

Access to Information Arrangements

Exclusion of access by the public to Council meetings

Information Compliance Ref: LGA 165/21
Meeting / Decision: Single Member Decision
Date: On or after 18 th February 2021
Author: Simon Martin
Report Title: RULE 15 Keynsham Land Investment Exempt Appendix 1 – LAF funding bid Exempt Appendix 2 – Grant offer Letter Exempt Appendix 3 – Cushman & Wakefield Commercial Report Exempt Appendix 4 – Land plan showing area to be acquired.

The Report contains exempt information, according to the categories set out in the Local Government Act 1972 (amended Schedule 12A). The relevant exemption is set out below.

Stating the exemption:

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

The public interest test has been applied, and it is concluded that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure at this time. It is therefore recommended that the Exempt Appendices be withheld from publication on the Council website. The paragraphs below set out the relevant public interest issues in this case.

PUBLIC INTEREST TEST

If Cabinet members wish to consider a matter with press and public excluded, they must be satisfied on two matters.

Firstly, they must be satisfied that the information likely to be disclosed falls within one of the accepted categories of exempt information under the Local Government Act 1972.

The officer responsible for this item believes that this information falls within the following exemptions and this has been confirmed by the Council's Information Compliance Manager.

The following exemptions are engaged in respect to this report:

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

Secondly, it is necessary to weigh up the arguments for and against disclosure on public interest grounds. It is considered that there is a public interest in information about property acquisition being disclosed into the public domain. Other factors in favour of disclosure include:

- furthering public understanding of the issues involved;
- furthering public participation in the public debate of issues, in that disclosure would allow a more informed debate;
- promoting accountability and transparency by the Council for the decisions it takes;

Weighed against this is the fact that the exempt appendices contain strategic and financial information which could prejudice future negotiations and as a result, prejudice the commercial interests of the Council, if disclosed at this time. The exempt appendices also include the observations and opinions of officers regarding the proposal. It would not be in the public interest if advisors and officers could not express in confidence opinions which are in good faith and on the basis of the best information available.

The Council's funds are in essence public funds and there is an obligation to obtain best value for money. Disclosure of this information would prejudice the Council's ability to ensure it obtains best value in this matter. It is in the public interest that the Council is able to deliver cost-effective solutions. This depends partly on the Council being able to protect its commercial position at this particular time.

Additionally, Exemptions 1 and 2 above must be considered in conjunction with the Principles of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). It is considered that disclosure of the information in this report would breach the first principle of the DPA, which requires personal data to be fairly and lawfully processed.

It is considered that the public interest is best served in this matter by not releasing this information at this time and that a significant amount of information regarding the matter has been made available on these issues – by way of the main report. Relevant information will be put in the public domain at the appropriate time. Therefore it is recommended that the exemptions apply. The Council considers that the public interest is in favour of not holding this matter in open session at this time and that any reporting on the meeting is prevented in accordance with Section 100A(5A).