

Runnymede Borough CouncilLEISURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE18 March 2004 at 7.30 pm

Members of the

Committee Present: Councillors C.J. Norman (Chairman), Mrs C.Y. Jones (Vice-Chairman), Mrs P.I. Broadhead, Ms D.V. Clarke, A.J. Davis, Mrs C.E. Gant, Miss M.N. Heath, A.M. Moore, R.J. Ray and B.J. Relph.

Members of the

Committee Absent: None

Councillors J.M. Edwards, Mrs J. Norman, Mrs E.E. Price and Mrs V.A. Smallman also attended.

792. NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Conservative Group had notified the Chief Executive Officer of its wish that Councillor Mrs S.E. Jacobs be removed from Membership of the Committee and that Councillor Ms D.V. Clarke be appointed in her place for a fixed period ending on the day after the meeting. Thereafter Councillor Mrs Jacobs would be reappointed.

The Chief Executive Officer had given effect to this request in accordance with Section 16(2) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

793. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22 January 2004 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

794. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs E.E. Price declared a personal interest under the Runnymede Code of Conduct for Members in respect of the report 'Egham Hythe Project – Progress Report' as she was a non executive Director of the North Surrey Primary Care Trust.

Councillor Mrs P.I. Broadhead declared a personal and prejudicial interest under the Runnymede Code of Conduct for Members in respect of the report 'Addlestone Community Association – Capital Grant Aid' as she was a member of the Association. Mrs Broadhead left the room during the discussion thereon, taking no part in the proceedings.

795. SERVICE PLAN 2003/04 – PROGRESS REPORT

(Ref: Minutes of Leisure and Environment Committee, September 2003, page 676 para.337)

The Committee received the latest progress report in respect of the Service Plan for those areas under its remit. In addition, approval was sought of the interpretation of aims resulting from new targets Officers had identified in the Leader's Position Statement 2004/05 so that these could be included in future editions of the Service Plan.

Leisure Services

Members were advised that owing to staffing shortages, it had not been possible to update the Leisure Services section of the Plan beyond adding draft targets to be approved by the Committee.

Members were pleased to note that the plans for a new public park at Pooley Green and the Allotments programme at Barrsbrook Farm and Painesfield were progressing well and that the Cemeteries Service had recently achieved the Institute of Burial and Cremation Authorities (IBCA) Excellence Charter Mark.

The Committee was encouraged by the popularity of the Hythe Centre, noting that existing staff were currently working extra hours to accommodate increased bookings at the venue. Members also welcomed the new Visitor Information Centre at Thorpe Park which was due to open in June 2004.

The Committee requested that their best wishes be conveyed to the Assistant Head of Leisure Services.

Technical Services

Members were advised that in respect of plans to reduce noise levels in the vicinity of the M25 an example of a small section of the new absorbent barriers was currently on display at the Wraysbury Road compound, details of which could be obtained from the Council's Environmental Protection Department.

The Committee noted that although the incidence of dog fouling in the Borough had been significantly reduced there were still some areas in need of attention which it was agreed would be addressed shortly in liaison with local Ward Members.

Subject to minor drafting changes, the Committee

RESOLVED that –

the interpretation of the aims resulting from the 2004/05 Leader's Position Statement be approved for inclusion in the Service Plan.

796. PROGRESS TOWARDS THE SAVINGS TARGET

The Committee noted for information progress which had been made towards the Council's savings target of £1 million a year being achieved by 2004/05 together with stepped increases in Council Tax.

Members recalled that when the Financial Forecast was approved in October 2003 savings of £475,000 were identified. The Forecast was updated at the turn of the year following new developments and a revised savings target of £518,000 had been identified.

797. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

The Committee received for consideration a report informing Members of the need to re-let the Grounds Maintenance Contract and highlighting an opportunity to adjust the content of the contract.

Members noted that the current contract, valued at £200,000 was let to John O'Conner in January 1998, and was due to expire at the end of December 2004. In addition, the floral baskets and troughs contract, also let to John O'Conner and valued at £31,500 was due to expire in March 2005.

The Committee agreed that the existing grounds maintenance contract specification provided a good standard across the Borough and the contract for the floral hanging baskets and troughs made the Borough very attractive during the summer and was much appreciated.

Members approved proposals to combine the floral baskets and troughs contract with that of grounds maintenance from March 2005 so that more preferable rates might be obtained by having a contract of a higher value. Officers also suggested there was scope to offer this larger contract jointly with a neighbouring authority, namely Elmbridge Borough Council, and a report discussing this in more detail would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

In the light of the Council's savings target, the Committee agreed that Officers should investigate the desirability of handing back the Highway shrub bed maintenance to Surrey County Council. In doing so, it was noted that the final decision would have to be made by Economic Development Committee and that if responsibility was transferred back to the County Council it might result in those areas being maintained at a lower level.

The Committee discussed in detail the option of reducing the frequency of grass cutting at a number sites across the Borough which had been selected on the basis of their being designated as informal open spaces without formal facilities. The purpose of this was so that when the contract was re-let potential contractors would be invited to produce pricings for two Bills of Quantity and in that way potential savings on the contract could be assessed.

Although the Committee considered it was unlikely that significant savings would be achieved, it was agreed that including two Bills of Quantity in the Tender Documents was sensible. In preparing the specification Members requested that two of the chosen sites be revised because it was considered that they would not benefit from fewer cuts.

The Committee noted the Public Services Contracts Regulations requirements concerning the number of contractors to be invited which was between 5 and 8 and the time limit of 37 days for receipt of tender submissions.

Accordingly, the Committee

RESOLVED that –

- i) the Grounds Maintenance Contract be notified in the Official Journal and a range of 5 – 8 be specified as the range within which the number of contractors intended to be invited to tender be fixed; and**
- ii) a further report be brought to this Committee in May 2004 for approval of the Specification and list of contractors to be invited to tender together with updates on discussions with Elmbridge Borough Council and Surrey County Council as appropriate.**

798. RIVERSDELL CLOSE FENCING – REPORT OF THE REVIEW BOARD SCRUTINY HEARING HELD ON 11 FEBRUARY 2004

The Chairman welcomed the Chairman and other members of the Review Board who had attended the meeting in order to assist with consideration of the report and their recommendations.

The Committee was reminded that the Recommendations of the Review Board, as set out below, would be reported to Full Council in April 2004;

- i) the Surrey County Council Local Committee be formally requested to make arrangements for a submission to the Secretary of State seeking the closure of the Riversdell Close alleyway as a matter of urgency, on grounds of anti-social behaviour;**
- ii) Runnymede Borough Council Committees should always comply with the Council's new Consultation Strategy in future;**
- iii) the Leisure and Environment Committee consider constructing a path along the alternative route identified by the Board which, dependent on the location of existing trees and other vegetation, will be a fully accessible footpath between the footbridge over the drain on the north bank of the River Bourne to the corner of Riversdell Close and Gogmore Lane, and if this route is approved it should be opened before the new youth facility is opened at Gogmore Farm Park;**
- iv) the police be urged to implement their new penalty notice powers under the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 as soon as possible; and**
- v) on balance, the Leisure and Environment Committee made the right decision at its meeting on 20 November 2003.**

It was emphasised that the Leisure and Environment Committee could not alter the decision made by the Review Board but were being invited to make comments thereon which would then be considered by Full Council at their meeting.

The Committee agreed that the matter had been thoroughly considered by the Review Board, and that the decision to erect the fence at that time had been beneficial to residents in Riversdell Close. It was acknowledged though that more consultation would have been desirable.

Members then considered each of the Review Board's Recommendations in detail.

The Committee was informed that at their meeting on 12 March the Local Area Committee had considered a report stating that if the alleyway was to be closed a designation order from the Secretary of State would be needed. Some doubt had been expressed in the report to the Area Committee over the merits of this course of action but Officers would be liaising with the County Council shortly.

The Committee noted that Gogmore Park had nine entrances and exits and that the closure of one of them, although inconvenient to a number of users would not close the park off altogether.

Members discussed the issue of consultation, mindful that the Council's Consultation Strategy had been ratified at Full Council in October 2003, a month before the report on the fence was considered by the Leisure and Environment Committee.

It was noted that a petition against the fence containing approximately 400 signatures had been submitted to the Review Board and that subsequently more letters had been received. However, letters in favour of the fence outnumbered those against and it was considered that although the fence was not a suitable long term solution there needed other schemes to be in place before it could be dismantled.

The Committee was reminded that although youth provision was the responsibility of the County Council, this Council had done much in this area and would continue to do so. To this end the opening of a youth facility in Gogmore Farm by Surrey County Council was a priority in order to address some of the problems with anti-social behaviour currently being experienced.

Members were advised that regular meetings between Chertsey Councillors, the Police, Church and other interested parties were taking place and that consultation and community involvement were improving. However, Members of the Review Board considered that early consultation involving those residents on the other side of the fence and discussion with other interested parties should have taken place.

The Committee agreed that before embarking on the construction of a path as described in Review Board Recommendation iii) more information was needed, particularly a decision on the closure of the alleyway to Riversdell Close. Members considered it would be appropriate therefore to defer that Recommendation.

Members endorsed Recommendation iv), anticipating that once the police exercised the new penalty notice powers a decrease in anti-social behaviour could be achieved.

The Committee considered that the decision which they had to make in November 2003 had been difficult, but in order to alleviate the situation faced by residents quickly there had been no alternative but to erect a fence. In doing so, the Committee was confident that it could be removed once the problems had lessened and welcomed the Review Board's on balance endorsement of their decision.

The Committee

RESOLVED that -

the following comments be drawn to the attention of Council as the view of this Committee when Council considers the Review Board's report:-

- i) the Committee endorses recommendations (i), (ii), (iv) from the Review Board as set out above;**
- ii) the Committee also endorses recommendation (v) and asks Council especially to note it; and**
- iii) the Committee considers that recommendation (iii) from the Review Board regarding the construction of a path should be deferred pending the outcome of a decision being made on the Riversdell Close alleyway.**

799. EGHAM SPORTS CENTRE TRADING ACCOUNT

The Committee noted the latest trading account figures for Egham Sports Centre.

Members expressed their satisfaction with recent progress which had been made regarding the staff restructuring exercise aimed at re-focussing attention towards membership retention initiatives and were confident that the trading figures would continue to improve over the coming months.

800. CABRERA TRUST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5 January 2004, as attached at Appendix 'A', were received and noted.

801. RUNNYMEDE ARTS DEVELOPMENT STEERING GROUP – MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Steering Group held on 3 February 2004, as attached at Appendix 'B', were received and noted.

The Committee noted that local arts groups could be directed towards TESIS school in Thorpe for an additional venue in the borough for theatrical or artistic events.

802. ABBEY FIT JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Joint Management Committee held on 10 February 2004, as attached at Appendix 'C', were received and noted.

Members were pleased that a planning application and plans for the Abbey Fit scheme had been submitted recently to the Council's Planning Officers for consideration.

803. ADDLESTONE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION – CAPITAL GRANT AID

The Committee considered an application from Addlestone Community Association for capital grant aid in the sum of £10,000 to assist with the purchase of chairs for use in the new community centre.

Members praised the Association's wide variety of community activities which had attracted the affiliation of twenty local organisations and a membership of a little over 1,000 people, most of whom were resident in the Borough.

The Committee wished the Association well and accordingly it was

RESOLVED that –

a capital grant of £10,000 be awarded to the Addlestone Community Association in respect of the purchase of chairs for the new Community Centre, subject to the usual conditions set out in the approved grant aid criteria

804. GRANT FUNDING TO SOCIAL CLUBS

The Committee received for consideration a report which asked Members to determine whether non-sporting social clubs without any explicit linkage between their objectives and the general factors mentioned in the grant aid criteria were eligible for grant aid, and in the light of that decision to determine an application from the Addlestone Royal British Legion Club for capital grant aid in the sum of £4,500 to assist with roofing works.

There was some discussion amongst Members regarding the merits of social clubs and the definition of recreational activities and the extent to which these could be regarded as having an element of community benefit. It was considered that non-sporting social clubs without any explicit linkage between their objectives and the general factors mentioned in the grant aid criteria should not be eligible for grant aid. With this in mind, Members agreed that the Legion Club itself did not provide a significant degree of community benefit to sit comfortably within the grant aid criteria.

Therefore Members were concerned that a precedent should not be set by awarding grant aid to private social clubs whose direct community benefit could not be clearly demonstrated, but regretted that the decision to refuse the application made by the Addlestone Royal British Legion Club might appear harsh especially as the club was associated with a national charitable organisation.

The Committee was keen to express its high regard for the Royal British Legion and its charitable activities. However, Members recognised that the social clubs associated with the Royal British Legion were distinct from the main charitable body.

Accordingly, the Committee

RESOLVED that –

- i) non-sporting social clubs without any explicit linkage between their objectives and the general factors mentioned in the grant aid criteria are not eligible for grant aid; and**
- ii) in the light of the decision relating to (i), the application by the Addlestone Royal British Legion Club for capital grant aid of £4,500 in respect of roof repair works at its Church Road premises be refused**

805. EGHAM HYTHE PROJECT – PROGRESS REPORT

(Ref: Minutes of Economic Development Committee, November 2003, page 1001, para. 472)

The Committee received a progress report on the Egham Hythe Project which also sought their approval for a parcel of land behind the Hythe Centre to be declared surplus to requirements in order to facilitate the development of a new health centre.

The Committee was pleased that significant progress had been made including the new Hythe Centre, completed within budget and opened in December 2002, and preparations for a new public park had begun formally with a recent tree planting ceremony involving local school children.

There had been extensive public consultation and a Friends of the Hythe Park Group had been formed with an elected committee which was keen to help shape the design of the park. The Group hoped to work in partnership with the favoured company, Woodland Environmental, who could provide a complete design and build service.

Members recalled that in order for the Town Park to go ahead it would be necessary to re-locate the Swan Sanctuary and Officers were currently discussing a way forward with them with a view to submitting a report for consideration to the Economic Development Committee in the next cycle of meetings in May 2004.

Another part of the project was the re-location of a local doctor's surgery. Following negotiations between Community Healthcare Investments Limited who were financing the facility and North Surrey Primary Care Trust it was now anticipated that the proposals could be expanded to include two surgeries, a dental practice, pharmacy, and area social services team.

Members were informed that to accommodate these proposals it would be necessary to utilise land, part of which was currently being used as an informal kickabout area. The Committee declared the land surplus to its requirements in order to facilitate the development of a new health centre.

The Committee commended the scheme, being reassured that parking provision would be adequate for all users of the facilities. In addition, Officers were confident that sufficient arguments to counter objections raised by the Environment Agency in respect of the location of the site which was in the flood plain could be satisfactorily resolved.

Accordingly, the Committee

RESOLVED that -

the land shown on Appendix 'G' of the Agenda be declared surplus to requirements in order to facilitate the development of a health centre.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 9.32 p.m.)