

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the RECREATION AND THE ARTS COMMITTEE

held on 15th November 2010

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

Councillor	E.L. Bamford	Councillor	Mrs M. Molesworth
"	Mrs J.C. Fulford	"	C.H. Spruytenburg
"	Mrs C.M. Michael	"	Mrs G. Walker

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillors V.M. Abraham, A.K. Bacon, M. Fayyaz and F.G. Holly.

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

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

Officers: Mr. W. Richards, Town Clerk; Mr S. Pearson, Finance and Contracts Manager; Mr D. Essex and Mr A. Jones, Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M.Z. Bhatti, Ms. J.E. Bramwell D.J. Lacey and Mrs C. Littley.

36. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Holly and Mrs Michael declared a personal interest in agenda items 4 and 6 as members of the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre.

Councillor Bacon declared a prejudicial interest in agenda item 6 as a regular user and gym member of the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre and left the Chamber during the discussion on fees and charges pertaining to the Centre. Councillor Mrs Fulford declared a personal interest in agenda item 6 as a user of the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre.

Councillors Holly and Mrs Walker declared a personal interest in agenda items 4 and 6 as members of the Allotments Group.

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

Councillor Holly declared a personal interest in agenda items 4 and 6 as a member of the Friends of Chesham Cemetery.

Councillor Abraham declared a personal interest in agenda items 4, 5 and 6 as a member of the Elgiva Board of Management. Councillor Bacon declared a personal interest in agenda 6 as a member of a group that hired the Elgiva.

Councillors Bacon, Bamford, Mrs Fulford, Spruytenburg and Mrs Walker all declared a prejudicial interest in agenda item 8 as Chiltern District Council Members.

37. **MINUTES**

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Recreation and the Arts Committee held on 4th October 2010, be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

The Clerk informed the Committee that Chesham Athletic (formerly Strides FC) was still finalising its quotations to repair the Moor Pavilion and, as this may have a slight impact on the estimates, it was agreed that this matter should be brought to the Policy and Resources Committee meeting scheduled for the 6th December.

38. **CHESHAM ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Environmental Group held on 19th August 2010. It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

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

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Environmental Group held on the 7th September and 12th October 2010 and the AGM of the 26th October 2010. It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

40. **FRIENDS OF CHESHAM CEMETERY**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Friends of Chesham Cemetery held on 5th October 2010. It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

41. **ELGIVA BOARD OF MANAGEMENT**

Members received the Minutes of the meetings of the Elgiva Board of Management held on 11th October and 8th November 2010. It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

42. **ALLOTMENTS GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Allotments Group held on 12th October 2010. It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

43. **REVISED ESTIMATES 2010/11 AND DRAFT ESTIMATES 2011/12**

The Finance and Contracts Manager's report on the revised estimates for 2010/11 and draft estimates for 2011/12 was considered by the Committee.

In respect of the 2010/11 estimates, the Finance and Contracts Manager's report advised that the summary showed an estimated net underspend of £14,371 when comparing the net projected actual budget total of £782,420 against the net revised budget total of £768,049.

In respect of the 2011/12 estimates, the Finance and Contracts Manager reported that estimates have been put together showing no reduction in services but incorporating individual budgets' reductions wherever possible. He reported that the budgets presented show the cost of services as if the current status is maintained and have reflected, as far as possible, any changes to the fees and charges as recommended to this meeting. He stated that officers were aware that the government wants a nil increase on Council Tax and is providing a grant of up to 2.5% to principal authorities in order for them to achieve this and therefore it was apparent to officers that Members would obviously also like to see a nil or minimal increase on this year's precept.

The Committee accepted that it was entirely proper that officers' first draft budget should reflect the costs of maintaining the current service for the Committee's consideration but Members were reminded that the Council had previously agreed to work towards presenting a balanced budget without recourse to use of the General Reserve. It was noted that this budget, as presented, was proposing a figure of £93,205 to be taken from the General Reserve to balance the figures. Accordingly, officers were requested to put forward a revised budget for consideration at the Policy and Resources Committee that more accurately reflected the Council's wish to provide its services without utilising its General Reserve fund.

The Committee was then requested to consider two items of expenditure. Firstly Members considered the Elgiva Board of Management's and Elgiva Manager's request to purchase of an 'E-Marketing' package for the theatre out of previously 'ring-fenced' monies. It was agreed that in these difficult economic times, it was important modern marketing tools were utilised to try and attract new customers and accordingly it was agreed that £2,700 (plus an annual licence fee) be committed to purchase the necessary software. Secondly Members noted the Parks and Premises Manager's observation that

the hanging baskets in Broad Street were not particularly visual and accepted savings could be made in this area by not funding them in future.

It was

RESOLVED

1. That the estimates and renewal and repairs programme be presented for consideration at the Policy and Resources Committee of the 6th December 2010 in light of the observations made at this Committee.
2. That the purchase of the Elgiva 'E-Marketing software plus annual fee be approved from the Elgiva ring-fenced monies budget.
3. That the funding of the hanging baskets in Broad Street be discontinued.

44. **PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES 2011/12**

Before considering the charges in detail, the Town Clerk reminded the Committee that the Treasury would be raising VAT to 20% in January and the proposed fees and charges would be reflecting this increase. He stated that the Council was obliged to implement this in January and therefore officers were planning to incorporate any agreed price increases in one go so as not to inconvenience customers with two rises in the space of three months. Accordingly, he reminded the Committee that if it agreed with the proposal, then the fees and charges would need to be resolved ideally at this Committee so appropriate notice could be given to customers. This was agreed by the Committee.

The Committee considered the proposals detailed in the report for fees and charges for 2011/12 as follows:

(a) **Allotments**

It was

RESOLVED

that a 15p per pole rise be levied on all of the allotments sites from 1 October 2011.

Councillor Bamford opined that the Council, in future years, should be looking to close the rental price differential between Cameron Road and Asheridge Road in light of the Council's waiting-list.

(b) **Cemetery**

The Finance and Contracts Manager reminded the Committee that most aspects of interments were exempt from VAT.

It was

RESOLVED

that the proposed scale of charges be approved reflecting a 4.6% rise from the 4th January 2011.

(c) **Housing**

The Finance and Contracts Manager reported that the Council's lease with Paradigm Housing pertaining to its two Cemetery Lodges expires in September 2011 and therefore suggested that the Council may wish to determine their future at the Policy and Resources Committee as part of its budgetary review.

Accordingly it was

RESOLVED

that the future of the two properties be considered at the Policy and Resources Committee on the 6th December 2010.

(d) **Office Services**

It was

RESOLVED

that no increase be applied to these charges.

(e) **The Elgiva**

It was noted that the Manger and Board of Management were recommending an increase in fees and charges of 5.6%. The Finance and Contracts Manager reported that there were one or two minor changes required to the scale of charges presented pertaining to rates for additional services. He explained that for these charges he had added the 5.6% increase which included the VAT increase. These charges are shown as plus VAT and therefore are only required to be increased by the 3.1 % consumer price index, so will need to be reduced downwards accordingly.

The Committee then considered the proposed charges for The Elgiva and asked questions of Mr Trevor Pilling as to whether the Board of Management believed that the rises were both fair and would increase, rather than lose, income. Cognisant of Mr Pilling's replies, it was

RESOLVED

that the proposed scale of charges, as amended, be agreed from the 4th January 2011 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**

Members debated the desirability of the officers' suggestion that the 50% block booking discount policy be discontinued for new hirers as it was argued that, while a 50% reduction was too generous, some financial incentive to block book may well be appropriate. It was requested therefore that officers research whether other local halls offer a block booking incentive.

In respect of wedding and civil partnerships, officers were asked to investigate how the Registers' fees are determined and by whom. Additionally it thought appropriate to try and ascertain how much local venues, such as licensed hotels, charged for such a ceremony.

Accordingly it was

RESOLVED

that the proposed scale of charges as presented be reconsidered at the Policy and Resources Committee on the 6th December 2010 following a further report from officers.

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

The Committee had a brief discussion on the hire of football pitches having considered the letter from the Chesham Sunday League which suggested the Council's hire fees were too high and there was a danger that many existing clubs may look to relocate out of town for their home matches. The Clerk confirmed that there was a general trend nationally in a drop in participation of adult football and accepted that the Council had lost bookings over the last few years.

In light of this, the Committee decided to raise charges only to cover VAT. It was also agreed that officers should write to the Sunday League inviting them to block book Codmore Field to save on the VAT as it did at Amersham. The Finance and Contracts Manager informed the Committee that this suggestion had been made before and been declined but Members believed it was worth making this approach once again.

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

RESOLVED

1. That the proposed Sports Pitches charges effective from the 4th January 2011 be held at the same figure as 2010/11 save for the VAT increase be agreed.
2. That the range of fees for fun fairs and circuses remain unchanged for 2011/2012 and that the Town Clerk be allowed to negotiate the charge within the range set.
3. That the Clerk continues to be empowered to negotiate charges for the use of Lowndes Park and other Council facilities by film companies.

4. That the fee of £100 should remain unchanged from 1st April 2011 for each use of the Council's Open Spaces.

Note: Councillor Fayyaz left the meeting at 8.55pm

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

It was

RESOLVED

that a new three year licence be offered at £130 (VAT exempt) from 1st April 2011.

Note: Councillor Bacon left the Chamber during the next discussion.

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

The Committee considered the fees and charges recommendations of the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre and obtained further justifications from Mr Ashby and the Centre Manger who were in attendance.

Members questioned whether it was financially prudent to offer an instalment payment system for season ticket purchases with post-dated cheques and decided that it was not a good idea. Rather it was agreed that the season ticket prices needed to be advertised earlier giving customers a chance to save. Members were also advised by the Finance and Contracts Manager that the Friends' proposal to allow season tickets to be brought early to avoid VAT increases was not permissible according to the Inland Revenue due to 'anti-forestalling' legislation. In respect of the price itself Councillor Mrs Fulford opined that the junior season ticket prices did not offer good value. However Mr Ashby and others argued that the loss of free swimming at principal authority pools may well see an increase in season ticket sales and it was agreed not to offer any further ticketing incentives at this juncture.

Members considered the opening of the pool in mid April to cover the Easter holidays which were late in April this year. The Committee had no objection in principle to this but only on the understanding it was subject to a grant from Bucks Sports being agreed in advance guaranteeing to underwrite any excess expenditure over income.

In respect of the Moor Fitness Gym, Councillor Bamford queried why the Friends' were recommending a price increase and then a review after six months. Mr Ashby replied by saying that prices had not be uplifted for three years and the Friends and Manager wanted to be sure they had the pricing structure correct and recommend adjustments if necessary.

In respect of the Moor pitches, Councillor Bamford enquired why the Retail Price Index rather than the Consumer Price Index was being used to determine a price increase whereas all other increases had been based on the latter index. The Finance and Contracts Manager explained that the RPI had always been used in annual contracts

with Chesham Athletic (formerly Strides FC) but he was happy to change it to the CPI if requested by the Committee.

Following consideration of the report, it was

RESOLVED

1. That the swimming and gym charges as presented be agreed and that the Chesham Moor Swim & Gym 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 Gym 'Pay As You Go' charges be re-assessed after six months and this review be brought back to the Committee for consideration.
3. That the opening of the pool in mid April be agreed subject to a grant being obtained in advance from Bucks Sports guaranteeing to underwrite any excess expenditure over income.
4. That allowing people to buy season tickets by instalments with post-dated cheques be not approved.
5. That the Moor Football Pitches be increased in line with any increase in the Consumer Price Index on the 1st August 2011.
6. That the Chiltern Harriers Running Club hire charges be increased to £507 (plus VAT) and £58.50 from the 1st January 2011 for use of the facilities and storage area, respectively.

Note: Councillor Bacon re-joined the meeting.

45. **ELECTORAL REVIEW OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

The Committee considered what, if any, response the Committee wishes to make to the Electoral Review of Buckinghamshire consultation.

In noting that the review will consider changes to the number of Members on Buckinghamshire County Council as well as the number and boundaries of the county council's electoral divisions, and, in light of lack of Members who were also County Councillors in attendance, it was agreed that the Council should not comment until the formal recommendations are out for consultation in July. However Councillor Bacon raised the matter of the growing sizes of certain wards within the town ward boundaries and proposed that this be raised with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England at this juncture. This was agreed by the Committee.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Committee put forward no observations to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England at this stage in regard to the electoral representation for Buckinghamshire County Council but write to suggest that a similar review of town and parish representation would be welcome.

46. **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.

47. **MANAGEMENT OF MARKET**

The Chairman, Councillor Mrs Pirouet, informed the Committee that, as all the Members who were also District Councillors had declared their intention to leave the Chamber during consideration of this agenda item, the meeting would be inquorate.

Accordingly it was agreed that it would be appropriate to convene a Council meeting following the Policy and Resources Committee on the 6th December 2010 to consider this matter anew.

48. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 9.30pm.

CHAIRMAN