

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

HERITAGE, CULTURE AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 30 OCTOBER 2018

Present: Councillors Cuming, Fermor, Fort, Harper (Chairman), Hinder, Mrs Hinder, Joy, Lewins and Mrs Wilson

Also Present: Councillor Adkinson

72. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Hastie.

73. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Councillor Mrs Joy was present as a substitute for Councillor Hastie.

74. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

75. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

Councillor Adkinson was present as a Visiting Member and indicated his wish to speak on Agenda Item 12 – Local Nature Reserves.

The Chairman indicated that he intended to read out a statement from Councillor Round who could not attend due to illness on Agenda Item 12 – Local Nature Reserves and Agenda Item 15 – MBC Festivals and Events Update.

76. **CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS**

The Chairman suggested that Agenda Item 15 – MBC Festivals and Events Update 2018 be considered after Agenda Item 12 – Local Nature Reserves as it was likely to stimulate a lot of debate.

RESOLVED: That Agenda Item 15 – MBC Festivals and Events Update 2018 be considered after Agenda Item 12 – Local Nature Reserves.

77. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

The following Councillors disclosed an interest in Agenda Item 12 – Local Nature Reserves:-

- Councillor Harper – Trustee of Fant Wildlife Group
- Councillor Hinder – Chairman of Friends of Boxley Warren Trust
- Councillor Mrs Wilson – Member of the River Len Nature Reserve Management Committee

78. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

79. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That the items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

80. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 OCTOBER 2018

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2018 be signed as a correct record.

81. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

82. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

83. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Committee Work Programme for 2018/19.

The following changes were made to the Work Programme:-

Review of Sports Facilities Update – this should be changed to 'Update on Sports Pitches Bookings'.

Bio-Diversity Action Plan – Mrs Jennifer Shepherd, the Head of Environment and Public Realm advised that the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership had been commissioned to write the plan. The Medway Valley Countryside Partnership had raised concerns about completing the plan by the deadline due to staffing issues. Mrs Shepherd confirmed she would update the Committee at the end of the financial year as to whether the plan was scheduled to be completed in time.

400th Anniversary of the Charter of the Swans to Maidstone Borough Council – This could be taken off as it would be discussed under the Festivals and Events Update on the agenda.

Visit to Museum for Members of the Committee – The Chairman undertook to speak to the Museum's Director to progress this.

Plans for the Museum Café – The Chairman would speak to the Museum’s Director to firm up a date when a report would come to the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted subject to the changes made by the Committee.

84. LOCAL NATURE RESERVES

Mrs Deanne Cunningham, Team Leader (Heritage, Landscape and Design) presented her report which scoped the requirements for the creation of additional Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and set out a list of sites identified in a recent Member Survey.

The Committee noted that an additional four sites were included in the Maidstone Borough Council Annual Monitoring Report 2017 as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report. However, if Members wanted to move forward with a programme for creating new LNRs and strengthening policy, then a robust evidence base would be required with a framework for assessment. In addition a Consultant would need to be appointed to carry out a full feasibility study.

Councillor Adkinson spoke on this item as a Visiting Member.

The Chairman read out a statement from Councillor Round who could not be present and made the following points:-

- He drew attention to the work done at Policy and Resources Committee in respect of the Medway Flood Action Plan to reduce the risk of harm from flooding.
- He advised that the Headcorn Parish Council, Ward Members and other agencies were working together to improve an area along the Headcorn Beult SSSI with the objective to provide a public area for conservation and wildlife.

In the proceeding discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- Once the Bio-Diversity Action Plan had been agreed a further report on Nature Reserves should be considered to reconsider areas eligible to become nature reserves, including River Medway corridor.
- The Council only had two designated nature reserves and this needed to be increased.
- That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2017 did not include amendments made to the 10 Year Parks and Open Spaces Plan but carried a recommendation that the Officer should make the amendments according to what was said at the meeting. Therefore a Reference should be made to the Democracy Committee to request that the Committee ask for minutes to include all

amendments made at Committee meetings to promote transparency.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The report be noted.
- 2) A more detailed evaluation and feasibility assessment of sites be carried out.
- 3) The 10 year Parks and Open Spaces Plan be published on the Council's website as soon as possible.
- 4) The Democracy Committee be requested to look at the value of including any amendments to a strategic document, that have been moved and agreed by a Committee, in the minutes to create more transparency.

Voting: Unanimous

85. MBC FESTIVALS AND EVENTS UPDATE 2018

The Committee considered the report of Mrs Laura Dickson, the Visitor Economy Development Manager which provided a review of large events held on council land and set out recommendations for the future of Proms in the Park.

Mrs Dickson provided an update on the events undertaken throughout the year. A number of events had taken place, including:-

- Proms in the Park
- Shemomedjamo
- Ramblin' Man Fair
- Oktoberfest
- Community Mela

Mrs Dickson confirmed that the organisers of the Community Mela had contacted the Council to warn that the 2019 event was under pressure and there was a risk it would not take place. Mrs Dickson also highlighted the funding gap for Proms in the Park for 2019 as Parkwood Leisure had indicated that it would cost more to run the event in 2019. Officers estimated that it would cost at least £17,000 to deliver the event which would not take into account costs associated with marketing and MBC staff time.

The Chairman read out a statement from Councillor Round as he was not able to attend as a Visiting Member and speak on this item.

The Committee debated the report and made the following comments:-

- There should be more advertising to encourage people to make use of Jubilee Square.
- To make use of the Bandstand in Brenchley Gardens on a Sunday having various bands playing such as the Salvation Army. To also re-invigorate Brenchley Gardens to make it a safe place for families to use.
- Once the new Culture and Arts Officer was in post, one of their top priorities should be to bring together the relevant community groups together with a view to organising a Pride Event.

Due to the funding issues with Proms in the Park, and the information that had been received from organisers of the Community Mela, the Committee debated the possibility of withdrawing the £5,000 funding for the event and transferring it to the Community Mela.

The Chairman undertook to contact the organisers of the Community Mela to understand whether a joint event with Shemomedjamo was a possibility. Additionally the Chairman confirmed that he would email members requesting that they allocate £200 of their member grant to the Community Mela to provide additional financial support.

The Committee requested that an additional event take place in 2019 in order to celebrate the 400th Anniversary of the granting of the first charter to the Mayor of Maidstone to keep swans on the River Medway. This could be in the form of an exhibition in the Museum with an event bringing together the River Medway user groups.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The updates in the report be noted.
- 2) The Proms in the Park be discontinued and that the remaining £5,000 budget for 2019 be used to support the Community Mela for one year only, subject to outcomes being agreed between Cohesions Plus and MBC and pump prime new events in Brenchley Gardens.

Voting: Unanimous

86. 2ND QUARTER BUDGET MONITORING 2018/19

Mr Mark Green, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement presented his report on the 2nd Quarter Budget Monitoring 2018/19.

The Committee noted that there was an underspend against the revenue budget of £106,000 but this was expected to change to an overspend of £16,000 by the end of the financial year.

Mr Green explained that there were some significant variances that had contributed towards underspend which included the delay in the opening of the Adventure Zone and the shortfall in income at the Market.

It was also noted that some capital expenditure had slipped to next year, due to the Mote Park Dam works taking longer than expected to complete and the Visitor Centre detailed design discussions being delayed.

In response to a question from a Member of the Committee, Mr Green advised that:-

- There had been a long term trend of decline in Markets nationally although at Maidstone the Tuesday Market had remained stable.
- The Internal Audit team would consider how the Market was accounted for as the Market Manager had little jurisdiction over his budget. An investigation would follow the Audit into how to rejuvenate the Market to improve its performance. Officers were working on improvements to the I.T. network to enable Officers at the Market to use wifi and social media. This report would come back to the Committee in the Spring.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The revenue position at the end of the second quarter and the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted.
- 2) The capital position at the end of the second quarter be noted.
- 3) That a report on the Market be presented to Committee in April once Internal Audit had provided their findings.

Voting: For: unanimous

87. DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2019/20 - 2023/24

The Committee considered the report of Mr Mark Green, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement which provided an update on the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019/20 – 2023/24.

Mr Green explained that the Medium Term Financial Strategy set out in financial terms how the Council would fulfil its Strategic Plan over the next five years which was due to be adopted in December at full Council.

It was noted that the Council's budget would be in a balanced position next year assuming that the Council tax is increased by 3%. However the funding position after 2020 was uncertain due to a lack of clarity from central government. Therefore financial projections had been prepared covering the five year MTFS period based on three different scenarios - favourable, neutral and adverse.

Members were asked to consider and comment on the draft MTFS. Any changes and comments would be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee in November.

Members made the following suggestions:-

- That there should be a clear definition for Environment issues under the responsibilities of all the Service Committees.
- That any suggested comments should be emailed to the Chairman within the next few days to enable him to present these to Officers for inclusion.

RESOLVED: That Members give consideration on how the Committee's budget is mapped across the Strategic Plan objectives and provide comments to the Chairman within the next few days.

Voting: Unanimous

88. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.15 p.m.