

Wolves Lane Horticultural Centre
Expression of Interest Evaluation Report

Introduction

This report will:

- Provide a summary of the expression of interest process launched by the Council in relation to Wolves Lane Horticultural Centre (WLHC)
- Provide an overview of the bidding organisations and the nature of their bids
- Explain how the bids were evaluated and the scoring system that was applied
- Provide a financial risk assessment of the bidding organisations

Executive Summary

During July and August 2016, the Council received 16 requests for application packs in response to its expression of interest advert. Three organisations submitted bids that are now under consideration by the Council, the organisations are:

- The Friends of Wolves Lane (FoWL)
- Greens and Glass
- OrganicLea

Background

At the cabinet meeting on May 17th 2016 the Council agreed recommendations to cease provision of Council funded services from April 2017 and to seek expressions of interest for the future use of WLHC from 'suitably qualified organisations'. The expression of interest process was launched on July 8th 2016, running for 10 weeks with a submission deadline of noon on September 16th. The opportunity was advertised on the Council's website. During the 10 week period 16 application packs were sent to interested parties (See **Appendix 1** for full distribution list). The application pack contained a detailed explanation of the site's current provision and the Council's priorities. In addition the pack contained an explanation of how the EOIs would be evaluated. Contrary to the Council's usual policy of weighting evaluation scores 60% for financial viability and 40% for quality, Cabinet agreed to a weighting of 60% for quality and contribution to the Council's priorities and

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40% for financial viability (split equally between income for the council (20%) and viability of the business plan 20%). This was agreed in anticipation of bids being received from social enterprises to ensure they were not unfairly disadvantaged.

For the quality and contribution to the Council's priorities mark, each of the Council's five priorities were allocated 10% of the available mark with a further 10% allocated to the proposal's contribution to the Council's aims of:

- Working together with our communities
- Building resilient communities where our people are able to help themselves and support each other
- Value for money – achieving best outcome from the investment made
- Working in partnership – delivering with and through others

The financial viability score was split 20% for income to the Council through lease rent and 20% for the achievability of the proposal.

Submitted Bids

Three organisations submitted bids as summarised below:

Friends of Wolves Lane (FoWL)

- FoWL formed in March 2015 in response to the Council's proposal to cease provision of services at the centre.
- Bid proposes the creation of a not for profit Community Interest Company (CIC) to run WLHC
- Bid focuses on the provision of educational services for young people and those with learning difficulties and mental health issues. In addition the bid proposes increasing the retail opportunities via the site's existing cafe and garden shop, offering a range of evening classes and hosting seasonal events.
- Proposing a minimum lease period of 10 years with a peppercorn rent in years one and two, increasing to £18,000pa from year three. Total rent proposed for first five years equates to £54,000

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- Bid anticipates raising start up funds via Tudor Trust, Esmee Fairburn Foundation, Awards for All, Heritage Lottery Fund and Sport England
- Bid proposes the Council will retain ongoing liability for a number of key areas of the site.

Greens and Glass

- Greens and Glass are a start up social enterprise supported by The Mill Co. Project.
- Bid proposes a lease with The Mill Co Project in partnership with Greens and Glass
- Bid combines growing organic vegetables and flowers, an organic cafe, a bespoke wedding event space and therapeutic horticulture.
- Seeking a partner organisation to oversee vegetable production and make specific reference to OrganicLea in their bid.
- Proposing the creation of a cutting garden to promote sales of flowers.
- Bid identifies the creation of 10 jobs by year three.
- Bid anticipates raising start up funds via Opportunity Investment Fund loans, GLA Regeneration Fund and private investment.
- Proposing an initial lease of 20 years with a peppercorn rent in years one and two, increasing to £18,000pa from year three. Total rent proposed for first five years equates to £54,000
- Bid states Greens and Glass would expect to negotiate terms with the Council regarding carrying out repairs on the site.

OrganicLea

- OrganicLea is a community food project that has been running since 2001 and has a track record of delivering successful outcomes similar to those proposed within their bid for WLHC
- OrganicLea have worked successfully with Waltham Forest Borough Council on similar projects
- The bid combines food growing, food distribution, training and volunteering, healthy eating and community activities which incorporate horticultural volunteering opportunities.
- OrganicLea are leading a consortium which also includes London Grown (food growing), Crop Drop (Food distribution) and Deidre Woods (healthy eating, food education).

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- Bid anticipates the consortium will generate start up funds via the Network for Social Change, the Big Lottery, City Bridge Trust and OrganicLea's own surplus.
- Proposing an initial lease of at least 25 years with a peppercorn rent in years one and two, increasing to £5,000 in year three. Total rent proposed for first five years equates to £19,300
- Bid proposes to take on WLHC 'as is' with no expectation of Council support.

Initial Evaluation

All three bids were reviewed by two Council officers. Initial scores were awarded and a number of clarification questions were identified for each bid. Bidders were invited to respond to their respective questions in writing and in person at a follow up meeting. All three meetings took place during the week commencing 10th October and where appropriate, scores were amended based on responses given to the clarification questions. (See **Appendix 2** full list of questions and answers).

Scoring

The individual scores (weighted 60% for quality and contribution to the Council's priorities, 20% for income to the Council and 20% for the viability of the business plan) were combined to produce an aggregate score for each organisation shown in the table below. (See **Appendix 3** evaluation score sheets)

	Technical Mark	Technical 60% Max	Financial 20% Max	Viability Mark	Viability 20% Max	Total Score of 100%
Fowl	9	18%	20%	1.5	6%	44%
G+G	20	40%	20%	2	8%	68%
Organic	26.5	53%	7%	3.5	14%	74%

Financial Standing

FoWL and Greens and Glass are brand new organisations, formed in response to the Council's EOI for the future use of WLHC. As such they do not have financial records that can be examined. Greens and Glass are supported by the Mill Co. Project, a social enterprise offering affordable workspace to independent start ups in East London. The Mill Co. Project would be the lead party on the lease and a credit check has been produced for them which shows they are a high risk

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company (See **Appendix 4** The Mill Co Project credit check report). A credit check has been produced for OrganicLea (**Appendix 5**) which, in conjunction with three years worth of company accounts they submitted, demonstrates they are a very low risk company.

Further Discussions

Reviewing officers recognised synergies between the three bids. In order to examine the synergies in more detail all three bidders were invited to a round table discussion hosted by Council officers. The meeting took place on October 31st and involved each bidder presenting a 10 minute summary of their vision for the site followed by an open discussion. On November 3rd all bidders were written to asking for further comments on their views of the other bids and whether they envisaged a way of sharing the site with one or both of the other bidders (see **Appendix 6** follow up emails and responses). This process reaffirmed some of the synergies as well as highlighting areas of potential conflict between the bidders.

Conclusion

Based on the evaluation score, low risk financial report and the fact they are an established organisation OrganicLea have demonstrated they offer the option which most closely meets the Council's criteria. Their bid promotes healthy eating, proposes working with Haringey's Pupil Referral Unit, increases the availability of affordable organic food in the borough, reduces food miles, supports existing local businesses enabling them to expand, propose leasing the site for at least 25 years and places no expectation on the Council for ongoing support. However there are merits in the bids from FoWL and Greens and Glass. Therefore we should seek to promote a partnership agreement between OrganicLea and the other two organisations once the lease arrangement has been confirmed.

All appendices can be made available on request via James Hunt james.hunt@haringey.gov.uk