

RAYLEIGH CIVIC SOCIETY: PLANNING SERVICES AGENDA/MINUTES

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks Members' views upon a request for a reduction in the annual charge by the Council for the supply of Planning Services Agenda, Minutes and Schedule of Planning Applications to the Rayleigh Civic Society (RCS).

The availability of Agenda for inspection by the Public and Press for Meetings of the Council, its Committees and Sub-Committees is a statutory requirement, but the Council is entitled to make a reasonable charge for providing copies.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 At its Meeting on 20 July 1999, Finance & General Purposes Committee considered a report concerning the supply of Committee Agenda and Minutes (Minute 323/99). Two principal issues were considered: the level of charge made to those organisations paying the full cost for the supply of Agenda and Minutes; and requests from the local media and the South-East Chamber of Commerce that they be supplied with these documents free of charge.
- 2.2 Regarding the former, the Committee agreed that the charges hitherto made for the supply of Agendas and Minutes did not reflect the true cost of production, and resolved to increase the charge to individual members of the public and commercial organisations to a more realistic level. For 2000/2001 the annual charge for the supply of a full set of a Committee's Agenda and Minutes is now £155.00. This compares with the charge in 1999 of £37.00. The policy of providing copies free of charge to other Local Authorities and organisations with which the Council works in partnership (for example, Essex Police, Town and Parish Councils) should, it was agreed, continue.
- 2.3 The Committee also resolved that copies of Agenda and Minutes be provided free of charge to all local media organisations, in order to maximise the potential coverage of the Council's affairs; and to the South East Chamber of Commerce/local Chambers of Commerce which required the information contained within the Council's Agenda to assist them fully to represent their Members.

3 REQUEST BY THE RAYLEIGH CIVIC SOCIETY

- 3.1 The RCS seeks to “encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general public amenity and historical interest; and to encourage high standards of architecture and town planning in Rayleigh”. As part of this role, the Society comments on a number of planning applications per year. Copies of specific planning applications are sent, at no cost, to the RCS for comment but, in addition, the Society also purchases copies of the Planning Services Committee’s Agendas and Minutes, and the Planning Schedule, to keep abreast of current planning trends in the District.
- 3.2 Upon receiving notification of the cost of these documents for 2000/01, which reflected the revised level of charge agreed by Finance and General Purposes Committee as outlined above, the RCS wrote to the Council requesting that the charge be reduced, to approximately £40.00 per annum. They argue that, for an organisation which depends entirely on voluntary subscriptions from its 90 members to function (including, for example, payment of speakers’ and accommodation fees), the increased charge is unaffordable.

4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Refusing the request, with the consequent possibility that the RCS may no longer choose to receive Planning Services Agenda/Minutes could reduce their contribution to the environmental preservation and enhancement of Rayleigh and its surroundings.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Agreement to the Society’s request would result in a loss of income to the Council of £115.00 at current figures. The RCS has, however, offered to collect copies of the documents from the Civic Suite which would serve to reduce the cost of postage.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Sub-Committee is asked to consider the request from the RCS to fix the charge for the receipt of the Planning Services Committee’s Agenda/Minutes and the Planning Schedule at £40.00 rather than at £155.00, which reflects the increased scale of charges previously agreed. Members may be of the opinion that the RCS is an organisation whose aims the Council would wish to promote, and whose function would be impaired by an inability to purchase and examine Planning Services Committee documentation; or alternatively that the option to examine public copies of Agenda/Minutes at the Civic Suite could be sufficient for their purpose.

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- 6.2 Members will also be aware that the Council's website (as contained within the Corporate Plan) is intended to be a means of encouraging wider availability of Agendas and Minutes at a minimum cost to organisations/individuals who have access to the internet.

7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Sub-Committee **RECOMMENDS**

To agree to the request by Rayleigh Civic Society to reduce the cost of Planning Services Committee Agendas and Minutes and the level of charge. (HAMS)

Andrew Smith

Head of Administrative & Member Services

Background Papers:

Letters dated 29 April 2000 and 11 May 2000 from the Chairman of Rayleigh Civic Society.

For further information please contact Guy Brazendale on (01702) 318141