

## CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

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

held on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2011

**PRESENT** Councillor Mrs P.R. Cherrill– Vice-Chairman (presiding)

Councillor	Ms R.K. Bhatti	Councillor	Mrs C. Littley
"	T. Franks	"	R.C. McCulloch
"	P.J. Hudson	"	Mrs C.M. Michael
"	D.J. Lacey	"	Mrs A.M. Pirouet

#### **IN ATTENDANCE**

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

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

Mr T. Pilling – Chairman, Elgiva Board of Management

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C.H. Spruytenburg and Mrs G. Walker.

#### 44. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Hudson and Mrs Michael declared a personal interest in agenda items 4, 7 and 8 as members of the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre.

Councillor Mrs Littley declared a personal interest in agenda items 4, 7 and 8 as a member of the Allotments Group.

Councillor McCulloch declared a personal interest in agenda items 4, 7 and 8 as a member of the Friends of Chesham Cemetery.

Councillors Mrs Cherrill, Lacey, Mrs Pirouet and Yerrell declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 as members of the Pond Park Community Association.

Councillor McCulloch declared a personal interest in agenda item 6 as a member of the Chesham Society and Chiltern Society.

Councillor Wilson declared a personal interest in agenda item 6 as a member of the Chesham Chamber of Trade and Commerce.

Councillors Abraham and Mrs Cherrill declared a personal interest in agenda items 7 and 8 as members of the Elgiva Board of Management.

Councillor Bacon declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 as a member of the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre.

45. **MINUTES**

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Recreation and the Arts Committee held on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2011, be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

46. **ALLOTMENTS GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meetings of the Allotments Group held on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2011. It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Minutes be noted.

Councillor Mrs Pirouet reported that there had been a spate of thefts at the Asheridge Road site and she enquired whether this could be looked at by the Allotments Group and the Parks and Premises Manager.

47. **FRIENDS OF CHESHAM CEMETERY**

Members received the Minutes of the Friends of Chesham Cemetery meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2011. It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Minutes be noted.

Councillor Mrs Pirouet asked whether there had been any developments in respect of the request to erect a fence as agreed at the last Recreation and the Arts Committee. The Clerk advised that there remained certain planning issues to resolve at the present time.

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

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre A.G.M held on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2011. It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Minutes be noted.

Councillor Bacon enquired as to progress on the solar power project. The Clerk replied by saying he remained hopeful this could be delivered on schedule to obtain the preferential tariff.

Councillor Mrs Michael reported that the A.G.M. had been well-attended and opined that the Centre was lucky to have such an active group of volunteers supporting the facility.

49. **PLAY AREA REDEVELOPMENT – WINDSOR ROAD**

The Committee considered the recommendations of the Play Area Working Party in respect of the further redevelopment of the town's play areas.

Members viewed the drawings for the proposed redevelopment of Windsor Road play area which had been scheduled as the next play area to be renovated and noted the Play Area Working Party had been unanimous in its decision to recommend proceeding with this renovation.

The Committee also briefly considered the Working Party's recommendation on the skatepark and agreed this should be discussed during the agenda item pertaining to the estimates.

The Committee agreed that the play area works should be undertaken in the current financial year and it was

**RESOLVED**

that the Committee agree to the redevelopment of Windsor Road Play Area by Proludic Play at the cost of £19,992 plus VAT as presented.

50. **ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS**

The Finance and Contracts Manager advised that officers had brought annual subscriptions to this meeting as it was felt to be somewhat inappropriate for the Annual Council meeting which was largely a ceremonial affair. Moreover it gave Members the opportunity to consider before the budgets were set for the following financial year.

Members agreed to the annual subscription requests put before them, other than the Chesham branch of the United Nations which was now no longer active and Arts and Business Ltd which had not invoiced the Council for over two years.

The Committee also considered whether to re-subscribe to the Buckinghamshire Association of Local Councils, following a presentation from its Chief Officer at the last Policy and Resources Committee 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 2012/13, except for the Arts & Business Ltd and the United

Nations through powers granted in Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972.

2. that the Council do not re-subscribe to membership of the Buckinghamshire Association of Local Councils for 2012/13.

51. **REVISED ESTIMATES 2011/12 AND DRAFT ESTIMATES 2012/13**

The Finance and Contracts Manager's report on the revised estimates for 2011/12 and draft estimates for 2012/13 was considered by the Committee.

In respect of the 2011/12 estimates, the Finance and Contracts Manager's report advised that the summary showed an estimated net underspend of £10,484.

In regard to the 2012/13 estimates, the Finance and Contracts Manager reported that the precept shown for next year to achieve a balanced budget is £855,200, which would represent a 6% increase. He stated that officers were aware Members would obviously like to see a zero or minimal increase on this year's precept and this will have to be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee which meets on the 12<sup>th</sup> December. However he articulated the officers' view that they did not think a nil increase was realistic for a second successive year due to the economic climate and the impact it was having on the Elgiva and Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre income. Moreover utility, fuel, non domestic rates and other costs were continuing to rise, some much higher than the rate of inflation. He opined that service costs have been trimmed in recent years so it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the standard of services and also reminded Members that the Council was investing around £27,500 in new energy saving solar panels at the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre. Finally he highlighted the fact that a 6% rise in this Council's precept would approximate to an extra £5 on the average band D tax bill of around £1,500.

The Chairman thanked the Finance and Contracts Manager for his concise summation of the budget and asked for general observations on this first draft. Councillor Wilson opined that, while he fully accepted the pressures the Elgiva and Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre were facing, he did not feel it appropriate to agree the level of subsidy proposed for both venues when local electors were experiencing hardships of their own. He continued that he was not in favour of further cuts but the setting of targets to increase income to a level where the subsidy would not be needed to be increased.

At this juncture, the Chairman, Councillor Mrs Cherrill, invited Mr Trevor Pilling to address the Committee. As Chairman of the Elgiva Board of Management, Mr Pilling stated that the Board was very aware of the need to keep the subsidy down. He commended the Elgiva staff very much in this respect and highlighted that they had lost the Marketing Manager's post last year and were, in his opinion, working over and above their hours to ensure the theatre functioned as well, and as economically, as possible. He agreed with Councillor Wilson that further cuts would be self-defeating and, moreover, opined that he did not think anything more could be cut at the theatre. He conceded that more income would, of course, be desirable and the Board and the Manager were looking at more innovative ways of attracting new customers, particularly with two new Board members with very relevant professional marketing

experience in this area. However he did believe that it would be difficult to guarantee significant increased income in this difficult economic time. Finally he reminded the Committee that since the Board's inception in 2004, the theatre had managed to come in under-budget every year and the level of subsidy now was very similar to that of when the current Manager was appointed at that time.

The Chairman thanked Mr Pilling for his comments and then requested Members discuss individual budgetary items for consideration.

Councillor Hudson referred the Committee back to the earlier agenda item in respect to the future of the skatepark. Members noted that the Play Area Working Party had obtained three different proposals for a totally renovated skatepark all ranging in price of between £45,000-£65,000. The Play Area Working Party believed it would be wrong to go out to consultation on these plans until the Council had determined whether it wished to finance such a renovation.

There was general agreement that the Council could not, at the present time, commit to such investment particularly as it appeared that recent inspections of the equipment suggested a longer life-span than once feared. It was agreed however that monies did need to be put in the Renewals and Repairs budget for the replacement of the skins on the main ramps within two or three years and that the Council should look to put in one or more new pieces of equipment when possible funding became available.

The Clerk then mentioned the matter of contributions to the Police Community Support Officers. He reminded Members that the Council had not contributed financially for this financial year and this had been a matter that had received certain local media attention. He further advised that he had been approached informally by senior police officers earlier in the year about the possibility of the Council reversing its decision but no formal approach had been received.

A discussion then took place as to how proactive the Council should be on this matter and what the implications would be if the Council again decided not to make a contribution. Accordingly the Clerk was requested to approach the local police Area Commander to ascertain how the Council's contribution helped to determine the level of Police Community Support Officers in Chesham, the level of risk in the numbers being reduced if funding was not forthcoming and financial contributions obtained from other areas, particularly town and parish councils. This information should then be fed back to the Policy and Resources Committee.

In respect to a residents' survey, Councillor Wilson opined that this was something the Chesham Action Partnership and/or 'Better Chesham' could perhaps assist with. The Clerk replied by saying he would be happy to have a further conversation with the respective organisations about this.

Councillor Mrs Pirouet enquired as to whether the Renewals and Repairs budget should take into account the poor state of the Moor car-park. The Clerk reminded Members that, as 'common land', the area could not be tarmaced without the Secretary of State's permission but agreed repairs were required in the short-term.

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Estimates and Renewal and Repairs programme be presented for consideration at the Policy and Resources Committee of the 12<sup>th</sup> December 2011 in light of the observations made at this Committee.

*Note: Councillor Yerrell left the meeting at 8.50pm*

52. **PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES 2012/13**

The Committee considered the proposals detailed in the report for fees and charges for 2012/13 as follows:

(a) **Allotments**

The Finance and Contracts Manager advised that officers were proposing a lower than inflation increase due to the in-house works recently undertaken by the Allotments Group, most notably the cutting of Asheridge Road site hedge.

It was

**RESOLVED**

that a 10p per pole rise be levied on all of the allotments sites from 1 October 2012.

(b) **Cemetery**

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the proposed scale of charges, reflecting a 5.2% rise, be approved save for the transfer of an exclusive right which was being uplifted to £25.00 to reflect the officer time involved to administer this.

(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 5.2% rise, 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**

Councillor Mrs Pirouet enquired whether the loss of Buckinghamshire County Council bookings was adversely affecting income and whether therefore a suggested price rise should be cognisant of this. The Finance and Contracts Manager advised that, while some County Council bookings had been lost, other bookings had been gained and therefore officers believed a rise in fees in line with inflation was justified.

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the proposed scale of charges, reflecting a 5.2% rise, be approved.

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

The Committee discussed the open spaces charges and noted it had remained at £100 for over ten years. It was agreed this was too low and, after some discussion, it was agreed to double the figure to £200. It was also agreed that when determining charges for 2013/14, it would be desirable to have an estimation of staff costs to prepare events.

Councillor Hudson enquired as to whether the range of charges for fairs and circuses was set too low. However both the Clerk and Councillor Lacey reported that, after

comparing with other town and parish councils, they believed the figure to be reasonable.

In respect to Wayleaves, it was agreed that it would be prudent to seek legal advice to oversee one draft contract on the understanding that fees would not be disproportionate to the income likely to be obtained.

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

### **RESOLVED**

1. That the proposed Sports Pitches charges, representing a 5.2% increase, effective from the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2012 be agreed.
2. That the range of fees for fun fairs and circuses remain unchanged for 2012/13 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 £200 be implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 for each use of the Council's Open Spaces.
5. That the officers seek a summer caterer for Lowndes Park in 2012 and on the same terms as 2011 i.e. a fee of 10% of gross sales.
6. That a wayleave charge of £5 per annum for pedestrian access only and £50 per annum for vehicular/pedestrian access be agreed; that a solicitor be engaged to draw up the necessary legal agreement and that this is then sent with a letter to all potential properties informing them of the Council's decision to regularise the situation with effect from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012.

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

The Committee considered the fees and charges recommendations of the Centre Manager and the Friends of Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre.

The Finance and Contracts Manager also advised of a new recommended charge of 10 junior swims for £20 during the school holiday period. The Clerk also advised that a new initiative of 10 gym visits for £40 had been implemented. Both were noted and agreed by the Committee.

The Finance and Contracts Manager also reported that he had received a request that those receiving a Carer's Allowance be added to those eligible for a concessionary fee. This was agreed.

Following consideration of the report, it was

**RESOLVED**

1. That the swimming, gym and multi-court charges as presented 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 2012.
3. That the rent for Chiltern Natural Therapies Ltd. be increased to £250 per month with effect from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 and that it be fixed for two years.
4. That the Chiltern Harriers Running Club hire charges be increased to £533 (plus VAT) and £61.50 from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 for use of the facilities and storage area, respectively.
5. That those receiving a carer's allowance be added as an eligible category for receiving the 30% Council concession at the Centre and other Council facilities where concessionary prices apply.

53. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 9.20pm.

CHAIRMAN