

Review Committee – 3 April 2012

Minutes of the meeting of the **Review Committee** held on **3 April 2012** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Vice-Chairman: Mrs H L A Glynn

Cllr Mrs P Aves
Cllr K A Gibbs
Cllr J R F Mason

Cllr R D Pointer
Cllr I H Ward

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr M J Steptoe.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mrs A V Hale.

OFFICERS PRESENT

R Evans	-	Head of Environmental Services
P Gowers	-	Overview and Scrutiny Officer
M Power	-	Committee Administrator

66 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

67 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr I H Ward declared a personal interest in the Grove Woods Capital Works item of the Agenda by virtue of being a Governor at Grove Wood School, Rayleigh.

68 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee heard from the Portfolio Holder for the Environment and the Head of Environmental Services on the Forward Plan items: Pet Memorial Garden, Open Spaces Programme, Play Spaces Programme and Grove Woods Capital Works.

05/12 Pet Memorial Garden

The following points were discussed:-

Siting the garden at the Hall Road cemetery may not be considered appropriate by some residents.

When questioned as to why there has not been a wider consultation, it was explained that the Council has a legal obligation to issue a Forward Plan of Key Decisions and to consult individuals, groups and organisations likely to be affected by its actions. Although the Forward Plan identifies the Friends of Cherry Orchard group as a consultee, District Councillors and officers will be consulted as a matter of course. Where appropriate, the Portfolio Holder can involve a wider consultation, including Parish/Town Councils. The Committee requested a District-wide consultation to seek the views of Parish/Town Councillors throughout the District.

Businesses in the area that would potentially be affected by the construction of a pet memorial garden in the District have been contacted; this will be reflected in the report. Veterinary practices in the District will also be approached as part of this process.

The proposal had received local press and media attention, from which feedback had been positive.

Concern was expressed around the option of siting the garden in the vicinity of a children's play area in Cherry Orchard Country Park. It was explained that there is still a need to undertake ground testing of proposed sites and as yet no specific location has been decided. It was requested that any proposals regarding siting be put before the Rochford Ward Members or that consideration be given to re-convening the Cherry Orchard Country Park Member Advisory Group for consultation purposes.

It was confirmed that the expectation is that the venture will be commercially viable, although the projected users of the facility had not been established, as a business plan was not yet developed.

Members of the public would not be able to purchase plots; the land would remain in the ownership of the District Council.

Members requested that usability, easy access and a central location that is accessible to all parts of the District be the main criteria when considering alternative sites for the memorial garden. It was further requested that wider consultation be used. The Portfolio Holder for the Environment agreed to consider alternative potential sites in the District and would employ a wider range of consultation, including seeking the views of Parish/Town Councils.

06/12 Open Spaces Programme

Because the maintenance budget for the Open Spaces Programme is relatively small, funding is invested into one or two specific open space areas each year; this has a more noticeable impact on individual park areas.

Discussion ensued around Canewdon Parish Council's bid to secure external match funding for a skate park. Officers were still optimistic about the prospects for external funding but if this was lead by the Parish Council they

would require a formal agreement from Rochford District Council that they would retain a right of access to the area.

It was agreed that a strategic plan for open spaces would be formed; this had been put on hold while the issues associated with the Grounds Maintenance Contract had been dealt with. Parish/Town Councils would continue to be asked what they perceive to be priorities for the District.

It was noted that a strategy for managing open spaces should include new-build developments where developers are obliged to provide public open space areas as part of their planning conditions. Large-scale developments are currently being approved, so the establishment of a strategic plan should be a priority. In the case of new development, while the simplest option is where the developer has the responsibility for maintaining such open spaces, with residents paying towards the upkeep, this does not necessarily ensure that the facility will be retained and managed in the longer term. If the District Council retains control of such open spaces, it would have the responsibility of the cost of maintenance and would need to ensure that appropriate developer contributions are obtained. Unless the District Council has ownership of the property, the land can be sold off in time.

07/12 Play Spaces Programme

Note: Cllr Mrs J R Lumley declared a personal interest in this item by virtue of being Vice Chairman of Rayleigh and Rochford Association of Voluntary Services (RRAVS).

The proposed strategy for the District's open spaces can be combined with a strategy for the play spaces programme. Having a strategy in place will provide more opportunities to apply for external match funding.

The budget is maintenance led and spent on refurbishing play equipment. Rochford District Council can provide assistance to community groups in identifying funding streams that it is ineligible to apply for itself. The District Council can offer advice to the Parish/Town Councils on specific projects. Partnership working between Rochford District Council and the Parish/Town Councils should be encouraged.

The District Council liaises with Rayleigh and Rochford Association of Voluntary Services (RRAVS) to establish contacts for funding. RRAVS will also assist in preparing funding bids for submission.

Frequency of safety inspections of the play equipment in the District is the same as under the previous Grounds Maintenance contract. These inspections are carried out by a trained individual and a separate budget is available if structural work is required. Different options as to how this should be managed in future (including the possibility of using Rochford District Council staff) are currently being explored. The Grounds Maintenance

contract also currently includes responsibility for the play areas in the ownership of Rochford Housing Association.

It was agreed that Cllr Mrs J R Lumley, who had been a key observer during previous negotiations around the waste management, street cleansing and grounds maintenance contracts in her role as chairman of the Review Committee, would be invited to participate as an observer in the newly-formed Member Advisory Group for the Grounds Maintenance Contract, which has its first meeting on 18 April 2012. This would provide an ongoing presence of scrutiny throughout the contract process.

08/12 Grove Woods Capital Works

Discussion took place on the subject of the funding available from Essex County Council to relieve parking stress in Grove Road and the proposal for an additional car park at Connaught Road, Rayleigh following concern by residents about parking by parents at Grove Wood School, Rayleigh. A public meeting at the school had been held to discuss the issue with residents. The Council's Open Spaces Manager had taken the ideas that had come from the meeting and revised plans accordingly. A further public meeting is planned to discuss options. It was confirmed that planning permission has been granted for a new car park in Connaught Road.

It was discussed that generally residents had indicated that they would prefer the Grove Woods car park to be enlarged rather than a new car park be constructed in Connaught Road. There was the added concern that a car park in Connaught Road would be located too far away from the school for people to use it; thus it would not alleviate problems of parking outside school.

The Portfolio Holder for the Environment added that there is a long-term plan to develop the concept of using Grove Woods and Hockley Woods as a gateway to link into Cherry Orchard Country Park. It is hoped that this will be developed in several phases over the next few years.

The meeting closed at 9.26 pm.

Chairman

Date

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