

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the RECREATION AND THE ARTS COMMITTEE

held on 7th September 2009

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

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

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillors F.G. Holly, C.H. Spruytenburg and P. W. Yerrell.

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

Mr J. Wilman – Proludic Play Ltd.

Mr M. Rowan – Friends of Lowndes Park.

Mr A. Tilbury – the Allotments Group.

Officer: Mr. W. Richards, Town Clerk.

21. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Holly declared a personal interest in agenda item 4 as a member of the Friends of Chesham Cemetery.

Councillors Mrs Fulford and Mrs Littley declared a personal interest in agenda item 4 as members of the Impress the Chess Group.

Councillors Holly and Mrs Walker declared a personal interest in agenda items 4 and 8 as members of the Allotments Group. Councillor Mrs Pirouet declared a personal interest in agenda items 4 and 8 as an allotment holder.

Councillor Mrs Fulford declared a personal interest in agenda item 4 as a member of the Environmental Group.

Councillor Holly and Mrs Michael declared a personal interest in agenda items 7 and 13 as members of the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim.

Councillors Bacon and Ms Bramwell declared a personal interest in agenda item 7 and 13 as members of the Moor Fitness Gym. Councillor Mrs Fulford declared a personal interest in agenda items 7 and 13 as a swimming season ticket holder.

Councillor Mrs Pirouet declared a personal interest in agenda item 11 as a regular dog walker in Co-op Field.

22. **MINUTES**

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Recreation and the Arts Committee held on 1st June 2009, be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

23. **ELGIVA BOARD OF MANAGEMENT**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Elgiva Board of Management held on 15th June 2009. It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

24. **ALLOTMENTS GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Allotments Group held on 23rd June 2009. It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

25. **CHESHAM ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Chesham Environmental Group held on 25th June 2009. It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

26. **FRIENDS OF CHESHAM CEMETERY**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Friends of Chesham Cemetery held on 7th July 2009. It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

27. **IMPRESS THE CHESS**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Impress the Chess Group held on 14th July 2009. It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

28. **PLAY AREA STRATEGY**

Members considered the draft play area strategy as devised by the Town Clerk and endorsed by the Play Area Working Party.

The Committee accepted the basic tenets of the strategy, namely that the Council's play areas needed rationalising, with some smaller sites to be closed and investment required in the remaining sites. In respect of this investment, Members debated the priority list. Councillor Yerrell opined that the play area in Marston Field should be the first to be updated. He suggested that the consultation already undertaken did not, in his view, adequately reflect the wishes of those in the Pond Park area and pointed out that, previous to the play strategy, the Parks and Premises Manager had already earmarked the facility to be upgraded. Councillor Bamford agreed with Councillor Yerrell and highlighted that the site was in an area of comparatively high deprivation which was not alluded to within the report. Councillor Mrs Fulford responded by saying that similar arguments on the consultation and deprivation could be applied to the Waterside ward and suggested that, since the priorities set for renovation would be heavily influenced by input from community groups, it would be advantageous for the Pond Park Community Association to become engaged in the consultation and fund-raising process. Other Members also agreed that the site in Moor Road should be given the highest priority since its topography and parking allowed for it to be developed into a fully integrated play area suitable for use by the disabled.

A discussion then took place on the requirements for a fully integrated, disabled friendly major destination site within town. Mr. James Wilman, from Proludic Play, advised that in his opinion, Moor Road would be the most appropriate site for the reasons already stated. However he informed Members that the cost for such a site and the specialist equipment required (particularly wet pour rubber type safety surfacing) would be considerable, and probably in excess of that spent on Lowndes Park recently. Mr. Michael Rowan advised the Committee that his professional background in park management had shown him that it was essential to know what forms of disability needed to be catered for and it did not necessarily require large amounts of wet pour surfacing to satisfy need, an observation accepted by Mr. Wilman.

Councillor Mrs Michael stated that the newly renovated play area in Lowndes Park had received some very positive feedback and she believed it was essential that the Council pushed on with the delivery of the strategy. In noting that the Council had been able to pay for almost all the Lowndes Park play-area through a government grant, she proposed that the Play Area Working Party be requested to look at the options and costs for re-developing both Marston Field and Moor Road during the next 12 months and report back to a future Committee accordingly. This was agreed by the Committee.

Members then went through the recommendations of the Play Strategy and made observations thereof. In light of comments received, it was agreed that the recommendations be amended to the following:

1. Following the renovation of Lowndes Park, the play-areas be renovated, subject to finance, in the order listed above but with the Council determining on the timetable for development at both Moor Road and Marston Field as the first priority dependent on costs, funding and the requirements for a site catering for disabilities at Moor Road. The designs and cost being proposed by Proludic in consultation with local residents.
2. That the priority listing be altered to reflect local need if a community group comes forward to progress a particular play-area.
3. That the play-areas at Hodds Wood Road, Bois Moor Road and Batchelor's Way be not renovated and ultimately closed unless there is overwhelming evidence that the local community can prove regular and widespread usage.
4. That the Council directly approach community and resident groups across town to ascertain what, if any, sites for the multi-sports goal are suitable and, if desired by a community group, it works with the Council and partners such as Paradigm Housing, to consult with all other residents to confirm the appropriateness of such a site.
5. Consideration be given to the current provision to the 13-17 years age group and the future of the skatepark and that the Council work with the Youth Council and the users to ascertain this.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Play Area Strategy, as amended, be adopted.

29. **GREEN FLAG STATUS EVALUATION AND RENOVATION OF PERFORMANCE AREA**

Mr. Michael Rowan, Chairman of the Friends of Lowndes Park, addressed the Committee in light of the unsuccessful attempt by Lowndes Park to have its Green Flag status renewed for 2009.

Mr Rowan stated that while the judges' decision was regrettable, their professionalism and independence could not be faulted and their observations appeared to be perfectly valid. He highlighted the fact that the Council had only failed to obtain the pass mark by a few marks and this should be easily rectifiable. He opined that obtaining and keeping Green Flag status would become increasingly important in obtaining external funding in future years and he urged the Committee to re-apply next year. Members accepted Mr Rowan's comments whole-heartedly and expressed their hope that the Friends could continue to play an increasing role with the overseeing and administration of the park's Management Plan.

The Town Clerk advised that he had had some indicative proposals from two companies to resurface the performance area and to provide a seasonal, waterproof canopy but that he required further discussions with Mr. Rowan and the Friends in light of the budget

limitations and criteria imposed by the lottery funder. Once this has been progressed, a detailed report with proposals will be brought before the Committee.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Council re-enter the Green Flag Award scheme for 2010.

30. **CHESHAM MOOR GYM AND SWIM UPDATE**

The Committee considered the officers' financial report on the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim facility.

Members noted with satisfaction that the general upturn on the income for the gym was continuing. Mr Peter Ashby from the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre stated that usage of the gym was up by about a third from 12 months ago and, in spite of an indifferent summer, swimming attendance remained healthy resulting in what he hoped would be a decrease in the budget by around £20,000 by the end of the financial year.

Members then discussed the issue of the Council being unable to apply for a grant from the Government to provide free swimming for the 16s and unders and the over 60s as Chiltern District Council had been able to do. There was unanimity that it was unfair and illogical that this scheme was only available to principal authorities and it was agreed that the Council should continue to lobby Government for the inclusion of first tier authorities, possibly by joining up with other town and parish councils who also managed pools.

In respect of the installation of solar powered heating, it was agreed that this should be progressed, though Mr Ashby opined that the idea of a quick pay back period should be treated with caution. It was also agreed that the matter of obtaining planning permission and the susceptibility of the panels to vandalism also needed to be considered before proceeding. Following a suggestion from Councillor Mrs Fulford, it was also agreed that the Clerk should write to the former Chairman of the Friends, Mr Mike Barden, to thank him for his efforts with this scheme.

It was

RESOLVED

1. That the financial position be noted.
2. That the Council engage with the Government and other appropriate bodies to extend the free swimming scheme to cover town and parish councils.
3. That the Council proceed with the proposal to install solar panel heating and bring a further report to the Committee.

Councillor Spruytenburg left the meeting at 9.10pm

31. **ALLOTMENTS NEW SITE AND REVISION OF ALLOTMENTS AGREEMENT**

The Committee considered the possibility of developing a new allotment site in the field abutting Nashleigh Hill Recreation Ground in Vale Road following a site visit by the Chairman of the Allotments Group, the Town Clerk and the Parks and Premises Manager.

Members agreed that there was a need for new allotments but did not feel that Berkhamstead Field would be the appropriate venue due to the overall installation costs, limited parking and the suitability of the soil. Moreover it was noted that the field has a lot of potential as a piece of chalk grassland – a habitat that is in serious decline in the South East of England. It was noted that conversion to allotment plots would eradicate the chalk grassland plants due to the use of herbicide to establish the plots, and then fertilisers and herbicides used by tenants, combined with regular strimming/mowing of grass paths. It was also suggested that the field should be considered as a potential new site for the cemetery once the existing one reaches capacity. Mr Allen Tilbury, Chairman of the Allotments Group, addressed the Committee and reminded Members that the new allotments would only take up about an eighth of the area so the environmental impact would be limited. He also opined that there was enough parking in Vale Road to accommodate both residents and allotment holders.

The Committee then made suggestions as to other potential sites to be investigated. These included the unofficial allotments site behind the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre and the play areas earmarked to be closed. Councillor Mrs Walker also alluded to the Transition Towns initiative that encouraged people who cannot manage their own gardens to offer up part of it for vegetable growing by interested parties.

After some discussion, it was

RESOLVED

1. That the proposal to develop a new allotments site in Vale Road be not progressed and a botanist be engaged to report on what the site contains and what potential it has.
2. That the Council continue to investigate other possible sites and report back to a future Committee.

32. **FUTURE OF HEARSE HOUSE, CHESHAM CEMETERY AND CEMETERY LOCK-UP TIMES.**

The Town Clerk reported that the Hearse House was surveyed by local surveyors in January of this year and a number of defects were found with the structure and, in light of this, numerous repairs were recommended to be implemented. The Committee was advised on the kind offer from the Friends of Chesham Cemetery to donate £1,000 towards the cost of the repairs instead of demolishing it. Members agreed that they did not wish to see the facility demolished due to its historic nature and decided to effect the repairs.

In respect of the Cemetery locking up hours, the Committee was of the view that locking up at 4.00pm in the summer was not desirable. As the Clerk reported there was no Parks and Premises Operatives wishing to work these extra hours, it was decided that the Friends of Chesham Cemetery be asked to investigate other options and to report back to the Committee.

It was

RESOLVED

1. That the donation of £1,000 be accepted by Friends of Chesham Cemetery to effect repairs on the Hearse House and the building be not demolished.
2. That the options for locking up the Cemetery to extend the existing opening hours of the Cemetery be investigated by the Friends of Chesham Cemetery and reported back to the Council.

33 **HIRE OF FOOTBALL PITCHES**

The Committee discussed the report from the Finance and Contracts Manager in regard to the dramatic drop in adult hirings for football pitches.

It was accepted that, in light of this, the increase in charges for 2009/10 be not implemented at the present time and a group be set up to look at the service the Council offers in comparison to other providers and the charges thereof.

It was

RESOLVED

that the new proposed scale of charges of £64.10 and £45.80 be agreed and the idea of setting up a service review to consider the hire of football pitches be progressed.

34. **REVIEW OF DOG WASTE BINS**

The Committee considered the provision of dog waste bins on Council.

In noting there was a surplus within the budget, it was

RESOLVED

that an extra bin be located in Co-op Field and the officers be authorised to increase the number of bins in Lowndes Park.

35. **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 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.

36. **FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF THE CHESHAM MOOR GYM AND SWIM CENTRE**

Members discussed whether they wished to progress with the investigation of the concept of alternative outside management of the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre.

While again the Committee expressed its whole-hearted support for the current Council management at the facility, it was agreed it would be prudent to allow the Service Review panel to scrutinise the proposals submitted by an outside operator to ensure adherence to providing best value to the local tax payer.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre Service Review panel consider the proposals submitted by the leisure company to manage the facility and include its findings within its final service review document.

37. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 9.30pm.

CHAIRMAN

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