

# Football club eyes new home

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The former Weydon Lane landfill site

**WAVERLEY council chiefs are expected to sign off £50,000 next week for a feasibility study into relocating Farnham Town FC to the former Weydon Lane landfill site and in turn developing the Memorial Ground in West Street for housing.**

The borough council's decision-making executive committee will meet on Tuesday, March 1, to discuss the recommendation by the council's Weydon Lane Special Interest Group (SIG), which was established in January 2015 to explore options for the former tip bordering Upper Way, Talbot Road and Weydon Lane.

Subject to the results of the study, the SIG proposes decontaminating the 10-acre site "to an acceptable standard" and building new facilities including playing fields, flood lighting, grandstands, a pavilion and parking, as well as the creation of public open space on the remaining land.

These new facilities would provide for both Farnham Town FC's senior and junior teams, as well as the Bourne Blades who currently train in south Farnham.

And it is proposed the "significant" costs of such a move would be met by releasing Farnham Town FC's current facilities at the Memorial Ground for housing as well as grants from national sporting bodies.

Farnham Town FC has long coveted a move away from the Memorial Ground which, despite hosting football matches since the early 20th century, is plagued by drainage issues resulting in two games being postponed this week alone.

The club has twice been denied promotion, in 1992 and 2007, due to the Memorial Ground not meeting FA standards, and Farnham Town FC's current chairman Ray Bridger has subsequently welcomed Waverley's recommendation.

Mr Bridger told The Herald: "This has been talked about for the last 15 years and this report is the first time we've seen anything in black and white. Obviously if it came up we would be interested, but there's lots of things to think about before that can happen and the move would have to be to the benefit of the club and the whole community.

"We would need something that would meet the FA's Grade 4 requirements, incorporating a stand for 150 people to sit as well as a standing stand for 100 people, a club house and changing rooms. All that would have to be in the package.

"The council must be serious enough about these plans to spend £50,000 on a study, but as far as I'm aware they still intend to move our changing rooms from the Memorial Hall to a new portable building at the Memorial Ground, so anything they're proposing is obviously not in the immediate future."

Waverley's proposals are further complicated by covenants on both the Weydon Lane site, conveyed to the Farnham Urban District Council in 1972 to be used as a recreation ground or public open space, and the Memorial Ground, which was left to the town by Farnham United Breweries for recreational and sporting use.

However, Pat Frost, the Mayor of Farnham and a member of the Weydon Lane SIG, believes these covenants can be overcome to the benefit of all parties concerned and has commended the report to next week's executive committee.

"I'm delighted with this recommendation," Mrs Frost said. "It offers an excellent solution for Farnham Town FC and will also create a much needed recreational area for local residents - it's a win/win situation all round.

"Available land for anything other than housing is in short supply, so it's lovely that we've been able to find a piece of land that we can't use for housing but we can offer to the football club instead to give them room to grow.

Mrs Frost added the Memorial Ground is “an ideal site for housing”, and will not only offset the costs of improvements to Brambleton Park but will also provide much-needed affordable housing within walking distance of Farnham town centre.

She continued: “No decisions have been made and it’s early days yet. But we are desperate for housing for our young people so I think if housing does go there I’d certainly like to see a good percentage of affordable housing to enable our young people to be able to stay in Farnham.

“I don’t believe the covenants on either piece of land are unsurmountable and I’m hopeful it’s going to succeed.”

In recommending Farnham Town FC’s relocation to Weydon Lane, the SIG considered and rejected other options for the former tip site including doing nothing, a Park-and-Ride service and housing.

Councillors also rejected a proposal by The Friends of Brambleton Park community group to develop the site as a natural park and recreation area, on the grounds that this would require complete augmentation of the site’s clay cap at a cost of around £2.75 million.

Founder of the Friends group John Austen welcomed the council’s recommendation to improve the site’s public use but urged councillors to reconsider his group’s plans.

He said: “The expensive options were thought to be out of reach due to funding, but relocating Farnham Town FC adds a new dimension and would provide some significant funds.

“However, there would be the matter of local residents suddenly having a football pitch and floodlights next to their back gardens, which wouldn’t go down well I’m sure.

“The report also says no funding was included in the Brambleton Park proposal. This was not included as we were proposing ideas to the council, not funding. There are plenty of funding options for a park, including one offered by the site managers themselves - SITA.

“For the council to dismiss Brambleton Park’s proposals for this reason is not fair. They can clearly see more pound signs from the housing development proposal from Farnham Town FC.

“As the report says, the option of the football pitches and park together is the most likely option. We would be happy for there to be a joint proposal, which could involve funds and grants from other areas for the park.”