

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

MAPLEDURHAM PLAYING FIELDS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 APRIL 2016

Present:

Councillor I Ballsdon	(Chairman)
Councillor E Hopper	
Councillor J Skeats	
Mr N Stanbrook	Mapledurham Users' Committee

Also in attendance:

Mr S Bolton	Caversham & District Residents' Association
Mr C Brooks	Head of Legal & Democratic Services
Mr B O'Neill	
Mr M Payne	Mapledurham Bridge Club
Ms N Simpson	Committee Administrator
Mr G Thornton	Head of Economic & Cultural Development

Apologies:

Mr S Ayers	Friends of Mapledurham Playing Fields
Mr R Bentham	Warren & District Residents' Association
Mr B Stanesby	Leisure & Recreation Manager

1. MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the meetings held on 19 January and 10 March 2016 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

- In Minute 2 of the meeting held on 19 January 2016, the last sentence of the first paragraph be amended from "The Management Committee held a vote on this proposal, with one member voting in favour, one member abstaining and three members voting against." to "The Management Committee held a vote on this proposal, with Nigel Stanbrook voting in favour, Keith Knee-Robinson abstaining and Councillors Ballsdon, Hopper and Skeats voting against."
- In Minute 2 of the meeting held on 19 January 2016, the last sentence of the second paragraph be amended from "The Management Committee held a vote on this proposal, with three members voting in favour and two members abstaining." to "The Management Committee held a vote on this proposal, with Councillors Ballsdon, Hopper and Skeats voting in favour and Keith Knee-Robinson and Nigel Stanbrook abstaining."

Further to Minute 4 (3) of the meeting held on 19 January 2016, it was noted that the formal update meeting with the users of the playing fields had not been held in the end.

Further to Minute 2, fifth bullet point, of the meeting held on 10 March 2016, regarding the reporting of Escape's position that it made sense to postpone a decision on the pavilion until the EFA had given a final proposal, Nigel Stanbrook reported that he had since spoken to representatives from Escape, who had felt that the decision should not be postponed indefinitely. Councillor Ballsdon said that when she had spoken to representatives from Escape following the previous meeting, their position had still been the same as she had reported at the previous meeting.

Further to Minute 2 of the meeting held on 10 March 2016, Councillor Ballsdon noted that the Policy Committee report, and therefore the Minutes, had said that WADRA had so far raised approaching £200k. However, she noted that this presentation was misleading, because £100k of the nearly £200k available for the rebuilding of the pavilion was the Section 106 money committed by the Council and £50k was the donation from Festival Republic, so it had not all been raised by WADRA. The total in the bank account held by WADRA at the time of its AGM had been £74,650, including the Festival Republic money. Chris Brooks said that he had spoken to the Chair of WADRA, Robin Bentham, in the previous week, who had confirmed that the £200k was indeed the total amount available. Councillor Ballsdon said that she would write to Robin Bentham about how the figures on fundraising by WADRA were presented and publicised.

AGREED:

- (1) That the position on these matters be noted;
- (2) That Councillor Ballsdon write to the Chair of WADRA about how the figures on fundraising by WADRA for the rebuilding of the pavilion were presented and publicised.

2. MAPLEDURHAM PLAYING FIELDS UPDATE

Grant Thornton submitted a report giving an update on the latest situation on a number of issues in relation to the ongoing management of the playing fields and associated facilities.

a) Pavilion Maintenance & Repair - Hall Closure & Impact

Further to Minute 2 of the meeting held on 10 March 2016, the report explained that, in January 2016, while repairs were being carried out at the pavilion, the Council's Clerk of Works had been concerned that sections of cladding on a wall were loose and might either fall or trap fingers of young people using the facility. The material into which the cladding was fixed had been rotten and re-fixing would be difficult. As a precaution, the structural engineer had been asked for an opinion on the condition of the pavilion. His advice had been to close the pavilion pending detailed structural investigations. The pavilion had been closed on 21 January 2016 following initial observations from the structural engineer. His subsequent report had identified structural weaknesses and the hall had remained closed.

While a proposal was awaited from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) on the provision of the Heights Free School, the Council believed it was prudent to delay the rebuilding/refurbishment of the pavilion. The position had been considered by Policy Committee on 14 March 2016 and by the Heights Free School Sub-Committee on 23 March 2016, and relevant Minutes from those meetings were attached to the report, that confirmed the Council's position in this regard as both Trustee and Local Authority (Appendices 1 and 2). The report also stated that two questions relating to the pavilion had been asked at Policy Committee on 11 April 2016 and the questions and responses were attached at Appendix 3.

The report gave details of the situation with regard to pavilion user groups following the hall closure, stating that all user groups had found temporary accommodation or were using a range of venues on an ad-hoc basis to deliver their activity. The removal of equipment stored within the pavilion was being facilitated as and when groups required, meeting on site and supervising access to ensure the process was handled safely.

All user groups had been pro-active in seeking to address the issues associated with closure of the hall, demonstrating flexibility and a degree of understanding. The Bridge Club had expressed frustration at not being able to use the hall, as they were understood to have not been able to agree/arrange regular temporary accommodation providing for all of their requirements, which had led to ongoing ad-hoc arrangements for the duration of the hall's closure.

The report gave details of the loss of regular booking weekly income resulting from the partial closure of the pavilion, totalling £243 a week, and it reported on ad-hoc bookings which had had to be declined since the hall had been closed. It concluded that the total amount of income lost from 21 January to 12 April 2016 had been £2,956.50, with the loss of pavilion income therefore effectively around £1,000 a month. It noted that there had been no impact on sports income over the period of partial closure.

b) Invoicing

Further to Minute 3 (2) of the meeting on 19 January 2016 regarding a query about frequency of invoicing, the report stated that the Administrator at Palmer Park had advised that all invoicing relating to the use of Mapledurham was up to date. Invoicing generally took place every four to six weeks dependent upon the availability of staff resource. The invoicing was completed retrospectively and as such the user groups were not felt to be adversely affected by this. Every effort was and would continue to be made to ensure consistency of invoicing frequency.

Nigel Stanbrook reported that he thought it had been Magikats who had reported a problem with invoicing, so he would see if it had been resolved or if there were any outstanding issues, and would contact Grant Thornton if necessary.

c) Children's Play Area

Further to Minute 3 (2) regarding the condition of the children's playground, the report stated that the play area was split into two sections. The larger area had

several items of equipment and play-bark as its safety surface. This was in good condition but two small spring rides and a bench had been removed from there some time previously which had left an unused space. Adjacent to that was a separately fenced and very small sand-filled area, which had some weed growth and contained just one item of equipment - a see-saw. It stated that it was proposed to relocate the see-saw into the space in the main play area. The fencing around the sand area and the sand would then be removed and the area reinstated as grassed open space.

The meeting discussed the sand-filled area, noting that it was historically under used by toddlers - partially because it was difficult to push buggies across the grass to the area - but that it would be good to have a separate play area for toddlers, as the play of older children in the main play area could be quite rough. However, it was discussed that it might be unwise for the Council to spend any money on the playing fields whilst awaiting the EFA proposal, when the position might be clearer soon. It was noted that it might be quite expensive to move the see-saw and just refilling the area with sand could be cheaper and might encourage more use. It was suggested that officers could investigate the costs of moving the see-saw and the proposal in the report, as well as for just refreshing the sand pit, and bring these back to the Management Committee. It was noted that, in the longer term, once the EFA proposal was received, and if there was a monetary element, it might be possible to use this to improve the playground area. However, it was also noted that even if such funding were to be possible, it would be unlikely to be available for some time.

The Committee decided that it did not need to see costings and concluded that it would prefer the sand in the small play area to be refreshed, rather than the see-saw relocation proposal in the report, and requested that officers implement this as soon as possible.

d) Sign at Entrance

Further to Minute 5 (2) of the meeting on 19 January 2016, the report stated that the sign at the entrance to the Playing Fields was old and becoming unsightly as well as leaning. It was proposed to remove the sign and replace it with a standard Parks site identification sign with the relevant bye-law symbols, which would give a more tidy appearance to the entrance.

Nigel Stanbrook reported that he thought that residents felt that the sign should say that the Recreation Ground was a charity, although it could say that it was administered by the Council, and also that he had asked Ben Stanesby for the new sign to include the Trust's charity number and Ben's email response had indicated he would be reporting on this to the next meeting. He said that a new sign provided the opportunity to include this information.

Chris Brooks explained that there was no legal requirement for a sign, or for any sign to state the charity number, but he understood the desire to replace the old sign. He recommended that, if it was wanted to have a bespoke sign rather than a standard Parks site sign, this should be costed and compared with the cost of the

standard sign and careful consideration should be given to the additional expenditure.

e) Orchard

Further to Minute 1 (3) of the meeting on 19 January 2016, the report stated that the Friends of Mapledurham Playing Fields had donated replacement trees for the trees in the orchard that had died. They had managed to source the same varieties and had replanted them in the previous month.

f) Heights Free School Proposal

Further to Minute 4 of the meeting on 19 January 2016, the report stated that the EFA had still not made a proposal to the Council in relation to the use of the Mapledurham Playing Fields for a new school, although they had closed their consultation. When a proposal was received from the EFA, following consideration by the Heights Free School Sub-Committee, users of the pavilion would be updated through their representatives.

Nigel Stanbrook noted that he would need to be updated as well, as the representative of the users.

g) Potholes

Grant Thornton reported verbally at the meeting that, on 22 April 2016 between 8am and 12noon, the maintenance team would be patching potholes in the Mapledurham Playing Fields car park and access road; there would be notices placed on site.

Nigel Stanbrook requested that, whilst the maintenance team was on site, they also looked at remedying the big drop in level next to kerb stones in the grass verge of the access road.

AGREED:

- (1) That the report and position be noted;
- (2) That Nigel Stanbrook liaise with Magikats to see if the problem with invoicing had been resolved or if there were any outstanding issues, and contact Grant Thornton if necessary;
- (3) That the Committee's preference and recommendation for the sand in the small play area to be refreshed, rather than the see-saw relocation proposal in the report, be submitted to officers and officers be requested to implement this as soon as possible;
- (4) That Grant Thornton pursue the issue of a replacement sign and get costings for both a standard sign and a bespoke sign with the extra details of the charity status;

- (5) That the Friends of Mapledurham Playing Fields be thanked for their help and support with replacing the dead trees in the orchard;
- (6) That Grant Thornton request that, when the maintenance team carried out pothole patching work at the Playing Fields, they also looked at remedying the big drop in level next to kerb stones in the grass verge of the access road.

3. MAPLEDURHAM PLAYING FIELDS USERS REPORT

Nigel Stanbrook submitted a report as the representative of Users of Mapledurham Playing Fields and Pavilion, giving an update on activity over the previous few months. The report covered: an EFA consultation with users; the pavilion closure; the meetings of the Management Committee on 10 March 2016 and Policy Committee on 14 March 2016; and the EFA public exhibitions on the new school. The report had appended notes from the User Group meeting held on 27 January 2016.

With regard to the EFA public exhibitions on the school, the report stated that the general view of the user group representatives was that, with the pavilion excluded from the proposed school site location, there was nothing to prevent the Council now pressing ahead with the promised refurbishment and, in the first instance, getting on with the tender process. It stated that some members of Escape had reservations at this stage until details of the final EFA proposal were known.

Nigel Stanbrook reported on the question he had asked at the Policy Committee meeting on 11 April 2016, regarding the maintenance and refurbishment of the pavilion (Appendix 3 to the report in Item 2 above refers), saying that the Leader of the Council's reply had not answered his question, and Chris Brooks reported on the wording of the reply.

Nigel also reported on discussions with user representatives about why the existing money was not being used on pavilion refurbishment, and on discussions with EFA representatives at the EFA exhibitions, who he said had evaded detailed questions and had shown a lack of understanding of the users' concerns about the proposals. He reported that, following the discussions at the User Group meeting on 27 January 2016 about the Users' Representative role, he had been nominated to stand again as the Users' Representative, and at a meeting on 6 April 2016 had been unanimously voted in for another three years.

Nigel gave a verbal update on the latest situation with regard to accommodation for the user groups since the hall closure. He reported that Escape had lost some members because of their new location in the Warren, the Bridge Club were fed up having tried a number of venues, and WADRA had been unable to run the summer fundraising fete because of the hall closure, which had been a big disappointment. He also reported that a local Beaver group would like to come to use the playing fields and the changing rooms in the summer. It was noted that the group would need to liaise with the Parks department and Grant Thornton said that he did not know the booking situation but he expected that the department would try to accommodate the request around other users.

Councillor Ballsdon said that Caversham Trents FC had published their position on the Heights School proposal on Facebook, indicating that they were 'on the fence' pending the outcome of the EFA consultation, and wanted to see the EFA proposal before deciding whether or not to support it, and she noted that this was not reflected in the User Group report. Nigel Stanbrook said that that had not been their position in January 2016 as he understood it, but he did not know if it had changed since then. He said he would check on Caversham Trents FC's position with Daniel Mander and would email members of the Management Committee to clarify the position.

AGREED:

- (1) That the report and the position be noted;
- (2) That Nigel Stanbrook tell the Beaver group to liaise with the parks department regarding use of the playing fields and changing rooms over the summer;
- (3) That Nigel Stanbrook check with Daniel Mander on Caversham Trents FC's position on the EFA Heights School proposal and email members of the Management Committee to clarify the position.

4. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

AGREED: That the next meeting be organised by email when needed.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and finished at 7.36pm)