

## CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

### MINUTES of the meeting of the RECREATION AND THE ARTS COMMITTEE

held on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2012

**PRESENT** Councillor Mrs A.M. Pirouet - Chairman (presiding)

Councillor	Mrs C.I. Boxer	Councillor	D.J. Lacey
"	Mrs P.R. Cherrill	"	Mrs C. Littley
"	T. Franks	"	R.C. McCulloch
"	P.J. Hudson	"	M.W. Shaw
"	Mrs R. Juett	"	C.H. Spruytenburg

#### **IN ATTENDANCE**

Councillors V.M. Abraham, A.K. Bacon, M. Fayyaz, F.S. Wilson and P.W. Yerrell.

Officers:

- Mr W. Richards, Town Clerk
- Mr S. Pearson, Finance and Contracts Manager
- Mr D. Essex, Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre Manager
- Mr M. Barnes, Elgiva Theatre Manager
- Mr T. Collett, Elgiva Theatre Technical Manager

Mr T. Pilling and Mr A. Ogden ó Elgiva Board of Management  
Mr D. Foulds and Mr R. Comer - Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre

#### 29. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Mrs Littley declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 4 as a member of the Chesham Environmental Group.

Councillors Mrs Cherrill and Mrs Littley declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda items 4 and 11 as members of the Allotments Group.

Councillors Abraham and Mrs Cherrill declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda items 4, 6 and 11 as members of the Elgiva Board of Management.

Councillors Mrs Boxer and Hudson declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda items 4, 5 and 11 as members of the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre.

Councillor Bacon declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 11 as a regular user of the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre and a pecuniary interest in agenda item 6 as a member of the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre gym and left the meeting during its consideration thereof.

Councillor McCulloch declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 11 as a member of the Friends of Chesham Cemetery.

Councillor Spruytenburg declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 11 as an allotment holder.

Councillors Lacey and Shaw declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 11b as

members of the Pond Park Community Association.  
Councillor Mrs Pirouet declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 11b as a resident of Paradigm Housing Group.

30. **MINUTES**

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Recreation and the Arts Committee held on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2012, be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

31. **FRIENDS OF CHESHAM MOOR GYM AND SWIM CENTRE**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim held on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2012. It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Minutes be noted.

32. **ALLOTMENTS GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Allotments Group held on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Minutes be noted.

33. **ELGIVA BOARD OF MANAGEMENT**

Members received the Minutes of the Elgiva Board of Management meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2012. It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Minutes be noted.

34. **CHESHAM ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the Chesham Environmental Group meeting held on

15<sup>th</sup> November 2012. It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Minutes be noted.

35. **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 Centre facility.

Councillor Hudson stated that there appeared to be a discrepancy between the gym income figures in the report compared with attached budgetary sheets and asked whether the Finance and Contracts Manager could explain this. The Finance and Contracts Manager explained that the differential was due to income carried over from the previous year for accounting purposes in the budgetary sheets and the month by month figures recorded in the report gave a better picture of the current position in respect to actual monies taken through the till.

Having noted there would be further discussion on the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre in the next agenda item, it was

**RESOLVED**

that the financial position be noted.

*Note: Councillor Bacon left the Chamber in consideration of the next agenda item.*

36. **FRIENDS OF CHESHAM MOOR GYM AND SWIM CENTRE PROPOSALS**

The Chairman welcomed the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre Manager, Mr Danny Essex, and representatives from the Friends, Mr Roger Comer and Mr David Foulds, and invited them to go through some of the proposals the Friends had suggested in the report circulated to Members.

The Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre Manager began, firstly, by justifying the recommended price changes for the gym. He stated that it was the Friends' view that the prices needed to be both simplified and, in some cases, lowered. He reminded Members that the gym faced much sterner competition now than when the Council took over running it four years ago with two budget chain gyms now operating in Chesham. While he stated that he did not think it possible, or indeed, desirable to drop the prices to match these gyms, he opined that more competitive prices should get more people through the door and increase secondary spend. The Friends accepted that there could be a further short-term dip in income but it was believed this was the best course of action to stabilise, and then begin increasing, revenue.

Mr Comer then addressed the Committee in respect of the proposals to facilitate all-year

around swimming. He stated that the Centre had already secured core income from pool hire outside the summer months through block bookings from local triathlon clubs and the market for public swimming was looking strong. He advised that the Friends were using Hampton Open Air Pool as a possible business model which was open 365 days a year and attracting around £1.4m in revenue. While he was aware that this sort of figure was not achievable for the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre, he and the Friends did believe that by opening up throughout the year; swimming, gym, multi-court hires and important secondary spends could be greatly increased to the benefit of the Council's finances. He alluded to the draft business plan previously circulated and stated that, though not completed, it set out a positive direction for the facility overseen by a Friends' group with its vast array of technical, marketing, financial and professional experience.

The Chairman thanked Mr Essex and Mr Comer for the overview and then sought questions and observations from Members.

Councillor Mrs Juett asked whether it was fair and reasonable to increase 'Seniors' season ticket charges while not increasing 'Junior' or 'Family Swim' prices particularly as older people were part of the 'protected characteristics' group listed in the Equalities Act 2010.

The Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre Manager said he accepted the point but stated that this group represented a fair proportion of the current clientele and research undertaken at the Centre had indicated that this was the price customers were willing to pay which was important if the Centre was serious about increasing income. He also emphasised that it was proposed to uplift the 'Adult' fee as well so it was not solely 'Seniors' that were facing a price rise.

Councillor Abraham commended the Manager and Friends and opined that he believed further income could be achieved by promoting the health and well-being aspect of the Centre by working with health centres and G.P. surgeries. Councillor Mrs Cherrill added that, in Hampshire, the local NHS had a 'social prescription' scheme where places like the Centre were recommended as places to improve health as an alternative to pills and medicines.

Mr Comer responded by saying that when Chesham Hospital had existed, it had referred many patients to the pool in respect of physiotherapy rehabilitation. Clearly it had been closed for some years now and the Friends were now intending to build new links with health providers.

Councillor Wilson said he was delighted that the challenge to increase income had been taken up. He applauded the idea of using Hampton Pool as a business model but enquired as to whether the gym was similar in size to the Centre's.

The Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre Manager answered by advising that, in actual fact, the gym at Hampton Pool was also quite small but obtained a relatively high usage simply because of the number of people going through the doors to swim and attracting

members this way. It was again, he opined, an example of why it would be advantageous to open the pool all year round.

Councillor Fayyaz enquired about the progress on e-marketing. The Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre Manager replied that a considerable database had been built up now and targeted marketing was being increased this way. He stated that it would be further enhanced by the new till which contained features which would give a more sophisticated recording of those attending.

Councillor Hudson stated, that as a Council representative on the Friends Group, he had seen a much improved business acumen emanating from the Friends and officers at the Centre over the past 18 months and opined that they should be given full support.

Finally the Chairman, Councillor Mrs Pirouet, enquired as to whether any decision had been taken as yet on new gym equipment. The Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre Manager advised that no wholesale leasing of new equipment was deemed necessary at the moment but equipment would be replaced as and when necessary. Councillor Mrs Pirouet suggested that when the time came to look at a new leasing agreement, the Friends discuss their options with the Finance Working Party.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked the Manager and the Friends' representatives for their attendance and it was

### **RESOLVED**

1. That the winter pool hirings and swimming proposals be approved and continued.
2. The summer opening date recommendation of 29<sup>th</sup> March 2013 be approved.
3. That the proposed fees and charges as recommended in the report be considered and approved, to be formally adopted at the Fees and Charges item later on the agenda.
4. That the recommended gym prices be applicable from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013.
5. That the Centre Manager be given authority to offer special promotional prices on the tennis court and multi-games area as outlined in the report.

*Note: Councillor Bacon re-joined the meeting*

### 37. **ELGIVA DIGITAL PROJECTOR PURCHASE**

The Chairman welcomed the Elgiva Theatre Manager, Mr Mark Barnes, the Technical Manager, Mr Tristan Collett, and representatives from the Elgiva Board of Management, Mr Trevor Pilling and Mr Anthony Ogden, and proposed that they verbally added anything to the report at this juncture.

The Elgiva Theatre Manager opened the discussion by saying that, clearly, he was reluctant to ask the Council for such a large sum of monies in these difficult economic times but he hoped that the report had expressed coherently that, without such a purchase of state-of-the-art Digital Cinema Initiative equipment with the outlined add-ons, the showing of films would no longer be viable and a valuable income stream and community activity would be lost. While the inclination might be to go for a cheaper option than the one recommended by officers (around £65,000), the Elgiva Theatre Manager opined that opportunities for significant income generation through one-off screening from ballet and opera houses, for instance, would be lost and therefore would increase the payback period.

Members generally agreed that the opportunities to show films should be retained and that only the purchasing or leasing of this equipment would continue to allow this to happen. Councillor Mrs Boxer advised that she worked professionally for a venue that showed films and asked a couple of questions on the technical specification. The Technical Manager replied that he had thoroughly researched the options on the projector and believed he and the Manager were recommending the equipment best suited for the theatre but he stated he would welcome Councillor Mrs Boxer's professional input and advice before a final purchase was made. Councillor Mrs Boxer then questioned whether 3-D was required straightaway. The Theatre Manager responded by saying that, without it, he did feel that income generation options would be more limited in respect of streaming live events and, moreover, Councillor Mrs Juett opined that 3-D was becoming increasingly popular for young people and family films.

Members then discussed the possible financing of the projector. It was agreed that it would put a severe strain on the Repairs and Renewals budget so other options such as possible leasing or taking out a loan should be considered. Councillor Bacon enquired as to whether the Elgiva Board of Management would be prepared to commit the remaining £8,000 of ring-fenced monies it had accrued. Mr Pilling confirmed that the Board had already agreed to this in principle.

The Committee agreed unanimously that, if possible, the Elgiva should remain a venue for showing films and that such a purchase was necessary for this to continue but the financing of such a purchase needed to be carefully assessed.

Accordingly it was

### **RESOLVED**

that the Committee agree in principle to the purchase/leasing of a new digital projector as recommended by the Elgiva Board of Management and the matter of financing it be reconsidered at the Policy and Resources Committee following recommendations from the Finance Working Party.

38. **WEDDING AND CIVIL CEREMONY LICENCE FOR TOWN HALL**

The Committee was asked whether it wished to approve the continuation of licensing the Town Hall to hold civil marriage ceremonies and civil partnership registrations. It was noted that the current licence is due to expire on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013 and, in fairness to couples who might be considering booking for 2014, officers were requesting that Members decide whether they wish to re-apply for another three year licence.

It was noted that, despite more targeted advertising taken on by the Administration Manager, the cost of the licence was costing more than the income taken for weddings and civil ceremonies and this was likely to continue. Members debated as to whether, regardless of making a profit, such a service should be offered to the residents of Chesham as a community service.

Councillor Lacey opined that more bookings could be obtained for both wedding receptions and private parties if there was a variation to the Premises Licence to include sale of alcohol. It was agreed that this should be considered again at the next Policy and Resources Committee even though such a proposal had been rejected in 2011. Councillor Mrs Pirouet also suggested that more bookings could be obtained if the Community Hall kitchen was considerably upgraded.

It was therefore agreed that the final decision should be made at the next Council meeting once the matter of variations to the Premises Licence and the state of the kitchen had been re-assessed.

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the matter of the Wedding and Civil Ceremony Licence renewal be re-considered at the full Council meeting of the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

*Note: Councillor Fayyaz left the meeting at 9.10pm*

39. **ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Members considered and agreed to the annual subscription requests put before them, other than the Chiltern Arts Forum that was no longer required.

The Committee also considered whether to re-subscribe to the Buckinghamshire Association of Local Councils but it was agreed that it was difficult to justify membership and associated fees at the current time.

It was

**RESOLVED**

1. that the payment of the annual subscriptions as listed be continued in 2013/14, except for the Chiltern Arts Forum through the General Power of Competence.
2. that the Council do not re-subscribe to membership of the Buckinghamshire Association of Local Councils for 2013/14.

40. **REVISED ESTIMATES 2012/13 AND DRAFT ESTIMATES 2013/14**

The Finance and Contracts Manager's report on the revised estimates for 2012/13 and draft estimates for 2013/14 was considered by the Committee.

In respect of the 2012/13 estimates, the Finance and Contracts Manager's report advised that the summary showed an estimated net underspend of £9,310.

In regard to the 2013/14 estimates, the Finance and Contracts Manager gave an overview of his proposed first draft budgets. He reported that to achieve a realistic budget of £849,140, there would need to be a 2.5% increase on the precept which, he opined, was both manageable and reasonable, given the similar current rate of inflation and the likelihood of the government underwriting some of the principal authorities' costs to allow them to set a nil per cent increase. He stated that officers were aware Members would obviously like to see no, or a minimal, increase on this year's precept and this will have to be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee which meets on the 17<sup>th</sup> December. However he articulated the officers' view that they did not think a nil increase was realistic without having an impact on current services.

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

Councillor Bacon asked specifically what adjustments could be made from the first draft to reach a 2.5% precept increase figure. The Finance and Contracts Manager replied that this could probably be achieved by having a less cautious pension provision option and being more optimistic on the general income generation.

In regard to the Renewals and Repairs budget, it was confirmed that the cinema projector purchase, previously discussed, was not in the presented figures but the provision of a new skatepark, to be funded as outlined at the Council meeting of the 5<sup>th</sup> November 2102, was. The Finance and Contracts Manager also advised that he was now aware that the Council wished to commit a further £5,000 for a parking review as agreed at the earlier Development Control Committee meeting.

The Committee then considered the request for the Parks and Premises Manager to purchase a new tractor now rather than wait until 2014/15 as originally programmed. It

was noted that the current one, now nine years old, was facing a large possible repairs bill in excess of £3,000 for a new clutch and servicing. Currently the Parks and Premises team was being loaned a temporary replacement for which a significant hire charge would soon be levied should it continue to utilise it. Having been satisfied that a good trade-in price had been negotiated and that the Council's Financial Regulations were being adhered to, this was agreed.

It was

**RESOLVED**

1. that the Estimates and Renewal and Repairs programme be presented for consideration at the Policy and Resources Committee of the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2012 in light of the observations made at this Committee.
2. The Committee agrees the purchase of a replacement tractor at a cost of £23,940 plus the first registration fee.

*Note: Councillor Yerrell left the meeting at 9.30pm*

41. **PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES 2013/14**

The Committee considered the proposals detailed in the report for fees and charges for 2013/14 as follows:

(a) **Allotments**

It was

**RESOLVED**

that a 10p per pole rise be levied on all of the allotments sites from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013.

(b) **Cemetery**

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the proposed scale of charges, reflecting a 2.2% rise, be approved.

(c) **Housing**

The Finance and Contracts Manager reminded the Committee that the Policy and Resources Committee decided at its meeting held on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011 to continue with the current renting arrangement through Paradigm Housing until such time as one or

more of the properties become vacant when the arrangement will be considered anew.

Accordingly it was

**RESOLVED**

that the current rents be noted.

(d) **Office Services**

It was

**RESOLVED**

that no increase be applied to these charges.

(e) **The Elgiva**

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the proposed scale of charges, reflecting a 2.5% rise in hire charges (but no increase to the additional 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.

(f) **Town Hall**

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the proposed scale of charges, reflecting no increase in room hire fees but a 2.2% rise in 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**

The Town Clerk advised that the general reduction in football pitch hirings and price comparisons with other providers such as Wycombe District Council had led officers to recommend that no increase be applied this year.

The Committee noted the officers' views that the doubling of fees for hiring of parks and open spaces last year had caused a lot of ill-feeling among hirers, particularly the smaller charitable groups with small margins for fund-raising. It was therefore agreed to return

the fees back to £100 per day.

Following consideration of this and other items on the report, it was

**RESOLVED**

1. That the proposed Sports Pitches charges effective from the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2013 be agreed.
2. That the range of fees for fun fairs and circuses remain unchanged for 2013/2014 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 £200 for each use of the Council's Open Spaces should be reduced to £100 from 1<sup>st</sup> December 2012.
6. That the officers seek a summer caterer for Lowndes Park in 2013 and on the same terms as 2012 i.e. a fee of 10% of gross sales.
7. 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 2013/14.

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

It was

**RESOLVED**

1. That the swimming, gym and multi-court charges as determined in agenda item 6 be agreed and that the Chesham Moor Gym & Swim Centre Manager be authorised to determine any course, block bookings, special promotional price changes or other charges not shown above in conjunction with the Town Clerk.
2. That the Moor Football Pitch charges be increased in line with any increase in the Consumer Price Index on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2013.
3. That the Chiltern Harriers Running Club hire charges be increased to £545 (plus VAT) and £63.00 from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013 for use of the

facilities and storage area, respectively.

42. **BATCHELORS WAY PLAY AREA**

The Committee was reminded that at the Recreation and Arts Committee in September, the Council offered Paradigm Housing Group the opportunity to buy back Batchelors Way play area for £1, subject to the question of the necessity of legal fees being clarified.

The Clerk reported that Paradigm was still keen to take over the play-area but was now of the view that it would be impossible to avoid sizable legal fees, on both sides, if the land was to be formally transferred. However, their officers were now proposing an option where Paradigm agrees to maintain and manage the area and the Council retains ownership of it. That would also avoid Paradigm having to be drawn into discussions and authorisations when and if the community decides to do anything different with the land.

Members agreed this seemed a sensible solution and it was

**RESOLVED**

That the Committee agrees to the proposal that the Council retains ownership of Batchelors Way Play Area while Paradigm Housing Group takes on its maintenance for the foreseeable future with such an agreement to be confirmed by an exchange of letters.

43. **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.

44. **IONISATION OF TOWN HALL WATER SUPPLY**

The Committee received a report from officers outlining the on-going problems the Town Hall had been experiencing with the quality of its water over the last two years and the differing attempts that had been made to try and address this.

It was agreed that a permanent solution was required to this matter and therefore

**RESOLVED**

that the Committee agree to the purchase of the system recommended in the report and agree to the continued maintenance and water testing as

required to keep up with current Health and Safety legislation.

45. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 10.10pm.

CHAIRMAN