

Scrutiny Task and Finish Panel Agenda



Leisure Task and Finish Scrutiny Panel Tuesday, 13th February, 2007

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

Time: 7.00 pm

Democratic Services Officer: Adrian Hendry, Research and Democratic Services
Tel. 01992 564246, email: ahendry@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. SUBSITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

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

3. DECLARATIONS 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. MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING - 21 NOVEMBER 2006 (Pages 7 - 10)

To consider and agree the notes of the meeting of the Panel held on 21 November 2006.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 11 - 14)

(Chairman/Lead Officer) To note the attached updated Terms of Reference and associated Work Programme. The Panel are asked at each meeting to review both documents.

6. FUTURE MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT FOR THE RODING VALLEY MEADOWS LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

As Members are aware, on the 12th September the Task and Finish Panel undertook a consultation meeting with respect to the Future Management of Roding Valley Meadows Local Nature Reserve.

The consensus of the Panel was that the Preferred Option would be to recommend that the Essex Wildlife Trust be offered a new Management Agreement for a length of twenty years (in order to attract external funding) but that the new agreement should provide for greater monitoring and evaluation of management practices, with more frequent and direct reporting to the Council. In addition, the Panel also recommended that partnership working with Countrycare should be formalised to promote joint working, within any new arrangements.

The Panel recognised that the Grange Farm Trust have an interest as landowners on the Nature Reserve. Unfortunately, the Trust could not send a representative to the consultation meeting. As such, they would need to be consulted prior to any final decision.

The Head of Leisure Services met with the Grange Farm Trust for an initial discussion on the 16th November 2006 and reported orally on the outcome, at the Task and Finish Panel's last meeting on the 21st November.

Subsequent to this meeting, the Head of Leisure Services attended another meeting with the Grange Farm Trust along with John Hall, Director of Essex Wildlife Trust. The meeting was generally positive with the Grange Farm Trust taking the opportunity to raise a number of concerns they have regarding the management of the site, in particular the perceived loss of flora and fauna.

As a follow-up from the meeting, the Grange Farm Trust have formally written to the Head of Leisure Services outlining their view as to how the process could proceed. Within the correspondence the Trust identify a number of key issues they would wish to see addressed in any future Management Agreement. The letter is attached for Members of the Panel's consideration.

It can be seen that whilst the Grange Farm Trust do not appear to have any fundamental objection to the re-appointment of Essex Wildlife Trust, they do express a view that other alternatives have not been adequately investigated. To this end they have proposed an exploratory meeting with the Epping Forest Conservators.

Members of the Panel are asked to consider the correspondence from the Grange

Farm Trust and in particular express a view on the Council becoming involved in talks regarding the management of Roding Valley Meadows Local Nature Reserve with the Corporation of London, Epping Forest Conservators.

7. REVIEW OF ARTS DEVELOPMENT IN THE DISTRICT

At their meeting in November 2006 Members of the Panel had the opportunity to visit Great Stony, Ongar Arts and Education Centre and hear of the work of Theatre Resource. The Director of Theatre Resource, Jeff Banks stressed the importance of the relationship with the District Council and touched on ways in which the Partnership could be strengthened to include Theatre Resource practically delivering some aspect or indeed all of the work currently undertaken by the Council's Arts Team. It is understood that this view was also expressed in a follow-up letter, sent by Theatre Resource, thanking Members of the Panel for their interest.

Panel Members had a thorough presentation on the work of Epping Forest Arts back in July 2006. Whilst Theatre Resource have some similarities in that they undertake a good deal of work with people with special needs and those at risk of social exclusion, the emphasis on Arts Education is clearly different.

Similarly, their current work is not confined to Epping Forest but undertaken on a Regional Basis, with the work they do undertake locally largely focused on the Ongar locality.

Notwithstanding, the role of Scrutiny Task and Finish Panels is to challenge and review the way that services are currently delivered. Therefore, Members views are sought on the desirability of undertaking further feasibility work on third party delivery of Arts Development work in the District. This would need to be undertaken on a wider basis than simply a dialogue with Theatre Resource to avoid acquisitions of anti-competitiveness and ensure that the Council achieved maximum value for money in whatever course of future action it may follow.

8. PRESENTATION ON THE 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 Lights, the initial Debden Day and World Mental Health Day. This was in addition to special events in 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 at North Weald Airfield, ensuring that the Major Outdoor Events Programme at the site adheres to Event Health and Safety Standards and other legislation and Contractors are aware of such organisational requirements.

In recent years, Event Management has developed into a specialist area of work. This is due to an increasingly complex technical 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 Council, 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 existing to showcase the quality of the Council Service and raise the profile of Key Community issues.

It was 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 celebrator 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-organised regional entertainment venue.

Members have had the opportunity in the Summer of 2006, to visit a major outdoor event "Donney South" at North Weald Airfield and also a smaller community event, "The Copped Hall Run" organised with the Council's assistance, by Epping Rotary Club.

Gerry Kehoe, the Council's Marketing and Events Manager will give a presentation and seek feedback from the Task and Finish Panel as to what level and role the

Council may aspire to in terms of the future involvement in Outdoor and Community Events.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

To consider any other urgent business.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be agreed.