

## **COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 17 OCTOBER 2017**

**Present:** Councillor R Williams (Mayor);

Councillors David Absolom, Debs Absolom, Ayub, Ballsdon, Brock, Chrisp, Davies, Dennis, Duveen, Eden, D Edwards, K Edwards, Ennis, Gavin, Gittings, Grashoff, Hacker, Hopper, Hoskin, James, Jones, Khan, Livingston, Lovelock, Maskell, McDonald, McElligott, McGonigle, McKenna, O'Connell, Page, Pearce, Robinson, Singh, Skeats, Stanford-Beale, Steele, Stevens, Terry, Tickner, Vickers, White, J Williams and Woodward.

**Apologies:** Councillor Rodda.

### **15. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

#### **(a) Kay Everett**

"It is with deep regret that I have to tell you that Kay Everett, former Councillor, Past Mayor and Freeman of the Borough, passed away at the end of September, at the age of 89.

Kay was a former Labour Councillor, elected for Church Ward in 1983. As a Councillor she was particularly known as a champion for older people in Reading.

She served as Mayor in 1988/89, and in June 2001, was made a Freeman of the Borough. As a Freeman of the Borough, she memorably exercised her right and privilege to drive sheep over Caversham Bridge in 2009, in order to publicise a Walk in aid of Age Concern.

Can I ask you all to stand and join me in a minute's silence to remember Kay?"

#### **(b) Order of Business**

"In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5(3)(a), I have decided to change the order of tonight's business. Item number 4 'Petitions' and item 4A 'Petition - Save Reading Central Club Mural/Do Not Sell The Central Club (A Community Asset) to Commercial Developers' will be taken concurrently immediately following item 5 'Questions from Members of the Public'."

### **16. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

### **17. PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER NO 8**

(A) Keith Kerr presented a petition in the following terms:

Do Not Sell The Central Club (A Community Asset) to Commercial Developers

"We the undersigned, petition Reading Borough Council (RBC) to think again and give proper consideration to the Aspire (Reading) CIC compelling, compliant, fully funded £10 Million Bid to acquire the spiritual home of the Black diaspora of Reading, the Central Club site and buildings.

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We feel the black community of Reading should not be scapegoated and made to suffer disproportionately for RBC's financial budgeting failure. We believe Aspire's bid provides strategic services to the diaspora that RBC are retreating from which makes Aspire a long term partner to the solution as their bid is 100% consistent with RBC's strategic priorities.

Aspire's fully funded Bid does not require a penny piece from RBC, **EVER!**"

In her response, Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council) stated:

"Thank you for the petition regarding the future of Central Club.

This Council has a long track record of supporting and working with all the diverse communities in the town, including the black community. We are all proud to live in a multi-cultural town and to celebrate and mark the distinct heritage of people from diverse backgrounds.

Back in 2009 Reading Borough Council backed a bid by the African and Caribbean Community Group to bring the former Central Club building back into community use. Despite a tremendous effort on their part - and a time extension granted by the Council - they were unfortunately unable to raise the necessary funds. The building has been empty and unused since 2006, which I think we all agree needs to be addressed. The next bidding process is about identifying options to bring it back into use.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind everyone again of the process we have gone through in relation to the former Central Club building, and the process to come.

In July 2016 the Council offered voluntary and community organisations a five-month window to bid for the building. Commercial developers or 'for profit' organisations were not permitted to bid at this stage, and the Council also insisted the iconic mural was retained as part of any proposal.

In July, the Council took the decision not to proceed with any of the third sector bids received and instead invite bids from both third sector and private bidders. The Council feels strongly that we owe it to all council tax payers to understand the full value of the property, what people are willing to pay for it and to then evaluate all bids against a set of criteria that balance and take into account both financial return and potential community benefit. We will also ensure that all bidders receive clear and transparent information on the evaluation framework to be adopted in order that the Council can demonstrate how it is meeting its duties with regard to securing the best value.

In relation to Aspire's original bid, ASPIRE maintain the bid remains confidential and has said it will report the Council to the Information Commissioner if we make full details public. I want to reiterate however, no cash sum was offered by Aspire to buy the property as part of its original bid. Whilst I am prevented from providing detail because of Aspire's insistence on confidentiality, I can say that in addition to a lack of any cash offer there were a number of additional concerns and risks associated with the bid in respect of conditionality clauses and a lack of certainty with regard to their proposals for the building and associated funding. As I explain below, Aspire have an opportunity to address these shortcomings in the next bidding process should they choose to do so.

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In terms of the bidding process to come, the Council is completely clear that all bidders - including Aspire or indeed any other community group - can either carry forward existing bids, or submit a fresh offer for the building. No organisation is precluded from bidding. For the avoidance of doubt, unless ASPIRE indicates that it wants its existing bid to be reconsidered as part of that process, the ASPIRE bid will not be reconsidered. All offers will be fully evaluated and this process will take account of any community value, as well as the financial offer itself.

The Council is also completely clear that it expects any offers received in the next round to include proposals to secure the future of the mural. The mural which borders the building remains a key landmark for Reading and a strong symbol of the black community, its history and its contribution to our town.

The Council's commissioning of work (currently being undertaken) to professionally clean and survey the mural at a cost approaching five-thousand pounds is a very practical indication of the Council's commitment in this regard. This professional cleaning will allow for a detailed survey of the mural to take place and a detailed assessment of the condition of the structure and the mural itself. The survey work will mean the Council will be in a much better position to identify the best way of securing the mural for future generations, including any conditions when the building is sold. The current work being undertaken will also enable bidders to have more information about the integrity of the mural and its structural stability and how it might best be protected in the event that building work is undertaken within the building.

When bids are sought bidders will specifically be asked how they intend to preserve the mural and this will form an important part of the evaluation process.

With regards to the second part of your statement, for a number of years now Government funding for public services has failed to keep pace with demand for Council services. It means every local authority has had to make difficult decisions to close the funding gap. In Reading funding will have been cut by £57.5 million between 2010 and 2020. It is in that context this Council has had to make a number of difficult decisions over a number of years which are affecting all areas of service delivery. We completely reject any assertion that a specific community is being scapegoated.

By opening up the bidding process to all parties, the Council aims to attract new bids which will provide us with a full range of options upon which to make an informed decision based on best value including community benefit. Details of the bidding process and timetable will be announced once we have the results of the survey."

### **18. PETITION: SAVE READING CENTRAL CLUB MURAL/ DO NOT SELL THE CENTRAL CLUB (A COMMUNITY ASSET) TO COMMERCIAL DEVELOPERS - DEBATE IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER 8**

Keith Kerr addressed the Council on the topic of the petition in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 8(6)(f).

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report on a petition about the future of the Central Club and its iconic mural, which had collected approximately 4,000 signatories. The petition had exceeded the 1,500 threshold and therefore at the request of the Lead Petitioner it had triggered a debate by full Council of the issue, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 8(6)(e). The report stated that the petition had been received by

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the Council on 25 September 2017. The petition, which was formally presented to the Council at this meeting, was in the terms set out in Minute 17 above.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Lovelock and seconded by Councillor Page and CARRIED:

### Resolved -

That the issues raised in the petition entitled 'Save Reading Central Club Mural/ Do Not Sell The Central Club (A Community Asset) to Commercial Developers', be noted.

### 19. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER 9

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Answer</u>
1.	Roger Lightfoot	Arthur Hill Swimming Pool	Cllr Hacker
2.	Peter Burt	Arthur Hill Swimming Pool	Cllr Hacker
3.	Jeff Jones	Central Club	Cllr Lovelock
4.	Keith Kerr	Central Club	Cllr Lovelock
5.	Keith Kerr	Central Club	Cllr Lovelock
6.	Keith Kerr	Central Club	Cllr Lovelock
7.	Mary Genis	Black History Mural	Cllr Lovelock
8.	James Pyle	Central Club	Cllr Lovelock
9.	James Pyle	Central Club Mural	Cllr Lovelock

As Mr Pyle was not present to ask Questions 8 & 9, written replies would be provided in accordance with Standing Order 11(3).

(The full text of the question and reply was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

### 20. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER NO 10

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Answer</u>
1.	Cllr Livingston	Universal Credit	Cllr Lovelock
2.	Cllr Steele	Health and Safety Policy	Cllr Jones
3.		WITHDRAWN	
4.	Cllr Steele	Tilehurst Station	Cllr Page

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5.	Cllr White	Cuts to Children's Centres	Cllr Gavin
6.	Cllr White	Central Club Meeting	Cllr Lovelock
7.	Cllr Tickner	BBC Caversham Park Site	Cllr Page
8.	Cllr Ayub	Reading Prison	Cllr Page
9.	Cllr Skeats	Accounts	Cllr Lovelock

As there was insufficient time, pursuant to Standing Order 10(4), written replies to Questions 7-9 above would be provided in accordance with Standing Order 11(3).

(The full text of the questions and replies was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

### 21. REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY - JOINT ARRANGEMENT

The Director of Children, Education & Early Help Services submitted a report seeking the Council's formal agreement to enter into the Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), which as a joint arrangement fell within the scope of a reserved matter for Council under Article 4 of the Constitution. The detail of the participation, inclusion and performance in the RAA had previously and would in future be considered by the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee (ACE). The Council's inclusion in the RAA would be an effective move in achieving positive outcomes through permanence for Reading's children. In joining the RAA, Adoption Services would be delivered on a greater scale and with more innovative approaches to practice. This approach had real potential to improve outcomes for Reading's children.

The report stated that the Policy Committee, at its meeting on 10 April 2017 (Minute 116 refers) had re-affirmed the Council's continued participation in the Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency and approved financial contributions of £487k for 2017/18 and £430k for 2018/19 to enable that ongoing involvement. The 'go live' date for the RAA was November 2017.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Gavin and seconded by Councillor McElligott and CARRIED:

#### Resolved:

- (1) That, in accordance with Article 4 of the Constitution, "The Full Council", the joint arrangement to participate in the Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency with Oxfordshire County Council as the lead authority, be approved;
- (2) That, in accordance with Article 11 of the Constitution, "Joint Arrangements", the Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency be included in the list of joint arrangements set out in the table in paragraph 11.2.2 of the Constitution.

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### **22. STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report on the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee of 29 June 2017, which were attached at Appendix A.

The report advised that Chapter 7 of the Localism Act 2011 had ended the statutory standards regime set up by the Local Government Act 2000, and introduced in its place a duty on local authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors and Co-opted Members, including adopting a local Member code of conduct. The Act also required local authorities to adopt arrangements to deal with allegations that Members had not complied with their local Code of Conduct, and allowed local authorities to establish a local Standards Committee, and to make Standing Orders relating to aspects of the standards process. The local Standards Committee had been first established at the Annual Council Meeting on 23 May 2012.

The following motion was moved by Councillor D Edwards and seconded by Councillor Ayub and CARRIED:

#### **Resolved -**

That the Minutes of the Standards Committee held on 29 June 2017, attached at Appendix A to the report, be received.

### **23. THAMES WATER**

Pursuant to Notice, the following motion was moved by Councillor Debs Absolom and seconded by Councillor Eden and CARRIED:

#### **Resolved -**

This Council notes with concern the number of times that Thames Water have disrupted local roads and pavements over recent months, particularly where this has been in the same or very nearby locations.

Whilst understanding that Thames Water need to carry out both emergency repairs and also planned upgrades of their infrastructure, this Council believes this work could be better coordinated and communicated to the public.

The recent problems which caused low water pressure and even no water supply in West Reading have also increased concern that more disruption may be planned.

This Council therefore resolves to ask the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services to write to Thames Water inviting them to meet with relevant councillors and officers to discuss their programme of planned works and a communication strategy with local residents.

(The meeting closed at 8.20 pm).