferred) or a long-term lease in line with the leases already agreed for Chapmans Close, Packsaddle & Tower View
4. Return to Council with a costed proposal in due course.