

**CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL**

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

held on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2014

**PRESENT** Councillor Mrs C. Littley – Vice Chairman (presiding)

Councillor	T. Franks	Councillor	Mrs C.M. Michael
"	P.J. Hudson	"	C.H. Spruytenburg
"	R.C. McCulloch		

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Councillors A.K. Bacon and P.W. Yerrell.

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

Mr P. Folly – Friends of Lowndes Park.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M. Fayyaz, D.J. Lacey, Mrs A.M. Pirouet and M.W. Shaw.

32. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Bacon and Spruytenburg declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda items 5 and 8 as members of the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre.

Councillor Spruytenburg declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 8 as an allotment holder.

33. **MINUTES**

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Recreation and the Arts Committee held on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2014, be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

34. **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 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014.

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Minutes be noted.

35. **ALLOTMENTS GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Allotments Group held on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014.

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Minutes be noted.

36. **FRIENDS OF CHESHAM CEMETERY**

Members received the Minutes of the Friends of Chesham Cemetery meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2014.

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Minutes be noted.

37. **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 Mrs Michael noted that the Centre still appeared to be performing strongly which she accredited, in part, to the efforts of the staff, whom, she opined, ought to be congratulated.

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the financial position be noted.

38. **ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Members considered and agreed to the annual subscription requests put before them.

Councillor Mrs Michael queried whether officers still believed membership of the National Association of British Market Authorities offered value for money. The Clerk replied its strength for the Council lay in the legal advice and support it could offer in the unlikely event of the Council facing litigation due to some issues pertaining to the local produce market.

Councillor Hudson clarified that the listed 'Chesham Chamber of Trade and Commerce' should now be referred to as the 'Chiltern Chamber'.

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the payment of the annual subscriptions, as listed, be continued in 2015/16, through the General Power of Competence.

39. **REVISED ESTIMATES 2014/15 AND DRAFT ESTIMATES 2015/16**

The Finance and Contracts Manager's report on the revised estimates for 2014/15 and draft estimates for 2015/16 was considered by the Committee.

In respect of the 2014/15 estimates, the Finance and Contracts Manager advised that the summary showed that the final end-of-year figures were likely to be close to the projected budget for the financial year, subject to the Elgiva Pantomime meeting its projected ticket sales.

In regard to the 2015/16 estimates, the Finance and Contracts Manager gave an overview of his proposed first draft budgets. He reported that setting next year's budgets was proving particularly difficult this year due to a number of 'unknowns'. He listed these specifically as the proposal to undertake a staff pay review; the still, as yet, unconfirmed national pay award settlement and the effect of 'auto-enrolment' in the pension scheme which would commence from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015. Added to this was the uncertainty over the government's Localisation of Council Tax Support Grant and whether the District Council would be passing on all, some or none of this to town and parish councils.

The Finance and Contracts Manager stated that to achieve a balanced budget of £877,355, there would need to be a 3.7% increase on the local town precept. He also warned that, depending on the decision Chiltern District Council took in respect to passing down of the Localisation of Council Tax Support Grant, this percentage figure may have to rise. He continued 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 8<sup>th</sup> December. However he articulated his view that taking monies from the General Reserve to achieve this, would result in increased pressure for future years.

In respect to the general budget, the Finance and Contracts Manager explained that no significant additions had been made other than increased monies for tree works across the Council's parks and open spaces.

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

Councillor Spruytenburg enquired as to whether there was any possibility of other savings/increased income between now and the end of the financial year that could be used to offset next year's budget. The Finance and Contracts Manager replied that this was unlikely, based on current forecasts.

Councillor Bacon asked whether the monies set aside for the pay review was sufficient. The Finance and Contracts Manager replied that it was very difficult to predict but the proposed first draft budgets had been based on the assumption that the two most likely services impacted by the review would be the Elgiva and the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre. It was therefore proposed to put most of the expected savings on this year's budget (2014/15) from these two services into a reserve until such time as the review has been completed and the impact of pension auto-enrolment can be better determined.

Councillor Bacon then stated his view that it was important to continue to lobby both Chiltern District Council and central government in regard to getting the former to pass over all the Localisation of Council Tax Support Grant to this Council as Chesham was being unfairly penalised in comparison to other towns and parishes within the District. Other Members agreed and Councillor Mrs Michael added that this Committee needed to send the message that it recognised the current financial constraints and regretted that this was exacerbated by the position previously taken by the District Council in passing down the grant.

Councillor Hudson enquired as to whether the Finance Working Party would be convened before the Policy and Resources Committee and the Finance and Contracts Manager confirmed this would be the case.

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Estimates and Renewal and Repairs programme be presented for consideration at the Policy and Resources Committee of the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2014 in light of the observations made at this Committee.

40. **PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES 2015/16**

The Committee considered the proposals detailed in the report for fees and charges for 2015/16 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 2015.

(b) **Cemetery**

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the proposed scale of charges, reflecting a 2.3% rise, be approved.

(c) **Housing**

The Finance and Contracts Manager reminded the Committee that the Cemetery Lodges were under discussion later in the agenda but, at the time of writing the report, no changes had been envisaged.

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**

1. That the proposed scale of charges, reflecting a 2.3% 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.

2. That the current caterer's agreement be noted.

(f) **Town Hall**

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the proposed scale of charges, reflecting no increase in room hire fees or 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 reminded Members that a review of the state of the Council's sports pitches had just been commissioned and therefore officers were of the view that any decision of hire charges should be deferred until this was further progressed.

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 2015 be deferred until the sports pitches' review has been progressed.
2. That the range of fees for fun fairs and circuses remain unchanged for 2015/2016 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 £100 for each use of the Council's Open Spaces be continued.
6. That the summer caterer for Lowndes Park be re-engaged in 2015 and on the same terms as 2014 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 2015/16.
8. That the Clerk be empowered to negotiate charges for the use of the Moor Hardstanding for car-parking.

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

It was

**RESOLVED**

that, subject to the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre's comments and observations, the following charges be agreed:

1. That the gym and summer swimming prices remain unchanged.
2. That the pool hire charges be increased by around 10% as detailed within the report.
3. That the Chiltern Natural Therapies Ltd rent be increased to £266 per month from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015.
4. That the Moor Football Pitch charges effective from the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2015 be deferred until the sports pitches' review has been progressed.
5. That the Chiltern Harriers Running Club hire charges be increased to £573 (plus VAT) and £66.00 from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015 for use of the facilities and storage area, respectively.

41. **GREEN FLAG AWARD ENTRY FOR 2015**

The Committee was asked whether it wished to enter the Green Flag Award judging for Lowndes Park for 2015.

Members noted from the officers' report that for the second successive year the administration from the organisation overseeing it had been exceptionally poor in respect to this Council. Specifically the 'Keep Britain Tidy' Group had failed to deliver the 2014 Green Flag to Chesham on time, meaning that publicity opportunities for the park and town were missed at the time that the results were announced nationally. Moreover officers have not yet received any feedback or

scores from the 2014 round of judging, despite being told this would arrive in August-September. It was noted that the late delivery of feedback, as also occurred in 2013, made it challenging for officers to incorporate the judges' comments into the Parks and Premises team's workload and into the annual revision of the Lowndes Park Management Plan.

The Committee unanimously expressed its disappointment in regard to this. Councillor Hudson reminded the Committee that he, and other Members, had similar reservations last year, but a personal appeal at the Council meeting last January by the Chairman of the Friends of Lowndes Park had convinced the Council to enter again. However he opined that this decision was made on the implicit understanding that administration and feedback would improve but, regrettably, this had been proved not to be the case.

Other Members agreed and Councillor Yerrell expressed the view that many of the town's residents were unaware of Lowndes Park's Green Flag current status in any case. However Councillor Bacon said he was in favour of entering again, as, obtaining such status gave the Council something to aspire to.

The Vice Chairman asked Mr Phil Folly what the Friends of Lowndes Park's position on entry was. Mr Folly replied that the Friends would like the Council to re-enter, if only to strengthen the chances of obtaining external funding. However he emphasised that the Friends' primary efforts were based around improving the park for the public rather than the park obtaining any formal status.

After a short further debate, the Committee agreed it would send entirely the wrong message to hand over another £300 entry fee to The Keep Britain Tidy campaign when getting little in return due to the inadequate administration. Councillor McCulloch further proposed that officers write a letter to the organisation to explain exactly why the significant flaws in the judging and subsequent feedback has led to the Council deciding not to enter next year, but emphasise that it will enter again in future years, if it can see evidence of improvement in administration and actually getting value for money for the entry fee. Members agreed this seemed a sensible approach and it was

### **RESOLVED**

that Lowndes Park is not entered for the Green Flag Award for 2015 and officers be instructed to write to the administrators to explain the reasons for this decision.

#### 42. **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

It was moved by the Vice-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.

43. **FUTURE OF THE COUNCIL'S CURRENT HOUSING PROVISION**

The Committee received a report from officers on the current situation in regard to the properties the Council currently lets out for accommodation.

The Town Clerk and the Finance and Contracts Manager reported on their recent inspection of its let properties, together with officers from Paradigm Housing, the current letting agents. While the Committee was reminded of the Council's policy that it would continue with the current letting arrangement until such time as one or more of the properties became vacant, the Clerk suggested that, potentially, a vacancy could occur in one of these within the short term, dependent upon the outcome of discussions between a particular tenant and Paradigm Housing. He advised therefore that it might be prudent for the Council to consider what internal works might be required to let the named property through another agency or indeed, sell the property on the open market should the Council be minded to do so.

The Committee agreed that any such decision on the buildings' futures required a fuller report as the tenancy position became clearer. However it was agreed that it would be prudent to obtain a surveyor's report (subject to it being at no cost to the Council) and a sale price estimate from a local estate agent in case of the scenario of a property becoming vacant occurring more quickly than expected.

In regard to the other property under discussion, officers advised that it becoming vacant in the short-term seemed much less likely. The Council was under an obligation to finance any external repairs and, with the tenancy relatively secure, an amount was now required to repair the windows.

The Vice-Chairman, Councillor Mrs Littley, advised that, in accordance with Standing Order 26 (d), Councillor Lacey had requested that the matter be referred to Full Council for determination. Accordingly it was

**RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND**

1. That a surveyor's report be agreed to be commissioned (subject to it being at no cost to the Council) and an open market sale price estimate be obtained for the property specified within the meeting and this be the subject of a further report at a future Committee.
2. That the amount recommended at the meeting be committed for

the repair of the windows in the property specifically referred to within the report and the current rental agreement for this property be continued.

44. **VEHICLE REPLACEMENT**

The Committee considered the replacement of the Parks and Premises team's twelve year old Toyota Dyna van.

While noting that the monies to replace it were within the Renewals and Repairs budget, Members commented on the relatively low mileage of the vehicle. Accordingly it was requested that further information on the state of the bodywork/engine of the existing van and the advantages of replacing it with a vehicle with a tipping capacity be submitted to Full Council before the matter was determined.

It was therefore

**RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND**

1. That a new Ford Transit 350 2.2TDCi Euro 5 One way tipper Body be purchased at a cost of £21,117 as included within the report, to be funded from the Renewal & Repairs Fund.
2. That the current Toyota Dyna be traded in at a value of £1,000.

45. **UPGRADE OF MOOR HARDSTANDING**

Members received and considered the three quotations to upgrade the Moor Hardstanding.

It was

**RESOLVED**

1. That the quotation from Saunders Surfacing Contractors of £14,995 plus VAT to upgrade the Moor Hardstanding be accepted.
2. That an amount of £3553.00 be utilised from the Renewals and Repairs General Reserve to cover the shortfall from the monies originally allocated to this scheme.

46. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 8.50pm.