



Epping Forest District Council



SCRUTINY

REPORT OF LEISURE TASK AND FINISH PANEL

March 2007

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1. Chairman's Foreword

Foreword by Councillor Mrs Heather Harding – Chairman of Panel

I was delighted to have the opportunity to explore and find out more about the Leisure and Cultural facilities and opportunities on offer in the Epping Forest District. My involvement with the Leisure Task and Finish Panel enabled me to do this. The committee embarked on an ambitious programme and were guided expertly by the Head of Leisure Services, Derek Macnab and his staff. Thank you.



As well as meetings and presentations in house, the Panel visited outside events including the Copped Hall Charity Fun Run and the Donny South Event, staged at North Weald Airfield. We enjoyed presentations from Epping Forest Arts, and Theatre Resource (based at Great Stony Arts and Education Centre Ongar), both were innovative and inspiring.

Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool and Ongar Leisure Centre are benefiting from the involvement of and investment made by SLM, the Council's Leisure Management Contractor. They are providing excellent sports facilities that residents now expect and appreciate. The ongoing development of Waltham Abbey Sports Centre is detailed fully in this report, with clear intentions to retain its use for the benefit of local people.

The Roding Valley Nature Reserve, "the jewel in our crown", as described by Panel Member Cllr Steven Murray, is recommended to stay in the capable hands of the Essex Wildlife Trust. We proposed that our own excellent Countrycare team, work more closely with them in the future and that a strengthened monitoring process be introduced to keep abreast of the Reserve's long-term protection and enhancement.

I was also particularly interested to explore the Council's involvement in outdoor and community events. Working with event organisers, charities and voluntary organisations is an ideal vehicle for raising awareness and highlighting the good work the Council does, within a dynamic environment. Events have great potential on several levels and I look forward to their ongoing development.

Finally, I would like to invite you to take the time to read this report, because it truly reflects our work this year. It also highlights the ongoing commitment by this Council to protect, challenge and scrutinise our Leisure Services, for the benefit of all who enjoy them.

Councillor Mrs Heather Harding
March 2007

2. Panel Composition:

The Leisure Task and Finish Panel comprised of the following 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.

The Panel met on six occasions throughout the Review Period and undertook a number of Site Visits as detailed below:

- 18th July 2006 - Waltham Abbey Sports Centre
- 18th July 2006 - Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool
- 8th Aug. 2006 - Roding Valley Meadows Local Nature Reserve
- 31st Aug. 2006 - Donny South Event at North Weald Airfield
- 17th Sept.2006 - Copped Hall Charity Fun Run
- 21st Nov. 2006 - Theatre Resource, Great Stony Arts and Education Centre

3. Introduction and Overview

Summary of issues scrutinised

The Leisure Task and Finish Panel was established by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2006.

Our primary objective was to undertake a review of four topics which had been submitted to Overview and Scrutiny for consideration. These are summarised below:

- 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.

The Public Interest Justification and Impact on Social, Economic and Environmental Well-Being considerations, presented as part of the original proposal forms, are attached at Appendix 1

4. Terms of Reference

At our initial meeting, the Panel developed and agreed the following Terms of Reference. These were kept under review throughout the period of our work, to ensure their continuing relevance.

1. To consider the four topics for Review as identified by Overview and Scrutiny Committee
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 as necessary, 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

5. Methodology – How we went about the Task

From the outset we accepted that the number and scope of the topics we were scrutinising was challenging and ambitious. However, there was a recognition amongst the Panel, that the Topics were all of equal importance, albeit that the two reviews of Future Management Options, (in relation to the Roding Valley Meadows Local Nature Reserve and Waltham Abbey Sports Centre), should be given initial priority, by virtue of being time bound, by the termination dates of existing legal agreements.

The Panel also felt that it was important, to fully appreciate the complexity of the issues under consideration. To this end we undertook a number of visits, to view at first hand facilities and events and to meet directly with providers and users. This has hopefully enabled us to reach informed decisions.

The site visits were supplemented by a number of formal presentations and a consultation evening. This allowed the panel opportunities to ask questions of people and organisations involved in the practical delivery, or in receipt of the services under Review.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

TOPIC ONE

FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF THE RODING VALLEY MEADOWS LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

The Panel recommends:

1. That negotiations be entered into with Essex Wildlife Trust with respect to a new Management Agreement for the Roding Valley Meadows Local Nature Reserve.
2. That the new Management Agreement be offered for a minimum of 20 years, preferably 25 years (in order to maximise opportunities for external funding) but that provision should be made for periodic, performance related, break clauses.
3. That any new Management Agreement should allow for enhanced monitoring and evaluation of management practices and their effect on the flora, fauna and wildlife on the site, with more frequent direct reporting to the Council and the Grange Farm Trust.
4. That Partnership working with the Council's own Countryside Management Service Countrycare, be formalised within any new Management Agreement, to ensure the continuation of joint working.
5. That the Grange Farm Trust be fully consulted on any new Management Agreement to reflect their interest and the potential future extension of the Local Nature Reserve to include the provision of an Interpretation Centre.
6. That the future costs of managing the Reserve, with respect to the Annual Grant to Essex Wildlife Trust, be reflected in the New Agreement on the basis of current costs plus inflation.
7. That the Grange Farm Trust are asked under the terms of the new Management Agreement, to contribute proportionately to the management costs and also encouraged to invest in infrastructure improvements.
8. That the final terms of any new Management Agreement be agreed by the Council's Finance and Performance Management Portfolio Holder in consultation with the Leisure Portfolio Holder.



TOPIC TWO

FUTURE MANAGEMENT OPTIONS FOR WALTHAM ABBEY SPORTS CENTRE

The Panel recommends:

1. That the council tries to ensure that Community use is retained at Waltham Abbey Sports Centre, for the benefit of local people.
2. That the current direct management arrangements, (under the terms of the current Dual Use Agreement), would not represent Value for Money in the longer term and as such the Council should be looking to achieve a reduction in risk and lower revenue consequences, in any future arrangements, which may include the involvement of a third party Leisure Management Contractor, secured by open competition.
3. That given the fact that the School Governing Body have yet to identify a Preferred Management Option, that a Leisure Task and Finish Panel conclude the review in the next municipal year, mindful of the urgency needed to reach a final decision by September 2007.

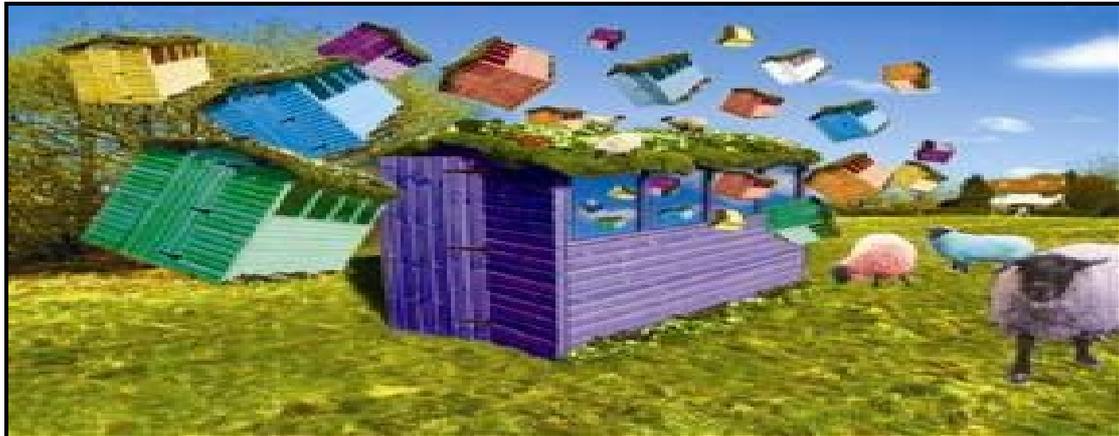


TOPIC THREE

REVIEW OF ARTS DEVELOPMENT IN THE DISTRICT

The Panel recommends:

1. That whilst recognising the quality of the current Arts Development work undertaken by the Council's own Arts Team, the Council actively explore the feasibility of third party delivery from suitably qualified and experienced Arts Organisations, for part or all of the Service.
2. That the underlying objectives and outcomes of any alternative future delivery option, should be to increase access to and participation in the Arts, for people of all ages and abilities, within the Epping Forest Community.
3. That the feasibility of the alternative delivery of the Arts be undertaken by a Leisure Task and Finish Panel in the 2007/08 Municipal Year, with their recommendations going forward to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet, for any final decision.



TOPIC FOUR

COUNCIL'S ROLE AND INVOLVEMENT IN OUTDOOR EVENTS

The Panel recommends:

1. That the Council recognise the important part that Community and Outdoor Events play in the life of the District and their value and benefit to local people.
2. That the Council currently are failing corporately, to maximise opportunities to utilise events to raise the Council's profile, consult on Policy and Service Issues and to showcase the current quality of the services it provides. To this end it is recommended that work is undertaken to improve the Council's presence at events, the cost and implications to be reported to the Cabinet for consideration.
3. That whilst the Council already hosts a programme of Outdoor Events at North Weald Airfield, consideration should be given to the Council becoming a more active provider of its own major events at the site, recognising the risk, to achieve increased profile and potential profit. A formal proposal for a trial event be developed, possibly a music or fireworks event, to be reported to the Cabinet for approval.
4. That further consideration should be given to increasing capacity within the Council to provide advice and technical support to Community Event Organisers, to help ensure that such events still continue in the face of more rigorous Legal, Health and Safety and Insurance requirements.
5. That a formal appraisal should be undertaken in liaison with all parties e.g. emergency services etc., to determine whether an Events Safety Action Group should be established for the District.



7. Reports

REPORT ON TOPIC ONE

REVIEW OF THE FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF THE RODING VALLEY MEADOWS LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

Background:

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.



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 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), a guided walks and events programme for local people, conservation and species research and bird watching.

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.

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, prior to the establishment of the Council's own In-House Countryside Service (The Grange Farm Trust is party to, but not a signatory of the agreement).

A fulltime Warden is employed by Essex Wildlife Trust, who receive an annual grant to cover the Warden's salary and essential conservation work. As part of the current arrangements the Warden is currently accommodated in one of the Council's properties in Borders Lane, Loughton. To undertake additional and 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 work of the Nature Reserve Warden, employed by Essex Wildlife Trust has in recent years been 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 voves 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.

A draft budget is annually presented by the Essex Wildlife 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. Local Conservation Policies are based on nationally accepted Policy and Practice.

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 they 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.

Matters the Panel Considered:

As the current management agreement was due to expire in April 2007. The Task and Finish Panel needed 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. To this end the Panel also explored other options such as bringing the Reserve under the stewardship of the Council's own In House Countryside Management Service or involving other third parties. The key issues around this topic, included cost benefit, quality of service and customer satisfaction.

The Review Process

Having initially agreed the matters to be considered, in reviewing Future Management Options for the Roding Valley Meadows Local Nature Reserve, the Panel visited the Reserve on the 8th August 2006. The visit was conducted by Essex Wildlife Trust Director John Hall, who explained the history of the Trust's involvement at the site Mr Hall was accompanied by the Reserve Warden, who illustrated a number of practical nature conservation and management issues as Members walked over the Reserve, to include fencing, coppicing and the grazing of cattle.

With this insight Members were well placed to take evidence from Stakeholders at the Consultation Evening we hosted on the 12th September. The Panel were able to hear the views and discuss management issues with Local Users, the Liaison Committee, as well as the LNR Management Committee.

The Panel received a Presentation from Essex Wildlife Trust, who made the case as to why they felt they were best placed to continue managing the Reserve in future. We also received a Presentation from the Council's Countryside Manager outlining the practical implications of bringing management back In-House.

Unfortunately, no representative of the Grange Farm Trust was able to be present at the Consultation Evening, however two subsequent meetings were held with the Grange Farm Trust and Essex Wildlife Trust. These allowed for the Grange Farm Trust to raise a number of concerns and indicate what they considered to be, the main considerations in any future Management Agreement.

In addition the Grange Farm Trust met with the Corporation of London to ascertain whether they had an interest in becoming practically involved in the Management of the Reserve. They declined this offer but confirmed a willingness to provide advice and support if requested, on the basis of a common interest in conservation and habitat management.



Conclusions:

1. There was a general consensus amongst the Panel, based on the site visit and the Consultation Evening dialogue, that the Nature Reserve was clearly a unique and valuable resource for the Council and Local People.
2. That in future the Nature Reserve should not only be protected, but that there was scope for additional investment to assist in achieving its full potential. This may not only be in terms of infrastructure e.g. water standpipes, access improvements etc., but also additional Warden presence.
3. The Panel concluded 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. A need for more qualitative research to be undertaken to determine the effect of the present conservation work on the diversity and quantity of the species was identified. 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 has been an area of concern to English Nature.

4. It was recognised that historically there had been mistakes in the running of the Reserve, with some of the more controversial management/conservation techniques, being poorly explained and justified to users. However, it was also recognised that in recent years there had been a significant improvement, evidenced by a reduction in complaints and the gaining of the Green Flag Quality Standard Award.
5. Whilst the Management and Liaison Committees had been established to assist in the management of the Reserve, there were concerns raised around the formal evaluation of Essex Wildlife Trust's performance and in particular the monitoring of flora and fauna over the period of the current agreement and the maintenance of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest. It was felt that any future Management Agreement should allow for performance monitoring to be reported back more frequently and formally, to the Council and Grange Farm Trust.
6. It was acknowledged that as a landowner, the Grange Farm Trust had a vested interest in the management of the Reserve. It was also understood that this was set to increase with the Grange Farm S106 Planning Agreement allowing for potential extension of the Reserve onto the other side of the Motorway as well as the provision of a new Nature Interpretation Centre. To date, Grange Farm Trust had not contributed financially to the management of the Reserve. It was encouraging, that the Grange Farm Trust had indicated through the consultation, that they may be minded in future to fund improvements.
7. It was apparent that Essex Wildlife Trust, through their active participation in the Review Process, were very keen to be offered a new long-term Management Agreement for the Reserve. The Trusts Countywide experience and resources were highlighted. In addition they demonstrated that they could bring economies of scale and added value with respect to specialist machinery, staff resources and volunteers.
8. Essex Wildlife Trust represent good value for money, in as much as they indicated that they were prepared to carry on managing the Reserve at the current grant level of approx £25k p.a. with inflationary increases. Importantly, they demonstrated the added value they could bring, which to match, would potentially cost the Authority up to £60k p.a.
9. Essex Wildlife Trust have significant expertise and are well placed as an Independent Charitable Trust to lever in external funding, provided they are given sufficient length of tenure, minimum 20 years, preferably 25 years as required by the majority of Grant Making Bodies. Whilst the Panel and Grange Farm Trust acknowledged this consideration and would be prepared to accede to this timescale, there was an expressed desire for some form of Performance Related Break-Clauses, to be included in any new Agreement.
10. It was noted that a good working relationship already exists between the Council's own Countryside Management Service Countryside and the Warden of the Nature Reserve. At the consultation evening the Council's Countryside Manager considered that they did not currently have the capacity

to take over direct management of the Reserve, and would need extra Financial and Human Resources to achieve this. Notwithstanding, the Panel considered that there was considerable merit in formalising Partnership Working with Countrycare in any new Management Agreement.



REPORT ON TOPIC TWO

FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF WALTHAM ABBEY SPORTS CENTRE

Background

Waltham Abbey Sports Centre (WASC) 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 1st October 1977 for a period of 30 years and is due to expire on the 30th 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 term. 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 20% 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 was £481,560 with total income estimated at £135,780, leaving a Net Expenditure of £345,760 . Total Attendances were in the region of 30,000 users.

The Council also provides other Leisure Facilities in Waltham Abbey, at Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool. These are managed under contract by SLM, the Council's Leisure Management Contractor, who during the period of the review, undertook a major Capital Investment Programme including changing room and fitness suite refurbishments, as well as an extension to provide a new Movement Studio.

Matters the Panel Considered:

The review considered what potential management options are available for the future of WASC. These included a continuation of the current regime, transfer of responsibility back to the school, or an opportunity for a third party Leisure Management Contractor to become involved.

The Review Process:

In order to allow the Panel to become more familiar with the Centre and the service it provides, the Panel undertook a visit to Waltham Abbey Sports Centre in July 2006. We were given an informative Tour by the Centre Manager who explained the programme of activities offered, the current limitations of the facilities and the issues and challenges presented by the Dual Use Arrangements.

Whilst in Waltham Abbey, the opportunity was also taken to visit Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool, approximately two miles away, which was being extended and refurbished by the Council's Leisure Management Partner, under the terms of their 7 year Management Contract.

With the benefit of the site visit, the Panel arranged a meeting with representatives of King Harold School to consider Future Management Options for the Sports Centre. The meeting held on the 28th September 2006, was attended by Mike Feehan the Headteacher, Ms Elaine Fletcher the Chairman of the Governing Body and the School Bursar.

In advance of the meeting the Panel and the School representatives had been supplied with a report which detailed the current financial performance of the Centre as well as a breakdown of programme and participation levels. The meeting focused on discussion of the four available future management options, namely:

- a) **Extend the current dual-use agreement on largely the same terms**
- b) **Extend the current dual-use agreement but the District Council employ an external management contractor to undertake their obligations**
- c) **Decline to enter into a further dual use arrangement with the school/cease the district council's future involvement.**
- d) **Negotiate a new dual use agreement, which varies the respective terms and responsibilities, to reflect each party's future objectives.**

Conclusions:

1. The Panel and the School representatives share a mutual desire for community use of the Centre to be maintained in future, but have yet to achieve a consensus as to how this could be best achieved.
2. In general terms, the school has indicated that they would not wish to manage the Sports Centre, particularly if required to provide services to the wider community, on an independent basis. The School have stressed that they could not in any circumstances subsidise community use from funds allocated for education. It is unlikely that the County Council will provide any additional resources to manage the facilities.
3. The Panel felt that the level of cost currently incurred by the District Council was disproportionate to the Community benefit, in terms of subsidy per use. There is also concern that the Council carries the majority of risk. It was the view of the Panel that this was unsustainable and the Council would like to explore whether a third party management contractor could address some of these concerns.
4. The Panel felt that some of the Council's Objectives delivered by the Management Contract with SLM who run the Council's other four Leisure Centres i.e. Reduced Revenue Costs, Capital Investment, Reduced Risk, Maintenance and Refurbishment and Continuous Improvement, could also be achieved at WASC
5. The School Governing Body to date have not been particularly keen on third party involvement, as they perceive that the motivation of the Private Sector with respect to the possible emphasis on Profit, is not compatible with the School's current philosophy.

6. However, the School are prepared to receive further information to explain how any third party involvement may work in practice and hear of the safeguards, which can be implemented through a contractual relationship to address any concerns. It was noted that any third party participation could only be achieved by open competition as the Council had excluded WASC from the original Leisure Management Tender Process.



REPORT ON TOPIC THREE

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARTS IN EPPING FOREST

Background

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 community settings. Since this time, the section has expanded and developed into one of the most well regarded and respected Arts delivery services throughout the region.

The service, which is unique in Essex, now includes an Arts Officer, Assistant 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.

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. In addition, the Arts Team work with internal parties such 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.

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".

Matters the Panel Considered:

The Panel undertook an examination of the Arts in terms of Local Provision and impact on the Community. This was done in order to gain an informed view of the value of the Arts in the District and to explore options, as to how this could be further developed and delivered in the future.

The Review Process

On 31st July 2006, the panel received a presentation from Epping Forest Arts Team on the scope of their work. An audio - visual presentation gave an insight into some of the projects and programmes of work undertaken throughout the district, including; work with Early Years to develop coordination skills through movement; Dance Development with young people to encourage positive behaviours and inclusion; work with the elderly in residential and sheltered homes to stimulate memories and develop forgotten skills; Arts in the Environment and special dance and movement programmes for people of all ages with disabilities.



The panel were also told about the Arts Teams success in securing external funding over many years, to provide additional projects for local residents, including a current project entitled Border Dialogues, which has received funding of £75,000 from The Arts Council East, for the period 2006 – 2008.



Common or Garden – an exploration of sheds and village greens.

They were advised that Border Dialogues in fact encompasses three different projects; 'Common or Garden' that took place over the Summer 2006 and involved 1500 children and adults from 5 areas of the district; 'Home Life', the current project, which focuses on young people living at Limes Farm, Chigwell and contrastingly, elderly people living in sheltered Housing in Chigwell and the final project 'Transitions', which aims to up-skill local individuals to enable them to assist with the delivery of high quality Arts provision in the district.

In addition, it was demonstrated how the Arts programme delivers on Corporate Policy Objectives around Community Well Being and Raising Quality of Life for local residents and contributes to targets contained within the Community Strategy, Council Plan and BVPP.

The panel were able to question the Arts Team about how they target work with various groups at risk of social exclusion. We also had the opportunity to talk with representatives of some of the partner organisations who have benefited from joint working with the Arts section, including the Activities Coordinator from Sherrell House, Residential Home for the Elderly, Chris Burn local composer / musician and Head of Ongar Music School and the Manager of IC Youth Dance Group based at Ivy Chimneys primary School.



Example of work produced at an older person workshop.

In November the Panel also visited Theatre Resource based at Great Stony Arts and Education Centre, Ongar. The Director of Theatre Resource, Jeff Banks welcomed us and gave a brief outline of the history of the group, founded in 1990, which is a registered educational charity and arts organisation. The Panel were advised that the objective of the Organisation is to provide Arts and Education for the wider community, covering all art forms and in particular, to provide a specialist organisation for developing arts and education, for disabled people and other socially excluded groups.

It was noted that currently they have 16 staff at Theatre Resource and offer about 70 contracts a year to outside/visiting tutors with 60% of these having a disability themselves. Their turnover is about £600,000 per annum mostly raised from commissioning projects, with about 16% coming from local authority grants (including EFDC). Last year they worked with about 50 partners and fundraisers.

It was explained that the building currently occupied by the group in Chipping Ongar acts as a base for them to run their various projects, although they currently have a long-term plan to develop the centre to provide a studio theatre, more and better teaching space and specialist accessible accommodation. The Panel heard how Theatre Resource would like to bring together disabled persons in residential courses who would need a high degree of physical accessibility. They currently use Wicken House, for hosting residential courses, but this facility may close soon.

The Panel were also informed that the group also provides supportive employment opportunities for people with disabilities, a number of staff are disabled, and they would ideally like the building to be run and managed by people with disabilities.

Theatre Resource stressed that they have a long funding relationship with EFDC, going back to 1990 and have worked closely with Epping Forest Arts. They were of the view that as there are two arts structures in the District, they proposed that Theatre Resource could support or indeed manage either all or part, of the current Epping Forest Arts services, utilising their expertise and charitable status to offer efficiencies. They welcomed the chance to talk to EFDC about making this happen.

Theatre Resource felt they were well placed to provide a specialist service as well as a range of arts activities for local people and would welcome the chance to strengthen their ties with the District.

Conclusions:

1. The Panel noted that the work currently undertaken by Epping Forest Arts, not only celebrates and contributes to the “Special Character” of the District but also helps to improve the quality of life of a diverse cross section of our local community.
2. Arts initiatives are being used successfully to target groups at risk of social exclusion as well as delivering Key Objectives within the Community, Council and Best Value Performance Plans.
3. Much of the work currently delivered by the Council's Arts Service is innovative and fairly unique, in local authority terms in the region, a fact that has been recognised by external funding support from the Arts Council East.
4. A key feature of the work of Epping Forest Arts is the strong and effective network of Partnership work that they have developed, to promote opportunities and participation in the Arts for all ages and abilities.
5. Epping Forest, unlike many other local authorities does not currently provide or manage any purpose-built arts facilities such as Theatres, Galleries or Studio/Workshop/Rehearsal space. Although some of these types of facilities do exist, on a more limited basis, in the voluntary and education sectors, local people generally have to travel outside of the District to attend performances or exhibitions.
6. Due to the lack of Council owned arts facilities, the vast majority of Arts Development Work undertaken by Epping Forest Arts is on an outreach basis, using other local facilities and the wealth of outdoor spaces across the District.
7. The wider development of Arts Activity in the District is limited by the current Human and Financial Resources available, in what is a Discretionary Service and by the constraints of working within a Local Authority framework.
8. A significant amount of Added value has been brought to the Arts programme by the successful procurement of external funding through Grants etc. However, there is a question mark as to how sustainable this approach will be for the future, as there could well be a reluctance for Charitable Grant making bodies to continue to fund public organisations and as we re-apply to existing funders, who may wish to distribute support to others in the Region. .
9. The District and adjacent areas host a number of other Arts Organisations who deliver arts opportunities to our residents, albeit there would appear to be considerable demand.
10. There has been a willingness expressed to explore the potential of some or indeed all of the Council's directly managed arts development work, to be in future delivered by third parties. There may be potential to increase the number of opportunities and participation in the arts by alleviating some of the

current limitations on funding and flexibility. The Council would need to be absolutely clear as to what objectives it was seeking in this respect and how quality standards could be retained.



REPORT ON TOPIC FOUR

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL'S ROLE AND INVOLVEMENT IN OUTDOOR AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

Background

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 moved on and 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 an the important on-going role for North Weald Airfield, ensuring that the Major Outdoor Events Programme at the site adheres to Event Legislation and Health and Safety Standards and that Contractors are aware of organisational requirements and their responsibilities.



Copped Hall Fun-Runners

Matters the Panel Considered.

The Panel considered the Council's future role in Event provision and examined the range of options available as either enabler, provider or producer. The Panel also

sought to establish to what level the Council may wish to aspire to, in terms of their involvement in and scope, for Major Events at North Weald Airfield.

The Review Process

In order to familiarise ourselves with the numerous organisational and technical considerations involved, in managing and promoting events, the Panel undertook two visits. The first of which was to Donny South, a major car enthusiasts event at North Weald Airfield and the second to the Copped Hall Charity Fun Run, organised by the Rotary Club of Epping. As such, we were able to gain an insight into a range of events from a major commercial venture to a local community/voluntary sector event.



The visit to Donny South at North Weald allowed us to view our own existing major outdoor venue and the current infrastructure. It also enabled us to see a large-scale public event taking place, and as such to have demonstrated in reality, the main event management considerations. The role of the multi-service, Events Scrutiny Group for the Airfield was explained with the roles undertaken by the respective officers to ensure that the Council are safeguarded. At the conclusion of the event we had the opportunity to meet with and discuss issues with the external organiser of the Event.

In September, we were the guests of the Rotary Club of Epping, and the Copped Hall Trustees at their Fun Run held in the grounds of Copped Hall. We were advised that Leisure Services had a longstanding working relationship with Rotary through their support to the Carnival of Light and Fireworks Display, where services had been provided at cost. We learned how the financial risk of the Firework Event had led Rotary to finally withdraw from hosting the occasion, which had been missed by local people. However, the Fun Run was a relatively new event which would encourage community participation and raise money for



Copped Hall Fun Run

The Panel were able to hear from the event organisers how valued the support of Leisure Services was to the success of the event and also see in use, some of the limited event equipment Leisure Services still retains.

With the benefit of the site visits, the Panel received an illustrated presentation in February 2007, by Gerry Kehoe, Leisure Services Marketing and Events Manager on the Value, Role and Benefits of Events. The History of the Council's participation in Events, along with current issues was explained.

The meeting discussed how the Council would capitalise on events to consult and communicate its policies, aims and objectives in a positive way, along with a more general debate on where the risk/expenditure balance should be with respect to the Council promoting itself, major events at North Weald Airfield.



Panel members at the Donny South event.

Conclusions:

1. The Panel acknowledges the value and importance of Events to the general well-being of the District's Community, which have long been a feature of the area and one which we would like to see continue.
2. The Panel observed that in recent years, event Management has developed into a specialist area of work, due to an increasingly complex legislative framework and a proliferation of Best Practice Guidelines and Recommendations. Significantly, this is set against an increasingly litigious outlook and a risk aversion from Insurers in relation to Events.
3. The Panel heard how other Authorities with significant Event Programmes have established multi-agency Event Safety Action Groups and questioned whether there was a need to establish such a forum for Epping Forest.
4. The Panel recognises that there is an ongoing expressed demand from local people, Town and Parish Council's, Voluntary Organisations and Charitable Groups, who turn to the District Council for operational assistance and technical advice, which currently cannot be met within existing resources.
5. The Panel concluded that the Council itself does not have a Corporate approach to managing its own Events, nor indeed a fully co-ordinated approach to participation at other Public Events. As such, the Council is failing to present itself in the best possible manner and missing out on valuable opportunities to consult, feed back and showcase Service Developments and Policy Initiatives to our Residents and the wider Community.

6. The Panel, whilst acknowledging the current expertise in Event Management with Leisure Services, appreciated that the existing level of human and financial resources was a limiting factor. Notwithstanding, the Panel felt that the Council were not currently maximising the potential opportunities presented by its ownership of North Weald Airfield, to promote major events with the possibility of raising the profile of the District and generating additional income. It was accepted that there was a financial risk to the Council promoting its own events, but also the potential for a good return.

Acknowledgements:

The Panel would like to thank the following Organisations for their assistance in the Review.

Topic One – Roding Valley Meadows Local Nature Reserve:

1. Essex Wildlife Trust
2. RVMLNR Management & Liaison Committees
3. Grange Farm Trust
4. Corporation of London
5. Epping Forest Countrycare

Topic Two – Future Management of Waltham Abbey Sports Centre:

6. King Harold School

Topic Three – Review of Arts Development in the District:

7. Theatre Resource
8. Ongar Music School
9. I C Dance Company
10. Sherrell House

Topic Four – The Council's Role in Outdoor and Community Events:

11. Donny South Management
12. Epping Rotary Club
13. The Trustees of Copped Hall

i) **REVIEW OF THE FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF THE RODING VALLEY MEADOWS LOCAL NATURE RESERVE**

Summary

The Local Nature Reserve has been managed by Essex Wildlife Trust on behalf of the Council for the last 25 years. The current Management Agreement was due to expire in April 2007 and the Council needed to review options for the future.

Public Interest Justification:

The RVLNR is an area of both high conservation and amenity value. The Reserve is extensively used by local people. The management regime has a direct impact on their use and enjoyment of the site. The Council therefore has a duty to ensure future management arrangements are effective and respond to local need.

Impact on the Social, Economic and Environmental Well-Being of the area:

The Local Nature Reserve encompasses a site of Special Scientific Interest. A number of diverse uses are made of the area e.g. walking, horse riding, cross country running, bird watching and wildlife research and study. The Reserve has the coveted "Green Flag!" Award and has a number of features which assist access by people with disabilities. Any future Management Plan needs to accommodate and balance these uses, within the overall remit of protecting the area.

ii) **FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF WALTHAM ABBEY SPORTS CENTRE**

Summary

The Dual Use Agreement with King Harold School expires in September 2007. The Council in liaison with the School and County needed to determine their respective future roles and the appropriate level of service.

Public Interest Justification:

There is currently a 30 year Dual Use Agreement, which facilitates community access to Waltham Abbey Sports Centre out of school hours. As the Centre was omitted from the main Leisure Management Contract the Council needs to review future management options to ensure Best Value.

Impact on the Social Economic and Environmental Well-Being of the Area:

The Centre serves both the school and local community. Use of the Centre currently is largely to local clubs, sports leagues and private functions. Future management arrangements and service levels need to be determined, particularly given the investment in new Health and Fitness Facilities at Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool, less than 2 miles away.

iii) REVIEW OF ARTS DEVELOPMENT IN THE DISTRICT

Summary

The Council's Arts Development Team have a successful track record in Community Arts Development Work. The Team, which includes three artists, works in partnership with the voluntary sector, schools and other partners to deliver a wide range of arts opportunities and performances. The review was designed to explore options to build on the current work and ensure future need is being met.

Public Interest Justification:

The district has a lack of specialist performance, rehearsal and gallery space. Epping Forest Arts works with people of all ages and abilities on a community outreach basis, to involve people in the Arts. It is important to ensure that in the future the Council's investment in the Arts is maximising the potential benefits and achieving Best Value.

Impact on the Social, Economic and Environmental Well-Being of the Area:

It has been recognised that through the Arts, members of the community have the opportunity to explore issues affecting their lives and locality as well as learning new skills and interacting with others.

iv) DISTRICT COUNCIL'S ROLE AND INVOLVEMENT IN OUTDOOR AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

Summary

Special Events can play an important role in enhancing community spirit and engagement. They can provide local family entertainment, raise the profile of the District and encourage visitors. However, events are increasingly more complex to organise due to legislative requirements largely to address health and safety issues. The Council has expertise and a history of involvement and there was merit in undertaking a Review to look at the future role and responsibilities.

Public Interest Justification:

Demand for safe, enjoyable community events and major events at North Weald Airfield has been expressed. Local Voluntary Organisations and Town and Parish Councils have aspirations to be involved but can lack expertise

and resources. Leisure Services has limited resources. There is a need to achieve an understanding of the Council's future role and involvement in Event Management.

Impact on the Social, Economic and Environmental Well-Being of the Area:

Special Events/Community Events can bring communities together both in the planning, participation and enjoyment of such occasions. The Council's involvement in the future must be transparent, equitable and co-ordinated. North Weald Airfield has the potential to host major outdoor events such as music festivals. The Council needs to determine the feasibility and desirability of such proposals.