

## **PROPOSED ENVIRONMENTAL CENTRE – FEEDBACK FROM RAYLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report updates Members on the latest information received from the Town Council in respect of the Environmental Centre. In the light of that information, the report seeks Members' views on the way forward.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 Members will be aware that the District Council transferred the land adjoining the Windmill at Rayleigh and adjoining 21 London Hill to the Town Council for the purposes of building an environmental and/or educational centre. The Lease was signed in January 2001. Under the terms and conditions of the Lease, the Town Council has five years to complete the project.
- 2.2. Given the uncertainty surrounding this very prominent site following the Town Council's decision to put the project on hold, the District Council considered the matter in February. The District Council agreed that it would be prudent to hold a joint member level meeting with the Town Council at this time in an attempt to secure some agreement with the Town Council as to the timeframe within which that body will make a decision concerning the site. Clearly, if the Town Council have no wish to proceed with their proposal, then the District Council would like to see the site transferred back.

### **3 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 The Environmental and/or Educational Centre site lies in close proximity to Rayleigh Windmill. With the new leisure contractor, Holmes Place, currently drawing up proposals to refurbish Mill Hall, and with the District Council itself now having submitted a lottery bid of over £180,000 relating to the Windmill, it would be extremely unfortunate if the future of the Environmental and/or educational centre site remained unresolved for too long.
- 3.2 In response to the District Council's request for a joint Member level meeting, the Town Council have responded that it is felt unnecessary to meet with District Members at present, particularly as the Town

Council's lease on the site runs until January 2006 and the fact that the Town Council have not yet reached a final decision on the future of the site.

- 3.3 Further inquiries as to when the Town Council are likely to make a decision regarding the future of the site have provided no further detailed information. All the Town Council advise is that they have put their proposals for the site on hold, due to ongoing investigations into a building project at Kind George V Playing Fields. This is confirmed by the Town Council's Annual Statement for 2002 which reveals that, although keeping the matter on hold, the Town Council nonetheless managed to spend over £8,000 on the Environmental and/or Education Centre site in the past financial year (2001/2002).
- 3.4 Given the reluctance of the Town Council to meet with the District Council and to provide any details as to their timeframe for making a decision on this site, there appears little more that the District Council can formally do to try and expedite the process to a definite conclusion. The terms and conditions of the lease, which was entered into in good faith with the Town Council, give them until January 2006 to resolve their position on this site. In the circumstances therefore, Members' views would be welcome as to what action, if any, should now be taken.

#### **4 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 If the area is left vacant and unused for a considerable period of time, then it has the potential to attract problems associated with Crime and Disorder.

#### **5 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The site offers the potential to bring further environmental benefits to the area if it is developed. Otherwise its continued vacancy will detract from the overall environmental quality of the area.

#### **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 At this point in time, there are no specific resource implications other than Officer and Member time involved in any correspondence with the Town Council.

**7 RECOMMENDATION**

7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

Subject to Members' views, how the council should now proceed with this matter.

Paul Warren  
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**Background Papers:**

Letters from Rayleigh Town Council dated 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2001, and 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2002

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