

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the RECREATION AND THE ARTS COMMITTEE

held on 23rd November 2015

PRESENT Councillor D. J. Lacey – Chairman (presiding)

Councillor	N. L. Brown	Councillor	Mrs J.E. MacBean
"	Q. Chaudhry	"	M.W. Shaw
"	M. Fayyaz	"	B. R. Whitfield
"	P. J. Hudson		

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillors A.K. Bacon and P.W. Yerrell.

Officers: Mr W. Richards - Town Clerk.
Mr S. Pearson - Finance and Contracts Manager.
Mr M. Barnes - Elgiva Manager.
Ms M. Little - Elgiva Deputy Manager.

Mr P. Folly - Friends of Lowndes Park.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. W. Franks, Mrs D. M. Varley and S. P. Willmoth.

27. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

It was noted that, as agreed, all previously stated Declaration of Interests remained unchanged from the first meeting of the administrative year.

28. **MINUTES**

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Recreation and the Arts Committee held on 21st September 2015, be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

29. **CHESHAM ENVIRONMENT GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Chesham Environment Group held on the 20th August 2015.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

30. **ALLOTMENTS GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meetings of the Allotments Group AGM held on the 10th September and the meeting of the 6th October 2015.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

31. **ELGIVA BOARD OF MANAGEMENT**

Members received the Minutes of the meetings of the Elgiva Board of Management held on the 12th October and 9th November 2015.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

Arising out of the minutes of the 12th October, Councillor Bacon requested further information on the remedial measures required to adhere to the stipulations laid out by the Bucks Fire and Rescue Service following a recent inspection and subsequent issue of a Regulatory Reform Order. The Clerk advised that he and the Elgiva Manager had commissioned a number of measures to ameliorate the alleged fire risks as soon as possible as a matter of good practice, bearing in mind the potentially dire consequences of not reacting to the fire report's recommendations. The Committee accepted the need for officers to act swiftly but requested that, in future, the Mayor or Committee Chairman are made aware of such actions for information purposes.

32. **FRIENDS OF CHESHAM CEMETERY**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Friends of Chesham Cemetery held on the 13th October 2015.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

33. **GREEN FLAG AWARD ENTRY FOR 2016.**

The Committee considered the report from the Policy and Projects Officer in respect to entry to the Green Flag competition for 2016. Members were reminded that, due to the poor administration and total lack of feedback from the Keep Britain Tidy organisers in the previous two years; in November 2014, the Recreation and Arts Committee had resolved that Lowndes Park was not entered for the Green Flag Award for 2014 and officers be instructed to write to the administrators to explain the reason for this decision. The Policy and Projects Officer had also been instructed to liaise with other local authorities during 2015 to ascertain whether the administration had appeared to have improved. Her report reflected that, regrettably, this was not the case and, since Lowndes Park was now separately judged in the 'Britain in Bloom' competition at a much lower entrance fee, she could not recommend that the Council re-enter for 2016.

Mr Phil Folly, the Treasurer for the Friends of Lowndes Park, addressed the Committee and stated that he would like the Council to re-enter the Green Flag scheme. He accepted that the lack of feedback was disappointing but opined that the public appreciated the status of having a Green Flag award and, moreover, the 'In Bloom' judges tended to focus on horticultural appearances rather than looking at the community benefit of a park.

Members agreed with the Policy and Projects Officer that it was difficult to justify re-entering when comments from other local authority officers had suggested the administration and feedback from the Green Flag administrators remained flawed. However they did request that she continue to monitor feedback to other entrants for consideration this time next year in respect to entering the 2017 competition.

It was

RESOLVED

1. That Lowndes Park is not entered into the Green Flag Award for 2016 but the scheme to be reviewed for possible entry in 2017.
2. That the Council supports Chesham in Bloom entering Lowndes Park into the RHS Thames & Chilterns in Bloom Parks and Open Spaces category for 2016.

34. **TOWN HALL CIVIL MARRIAGE CEREMONIES AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIP REGISTRATIONS**

The Administration Manager's report was discussed by Members in respect to her recommendation not to continue to license the Town Hall to hold civil marriage ceremonies and civil partnership registrations. It was noted that the fee for 2017 to obtain a licence for the next three years was unlikely to be recouped in hire fees based on the last three years.

The Committee agreed that the proliferation in other local venues now licensed for such ceremonies made the use of the Town Hall less likely, even with the comprehensive advertising of the facility that the Administration Manager had undertaken in the last two years. Councillor Lacey opined that if the Council obtained a liquor licence for the Town Hall, more people may be encouraged to use the venue for both getting married or entering into a civil partnership and then holding a post ceremony reception, but other Members suggested that people could apply for a Temporary Events Licence easily enough if they wished to do this.

It was therefore

RESOLVED

that the civil marriage ceremonies and civil partnership registrations' licence is not renewed from the 1st January 2017.

35. **REPRESENTATION ON BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

It was noted that Officers have been approached by members of Chesham 'Walkers are Welcome' Group to ascertain whether the Council could provide representation to the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum - an independent, statutory advisory body on all matters relating to countryside access, with members representing a wide range of interests including farmers, landowners, walkers, cyclists, equestrians, parish councils, National Trust and those with disabilities.

The Committee was happy to accede to this request and it was

RESOLVED

that Mr Ken Austin be appointed to represent the Council on the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum.

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

It was moved by the Chairman and

RESOLVED

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

37. **ELGIVA PANTOMIME 2016**

The Chairman welcomed the Manager and Deputy Manager of the Elgiva to the meeting and asked them to elaborate on the Manger's report which proposed to outsource the annual Elgiva Pantomime from 2016 onwards.

The Manager, Mark Barnes, explained the history of the pantomime at the Elgiva and advised that two unsolicited offers had been recently received in respect to an outside theatre company running, promoting and directing the pantomime for three years from next season. He explained that both were offering a guaranteed income significantly in excess of what the in-house pantomime was currently obtaining in its net profits. The Deputy Manager, Moira Little, added that not only was this financially attractive but it would considerably lessen the strain on the Manager and, indeed, all the Elgiva staff over this busy festive period. It was explained to the Committee that both the company and the Elgiva could evoke a one year break clause in the three year contract if the first season proved unsuccessful for some reason. Finally the Manager and Deputy Manager, while highlighting that the two proposals were broad similar in financial terms, they had a preference to contracting Rare Productions as they were aware of its high quality performances and its previous hiring of the theatre.

While Members accepted there was a degree of risk in changing from a very popular and successful current format, the case appeared to have been made for the change and it was therefore

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee agrees to accept the proposal from Rare Productions to produce the 2016 pantomime on the terms presented, subject to any further clauses the Elgiva Manager wishes to insert to the contract.
2. That the Committee agrees that no further proposals be sought on this matter due to the reasons outlined within the report.

Note: The Chairman then re-opened the meeting to the Public and the Press.

Note: Mr Barnes and Ms Little then left the meeting.

38. **REVISED ESTIMATES 2015/16 AND DRAFT ESTIMATES 2016/17**

The Finance and Contracts Manager's report on the revised estimates for 2015/16 and draft estimates for 2016/17 was considered by the Committee.

In respect of the 2015/16 estimates, the report showed that the final end-of-year figures were likely to be close to £5,000 under the original budget.

In regard to the 2016/17 estimates, the Finance and Contracts Manager gave an overview of his proposed first draft budgets. He reported that next year's first draft budget shows a total funding requirement of £925,060, a significant percentage increase on the annual precept. This is mainly as a result of the reduced Localisation of Council Tax government grant £20,000 (2.5%); new marketing provision £25,000 (3%); Devolved Services provision £11,075 (1.4%) and the Moor Gym & Swim budget increase £15,660 (1.9%). However he was keen to emphasise that this first draft included all the schemes that had been mooted as desirable by respective Committees and the Finance Working Group and that he was well aware that

Members would obviously like to see a much smaller increase on this year's precept and this will have to be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee which meets on the 7th December.

The Chairman thanked the Finance and Contracts Manager and asked for general observations on this first draft.

Councillor Yerrell expressed his reservations in respect to the possible recruitment of a Marketing Officer, particularly if the post had significant aspects in respect to Town Centre management and promotion as he opined that such a post had not really succeeded previously. He also stated he was surprised that the devolved services provision was likely to cost monies as he assumed it would be funded totally from the proposed Buckinghamshire County Council grant. In respect to the latter, Councillor Hudson replied that he believed the residents of the town would not necessarily object to paying a little more if such a service was to be improved.

While it was generally accepted by the Committee that this first draft reflected a 'wish list' of desirable projects and developments requiring significant refinement and revision, a view was expressed that the projected income targets generally were too low set against the proposed investment and it was questioned whether these figures, as presented, should have been in the public domain when they were unlikely to be reflective of the final precept figure.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Estimates and Renewal and Repairs programme be presented for consideration at the Policy and Resources Committee of the 7th December 2015 in light of the observations made at this Committee.

39. **PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES 2016/17**

The Committee considered the proposals detailed in the report for fees and charges for 2016/17. While it was usual to resolve these charges at this Committee, it was agreed that they should only be recommendations to Council so the Finance Working Group could ensure they did not contradict with its views when it met on the 21st December.

In light of this, the following was agreed:

(a) **Allotments**

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that a 5p per pole rise be levied on all of the allotments sites from 1st October 2016.

(b) **Cemetery**

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that the proposed scale of charges, reflecting no increases, be approved.

(c) **Housing**

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that the current rents be noted.

(d) **Office Services**

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that no increase be applied to these charges.

(e) **The Elgiva**

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

1. That no increases of charges be approved 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.
2. That the proposed increased cinema admission prices be agreed.
3. That the current caterer's agreement be noted.

(f) **Town Hall**

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that the proposed scale of charges, reflecting no increase in room hire fees or other hire charges, be approved and that the Town Clerk continues to be delegated the determination of any ad hoc charges.

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

Lowndes Park Catering

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

1. That no increases in Sports Pitches charges effective from the 1st August 2016 be agreed.
2. That the range of fees for fun fairs and circuses remain unchanged for 2016/2017 and that the Town Clerk be allowed to negotiate the charge within the range set.
3. That the Shelter on the Moor continues to be let at no charge to the Environmental Group.
4. That the Clerk continues to be empowered to negotiate charges for the use of Lowndes Park and other Council facilities by film companies.
5. That the fee of £100 for each use of the Council's Open Spaces be continued.
6. That the summer caterer for Lowndes Park be re-engaged in 2016 and on the same terms as 2015 i.e. a fee of 10% of gross sales.
7. That the current Lowndes Park Ice Cream concessionaire be offered a two year extension at an agreed fee of £3,500 per annum.
8. That a wayleave charge of £5 per annum for pedestrian access only and £50 per annum for vehicular/pedestrian access be progressed at the earliest opportunity and the charges remain unchanged for 2016/17.
9. That the Clerk be empowered to negotiate charges for the use of the Moor Hardstanding for car-parking.

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

Councillor Bacon highlighted that the proposed increases suggested by the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre Manager had been submitted with the caveat that it was 'against his (the Manager's) judgement' and therefore the Finance Working Group may wish to give these proposals particularly greater scrutiny.

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that the following be agreed:

1. That the gym and summer swimming prices as detailed in the report be agreed.
2. That the Chiltern Natural Therapies Ltd rent be increased to £300 per month from the 1st April 2016.
3. That the Moor Football Pitch charges effective from the 1st August 2016 are not increased.

40. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 9.50pm.

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CHAIRMAN