

HEIGHTS FREE SCHOOL SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES - 12 JULY 2016

Present: Councillor D Edwards (Chair); Councillors Ayub, Grashoff, Hoskin, Steele, R Williams and Woodward

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Committee held on 23 March 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. PETITIONS AND QUESTIONS

Questions on the following matters were submitted, and answered by the Chair:

Questioner	Subject
Elisa Miles	Mapledurham Playing Fields and Pavilion - Alternative Proposal
Elisa Miles	Mapledurham Playing Fields - Sale Of Further Land
Elisa Miles	Heights Free School Sub-Committee - change of Chair
Mark Corbett	Heights Free School Sub-Committee - Consideration of Options
Mark Corbett	Loss of Sports Pitches And Parking
Martin Brommell	Restoration or Rebuilding of the Pavilion
Martin Brommell	Mapledurham Playing Fields - Status of Land in Event Of School Closure
Martin Brommell	The Heights School - risk to other local schools
A N Other (asked by Martin Brommell)	Heights Free School - Size of Proposed Site
Jane Bickerstaffe	Mapledurham Playing Fields - Value of Land
Andrew Morris	Mapledurham Playing Fields - Consideration of Other Bids

Questions on the following matters were submitted, and answered in writing:

Bob O'Neill	Council Policy on Loss of Public Open Space
Barbara Garden	Mapledurham Playing Fields - Meeting to Discuss Alternative Proposal
Barbara Garden	Planning Policy - Development on Public Open Space
Barbara Garden	Mapledurham Playing Fields - Value of Land
Robin Bentham	EFA Proposals - Traffic Data
Robin Bentham	EFA proposals - Access to Playing Fields
Nick Gale	Sale valuation for the 1.231 acre EFA request

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Nick Gale	Mapledurham Playing Fields - Proceeds of sale or lease
Jacqui and John Kavanagh	Future Care, Repair And Management of the Mapledurham Playing Fields and Pavilion
Jacqui and John Kavanagh	Sale of Land at Mapledurham Playing Fields
Hannah Smith	EFA Proposals - Timetable For Consideration
Kerry Parr	Mapledurham Playing Fields - Precedent for Further Development
Hannah Smith	Consultation on EFA Proposals
Kerry Parr	EFA offer
Annie Ellison	Heights Free School site - Spending of Purchase Monies
Matt Leach	Mapledurham Pavilion - Benefits of Community Asset Status
Alex Bradbury	Heights Free School - Traffic and Parking
Tom Walton	Trust responsibilities
Stasha Lauria	Sale of land at Mapledurham Playing Fields - pledge and conflict of interest
Stasha Lauria	Mapledurham Playing Fields - Value of Land

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

3. PROPOSAL FROM THE EDUCATION FUNDING AGENCY

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report advising the Sub-Committee of a proposal from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) in respect of the acquisition of part of Mapledurham Recreation Ground/Playing Fields (The Trust Land) for the purpose of building a new Free school. The report advised the Sub-Committee of the various options which were open to it in respect of the charity trusteeship of the Recreation Ground Charity delegated to it by Reading Borough Council.

The report explained that the Borough Council held the Trust Land in its capacity as charity trustee and the object of the Charity was:

“the provision and maintenance of a recreation ground for the benefit of the inhabitants of the parish of Mapledurham and the Borough of Reading without distinction of political, religious or other opinions.”

The report explained that the Sub-Committee had delegated authority, with the support of officers, to discharge the Council’s functions as charity trustee and had a duty to make all decisions in what it considered to be the best interests of the Charity and in order to advance the object of the Charity. Therefore, any decision made in respect of the proposal would need to be in line with all relevant charity law and other legal restrictions.

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The proposal from the EFA was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

The report summarised the salient points of the proposal, which involved transfer of 1.231 acres of Trust Land (about 5% of the total) in the North West corner of the Playing Fields as a site for the Heights Free School; a request for free use of the Playing Fields for sport related activities; the sharing of certain facilities outside of school hours; potential to improve existing parking facilities if these could be used for additional school use; and an offer of £1.36m to the Borough Council, of which £30,775 was in respect of the part of the Trust Land which the EFA wished to purchase.

The report also advised that an application had been made by Warren and District Residents' Association to list part of the Trust Land as an Asset of Community Value and this had been agreed by the Council.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Sub-Committee received spoken representations from:

Mr Daniel Pagella and Mrs Kelly Parr on behalf of Trustees and parents at the Heights Free School

Mr Martin Brommell, Chair of Mapledurham Playing Fields Action Group

Councillor Ballsdon, local Ward Councillor

In discussion the Sub-Committee concluded that it would be in the best interests of the Trust to give further detailed consideration to the proposal with the support of independent valuation, property and legal advice, all of which would be considered in public.

Resolved -

- (1) That the EFA proposal be considered in more detail, with the benefit of independent professional property and legal advice with a view to deciding whether to accept or reject the offer set out in the proposal;
- (2) That further meetings of the Sub-Committee be arranged to consider these matters in public, with independent legal and property advice; and
- (3) That officers seek confirmation from the EFA that it will meet the cost of obtaining independent legal and property advice for the purpose of reaching an informed decision on the proposal.

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and finished at 7.30 pm).