

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

MAPLEDURHAM PLAYING FIELDS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 OCTOBER 2016

Present:

Councillor I Ballsdon	(Chairman)
Councillor E Hopper	
Councillor J Skeats	
Mr N Stanbrook	Mapledurham Users' Committee
Rev K Knee-Robinson	Mapledurham Parish Council

Also in attendance:

Mr S Ayers	Friends of Mapledurham Playing Fields
Mr R Bale	CARPS (Catchment Area Residents' Preferred Site)
Mr R Bentham	Warren & District Residents' Association
Mr S Bolton	Caversham & District Residents' Association
Mr C Brooks	Head of Legal & Democratic Services
Ms A Elliott	Mapledurham Bridge Club
Mr K Macrae	Friends of Mapledurham Playing Fields
Mr D Maynerd	Mapledurham Lawn Tennis Club
Ms P Mead	Escape Toddler Group
Ms E Miles	Warren & District Residents' Association
Mr B O'Neill	
Mr M Payne	Mapledurham Bridge Club
Ms N Simpson	Committee Administrator
Mr B Stanesby	Leisure & Recreation Manager

Apologies:

Mr G Thornton	Head of Economic & Cultural Development
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1. MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2016 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:

- In the third paragraph of Minute 3, amend the wording "...and his view of the perceived inadequacy of the reply,..." to "...saying that the Leader of the Council's reply had not answered his question,..."

Further to Minute 1 (2), regarding the presentation of the nearly £200k total available for rebuilding of the pavilion as being raised by WADRA, Councillor Ballsdon reported that she had written to the Chair of WADRA about how the figures on fundraising by WADRA for the rebuilding of the pavilion were presented and publicised, and she had received confirmation of the breakdown of the money available, which included £85k remaining from the Section 106 money, £50k from Festival Republic, and the remainder from WADRA fundraising.

Further to Minutes 2 (3) and (4), it was reported that the children's play area had been weeded and had its sand refreshed and an order had been placed for a replacement sign at the entrance to the playing fields, with wording to include reference to the charity, and that delivery of the sign was expected imminently. In response to an enquiry about the exact wording to be on the sign, Chris Brooks said that he would obtain the full wording and confirm it to members of the Management Committee.

Further to Minute 3 (3), Nigel Stanbrook reported that, as agreed, he had checked with Daniel Mander from Caversham Trents FC about the Club's position on the EFA Heights School proposal and Daniel Mander had said that the Club wanted the refurbishment of the pavilion to proceed as soon as possible, without waiting for any further information from the EFA. Nigel Stanbrook had also emailed this information to members of the Management Committee to clarify the position, as agreed.

AGREED:

- (1) That the position on these matters be noted;
- (2) That Chris Brooks confirm the details of the wording included on the new entrance sign to members of the Management Committee.

2. PROPOSALS FROM THE EDUCATION FUNDING AGENCY & FIT4ALL

Chris Brooks presented copies of two reports to the Heights Sub-Committee, which were to be considered at its meeting on 11 October 2016, on proposals affecting Mapledurham Playing Fields, one on the EFA proposal and one on a Fit4All proposal.

(a) Education Funding Agency Proposal -

The first report was on a revised proposal received from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) in respect of the acquisition of part of Mapledurham Recreation Ground/Playing Fields (the Ground) for the purpose of building a new school for The Heights Free School;

The report had attached:

Appendix 1 -Revised plan showing boundary change to 2.7 acre site (also repeated in Figure 1 in the report on the Pavilion referred to in Minute 3 below)

Appendix 2 -Revised EFA Proposal

(Updated Appendix 2 - Further Revised EFA Proposal - circulated after the original despatch)

Appendix 3 -A new home for The Heights - Consultation Proposal by The Heights Free school for a site at the Mapledurham playing Fields

Appendix 4 - Mapledurham Playing Fields Foundation - letter dated 29 September 2016 and enclosed leaflet on 'Fit4All'

Appendix 5 - (for the Mapledurham Management Committee only) Heights Free School Sub-Committee Minutes from the meeting on 12 July 2016

A proposal in respect of the acquisition of part of Mapledurham Recreation Ground/Playing Fields (the Ground) for the purpose of building a new school for The Heights Free School had originally been received from the EFA and circulated to members of the Management Committee in June 2016, and had been considered by the Heights Free School Sub-Committee at a meeting on 12 July 2016. The Sub-Committee had agreed that the proposal should 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. The Minutes from 12 July 2016 were appended to the report for the Management Committee's reference.

The report advised the Sub-Committee of a revised proposal which had since been received from the EFA and explained that the Sub-Committee had the delegated authority, with the support of officers, to discharge the Council's functions as sole charity trustee for the Recreation Ground Charity at Mapledurham, and had a duty to make all decisions in what it considered to be the best interests of the Charity in order to advance its charitable objects.

The EFA proposal was that the school would require the transfer of 1.231 acres of land at the Ground, within a total specified area of 2.7 acres. This wider area was shown on the plan attached at Appendix 1, hatched.

The revised EFA proposal was attached at Appendix 2 and an updated version of Appendix 2 had been circulated before the meeting. Within its submission, the EFA had identified a draft initial layout (Fig. 1 of Appendix 2) showing the indicative area of where the 1.231 acres would be located, in the North West corner of the Ground. The EFA had also confirmed that it had no intention of building in a way that inhibited access to the pavilion or playing fields. However, it was possible that during the planning process and further detailed site investigation the layout of the school might need to change, although it would always remain within the 2.7 acre site.

The report stated that, despite being asked to do so, the EFA had not been prepared to confirm where the 1.231 acres of land they required for the school would be located within the wider area, because they considered that the greater area of 2.7 acres provided them with some flexibility should some changes be needed to the initial design layout, for example following intrusive survey works.

The revisions made by the EFA to the proposal considered by the Sub-Committee in July 2016 were listed in the report, as follows:

- The 2.7 acre area requested had been re-drawn to provide for at least a 3 metre gap between the site and the existing Pavilion and tennis courts (see Appendix 1).
- The school hall and MUGA would be available for community use, subject to charges to users at affordable rates.

- The Charity would provide the school with access to one sports pitch, for which it would pay a nominal usage charge, which met the Grass Pitch Quality Standard. There was an obligation on the Charity to bring one pitch up to the Grass Pitch Quality Standard (which could be reviewed on the FA website).
- Recognition that the future management arrangements for the Ground would be for the Council as trustee of the Charity to determine, and reiteration that the school would be willing to cooperate with any such arrangements put in place.

The EFA proposal included a total payment from the EFA to the Charity of £1.36M. In this regard, the EFA considered the purchase price for the unspecified 1.231 acre site to be £30,775 (at £25k an acre based on their Red Book Valuation).

The EFA proposal was made on the basis that it was open for acceptance for a period of 16 weeks, until 14 October 2016. Therefore the EFA were looking for the Council, as trustee of the Charity, to make a decision on the proposal by this date. The EFA were aware that it was impossible for a final decision to have been reached by 14 October 2016 because much information was still outstanding and a process of consultation (with the public and the Charity Commission) was required. However, they had a timetable for applying for planning permission in order to get the school ready for occupation in September 2018 which required a decision "in principle" by 14 October 2016 so that they could proceed with design work and the planning application. If the Sub-Committee's decision was to progress the EFA offer, then the Charity would not be contractually committed to proceed with the sale until contracts had been exchanged and the EFA would have to take comfort from the Sub-Committee's approval to proceed, subject to such conditions as the Sub-Committee deemed appropriate.

The EFA were prepared to accept a condition that, once the site design had been confirmed as part of the planning application, the Sub-Committee had 12 weeks (from receipt of the site plans) to comment on and finally agree the 1.231 acre area and associated access to the school and access during the construction period; and to consult with the beneficiaries upon the scheme. The Sub-Committee could impose any other conditions they felt necessary on their "in principle" decision on the EFA's proposal.

On 29 September 2016, the Chair of the Sub-Committee had received a letter from Gordon Watt, Chairman of the Mapledurham Playing Fields Foundation, setting out and attaching what was described as an alternative proposal to that submitted by the EFA, under the heading 'Fit4All', to undertake the enhancement, management and operation of the Mapledurham Playing Fields with a 25 year lease. This was attached at Appendix 4, and a more detailed proposal on 'Fit4All' had been received from Mr Watt on the day of publication of the report, which was the subject of a further report to the Sub-Committee, which had been circulated later, under a separate agenda item on the Sub-Committee's agenda.

The report recommended that the Sub-Committee should read the report in conjunction with the report by the Leisure and Recreation Manager on the impact of the EFA proposal on the Ground and Pavilion which was also on the Sub-

Committee's agenda (see Minute 3 below); and also the latest proposal on 'Fit4All', referred to above and in Minute 2 (b) below, and that no decision should be taken until both had been considered.

(b) Fit4All Proposal

The second report was on a proposal received from the recently established Mapledurham Playing Fields Foundation to enhance the facilities and operations at Mapledurham Playing Fields without the need to sell land to fund the enhancements, entitled "Fit4All", as an alternative to the EFA proposal.

The Mapledurham Playing Fields Foundation had been founded as a charity with the following object: "To provide or assist in the provision of facilities at Mapledurham Playing Fields in the interests of social welfare for recreation or other leisure time occupation of individuals who have need of such facilities by reason of their youth, age infirmity or disability, financial hardship or social circumstances with the object of improving their conditions of life."

A letter from Gordon Watt, the Chairman of the Foundation to the Chair of the Sub-Committee and an initial leaflet summarising the proposal had been included in the original papers for the Sub-Committee and the Management Committee. An officer covering report and the full proposal had been circulated after the original despatch. The Fit4All proposal set out proposed plans for the Foundation to undertake the enhancement, management and operation of the Playing Fields with a lease for 25 or 30 years. A letter from Robin Bentham, Chair of the Warren & District Residents' Association (WADRA), to the Mapledurham Playing Fields Foundation regarding the release of funding had also been circulated after the original despatch.

(c) Discussion

Chris Brooks said that the lack of clarity in the EFA proposal, in particular concerning the location of the 1.231 acres, made it difficult for the Property Adviser and Leisure & Recreation Manager to assess the impact and implications of the proposal for the Sub-Committee.

He explained that the Sub-Committee would be asked to decide whether (1) The EFA offer as currently articulated was not in the best interests of the Charity and should not therefore be proceeded with any further; or (2) That the offer was, in principle and without creating any binding legal commitment, capable of being in the best interests of the Charity (ie capable of enhancing the amenity value of the Ground) and should therefore be pursued, subject to the conditions recommended by officers, and any other conditions the Sub-Committee thought appropriate and necessary.

The conditions recommended in the report were for the EFA to clarify the location of the 1.231 acre site at the earliest opportunity and to seek planning consent in consultation with the Sub-Committee on the likely effect of the various design options upon the amenity value of the Ground, so that the planning application that was submitted was acceptable to the Sub-Committee.

The report recommended that, subject to the EFA carrying out the actions set out in the conditions, the Sub-Committee should obtain and consider a report from Bruton Knowles, Property Advisors, on the EFA proposal in relation to the potential sale of land and regarding amenity value and also consult with the public, the Management Committee and the Charity Commission.

Chris Brooks said that, due to the timescale of receiving the Fit4All proposal, which had not originally been expected to be ready before the end of the year, officers had not yet had time to assess the proposal in detail, but it had been brought to the Sub-Committee so that they were aware of the proposal. An initial officer meeting had been held with representatives from the Mapledurham Playing Fields Foundation at which a lot of issues that needed further work had been identified.

In the discussion on the reports, the points made included:

- Councillor Ballsdon had been asked, as Chairman of the Management Committee, to speak on the item at the Heights Sub-Committee meeting and it was suggested that the Management Committee agree a statement for her to present;
- The EFA proposal was only to acquire the 1.231 acres, not the rest of the land within the 2.7 acres, which would remain as part of the Trust;
- Concern was expressed, however, that accepting the EFA proposal could leave the Ground open to further land grab and development;
- The EFA had been told that, in order for the Sub-Committee to take the proposal forward, they would need to provide details of the position of the 1.231 acres, so that consultation with the public, the Management Committee and the Charity Commission could take place;
- If the school was built in front of the current pavilion, this would affect access to the remaining recreation ground, so this should be avoided. If the school was too far into the playing fields this could also leave unusable land behind the school. Siting of the school should be done to minimise loss of usable space;
- The Council had appointed an independent legal adviser from Veale Wasbrough Vizards, who was experienced in charity law.

The meeting discussed possible wording for a statement for the Chairman to present at the Heights Sub-Committee on 11 October 2016 on behalf of the Management Committee.

The Management Committee agreed the following statement, with Councillors Ballsdon, Hopper and Skeats voting for the statement and Keith Knee-Robinson and Nigel Stanbrook abstaining because they had not had time to consult their respective groups on the EFA proposal:

“Should the Sub-Committee decide to pursue the EFA proposal further, the EFA should be urged to site the school as far into the North West corner of the site as possible, in order to minimise the loss of usable space in the

playing fields and, in particular, to avoid putting the school in front of the pavilion.”

AGREED:

- (1) That the reports and position be noted;
- (2) That Councillor Ballsdon address the Heights Sub-Committee meeting on 11 October 2016 as Chairman of the Management Committee, presenting the statement set out above;
- (3) That it be noted that Keith Knee-Robinson and Nigel Stanbrook would be consulting with members of Mapledurham Parish Council and Users of the Pavilion and Playing Fields respectively on both the EFA and Fit4All proposals.

3. MAPLEDURHAM PLAYING FIELDS PAVILION

Ben Stanesby submitted a copy of a report to the Heights Sub-Committee, to be considered at its meeting on 11 October 2016, giving an update on the current position on and possible next steps for the pavilion at Mapledurham Playing Fields.

The report explained that the pavilion remained closed following the structural survey which had identified significant deterioration requiring additional supports to stabilise the building.

It stated that the EFA proposal currently did not include enough detail to allow a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the scheme. However, the proposal identified the overall area within which the EFA were considering locating the school. The report gave details of the current football playing pitches at the playing fields and their use, and considered two different scenarios, depending on the location of the school, giving details of possible impact on the playing fields and possible costs:

Scenario A - if the school was located to the immediate south of the pavilion;
Scenario B - if the school was built in the north east of the area identified.

The report also gave details of options that might be needed to support intensified use as a result of reduction in recreational space available.

The report explained that the positioning of the school in an intermediate position would have varying impact on how the pavilion could be used and, if the relationship between the two was compromised, then the pavilion would need to be moved. The cost of this was likely to be in excess of a payment from the EFA. An assessment would need to be made of any detailed proposal, in order to assess the impact on the pavilion and whether the pavilion would need replacing.

It stated that, to prevent the interaction between the pavilion and playing fields being compromised, it was important that the school did not occupy land immediately to the south of the pavilion. In order to determine whether it was appropriate to start work to repair the pavilion, greater clarity was required in terms of what the EFA was proposing.

The report also noted that a proposal was being prepared by the local community to refurbish the pavilion, which was predicated on the Council not accepting the offer from the EFA which would result in the building of the school on the playing fields. It stated that a formal proposal was awaited, as the report had been written before the Fit4All proposal had been received.

The report explained that, should work be undertaken to the pavilion and then a proposal from the EFA be implemented such as that in Scenario A, any funds expended on the refurbishment would be lost as the pavilion would need relocating. Therefore, before any work was undertaken to the pavilion, confirmation would be required that any developments would not compromise the use of the pavilion to the extent that it would need relocating. Should the position be reached where it was clear that work could commence to the pavilion, agreement should be sought with WADRA to ensure that the proposals did not compromise any future proposals they wished to make.

The report recommended that a decision on refurbishing or replacing the pavilion should be made only after the Heights Sub-Committee was confident in the implications of the proposals from the EFA or other potential interested parties.

The meeting discussed the possible impact of the EFA proposal on the timescales for being able to do any work to the pavilion. It was noted that any planning application would need to specify the position of the school, but that there might be more clarity on the position earlier than the submission of the planning application and, conversely, applicants sometimes made amendments to planning applications or could submit an amended application. However, in this case, the Sub-Committee was being recommended in the previous report to require the EFA to seek planning consent in consultation with the Sub-Committee. It was pointed out that the position of the school would also need to be established to carry out consultation on the proposal.

Councillor Ballsdon suggested that, in her address to the Sub-Committee as Chairman of the Management Committee, she should make it clear that the user groups would like the pavilion refurbished and rebuilt as soon as possible, as that is what they were telling the Management Committee; users were suffering as a result of the hall being shut.

In response to an enquiry, Ben Stanesby said that there was due to be another structural survey of the pavilion soon and that there had been no further damage to the pavilion since a break-in a couple of months previously.

The meeting also discussed the position with regard to funding any works to the pavilion, noting that, although it might be possible for a contractor to carry out works with the ~£185k available, £85k of this was from the Council, £25k from Festival Republic and £75k from WADRA, so all parties would need to provide their funding. Ben Stanesby said that WADRA had expressed a view that it did not wish to invest money into the pavilion until there were more guarantees or a higher degree of certainty about what was going to happen on the site. In response to a question about the current position, Robin Bentham, Chairman of WADRA, said that, if money was spent on work on the pavilion which was then negated by a later decision to move the pavilion, recompense for the funds invested would be

expected and he said that he would like to consult with WADRA members about the situation.

Chris Brooks also noted that, in the letter from WADRA to the Mapledurham Playing Fields Foundation circulated in relation to the Fit4All proposal in the previous report, it stated that WADRA would hold its pavilion funding until a satisfactory contract for the restoration of the pavilion was in place, subject to inclusion of the RBC funding and maintaining the integrity of the Mapledurham Playing Fields Trust in its entirety. Chris Brooks noted that, if the EFA proposal went forward, this could provide funding to invest in the recreation ground, but the position regarding the pavilion would be made more difficult if there were caveats from WADRA.

In response to a question, Chris Brooks said that he understood that the name of the Heights Sub-Committee was due to be changed to the Mapledurham Playing Field Trustees Sub-Committee at a future Policy Committee meeting.

AGREED:

- (1) That the report and position be noted;
- (2) That Councillor Ballsdon address the Heights Sub-Committee meeting on 11 October 2016 as Chairman of the Management Committee, presenting the following statement:

“The Sub-Committee should be informed that the user groups would like the pavilion to be refurbished and rebuilt as soon as possible, as they are suffering as a result of the hall being shut.”

4. MAPLEDURHAM PLAYING FIELDS USERS REPORT

Nigel Stanbrook gave a verbal report as the representative of Users of Mapledurham Playing Fields and Pavilion. The report gave an update on the views of users about the situation on the pavilion, the Management Committee and the Trustees; it gave details of the activities of and current venues being used by User Groups; and it set out information Nigel Stanbrook had reported to User Group representatives following the previous Management Committee meeting. A copy of the text of the report is appended to the Minutes.

Councillor Ballsdon noted that the Management Committee had a very restricted remit, with no budget, and that even simple requests had to go via officers, and past the Council Administration if there were any budgetary implications. She said that she understood why residents were tempted to blame the Management Committee for lack of progress, and that she shared residents' frustration that the building was closed and unable to be used by the community, but noted that the Management Committee had little power. She said that on behalf of user groups she had pressed the Trustee, the Heights Sub-Committee, to get on with refurbishment/rebuilding of the pavilion, but it was their prerogative to look holistically at the situation and then make their decision.

She also noted that WADRA did not want to put the money they had raised into refurbishing the pavilion at the current time, so the situation could not currently be changed, and she said that there was a need to help the community understand

the way that the Council worked and how limited the Management Committee's remit was.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

5. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the timing of the next meeting would depend on the decision taken by the Heights Sub-Committee at its meeting on 11 October 2016. A meeting was likely to be needed sooner if the EFA proposal was rejected and later if it was to be pursued further; in the latter case, consultation with the Management Committee by the Heights Sub-Committee would also need to be factored in.

AGREED: That the next meeting be organised by email when needed, depending on the decision of the Height Sub-Committee on 11 October 2016.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and finished at 8.00pm)

Mapledurham Playing Fields User Report for Management Meeting 10 October 2016

In August I copied the user group representatives my requests to the management committee members, and the negative responses received back from them, to have an urgent management meeting to discuss the latest proposals from the EFA, the alternative Fit4All proposal and the situation on the pavilion and to dispel the perception of the management committee having an uncaring and indifferent attitude to the whole situation.

Prior to this management meeting representatives from Caversham Trent Football Club, Mapledurham Tennis Club, Escape, Bridge Club and Beavers have all reiterated that the refurbishment of the pavilion should go ahead immediately.

The Bridge Club have said the Trench Green Hall location will become more unsatisfactory in the winter as its location will discourage older members from attending. The Escape toddler group say their venue is OK but is really in the wrong place with parking a difficulty and is really too small. They say they are currently just keeping their heads above water. Equally the Beavers have started using Trench Green Hall but will need to review their needs at the year end. CTFC use the changing rooms regularly are going ahead with pitch refurbishments and purchasing goals for the club's increased usage of the playing fields: (five age groups with over 400 members)

I have been on the end of much criticism of our Management Committee, receiving the following comments:

- The football club state they have no confidence in us as a committee and wish to see the elected members replaced by people who have the will and drive to improve Mapledurham Playing Fields as a community hub. These Councillors have wilfully let the pavilion run into disrepair by their inaction and uncaring attitude towards their own constituents.
- I have also received a comment from the Beaver group that to see a super local facility be allowed to fall into such a poor state only reflects poorly on the Trustees lack of stewardship and leadership.
- The Tennis Club are very unhappy that the EFA have asked for an area of land which could go along the back of the pavilion and along court 4 fence. This not only blocks the footballers entrance to the changing rooms but blocks the back gate to the tennis courts. This back gate is used by members walking or cycling from Chazey Road, etc. In addition, the tennis club have planted shrubs and trees along this fence and maintained them to give protection from wind and to provide a very attractive bank of shrubs around the courts.
- Friends of Mapledurham Playing Fields continue their work to enhance/manage the environment for the betterment of wildlife and the public. Their programme of events will commence later in October. They are in conversation with the Beaver Scout Group and intend to organise a planting day with them. This may not be until spring 2017 when the supply of free trees/shrubs from the Woodland Trust and/or TCV (the conservation volunteers) is more readily available. The Group continues to support the aim to prevent the selling of any land for any purpose outside that laid down by the original wording of the Trust.

Following the Management Meeting of 20 April 2016 I reported to User Group representatives:

1. My request to Reading Borough Council Policy Committee on 11 April 2016 to acknowledge publicly the Council's failure to maintain the pavilion, ignoring their own professional surveyor's reports from 2007 to 2010 on the poor structural condition of the pavilion.
2. My request to the Policy Committee to cease blocking the refurbishment of the pavilion and to progress the tender process for the works.
3. That Councillor Lovelock failed to answer my question over maintenance and also said no public money would be spent on the pavilion at this time.
4. These points were repeated by me at the April management meeting but the Councillors had shown no interest in supporting me on this with Mr Brooks saying the pavilion falling into disrepair was a complicated matter and RBC had to operate within Council budgetary constraints.
5. That I had stressed to the Management Committee the users wanted the promised refurbishment of the pavilion without waiting to hear from the EFA.
6. I had secured the decision of the Management Committee to retain the toddlers play area (I have subsequently informed them that weeding of the play area has taken place with some sand added).
7. A bespoke new sign for the playing fields to replace the current damaged sign is to be pursued and costed.

As you can see from my previous paragraphs the above are very unhappy with the situation and the ineffectiveness of our committee which since the initiation of the school proposal has achieved nothing in the protection or support of the pavilion or the playing fields.