

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the RECREATION AND THE ARTS COMMITTEE

held on 6th October 2014

PRESENT Councillor Mrs C. Littley - Vice-Chairman (presiding)

Councillor	Miss R.K. Bhatti	Councillor	R.C. McCulloch
"	M. Fayyaz	"	Mrs C.M. Michael
"	T. Franks	"	Mrs A.M. Pirouet
"	P.J. Hudson	"	C.H. Spruytenburg

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor A.K. Bacon.

Officers: Mr W. Richards, Town Clerk.
Mr S. Pearson, Finance and Contract Manager.

Dr M. Pegg – Chesham United F.C.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D.J. Lacey and M.W. Shaw.

18. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Hudson declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda items 4 & 5 as a member of the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre. Councillor Spruytenburg declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 4 & 5 as a regular user of the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre.

19. **MINUTES**

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Recreation and the Arts Committee held on 2nd June 2014, be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

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

Members received the Minutes of the meetings of the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre AGM held on the 28th May and the meetings of the 25th June, 30th July and 27th August 2014.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

21. **RIVER CHESS ABSTRACTION MEETING**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the River Chess Abstraction meeting held on 19th June 2014.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

22. **ALLOTMENTS GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meetings of the Allotments Group held on the 10th June and 29th July 2014.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

23. **ELGIVA BOARD OF MANAGEMENT**

Members received the Minutes of the meetings of the Elgiva Board of Management held on 16th June and 8th September 2014.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

Councillor Bacon noted that the figures for the Elgiva in respect to its income and expenditure were not quite as good as the corresponding period for the previous year and opined that it was likely to be difficult for the theatre to continue producing a year-on-year reduction of the deficit as previously achieved.

24. **CHESHAM ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meetings of the Chesham Environmental Group held on the 19th June and 21st August 2014.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

25. **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. Moreover, the Committee considered the officers' request to purchase a defibrillator (a request supported by the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre); to increase the winter swimming prices and agree the Christmas Day swimming price.

In respect to the purchase of the defibrillator, it was unanimously agreed that it was important for the centre to have such an important, potentially life-saving piece of equipment on site.

In respect to the winter prices, it was noted that some members of the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre had raised concerns on the level of increase to last year. However the Clerk explained that this increase merely reflected the increased opening hours for this season. Moreover the Deputy Manager had reported he had consulted with regular swimmers who believed the new prices were fair. The Finance and Contracts Manager then advised that the current winter swimming sessions did not appear to be breaking even (though it may well be attracting more people to the centre to use other facilities) and therefore increased income through higher season ticket prices would be welcome. In light of this, the Committee was prepared to support the increased prices but stated that the management should explain the new charges were based upon longer opening hours to the customers.

It was

RESOLVED

1. That the financial position be noted.
2. That a defibrillator be purchased following the receipt of appropriate quotations.
3. That the proposed winter swimming and Christmas Day prices be agreed.

26. **CHESHAM PLAYING FIELDS AND POSSIBLE INSTALLATION OF 3G ALL-WEATHER PITCH**

The Vice-Chairman, Councillor Mrs Littley, welcomed Dr Mark Pegg to the meeting and thanked him for his excellent report, previously circulated to Members, on the current state of the Council's football pitches and changing facilities and the possibility of installing a 3G artificial pitch somewhere in the town. Councillor Mrs Littley accordingly invited Dr Pegg to address the Committee.

Dr Pegg briefly gave Members details of his background. He explained that he was local citizen who lived in Chiltern District; involved in sport and currently coaching a Chesham United U18 team; had a background as Director and CEO of educational charities; was Vice Chair of Governors at Dr Challoner's Grammar School; played football, rugby and cricket at school, university and beyond and had a successful track record of tendering for public contracts. He stated he had taken on compiling this report as he believed Chesham's facilities for football were far below the standard of neighbouring authorities and were holding back young people wishing to develop and improve within the sport. He opined that not only should the current facilities be upgraded where possible, but the town could really benefit from a full-sized artificial pitch, potentially to be used by both football and rugby clubs for matches and other sports for training. He reiterated that he believed that the financing and installation of such a pitch was eminently achievable with the support of the Council (particularly as the Chesham Stags Rugby Club was also looking at developing such a pitch) and pointed out that it had been attained by many other similar communities. He concluded by saying he would be very happy to work with the Council and other partners to help achieve both an improvement to existing facilities and to take a lead on a multi-agency project to install a 3G artificial pitch in Chesham.

The Vice-Chairman then asked whether Members had any questions or observation for Dr Pegg pertaining to his report and subsequent presentation.

Councillor Franks enquired as to the life expectancy of a 3G pitch. Dr Pegg replied that it was a minimum of 10 years and it would be advisable for a sinking fund to be set up once installed to finance its surface replacement in 10 years' time.

The Town Clerk asked whether Dr Pegg could confirm that, if a 3G pitch was suitable for rugby union, the length and texture of the artificial turf would make it unsuitable for tennis and hockey. Dr Pegg agreed this was the case but believed the local rugby club's involvement would be crucial to help unlock funding from the Rugby Football Union. Moreover he pointed out that while the surface may restrict some other sports hosting competitive matches, there was no reason why a great variety of sports clubs could not train on it.

Councillor Hudson opined that there was, in his view, a definite need for a 3G pitch and enquired whether Dr Pegg had made any contact with Chiltern District Council for support as yet. Dr Pegg replied that he thought it prudent to get the support of the Town Council first but he fully intended to do so.

Councillor Bacon said that he remembered the outcry several years ago when training lights were proposed for the Moor and questioned therefore whether gaining planning permission for a full sized pitch with floodlights would be straightforward in any location in town. He stated that he definitely believed that facilities needed to be improved and cited the old Marston Pavilion as an example of very sub-standard provision but opined it was important to get as many different statutory and non-statutory organisations, sports teams and interested parties as involved as possible at the earliest possible stage to ensure full local community support. He added that he would also welcome suggestions of how cricket could be accommodated in any upgrades to the existing sporting facilities in town. Dr Pegg replied that he agreed

with Councillor Bacon's comments about the need for full community involvement. He replied that he was also aware of possible planning permission difficulties but believed that advances in technology have meant that floodlights were now much less obtrusive and caused less light spillage than a decade ago.

Councillor Mrs Michael stated that she too was fully behind Dr Pegg's aims and objectives but she believed that it needed to be emphasised that any Council support should not be construed as implying financial assistance at this stage. This was agreed and it was proposed that any support for a 3G pitch should be, initially, through encouraging a partnership approach to its installation. Dr Pegg stated that he fully understood the financial constraints the Council was facing at this time and was grateful for its preliminary support. In light of this, the Committee considered it sensible to engage Dr Pegg's considerable talents to lead on a partnership bid to progress the idea of installing a 3G pitch somewhere in Chesham as well as assisting the Council's Play Area Working Party in seeing how existing football and other sporting facilities could be improved.

The Committee thanked Dr Pegg for his attendance and it was duly

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee welcomes the initial report from Dr Pegg and offers its in-principle support for a partnership approach to developing a full-sized artificial sports pitch within the town.
2. That the Play Area Working Party be delegated to consider the report's audit of existing sporting facilities and to report back on recommendations for improvements and costings to a future meeting.

27. **WORLD WAR ONE COMMEMORATION AND BALLOON AND SKY LANTERN POLICY**

The Committee received a report on the programme and final costings for the World War One commemorations over the 2nd - 4th August. Members agreed it had been a highly successful and moving three days and all those who had been involved, ought to be congratulated. It was also noted that a number of external grants and private donations obtained by the partnership had meant that less than £400 had been needed to be committed from the Council's Community Events budget.

Councillor Mrs Pirouet opined that while the three days had appeared to be funded at a relatively small cost, this was due primarily to certain people close to her donating equipment and services at very low cost as a favour. She also said that the event organisers should be indebted particularly to Matthews Brickworks who underwrote the not inconsiderable costs of the stewarding for the three days. She concluded by suggesting the Council should consider whether its annual £1,000 budget was sufficient to support community events bearing in mind the actual market costs for hiring equipment, first-aid and insurance, etc. This was noted by the Committee and it was also agreed a letter should be sent to Matthews Brickworks thanking them for their financial support.

The Committee then discussed whether it ought to implement a policy on the release of balloons and sky lanterns. Even though the commemoration weekend was not an official Council event and 188 balloons commemorating the fallen from Chesham in the First World War were eventually released from the Market Square and not from council land, the Council itself received complaints from individuals on its social media in respect to the environmental damage balloons caused. Moreover, letters had been received from the National Farmers Union and the Marine Conservation Society which also explained the alleged negative impact balloons and sky lanterns had upon the environment and animal welfare.

Members agreed that, with the Council being at the forefront of the ‘Stop the Drop’ anti-littering campaign and having a strong Environmental Policy, it was impossible to justify the release of balloons and sky lanterns on Council land.

It was therefore

RESOLVED

1. That the final budget for the World War I commemoration weekend be noted.
2. That the costs usually associated with one-off events be noted and the Community Events budget be re-considered in the autumn in light of this.
3. That the Council will no longer allow balloon and sky lantern releases upon its land.

28. **WILDFOWL IN LOWNDES PARK**

Councillor Spruytenburg informed the Committee that he had requested this to be on the agenda as the quantity of Canada Geese in Lowndes Park was still attracting a number of complaints.

The Town Clerk referred Members to his report and reiterated that officers were still struggling to come up with any realistic solutions to the problem. He reported that he had spoken to a colleague at York City Council who had stated his council had a similar problem with excess wildfowl but, even as a large local authority, they had been unable to rectify the situation.

The Clerk did explain that the temporary fence erected around the park side of Skottowes Pond did seem to be having a limited success in stopping the Canada Geese grazing all over the grass area though they were still fouling the footpath. He also stated that, while officers had held off commissioning ‘no feeding’ signs until the idea of a designated feeding site had been agreed or otherwise, he would now order such information signs as the Friends of Lowndes Park had expressed reservations about a feeding area. He concluded by stating that the most likely successful solution still appeared to be planting around the pond to discourage the birds’ sight lines but this would be a major expense; take a long period to establish itself and it would still be no guarantee of a deterrent.

The Committee accepted that there was no method that could be assumed to be completely successful in eradicating the number of Canada Geese visiting the park. However it was agreed the planting of a native hedge to replace the temporary fence along the park side of the pond path would not look unattractive and may help ease the problem. It was also agreed that proper signage may deter some people from feeding the geese thus making the environment less comfortable for them.

It was therefore

RESOLVED

that the officers be instructed to plant a native hedge along the park side of Skottowes Pond and commission and erect signage explaining to the public the undesirability of feeding the wildfowl.

29. **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.

30. **CONTRACTUAL MATTERS PERTAINING TO CHRISTMAS LIGHTING**

The Committee was asked to consider the Town Centre Christmas lighting scheme for 2014/15.

There was a general agreement that, for environmental and financial reasons, the Council should be encouraging the use of LED lighting. On the understanding that the Council and the town would be getting the best possible deal in terms of cost and quality of display, it was

RESOLVED

1. The current festoons are continued for 2014/15.
2. That the bulbs be replaced with LED lights.
3. That the actual bulb and colour be delegated to the Chairman of this Committee, the Town Clerk and representatives of the Chiltern Chamber and Christmas in Chesham.
4. That a new three year contract for Christmas lighting be awarded to Lamps and Tubes Illuminations following the submission and consideration of the quotations received.

31. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 9.15pm.

Publication date 10.10.14

CHAIRMAN