

## Scrutiny Task and Finish Panel Agenda



### **Leisure Task and Finish Scrutiny Panel Thursday, 13th July, 2006**

**Place:** Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping

**Time:** 7.00 pm

**Democratic Services Officer:** Adrian Hendry (direct line 01992 56 4246)  
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**Members:**

Councillors Mrs H Harding (Chairman), Mrs P Brooks (Vice-Chairman), M Colling, Mrs A Grigg, Mrs J Lea, J Markham, S Murray, Mrs P K Rush, Mrs P Smith, P Turpin and J M Whitehouse

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<p><b>PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO ALL MEMBERS TO ATTEND</b></p>
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**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

**2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTES 39 - 23.7.02)**

(Head of Research and Democratic Services) To report the appointment of any substitute members for the meeting.

**3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

(Head of Research and Democratic Services). To declare interests in any items on the agenda.

In considering whether to declare a personal or a prejudicial interest under the Code of Conduct, Overview & Scrutiny members are asked pay particular attention to paragraph 11 of the Code in addition to the more familiar requirements.

This requires the declaration of a personal and prejudicial interest in any matter before an OS Committee, which relates to a decision of or action by another Committee or Sub Committee of the Council, a Joint Committee or Joint Sub Committee in which the Council is involved and of which the Councillor is also a member.

Paragraph 11 does not refer to Cabinet decisions or attendance at an OS meeting

purely for the purpose of answering questions or providing information on such a matter.

#### **4. SCOPE OF THE REVIEW AND TERMS OF REFERENCE (Pages 13 - 28)**

Attached to this agenda is a copy of the proposals presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which led to the setting up of this Leisure Panel. However, Members now need to determine the final scope of the study and a set of Terms of Reference, which reflect those objectives.

In order to help the Panel, a set of 'Notes for Guidance' for the operating of a Task and Finish Panel is also attached. This sets out how a Task and Finish Panel should ideally go about scoping its programme of work, gathering information and evidence. The note also suggests how final reporting back to the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the larger Council is undertaken. A draft layout for a Final Report is also attached. *Please note that these are still in draft and are yet to be fully endorsed by the July Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.*

#### **5. SCOPE OF THE REVIEW**

The Proposals submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Committee form the basis and justification for the scrutiny of the four individual topics. In order to assist Members of the Panel in determining the breadth and focus of the reviews, additional background information is detailed below.

##### **1. Review of the Future Management of the Roding Valley Meadows local Nature Reserve**

Located in the South of the District, within the Roding Valley, are the Roding Valley Meadows, declared a Local Nature Reserve in 1986. The 64 ha Reserve is bisected by the River Roding. The majority of the site is to the east of the river and occupies a north-south corridor being bordered on its eastern side by the M11 motorway. Approximately one-quarter of the reserve lies to the west of the river and is bordered by Oakwood Hill and Chigwell Lane (See Map attached)

The Reserve primarily comprises species-rich meadows and pasture, ancient hedgerows and areas of marsh and woodland. There are two ponds on the site plus several wet ditches. Four of the meadows are Sites of Special Scientific Interest and, as such, receive legislative protection (administered by English nature).

There is a way-marked Nature Trail supported by both Adult and Children's Visitors Guides. There is specific provision for visitors with disabilities through specially adapted footbridges and kissing gates, and a purpose built hard surface track. The Reserve has been awarded the coveted "Green Flag" award in recognition of its quality of access and management.

The Reserve is provided at the discretion of the Council and the Grange Farm Trust who are part landowners. Currently the site is managed by Essex Wildlife Trust on behalf of the Council under a 21 year legal agreement which commenced in 1986 (The Grange Farm Trust is party, but not signatories to the agreement).

A fulltime Warden is employed by Essex Wildlife Trust which receives an annual grant to cover the Warden's salary and essential conservation work. To undertake the additional, desirable conservation work requires considerable volunteer and external funding resources. The Essex Wildlife Trust is responsible for all on-site operational works, the management of public access and the production and implementation of Management Plans.

The Roding Valley Meadows are within easy reach of the residents of Loughton, Buckhurst Hill and Chigwell and, as such, are extremely popular with local people many of whom make daily usage of the Reserve for walking and exercising dogs. Access is free, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Other regular users of the Reserve include, horse riding (the nearby Pony Riding for the Disabled Trust have a legal right of access into the Reserve, which is also used by casual riders), athletics (cross country events and general training by Loughton Athletics Club), orienteering, education (primarily visits by local schools) and a guided walks and events programme for local people, conservation and species research; and bird watching.

The work of the Nature Reserve Warden employed by Essex Wildlife Trust, is supported by the Council's Countryside Management Service "Country Care". Volunteers also assist with hedge-planting, hay-making, path maintenance and event organisation.

The Roding Valley Meadows are the largest surviving area of traditionally managed grassland in Essex. The diversity of species in three of the meadows and the marsh, are considered sufficiently important for these areas to be designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Throughout the Reserve, there are many species of flora and fauna which are now rare in Essex, e.g. black poplar, arrowheads, brown sedge, water volves and white legged damselfly. The Reserve is one of the best surviving examples of the landscape and floral/fauna of a lowland flood plain system in the county due to the high quality of its habitats and traditional management methods. The reserve is also an important research site for the monitoring of both individual species and the flora/fauna of different habitats.

Some 30,000 local people live within 5 minutes driving time of the Reserve. Research indicates that visitor numbers are around 200 per day between April – September dropping to around 100 in the winter (dependent on weather). A conservative estimate of total annual visitor numbers is 50,000 – 60,000 visitors a year. As a leisure resource, the Reserve is therefore significant and is clearly much appreciated and valued by those who use it. Unusually for a local Nature Reserve dogs and horses, under control, are welcome to walk the area and the meadows are especially well used for this purpose.

Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT) were appointed to manage the site in 1986 as at that time the Council did not have the in-house expertise it has, as a result of the creation of the now well-established and respected "Country Care" service.

The Council entered into a 21-year legal agreement with the Essex Wildlife Trust in respect of the Management of the Nature Reserve. This is due to expire in March 2007, which is why it is necessary to now undertake a review of the service.

The Essex Wildlife Trust is awarded a grant by the Council to manage the Nature Reserve. The draft budget is annually presented by the Trust to the Nature Reserve Management Committee for approval. The Management Committee comprises of three Members of the District Council, representatives of Grange Farm Trust, Essex Wildlife Trust, English Nature and the local Town and Parish Councils).

Policy and strategy is developed by the Management Committee who produce a cyclical five year management plan based on:

- National policies for conservation
- User opinions
- National policies for the management of nature reserves
- Comparison with policies for other reserves; and
- The needs of user groups.

The five-year plan is subject to agreement by the District Council. Policies are based on national policies. There is a good knowledge base as to why flora and fauna exist on the site but there is less knowledge of the distribution, quantities and development. Consequently EFDC Council officers have recommended that more qualitative research is undertaken to determine the effect of the present conservation work on the diversity and quantity of the species. This work should already have been undertaken by EWT as part of their Management agreement but has not yet been completed. The adequacy of the monitoring of the SSI meadows is an area of concern to English Nature.

The Management Plan prioritises conservation work over a five-year period and this is annually reviewed by a Liaison Group. The Liaison Group comprises of representatives of the diverse users of the site, but do not have any executive decision making powers.

Policies are evaluated in the light of national and local developments and their effectiveness is measured via public opinion surveys and at The Liaison Group and Management Committee Meetings. Quarterly and annual reports are also produced by the Reserve Warden for the consideration of these bodies.

As the current management agreement is due to expire in 9 months time, the Task and Finish Panel will need to explore options and recommend accordingly as to whether to extend/enter into a new agreement with Essex Wildlife Trust, if this is thought to be the most cost effective and efficient means of future management or alternatively the Panel may wish to pursue other options such as bringing the Reserve under the stewardship of the Council's own In House Countryside Management Service.

It is envisaged that the key issues around this will be explored to include cost benefit, quality of service and customer satisfaction. The Panel may well wish to include in there deliberations consultation with the Essex Wildlife Trust, Grange Farm Trust, Management and Liaison Committees as well as undertaking a fact-finding visit to the Reserve.

## 2. Future Management of Waltham Abbey Sports Centre

Waltham Abbey Sports Centre is a Dual Use Sports Centre, located adjacent to King Harold Secondary School, in Broomstick Hall Road, Waltham Abbey. The Council enjoys the right to use the premises for the benefit of the wider community by virtue of a joint agreement entered into with the Education Authority, i.e. Essex County Council. This dual-use agreement came into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1977 for a period of 30 years and is due to expire on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

Over the years the District Council has provided additional facilities to the original sports hall and changing rooms, with the construction of two squash courts, a dance studio and bar area. With the exception of the dance studio and the bar (which is closed during the day) the school has exclusive use of the Centre during the day (8.30a.m. – 5.00p.m.) and priority use of the Centre, excluding the Squash Courts on Saturdays. This exclusive use arrangement covers the 40 weeks of the school terms. The facilities are available to the District Council to organise holiday activities during the school holidays.

A critical appraisal of the operating costs of the Sports Centre, was undertaken as part of the Best Value Service Review of Leisure Management. This highlighted that in comparison to the Council's other leisure facilities, in financial terms, the Centre was performing significantly poorer. Despite a number of cost reduction initiatives undertaken as part of the Budget Process 2003/04, this position, largely due to the constraints of the joint use agreement and age, design/quality of the facilities, still pertains.

The long-term management of the Sports Centre was considered by the Ad Hoc working Group in Leisure, as part of the Alternative Management Review. The Working Group concluded that based on the Centre's potential, and given that the Joint Use Agreement, at the time, had only two years left to run, that the Centre be excluded from the Tender process. The Centre therefore has continued to be managed In-House, until any new arrangements are put in place at the expiry of the current joint-use agreement.

Historically it has been difficult to achieve high levels of use and participation by the local community. This can largely be attributed to the relatively utilitarian nature of the changing/toilet facilities etc., which have been designed with school use in mind (rather than the more discerning modern leisure customer), coupled with the irregular hours and the physical limitations of the facilities. In addition, there would appear to be a resistance from local young people to participate, who may have the impression that they are returning to school in their time off.

The programme delivered by the centre, whilst still offering some coaching courses, instructed sessions and holiday schemes, has tended, particularly since budget savings on staffing etc., in 2003/04, to be on a club hire or letting hall basis. The bar still meets the needs of sports users such as the 5 a side football and cricket leagues, as well as hosting functions such as birthday/anniversary parties.

Staffing levels are currently at the minimum level to cover the opening hours therefore, there is at risk of ad-hoc closure of the facility in the event of unanticipated staff absences. As part of the externalisation process of the Council's other four Leisure Centres, all the staff at WASC were offered the opportunity to transfer to the other centres, to be managed by SLM, the Council's Leisure Management Contractor. Despite the uncertainty of approaching the end of the current Dual Use Agreement, all the staff declined this offer.

Under the requirements of the Dual Use Agreement, in simple terms the District Council is responsible for meeting all expenses with the exception of 50% of the General Managers salary and , 50% of building maintenance costs. The Council meets 100% of the bar area and each respective party bears 100% of the costs of their own Public Liability Insurance. The Council retains all income from hire and use of the facilities and receives a contribution towards utility costs.

In July 2005 the Cabinet received a report concerning the County Council's wish to receive a contribution of 50%, (£75,000) towards the cost of a new roof for the Sports Centre and a £15,000 contribution towards the cost of new heating. In the event the Council declined to contribute to the roof arguing that it was not maintenance but 'betterment' through replacement. However, the Council did contribute to the heating upgrade.

For the Financial Year 2006/07 the total expenditure for the Centre is estimated to be £481,560 with total income estimated at £135,780, leaving a Net Expenditure of £345,760 . Total Attendances are anticipated to be in the region of 15,000 p.a.

The Council also provides other Leisure Facilities in Waltham Abbey at Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool. These are managed under contract by SLM, who are shortly to embark on a major Capital Investment Programme including changing room and fitness suite refurbishments, as well as an extension to provide a new Movement Studio.

The review should perhaps consider what potential management options are available for the future of WASC. These may include a continuation of the current regime, transfer of responsibility back to the school, or an opportunity for the existing or indeed another Leisure Management Contractor to become involved. Consultation with the school, County Council, User Groups and the current Leisure Management Contractor is recommended. A fact finding site visit to both WASC and WASP may be beneficial.

### **3. Future Development of the Arts in Epping Forest**

Epping Forest Arts, the Council's Community Arts section was established in the late 1980's in accordance with government recognition of the value of Arts provision within the community setting. Since this time, the section has expanded and developed into one of the most highly regarded and respected Arts delivery services throughout the region.

The service, which is unique in Essex, now includes an Arts Officer, Asst. Arts Officer, Arts Assistant, Dance Development Artist and a part time Admin. Officer. In addition, the team benefits from the services of 2 professional practicing artists, who work for Leisure Services on a part time basis.

The programme of work that the Arts Team undertakes covers a very wide cross section of arts disciplines that include; dance development, visual arts (photography, video and creative arts such as producing large community mosaics and sculptures) and performing arts (drama, movement & mime etc), as well as providing support and resources to the many voluntary arts groups in the area. People of all ages are accommodated through the Arts service and specific work is undertaken with the elderly and people with disabilities, as part of a comprehensive inclusion programme. The range of accessible opportunities available through the Arts, enable people in the

district to take part in the arts as participants, spectators and as local artists.

The Arts section also provides the strategic lead and acts as the planning agency for arts provision in the district offering a range of professional services in order to facilitate the development of the arts. This includes the direct provision of projects, performances, classes and workshops, run by professional artists, companies and the Council's own artists. Many of the Arts projects are delivered in conjunction with local partners and particularly local schools, colleges, sheltered housing and residential homes, community centres and groups, as well as the Council's Museum, Community Development, Sports Development and Country Care services.

In recognition of the innovative and groundbreaking work that Epping Forest Arts has undertaken over the years, the Arts Council (England East) has acknowledged these achievements through providing significant funding for development of the Arts in the district on three occasions since 2001. The latest award that has been secured is for a total of £75,000, to develop a three-year programme of projects and events that explore and celebrate the District's community, history, heritage and environment. This programme is entitled 'Border Dialogues' and its' initial project 'Common or Garden', was launched in June in a range of rural areas across the district and is being showcased in a district wide context in Theydon Bois on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> July. 2006.

Common or Garden investigates the use of the common garden 'shed' and looks at the type of activities and uses that sheds have in the area, such as; a place of respite, a place to think, hide, or relax. It also looks at the history of sheds and how many artists including poets have produced some of their best works in the 'shed' environment. The project has involved local communities, school children and Parish Councils and has focused on several rural parishes in the District.

As the district does not have a purpose built public arts facility, gallery or theatre, all of the work that is undertaken by the Arts team is provided through community & village halls, libraries local schools and through neighbouring facilities such as the Harlow Playhouse, where many performances are show cased.

The Council's currently Adopted Arts Policy is as follows:

*"The Council supports the arts in recognition of the vital contribution that they make to the quality of life and to community identity; to the enhancement of the built and natural environment; to mental, physical and spiritual health and to the local economy". Through this, the Council's objective is: "to enable all sections of the community to have access to a wide range of arts provision of a high quality".*

It is suggested that the Task & Finish Panel undertake an examination of the arts in terms of local provision and impact on the community, through a presentation by the Arts team; attending a sample of the events and activities undertaken locally and through meeting a cross section of the participants involved in the Arts. This is to gain an informed view of the value of the arts in the District and explore how this can be developed in future.

In addition it is recommended that meetings are established with a range of partners, including Theatre Resource, Voluntary Services, Members of the Local Strategic Partnership, Epping Forest College, Harlow Playhouse and possibly, Residential Care Homes and Sheltered Housing officers that have been involved in arts projects in the District.

As the arts is such a specialised field, it is anticipated that the aforementioned consultation will be essential for the panel to understand the dynamics and impact, that this local provision has on individuals and the wider community so that an informed view can be taken on options for the future.

#### **4 The District Council's Role and Involvement in Outdoor and Community Events**

Outdoor and Community Events have long been a feature and reflection of the "Special Character of the Epping Forest District. Participation in such Events, whether they be school fetes, village days, festivals or major outdoor shows, can foster a sense of community well-being and promote social inclusion, by bringing a wide range of people together to celebrate, commemorate, raise funds or simply to enjoy themselves.

Historically, Leisure Services has had an important role to play in the facilitation and Management of Events, such as the Epping Fireworks Carnival, Ongar Carnival, Waltham Abbey Festival Week and Carnival of Light, the initial Debden Day and World Mental Health Day. This was in addition to special events at the Council's Leisure Centres and the Leisure promotional "Roadshow"

However, as far back as the Best Value Review of Leisure Management in 2001, it was noted that whilst there was a significant expressed demand for the council to assist in the Management of Events (and indeed also to participate in them), due to a lack of dedicated resources as the Council focused on other aspects of community development work, this was likely to be unsustainable in the longer term.

Therefore, whilst the Council has retained significant expertise in the form of Leisure Services Marketing and Events Manager, the level of practical involvement in Events Management has been severely curtailed over time, as other staff with the training and experience of the production of Events have not been replaced and the Council's own stock of specialist equipment has been depleted through time because of reduction in expenditure for maintenance and replacement.

As such, more recently Leisure Services has only been able to practically assist in a much-reduced number of community events on a re-charge basis, such as the Epping Fireworks Carnival whilst also providing technical advice to other Event Organisers. This also includes the important on-going role for North Weald Airfield, ensuring that the Major Outdoor Events Programme at the site adheres to Event and health and Safety Standards legislation and Contractors are aware of the organisational requirements

In recent years, Event Management has developed into a specialist area of work. This is due to an increasingly complex legislative framework and a proliferation of Best Practice Guidelines and Recommendations. This is set against an increasingly litigious outlook and a risk aversion from Insurers in relation to Events.

Notwithstanding, as highlighted earlier there is an ongoing expressed demand from local people, Town and Parish Councils, Voluntary Organisations and Charitable Groups who turn to the Council for operational and legislative assistance with Events. This demand currently cannot be met within existing resources. The Council itself does not have a Corporate Council wide approach to managing its own Events, nor



indeed, a fully co-ordinated approach to participation at other Public Events, where the opportunity exists to showcase the quality of the Council Service and raise the profile of Key Community issues.

It is therefore proposed that the Council needs to address its future role in Event provision and look at the options. Whether this be the organisation of its own major Civic Event, as many other Local Authorities in the region undertake e.g. Chelmsford Spectacular, or indeed the hosting of major celebratory events such as the Harlow Town Show and Fireworks Spectacular. Such Civic Events, particularly organised Firework Displays, have an important role to play in public safety. Alternatively, the Council may prefer to support other organisers or promoters by means of technical advice or grant aid. All of these need to be approached from a resourcing stance. In addition, the Council's own Major Outdoor Events venue at North Weald Airfield, already plays host to numerous Events. The site has the potential in the longer term to develop into a well-recognised regional entertainment venue. Clarity is therefore also required as to what level the Council may wish to aspire to, in terms of the scope of major public Events at North Weald Airfield.

An overview of current Events activity and issues across the District is proposed by means of a presentation, combined with a visit to North Weald Airfield and consultation with other event organisers who currently, or in the future wish to organise local Community or Outdoor Events.

## **5. Terms of Reference**

The following proposed Terms of Reference have been developed from the proposal forms. Members are asked to consider the Draft Terms of Reference and comment accordingly. Previous discussion on the scope of the review may impact on the Terms of Reference.

### **Draft Terms of Reference:**

1. To consider the four topics for Review as identified by Overview and Scrutiny Committee i.e.
  - i) Future Management of Waltham Abbey Sports Centre
  - ii) Review of the future Management of the Roding Valley Meadows local Nature Reserve
  - iii) Review of Arts Development in the District and
  - iv) The District Council's Role and involvement in Outdoor and Community Events.
2. To gather evidence and information in relation to the four topics through the receipt of data, presentations and by participation in fact finding visits.
3. To consult with Partners, Agencies, Stakeholders and Users of the services under review, to establish key issues and future need.
4. To evaluate all relevant facts in relation to the topics under review in an objective way and to produce recommendations for future action accordingly.

5. To establish whether there are any resource implications arising out of the topics under review and advise Cabinet for inclusion in the Budget Process 2007/08
6. To report back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at appropriate intervals and to submit any final reports in the proposed Corporate Format for consideration by O & S, the Cabinet and Council.

## 6. WORK PROGRAMME

Having agreed the Scope of the Reviews and the Terms of Reference, it is necessary to agree at Work Programme to achieve the outcomes.

Members will appreciate that the scale of the task in undertaking four reviews within a relatively short timescale is ambitious. It is therefore recommended that the topics are not taken sequentially but rather that an amount of work is undertaken in parallel.

This is of particular relevance to the two future operational management topics in relation to Waltham Abbey Sports Centre and the Roding Valley Meadows Local Nature Reserve, which both have fixed dates for termination of the current arrangements i.e. WASC September 2007 and RVLNR April 2007. In addition, these two topics have perhaps the greatest potential implications for the 2007/08 Budget process, which starts in October 2006, with the Council setting its budget in February 2007.

The Panel therefore needs to consider the most effective way in which it wishes to organise in order to achieve its objectives. This could be by frequent meetings of the full Panel or in some cases the appointment of smaller groups to carry out visits/interviews with others.

A suggested set of initial dates and visits is proposed below, in order to start the process.

### **Task and Finish Panel on Leisure Schedule of Meetings/Visits.**

Proposed Date

<b>Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> July</b>	<b>Initial Meeting of Panel, Scope &amp; Terms of Reference</b>
<b>Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> July</b>	<b>Visit to Waltham Abbey Sports Centre and Waltham Abbey Pool</b>
<b>Monday 31<sup>st</sup> July</b>	<b>Presentation on the Arts. Follow-up discussion from visits to WASC &amp; WASP</b>
<b>Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> August</b>	<b>Visit to Roding Valley Meadows LNR</b>

Dates thereafter to receive Presentation on Community and Outdoor Events, and other meetings/consultations to be discussed.

NB: The Panel should be aiming to put forward at least an interim report with outline recommendations, by the date of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2006, if it wants to make a bid to fund any recommendations in the Financial Year 2007/08

**7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING.**

To be agreed as per item 6.