

MARCH TOWN COUNCIL

Extraordinary Meeting of March Town Council held on 4th December 2019 in The Skoulding Suite at March Town Hall commencing at 6.30pm.

Present	Councillor	RF Skoulding K French	Town Mayor Deputy Town Mayor
	Councillors	DW Connor J French MW Purser RW White	AR Donnelly R Jack G Tustin
		Estover Playing Field 2015 CIC Chairman	CC Owen
	Town Clerk		C Lemmon

Apologies:

Apologies were received from Councillors Court and Johnson.

Purpose of Meeting:

The meeting had been requested by the Chairman of Estover Playing Field 2015 CIC and the Clerk (also a Director of EPF 2015 CIC) to discuss the current situation with regards to the proposed development of Estover Playing Fields in respect of the following:

- a) Costs incurred to date, and committed costs, in respect of the Estover project.
- b) Anticipated project completion date.
- c) Future management of the site, with two parties currently interested.
- d) Possibility of sub-lease or assignment in respect of the facility, highlighting the advantages or otherwise associated with each course of action.

Project Costs:

To date, the costs incurred by March Town Council amount to	£523,786.59p
Costs committed over the next 5 years amount to	<u>£400,000.00p</u>
Total commitment	<u>£923,786.59p</u>

Based on the current FDC tax-base estimate (6,554), the above figure equates to approximately £141 per Band D property.
These figures are attached as Appendix 1.

Anticipated Project Completion Date:

As everyone is aware, getting an electricity connection to the site has caused major problems and delays.

However, it can now be reported that we have been given the date of 11th December 2019 for the electric meter to be installed.

This will allow Lee Batchelor to complete all outstanding works within a very short period of time and, barring unforeseen problems, everything should be completed by the end of the year.

Once completion is finalized, Estover Playing Field 2015 CIC will become responsible for all costs including insurance, rates etc.

Future Site Management:

EPF 2015 CIC is extremely grateful to March Town Council (the major funder) for getting the project to this stage.

However, we now need to plan for the future.

Without the assistance of March Town Council, this project would not have got off the ground, particularly in regard to finance, project management and business control.

However, how long does March Town Council wish to retain a “hands-on” role when it does not have expertise in the fields of sports or site management?

Primarily, the site will be used by football clubs and two approaches have been received from clubs wishing to take over full control of the management of the site and full responsibility for the costs of operating the site.

These two parties are as follows:

- a) March Academy, with whom we have been in discussion for over two years, who have been formed into a charity in recent weeks.
- b) March Town United FC Limited, who are amalgamating with March Park Rangers Youth, and will form a specific CIC if it is decided that they are the preferred candidate. The March Town route would take a slightly longer period of time to complete since their approach was only made in the last few weeks.

Without doubt, both parties have things to commend them:

- a) March Academy operate the biggest number of teams within March.
- b) March Town United FC Limited has more experience in overall site and clubhouse management.

It should be noted that Cambridgeshire County Council will only allow a sub-lease or assignment to a Charity or CIC.

Sub-lease or Assignment:

Sub-lease:

This would still require Estover Playing Field 2015 CIC to be retained.

In this scenario, EPF 2015 CIC could possibly over-rule what the club holding the sub-lease requires and, without doubt, this could create problems in their pursuit of managing the site in a profitable manner. However, it could also cause difficulties over where funds were held, and it would be necessary for March Town Council to retain the financial management, carry forward all commitments currently made and, in the event of problems, provide on-going financial guarantees.

Assignment:

Provided MTC gave a guarantee (or similar) to Cambridgeshire County Council regarding commitments already made (ie guaranteed loan repayment and small annual capital/revenue contribution totalling £80,000 per annum for a further five years),

Estover Playing Field 2015 CIC could be closed. The manner in which the aforementioned guarantee was provided, would be the subject of negotiation with CCC. All tasks and costs would become the immediate responsibility of the assignee and, in the event of future problems, there would be no comeback against MTC.

It should be noted that the following points have already been discussed with the two applicants:

- a) March Academy would accept either a sub-lease or an assignment, but their preference would be the assignment.
- b) March Town United FC Limited would only continue discussions under the assignment scenario. Discussions with this group commenced at a later date than those with March Academy so are not at such an advanced state and could not be concluded as quickly.

The Chairman of Estover Playing Field 2015 CIC and the Clerk, therefore, initially recommended that March Town Council (as the major funder) should allow an assignment, rather than a sub-lease, to be negotiated. This would allow MTC to have a clean break with predetermined financial commitments that could not be exceeded. This suggestion was agreed and supported unanimously.

Further Decisions Taken:

In depth discussions then took place regarding MTCs preferred assignee. Both parties had strong personalities within their groups and were aware of how important the concept of community usage was to March Town Council.

The initial decisions to be taken were as follows:

- a) Does MTC wish to see the deal concluded at the earliest opportunity? If this is the case, March Academy would be the only contender.
- b) Does MTC wish negotiations with both parties to continue so that ideas from both parties reach their logical conclusions before a decision is finally taken? If this is the case, is MTC prepared to allow Kit Owen and Clive Lemmon to continue these discussions and negotiate the best possible deal for MTC and the March community?

It should be noted that if option b) above is agreed, any deal is not likely to be concluded before the end of the MTC financial year (31st March 2020) and it would be necessary to fund EPF 2015 CIC with up to a further £10,000 to allow it to meet all debts (rates, insurance, legal fees etc) up to that point in time.

The following decisions were unanimously agreed:

- a) Although MTC wanted to see conclusions reached as quickly as possible, it felt it was important to have further discussions with both parties prior to making a final decision.
- b) It was agreed that Kit Owen and Clive Lemmon should continue discussions with both parties and report back to MTC by mid-February 2020 latest.
- c) It was agreed that up to £10,000 additional funding should be awarded to EPF 2015 CIC.

- d) As soon as is practicably possible, some form of opening ceremony should be agreed. This could be undertaken by EPF 2015 CIC alone or in conjunction with the future assignee. A final decision should be taken under a similar timescale to b) above.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 7.05pm.

Councillor RF Skoulding..... 6th January 2020.
Mayor of March.