

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES of the meeting of the Community, Assets, Recreation and Environment (CARE)
Committee

held on Monday 21 November 2022

Councillors:

Councillor Parveiz Aslam	Councillor Majid Ditta
Councillor Wilford Augustus	Councillor Justine Fulford
Councillor Simon Booth	Councillor Jane MacBean (Chairman)
Councillor Emily Culverhouse	Councillor Nick Southworth

In attendance:

Councillor Alan Bacon	
Councillor Joseph Baum	
Councillor Francis Holly	
Councillor Qaser Chaudhry	
Mr Tony Marmo	Chief Executive Officer
Mr Danny Essex	Head of Operations
Ms Kathryn Graves	Community, Economy and Environment Manager

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Rachael Matthews and Councillor Paul Harding.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations.

28. MINUTES

Councillor MacBean expressed concerns that there were inaccuracies in the minutes but left it to members to decide whether to agree what was presented or not. Minutes of the meeting of the Community, Assets, Recreation and Environment Committee held on 10 October 2022 were agreed by members.

29. TO RECEIVE THE ACTION TRACKER OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS OF CARE

The Committee received the action tracker noting progress made against each action.

30. DRAFT ANNUAL STRATEGIC PLAN AND BUDGET 2023/24

The CEO presented the annual strategic plan. This showed the strategic aim, strategic objectives and the projects to deliver each strategic objective. Members generally agreed with the six strategic objectives but Councillor Fulford queried whether the order of the strategic objectives was correct in terms of importance. Councillor Bacon commented on the use of the wording 'to identify funding opportunities' as this was used in certain projects and not others, and he felt it was not clear why this was. The Chair suggested that members look at the document in detail and present any proposed alterations to the CEO by the end of the week.

The CEO explained that officers have presented a balanced budget, which shows what it costs to operate the Council, and that a 10% increase in fees/charges and precept will be required to fund this. The CEO confirmed the budget does not include money for projects and that projects would need to be confirmed on a case by case basis throughout the year based on a business case showing whether it was funded from grants or a call on reserves.

Councillor MacBean expressed the view that a 10% increase in the precept will affect every resident and that it might be onerous for some in the current financial climate, and members agreed that a lower level of precept increase should be explored by the finance committee. The CEO confirmed he understood this point and that alternative precept levels could be put forward. However, a reduction would require additional savings across the Council's operations including a potential review of staffing levels.

The CEO confirmed the increase in fees/charges and precept proposed would not leave the Council with enough income to undertake projects. Including the projects in the budget would require either a greater level of increase in the fees/charges and precept, or a further call on reserves to be confirmed at the outset of the budget. Councillor MacBean expressed strong concerns that the budget did not include key specific projects that the Council are committed to and are required to deliver as part of the annual strategic plan. Further discussion was had on which of them needed funds in order to be progressed.

The CEO confirmed that there may be a decrease in the reserves as a consequence of the active delivery of projects in the current financial year. It is predicted the general reserve may be £117,000 above the required general reserve level at the end of the financial year but this is not going to be clear until nearer the end of the financial year, and this will be after the budget for 2023-24 has been set.

It was proposed by Cllr MacBean and seconded by Cllr Augustus and

RESOLVED:

- i) That the draft Annual Strategic Plan and Budget for 2023-24 is noted.
- ii) That the CARE Committee recommends to the Finance Committee the cost of the enabling work for the Gym & Swim expansion and refurbishment project and the cost of the work to complete the Chesham Neighbourhood Plan is included in the final Annual Strategic Plan and Budget.

31. CHESHAM MOOR GYM & SWIM POOL LINER

The Committee received a report on the deterioration of the pool liner, which has caused the pool to be closed for health and safety reasons. Members were advised that it is not known what has caused the liner to fail and a more significant problem, such as a crack in the tank, may be revealed when the failed liner is removed.

The Committee considered the possibilities of replacing the current liner with vinyl or fibreglass, considering the cost, longevity and availability of materials.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the Council accepts the quote of Gibson Fibreglass as per the quote dated 2 November 2022 and that reserves are used to cover the cost of £39,860.

32. MEADES WATER GARDENS BOARDWALK

The Committee were informed that additional grant funding had been approved for this project, requiring the Council to spend £10,000 on the installation of a recycled plastic boardwalk, as opposed to the £20,000 originally assigned from reserves

RESOLVED:

- i) A reduced contribution of £10,000 from reserves be agreed towards the installation of a boardwalk.

33. ENERGY REDUCTION ACTIONS

The Committee considered the business cases for solar PV installation at The Elgiva and Town Hall, LED installation at The Elgiva and the installation of an air source heat pump and air conditioning at The Elgiva. The Committee noted the projects would be of benefit to the sites and that return of investment business cases were available for the solar panels and LED lights projects, but not for the heating and cooling project. The Committee felt that it needed to wait to see what the end year financial position was before committing funding to these projects. However, the Committee asked for clarity on the legal deadlines for replacing the lights in the theatre's auditorium.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the decarbonisation projects are considered at a future committee once the reserve position is better understood.

34. ECO AUDIT UPDATE

The Committee received a report on the Council's progress towards achieving net carbon zero and tackling the biodiversity crisis. In considering how to control the small Japanese Knotweed infestation on The Moor, officers were asked to inform the neighbouring landowner of their responsibilities to prevent the spread of Knotweed from their property.

The recent additional sewage discharge into the River Chess from Thames Water's Chesham Sewage Treatment Works was noted with concern.

RESOLVED:

- i) The inclusion of £2,413.50 in the 2023/24 budget for Japanese Knotweed control was approved.

35. LOWNDES PARK MASTERPLAN

The Committee received an Environmental Impact Assessment report for Skottowes Pond and the results of analysis of the pond's silt. Officers recommended that options for the regeneration of the pond be considered within the broader context of a park masterplan. Councillors stressed that the creation of a masterplan should not hold up progress on the replacement of play equipment in Lowndes Park.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the Committee approve officers to make an application to the Chesham & Villages Community Board for contributory funding towards the cost of the Lowndes Park Master Plan.

36. PLAY AREA WORKING GROUP UPDATE

The Committee noted the minutes of the working group's meeting held on the 7 November 2022. A discussion was held on the Terms of Reference for the Play Area Working Group and Councillor MacBean expressed concerns that the original remit of the working group appeared to have been

excluded from the ToR. She opined that the original decision to form the working group was made after consideration of a play area update from officers earlier in the year.

It was agreed at that time that the current provision should be mapped out and assessed to ensure each space and current provision is still fit for purpose, establish levels of use and any gaps in provision be identified so that they might be addressed as part of the Chesham Neighbourhood Plan. The refurbishment of Nashleigh Hill Recreation Ground is well under way and the working group is making good progress in identifying the equipment need for Lowndes Park. Councillor Fulford raised the issue of the Bois Moor play area and members agreed that the issue of the recent insurance claim should be discussed by the Finance Committee.

37. CARE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN

The forward plan for the Committee meeting of the 13 February 2023 was received.

The meeting closed at 9.32pm.