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Statement to the Executive:

Barrowford Parish Council would like Pendle Borough Council to consider its request for the transfer of Barrowford Memorial Park including the buildings and land which now comprise Pendle Heritage Centre. Historically the Park along with Park Hill Farm and its buildings was gifted to the people of Barrowford as its War Memorial for the enjoyment of the people of Barrowford forever, and in the spirit of that gift feels that it should remain in public ownership to retain a true level of local accountability.

Barrowford Parish Council only became aware of The Heritage Trust for the Northwest's request for the transfer of the freehold of Pendle Heritage Centre at a meeting to discuss the transfer of the park held on Friday 11th November and that it was to be discussed at the 17th November Executive meeting. Representations were made at that meeting regarding Barrowford Parish Council's interest in having Barrowford Park transferred in its entirety.

The reasoning behind this request is solely to retain the park within public ownership giving the level of local public accountability which is not always possible within trusts, charities and limited companies.

Barrowford Parish Council is the first of the Parish and Town Councils to enter into meaningful negotiations with Pendle over the future maintenance of its park, to help reduce overall costs to the Borough Council starting in the next financial year. The Parish Council sees this as a further extension of the long history of co-operation between the two bodies in improving and enhancing our park.

The inclusion of the freehold for Pendle Heritage Centre is essential to the Parish Council as this is seen as the gateway to the park. The transfer if approved would not materially alter the existing lease or terms agreed with The Heritage Trust for the Northwest, though there may need to be slight adjustment to reflect the inclusion and status of the newly formed Pendle Heritage Centre Trust Ltd.

At the meeting between representatives of Pendle and the HTNW held on the 21st November to which we were invited as observers, the HTNW spoke of their reasons for wishing to take the freehold. These included:

1. Removal of conditions in the existing lease which they perceived as injurious to running a successful business.
2. That the Heritage Centre is currently running at a £20-30,000 loss annually and was being propped up by other incomes within the HTNW.
3. The ability to use the freehold as surety to apply for either grant funding or loans.
4. That the Heritage Centre was diversifying into wider business activities including being used as a wedding venue.
5. That additional money needed to be generated for the adaption of buildings to meet this new role and the refurbishment of the existing café.
6. The Chairman of the newly formed Pendle Heritage Centre Trust Ltd. stated that in time this would become a trust run by local members.

Barrowford Parish Council's Transfer negotiating team have considered the points raised and would like to offer the following comments in relation to local public accountability:

1. HTNW intimated that they had considered terminating the existing lease, which has sixty years to run, and handing the building back to Pendle; or

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requesting a variation of the terms of the lease. The terms were varied at the request of HTNW in May 2012, and a similar request could be submitted if the HTNW thought the changes necessary for the future survival of the Heritage Centre.

The Parish Council would oppose any request for variance of conditions prior to the decision on the transfer of assets as it may prove prejudicial to the Parish Council if Pendle are minded to transfer the asset to the Parish Council.

2. HTNW have clearly stated that they want to be given the Freehold assets, land and buildings so that they can be used as sureties for grant and low interest loan applications to further their Company commercial & trading interests.

Although it is claimed that the benefits would be used solely for the Pendle Heritage Centre there can be no guarantee that this would hold for the future.

The Parish Council sees no benefits for the Borough Council or to the people of Barrowford and calls for the transfer request to be rejected.

3. HTNW state that the Pendle Heritage Centre is losing between £20,000 and £30,000 a year.

Available Annual Accounts for HTNW contain no breakdown of finances between their Centres or operations, so the actual loss cannot be substantiated. Overall figures show their total income to be £2.3million and trading profit of £885,000 which equates to a 37% Return on Sales.

Barrowford Parish Council has found no figures on file at Companies House for Pendle Heritage Centre Ltd. and is unable to verify the trading position.

The fact that the new Pendle Heritage Trust Ltd. sees itself as currently not consisting of a significant proportion of local representatives, is a grave concern regarding local accountability and if Pendle Borough Council is sincere in its commitment to local control then Barrowford Parish Council is the best local option with public accountability and decision making being judged every four years at the local elections.

Barrowford Parish Council fully recognises the value of the Heritage Centre to the cultural life of Barrowford and wishes to work with it to ensure long term success and viability. We will support proposals for partnership or local Trustee representation to provide a framework for future cooperation and the envisaged future major role in the day to day running of the centre by the newly formed Pendle Heritage Trust Ltd.