

Peter (Anchor)	It's claimed that the public purse in East Yorkshire could lose out on potentially hundreds of thousands of pounds in a deal to sell a council owned asset. It's alleged that land south of Bridlington could be sold off at significantly less than its market value. A BBC <i>Look North</i> investigation has found that the deal proposed involved the leader of the Council Steven Parnaby and the Director of Planning Alan Menzies. The Council is adamant that the deal offers value for money. Caroline Bilton has this report:
Caroline Bilton	This large piece of land is owned by East Riding of Yorkshire Council. It's used as a golf course. Bridlington Golf Club is the tenant here. With its stunning sea views this land is a valuable asset to the local authority.
Bruce Collinson	Bridlington itself is not the most valuable town in Yorkshire but the south side, sea views, there is a big premium for that.
Caroline Bilton	There are plans to declare this large piece of land surplus to the local authorities requirements and to sell it to the Golf Club for £750,000 in a proposal involving the Leader of the Council, Steven Parnaby, and the Director of Planning and Economic Regeneration, Alan Menzies. The plan is to build up to 22 homes here on this prime land with its desirable sea views and, next to the club house, there are plans for a hotel. But there are some who believe this has involved the bending of rules – something the Council strongly disputes. Bruce Collinson has worked as a Chartered Surveyor in Yorkshire for more than 40 years.
Bruce Collinson	There've been two breaches of policy because the planning policy for Bridlington would not normally permit building houses that far south and there is an assumption in all local authorities to get best value. They bang on about it and they're not getting best value as far as I see.
Caroline Bilton	We are led to believe this was the deal put forward by the council. The Council sell the 116 acres to the Golf Club for £750,000, the Golf Club, however, is in financial dire straits so it suggested in order to purchase the land, the Golf Club sell off their 16 th hole with its sea views to a preferred developer - raising the funds it needs. And to secure its long term future, it's suggested the Golf Club also build a hotel. All of this was discussed at an extraordinary general meeting of the Golf Club held four years ago. These are the Minutes of that meeting. They tell us that the plan was suggested by Mr Parnaby and Mr Menzies. They asked the Chairman of the Golf Club if they'd ever thought of buying it which apparently surprised the Chairman. According to the Minutes, the Council came back with some figures. They suggested that the Golf Club find a preferred builder. Three builders were contacted by the Golf Club. Two were not interested as the site was not big enough. The third was very interested.
Bruce Collinson	To get best value, you put property on the open market and let the world and his wife have a go at it – rather than a closed list of three for whom we understand, two declined to bid. This is not transparent and in terms of commercial expediency, this is not expedient.
Caroline Bilton	The preferred builder had offered £1,65 millions for their 3.5 acres – the 16 th hole. A price which the Minutes say had been agreed and verified both by the District Valuer and the Council. The sale of the land to a developer would give them the funds they needed - but were they getting the best possible price?
Bruce Collinson	I've tested this in three different ways -three orthodox ways of valuing building land - and every single one of them comes out at north of £2 million; it comes out at about two and quarter million. In comparison with the figure which we understand they're proposing to sell it at, £1.65 million – it's a third off.
Caroline Bilton	Two other reputable house-builders have also told us that they, too, would expect to pay over £2 million. We've also learned that plans were well advanced before approval to dispose of the land were sought by Cabinet and Councillors. David Robson is the local ward Councillor on the East Riding Council. He represents the area including the Golf Course. He's been refused access to information relating to the value of the land on the basis that it is commercially sensitive.

David Robson	The decision to make this surplus to requirements and offer the Golf Club to deal should have been signed off by full Council and that didn't take place until October 2014, yet the deal was put to the Golf Club on 21 st July 2014 – three months before the Council signed it off. If it secures the Golf Club as a Golf Club forever, then I would support it, but . . .
Caroline Bilton	You don't believe it will though, do you?
David Robson	No, I do not. I think ultimately this. . . if I came back in 50 years time, this would be a housing estate.
Caroline Bilton	Full Planning has been granted for a 19-bed hotel at the Golf Club. Outline Planning has been granted for up to 22 homes. The sale of the land is still being discussed.
Peter (Anchor)	And Caroline Bilton is joining me in the studio now. What have the Council said today?
Caroline Bilton	Well, I've met with Alan Menzies, the Director of Planning & Economic Regeneration at the East Riding of Yorkshire Council today. They are adamant that they have received best value for the Council Tax payers of East Yorkshire. They dispute the fact that the idea to sell the land came from them; they say the Golf Club approached the Council asking to buy the land.
Alan Menzies	My recollection of the meeting which was, er, over four years, well four years ago, was that meeting was at their request. In fact, I'm sure it was at their request. We went to Bridlington to have a conversation because they were encountering some financial difficulties and they needed to discuss their options.
Caroline Bilton	And Mr Parnaby went along to that meeting?
Alan Menzies	I took him.
Caroline Bilton	Yes, and is it normal for the Leader to go along to a meeting of that nature?
Alan Menzies	The ... the Leader of the Council meets private sector concerns and interests every working day and it's a natural part of being Leader of a Council for 28 years.
Caroline Bilton	Has the Council, in your opinion, acted in a completely transparent way in relation to this deal?
Alan Menzies	Er. Council has been open, honest and direct in all respects in, in, er, dealing with this matter. Fully in line with the Council's constitution. All values have been checked with the District Valuer and by the Council's External Auditor, er, and so this, er, proposal has been handled in the most appropriate manner.
Caroline Bilton	Alan Menzies, the Director of Planning talking to me earlier, Peter. Well, as we go to air tonight, the Council has not completed the sale of any of the land; the discussions are still ongoing. Mr Menzies stressed that there would be a very significant capital receipt from this sale and the money would see investment in education, in social services, in highways and transport. There has been a Golf Course on this land in Bridlington for over a hundred years. Whether these plans will secure its future is one that remains to be seen.