

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the RECREATION AND THE ARTS COMMITTEE

held on 23rd November 2009

PRESENT Councillor – Chairman Mrs A.M. Pirouet (presiding)

Councillor	A.K. Bacon	Councillor	Mrs C. Littley
"	E.L. Bamford	"	Mrs C.M. Michael
"	M.Z. Bhatti	"	Mrs M. Molesworth
"	Ms. J.E. Bramwell	"	Mrs G. Walker

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillors V.M. Abraham, N.L. Brown, M. Fayyaz, F.G. Holly and M.W. Shaw.

Mr T. Pilling – Chairman, Elgiva Board of Management.

Mr P. Ashby – Chairman, Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre.

Mr A. Tilbury and Mr V. Compton – Chairman and Vice-Chairman, the Allotments Group.

Mr P. Folly and Mr H. Peters – Chairman and Secretary, Chesham Environmental Group.

Officers: Mr. W. Richards, Town Clerk; Mr S. Pearson, Finance and Contracts Manager and Mr M. Barnes, Elgiva Manager.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs J.C. Fulford and D.J. Lacey.

53. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Holly and Mrs Michael declared a personal interest in agenda items 5, 12 and 13 as members of the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim.

Councillor Bacon and Ms Bramwell declared a prejudicial interest in agenda items 5 and 13 as users of the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre and left the Chamber during the discussion on fees and charges pertaining to the Centre.

Councillors Holly and Mrs Michael declared a personal interest in agenda items 4, 12 and 13 as members of the Allotments Group. Councillor Mrs Pirouet also declared a personal interest in agenda item 4 and a prejudicial interest in agenda item 13 as an allotment holder and left the Chamber during the discussion on fees and charges pertaining to allotments.

Councillor Mrs Littley declared a personal interest in agenda item 4 as a member of the 'Impress the Chess' Group and the Environmental Group.

Councillor Holly declared a personal interest in agenda items 4, 10, 12 and 13 as a member of the Friends of Chesham Cemetery.

Councillor Abraham declared a personal interest in agenda items 4, 7, 8, 12 and 13 as a member of the Elgiva Board of Management.

Councillor Mrs Michael declared a personal interest in agenda item 13 due to her association with the annual Donkey Derby.

54. **MINUTES**

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Recreation and the Arts Committee held on 5th October 2009, be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

55. **CHESHAM ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Environmental Group held on 27th August 2009. It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

In response to Members' queries, Mr Phil Folly advised the Committee that no response had been received to date from either the Environment Agency in regard to black moss in the River Chess or from Chiltern District Council on the Canon's Mill Meadow Area.

56. **ALLOTMENTS GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Allotments Group held on 22nd September 2009. It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

Arising out of Minute No.7, the Committee discussed the height of the main hedge in Asheridge Road. Mr Allen Tilbury advised that he had been informed by the Parks and Premises Manager that it would be lowered to six feet but the Committee agreed that, for security reasons, it should be lowered to four feet and that this be conveyed to the Parks and Premises Manager.

57. **IMPRESS THE CHESS**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Impress the Chess Steering Group meeting held on 6th October 2009. It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

Arising out of Minute No. 6 and in light of the query raised during consideration of the Chesham Environmental Group minutes, the Clerk advised the Impress the Chess Group had received a response from Chiltern District Council in respect of Canon's Mill Meadow Area and this letter could be circulated to Members upon request.

Arising out of Minute 8 (viii), the Clerk reported that the Environment Agency had promised to make good on the Moor Marsh surface but, thus far, its work had not been completed.

58. **FRIENDS OF CHESHAM CEMETERY**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Friends of Chesham Cemetery held on 6th October 2009. It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

59. **ELGIVA BOARD OF MANAGEMENT**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Elgiva Board of Management held on 9th November 2009. It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

60. **CHESHAM MOOR GYM AND SWIM CENTRE UPDATE**

The Committee considered the officers' report on the current financial situation at the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim facility and the proposal to extend the summer season to the end of October 2010.

In respect of the financial position, Councillor Bacon opined that the figures for the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre continued to be encouraging and should be welcomed, particularly the swimming pool income, since the weather had been somewhat mediocre during the summer.

Members noted the figures for October swimming this year and the likelihood of further financial support from Bucks Sports next year. Accordingly the Committee was happy to extend the swimming season until the end of October 2010 for the next year.

It was

RESOLVED

1. That the financial position pertaining to the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre be noted and welcomed.
2. That the Committee agree in principle to the extension of the swimming season until the end of October and refer the proposed

six month ticket prices to the fees and charges report later on the agenda.

61. **'WALKERS ARE WELCOME' INITIATIVE**

The Committee considered a request from the Walkers Are Welcome Steering Group for a Member or Members to be appointed as Council representative(s) on the steering group.

It was

RESOLVED

that Councillor Mrs Littley and Mrs Walker be appointed to the Chesham 'Walkers are Welcome' Steering Group.

62. **ELGIVA CARBON AUDIT SURVEY**

The recent report compiled by the Carbon Trust on energy usage in the Elgiva was received by the Committee.

Members welcomed the fact that the theatre had received an 'excellent' rating with both fossil fuel and electricity usage well below levels even set as being good practice benchmarks.

The Committee congratulated the Elgiva staff on their efforts and it was

RESOLVED

that the report be noted.

63. **ELGIVA IN-HOUSE PANTOMIME 2010/11**

The Elgiva Manager addressed the Committee in respect of his proposal to produce an 'in-house' pantomime for 2010/11. He advised that since the audience numbers had been steady for the last three years, he believed it would be relatively low risk to produce a pantomime using a local producer and his own experience, thus not having to split half the profits with a professional company, once a 'first call' figure had been exceeded. This would, according to his calculations, greatly increase income for the theatre in a difficult economic time. He informed the Committee that he was proposing to use professional actors and the quality would remain high while still catering for a family audience.

Members were happy to support the Manager's initiative, particularly as it had been endorsed by the Elgiva Board of Management and it was

RESOLVED

that the Committee support the principle of producing an 'in-house' pantomime at the Elgiva Theatre for the 2010/11 season.

64. **RE-SITING OF MULTI-GOAL AREA**

The Committee considered where to re-site the multi-sports goal previously located at Woodland View Play Area in light of the Clerk's report on this matter.

It was noted that there had been only two requests for the goal's relocation and one of these had been from a school outside the town's boundaries. The report highlighted that a petition had been received from 37 residents, the large majority of whom lived nearby, for the goal to be installed in Codmore Field Recreation Ground. The Clerk also advised that this was the officers' preferred location for the facility.

Members agreed that this would appear to be the best location, particularly in light of the request received and that the old tennis court could be renovated to facilitate basketball around the goal at relatively low cost. However both Councillors Bamford and Brown commented that they had heard no such request for such a facility from local residents and opined that there may be some antipathy. Moreover Councillor Brown stated that the only requests he had heard had been was to renovate the tennis court area to allow for children's cycling and model cars.

It was accepted that it was essential to consult with local residents before instigating works and it was noted that the Clerk was proposing to contact occupants whose houses backed onto the field to ascertain views and then report back to the Committee for a final decision.

It was

RESOLVED

that the officers seek quotations for the necessary works to install the multi-sports goal in Codmore Field and begin a consultation process with residents on proposals to locate it in that area.

65. **CEMETERY LOCKING UP TIMES AND PROCEDURES**

The Committee discussed options in regard to locking up the cemetery. It was agreed that it would be preferable to have it open until 5.00pm daily during May –October and Members were of the view that it would be desirable to have this done on a rota basis by the Parks and Premises team rather than paying someone else to do this. The Clerk responded by saying there may be logistic and contractual difficulties with this but that he would speak to the Parks and Premises Manager on this matter and report back to Council.

It was therefore

RESOLVED

that the Committee's stated preference for the Cemetery to be locked at 5.00pm daily by the Parks and Premises Operatives be considered at full

Council following discussions with the Parks and Premises Manager and Operatives.

66. **CONSULTATION ON PROPER ACCOUNTING PRACTICES**

The Committee was asked to consider if it wanted to make any response to the Joint Practitioners Advisory Group (JPAG) draft proper accounting practices.

It was noted that the implementation of the new guidance will exempt larger local town and parish councils such as Chesham from the more complex accounting standards. It was also highlighted that one of the proposed changes stated that, other than for investment property, the option of revaluing assets, although permitted, is not recommended. As this seemed to support the Council's recent decision not to revalue its properties as requested by the Audit Commission, it was

RESOLVED

that the Committee welcomes the proposals and responds to the consultation paper accordingly.

Councillor Brown left the meeting at 8.15pm

67. **REVISED ESTIMATES 2009/10 AND DRAFT ESTIMATES 2010/11**

The Finance and Contracts Manager's report on the revised estimates for 2009/10 and draft estimates for 2010/11 was considered by the Committee.

In respect of the 2009/10 estimates, the Finance and Contracts Manager advised that the summary showed a net underspend of £17,777 when comparing the net projected actual budget total of £752,898 against the net revised budget total of £770,675.

In respect of the 2010/11 estimates, the Finance and Contracts Manager reported that officers were presenting a budget which reflected a very rigorous review of all services and which left little room for further reductions in budgets without having a significant effect on service provision. He advised that if the budgeted savings of this year were to be used to reduce next year's total net expenditure requirement, the increase would be 2.6%. He further advised that increasing the precept by 2.6% would mean a precept of £809,667 with the sum of £61,216 having to be taken from the general reserves in addition to the £17,777 savings already mentioned.

Councillor Ms Bramwell opined that in these difficult economic times, the Council should be trying to produce the lowest possible budget. She reported that to achieve a zero increase, an amount of £19,000 in savings would have to be found. Since there was little in her view that could be reduced from service budgets and with interest rates low, she opined that the Council needed to make some difficult decisions over the next two years and perhaps needed to take a close look at reducing staffing and associated costs.

Councillor Bacon agreed with Councillor Ms Bramwell that it was right and proper to consider long-term implications for all budgets including staffing. However he stated that for the last three years, the Council had been under-budget and indeed, because of

prudent spending, had only needed to take £3,000 from the reserves last year. He opined that the possibility of greater savings if the Council set up a company limited by guarantee for Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre and there was no need to be duly alarmed about the long-term financial future as yet. Councillor Ms Bramwell stated that while she had no objections to the budget as presented, it should be the Council's aim to deliver the lowest precept possible it could without reducing services.

In respect of the revised prioritised scheme, Councillor Mrs Pirouet queried on the necessity of a path and raised bed for the Asheridge Road allotments.

It was

RESOLVED

that the estimates, renewal and repairs programme and the list of schemes be presented for consideration at the Policy and Resources Committee of the 14th December 2009 in light of the observations made at this Committee.

68. **PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES 2010/11**

Before considering the charges in detail, the Finance and Contracts Manager advised that the Treasury would be raising VAT back to 17.5% in January and the proposed fees and charges would be reflecting this increase.

The Committee considered the proposals detailed in the report for fees and charges for 2010/11 as follows:

(a) **Allotments**

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that a 5p per pole rise be levied on all of the allotments sites from 1 October 2010.

(b) **Cemetery**

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that the proposed scale of charges be approved reflecting a 2.5% rise from the 1st April 2010.

(c) **Housing**

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that the two properties continue to be let through Paradigm Housing and the rent determined by Paradigm in line with their other properties.

(d) **Office Services**

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that no increase be applied to these charges.

(e) **Little Theatre by the Park (Temperance Hall)**

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that the report be noted.

(f) **The Elgiva**

The Committee considered the proposed charges for The Elgiva.

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that the proposed scale of charges as presented be agreed from the 1st April 2010 and that the Manager continues to be allowed flexibility and discretion in determining any charge where he believes it to be in the interest of the Theatre.

(g) **Town Hall**

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

1. that the proposed scale of charges as presented be approved from the 1st April 2010 and the Town Clerk be delegated to determine any ad hoc charges.
2. The 50% block booking discount policy be continued until determined otherwise by Council.

(h) **Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre**

It was noted that the recommendations of the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre had not reflected the Council's resolution to offer concessionary rates at a 30% discount and that these proposed fees and charges needed to be amended to accord with this.

It was also raised that where no increases had been recommended on swim hires and other associated pool hires, this appeared not to have taken into account the rise in VAT and therefore they should be uplifted to reflect this.

Following consideration of the report, it was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

1. that the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Manager be authorised to determine special promotional price changes in consultation with the Town Clerk.
2. that the Moor Football Pitches be increased in line with any increase in the Retail Price Index on the appropriate dates.
3. the Chiltern Harriers Running Club hire charges be increased to £577 and £56 for use of the facilities and storage area respectively.
4. that the swimming pool charges as presented be approved but be amended to reflect the Council's position on discounted rates.
5. that a six month season ticket be introduced at a rate recommended by the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre but be amended to reflect the Council's position on discounted rates.
6. that no change be made to the gym, tennis court and multi-court charges.
7. that a two year rent be offered to Chiltern Natural Therapies at £215 per month.

(i) **Sports Pitches and Pavilions, Film Fees, Wayleaves, Fairs and Circuses**

Following consideration of the report, it was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

- (i) that the proposed fees and charges for sports pitches and pavilions be approved;
- (ii) that the Clerk continue to be empowered to negotiate charges for the use of Lowndes Park and for any of the Council land or property by film companies;
- (iii) that a fee of £100 be charged for each use of the Council's Open Spaces;
- (iv) that a further report be submitted on the Council's wayleaves and the Moor wayleaves be not implemented until this has taken place;
- (v) that the cessation of storage by Chesham Theatre Company at Codmore Field Pavilion be noted;
- (vi) that the range of fees for fun fairs and circuses remain unchanged for 2010/2011 and that the Town Clerk be allowed to negotiate the charge within the range set.

(j) **Chesham District Model Boat Club**

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that the current Model Boat Club licence be noted.

69. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

It was moved by the Chairman and

RESOLVED

that the public and the Press be excluded from the following two items in accordance with the Public Bodies (Access to Meetings) Act 1960, as matters which are considered to be confidential are about to be discussed.

70. **JAPANESE KNOTWEED CONTROL - AWARDING OF CONTRACTS**

Members were advised that two stands of Japanese Knotweed have been identified on Council land. It was reported that there was an extremely mature, large and dense infestation of Knotweed along one edge of the Moor which was threatening to spread onto adjacent properties and that a new stand of Knotweed has been identified this year in Canon's Mill Wood.

The Committee was reminded that Japanese Knotweed is regulated by several acts of legislation, which puts a duty of care on landowners with infestations to be proactive in their control and eradication. Third party litigation may be used to seek damages where

Japanese Knotweed is allowed to spread onto other properties. Officers were of the view that not controlling the infestation was not a realistic option and the longer the infestation is left to spread, the greater the cost of control will be.

In light of this, Members considered the three quotations received to eradicate the problem from specialist companies experienced with dealing with controlled waste. While accepting the work was required to be undertaken, it was noted that the quotation from the recommended company far exceeded the £5,000 in the budget for this work even though the amount was payable over three years. Because of this, Councillor Bamford suggested that officers contact other authorities such as Buckinghamshire County Council to see if the Council could 'join up' with other knotweed clearance works to keep prices down. Councillor Bacon opined that, while this option could be considered, he would like to see officers authorised to proceed as soon as possible with the recommended company if no alternatives as proffered by Ms Bamford existed, as it needed to be treated as soon as possible.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 26 (b), Councillor Bamford asked for the matter to be forwarded to full Council for determination and it was therefore

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that the Committee confirm that a contract be offered to Japanese Knotweed Control Ltd for a three year programme of works at a cost outlined within the report.

71. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 8.45pm.

CHAIRMAN

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