

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AMENITIES COMMITTEE,
HELD ON THURSDAY, 11TH FEBRUARY 2010,
IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, KING'S HOUSE, THETFORD,
STARTING AT 6 P.M.

Present:

Councillor T J Jermy, Chairman
The Mayor, Councillor Mrs P A Spencer

Councillors:

G P Balaam
R F W Brame

A Paines

Note: The published agenda for this meeting started with Item reference 407/09. Owing to the Planning Committee meeting the previous evening 'laying claim' to minute references 407 to 409 inclusive, the first five items below have been 'clustered' under reference 410 (A to E). Item 410D is an additional item, which will be a regular item on future agendas.

410/09A DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

410/09B APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors T J Lamb and Mrs P P Quadling.

410/09C MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 21st October 2009, as received by Council on 28th October 2009 under minute 267/09b, be confirmed as a true record and signed/initialled by the Chairman.

410/09D MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES NOT OTHERWISE ADDRESSED BELOW

Skatepark Funding

The Town Clerk confirmed that there would be a balance of £5k in the Council's Reserves as at year-end 2009/10, earmarked for 'Youth Projects'. There was no provision in the budget approved by the Council at its 27th January 2010 Meeting to add to that sum in the course of 2010/11. It would be up to the Council to agree that 'Youth Project' monies should be dedicated to the skatepark project being 'worked up' by Breckland Council; that decision had yet to be taken.

Xmas Lights Income

The Committee endorsed the Town Manager's view that any income received from businesses for Xmas Lights should be for the purchase of additional lights and not to cover running costs.

Hanging Basket Watering Cost

The Committee noted that the only direct charge to the taxpayer in respect of hanging baskets was to cover the cost of watering.

Hanging Basket Provision

The Committee noted that sponsorship covers the (discounted) cost of the baskets themselves.

410/09E

FINANCIAL REPORTS AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2009

The Committee had received copies of the Dept 8 and Dept 10 reports with their agenda papers. The Town Clerk and Finance Manager responded to questions.

RESOLVED that the respective departmental reports be noted.

411/09

2010/11 BUDGETARY PROVISION

Copies of the respective departmental budgetary provisions were circulated. A wide-ranging discussion ensued.

Event Financing

It was noted that the only specific provisions for events related to the Xmas Lights Switch-On and the Dad's Army event scheduled for June 2010. Whilst the Town Manager was of the view that local people might have greater expectations, it was pointed out in the course of the discussion that there would be a Firework Event this year, so it was not exactly a case of there being very little planned by way of public entertainment. What was perhaps a discussion for another time was the extent to which the Town Council should involve itself and commit public money. It was agreed to note in these minutes the Committee's wish for more event funding to be made available in future years.

Barnham Cross Pitch Update

It was noted that there could be a slight underspend in 2009/10, but it was too early to confirm this. The issue of young players seemingly having no alternative to urinating in the bushes adjacent to the container was being looked into, with Charles Burrell High School having been approached by the Chairman (in his capacity as Chairman of the School's Premises Committee) to see whether an arrangement could be made, whereby School toilets could be made available. It was agreed to have a 'Football' item on the Committee's next agenda.

Cutting of Barnham Cross Common Grassed Area by Riverside Car Park

Members of the Committee asked for this area not to become an annual eyesore. The Town Clerk confirmed his understanding that it was covered under the Serco contract, but reminded members that there had been seeming equipment problems cited by the contractor in recent times. He assured the Committee that he would look into solving the problem, committing, if necessary, Town Council staff to a task that was not in itself that time-consuming.

RESOLVED that the 2010/11 budgetary provisions be noted.

412/09 OPEN SPACE TRANSFER

There were no specific pieces of land that the Committee was at this point in a position to identify for priority transfer, it being agreed that the next agenda item was a more pressing matter.

413/09 PLAY AREA TRANSFER

A draft letter, conforming to what had been agreed by the Council on 27th January 2010 under agenda item 390/09, had been circulated by the Town Clerk to all town councillors ahead of the meeting.

RESOLVED that the letter, as drafted, be sent without delay to Breckland Council. This covered the following points:

- Acceptance by Thetford Town Council of the terms of transfer set out in Breckland Council's letter of 3rd December 2009, these being in line with the 'in principle' acceptance reported by the Town Clerk to Breckland Council's then Senior Leisure Manager in March 2008.
- Prior to the Councils' respective solicitors becoming involved, clarification sought under the following four headings:

1. Interpretation of Restrictive Covenants

- (i) Did the definition of 'amenity area' include potential alternative use as allotment land?
- (ii) The Town Council would not wish the seemingly proposed prohibition of the erection of, quote, "any structure whatsoever" to preclude the possibility of play equipment being replaced and/or upgraded and/or added to in a given location (a point raised by the Town Clerk when responding to a letter, dated 17th December 2009, received from Breckland Council's Land Management Officer).

2. Serco Contract Cover until April 2015

Back in March 2008, the Town Council had been told that the cover would extend to the following: weekly play area inspections, minor repairs, regular grass cutting, bin emptying and routine maintenance of the curtilage to each area. What remained unclear was the precise scope/definition of 'minor repairs' and 'routine maintenance'.

3. Status of Play Area off Richard Easten Road

Back in March 2008, the Town Council had asked whether this was the only new play area in Thetford in existence, yet to be adopted (the reason being to prepare for the possible prospect of this area too being offered for transfer in due course).

If said transfer were to occur before April 2015, then the Town Council wanted to know whether Serco contract cover would extend automatically to inspections and maintenance in the immediate term.

The Town Council was also now interested to learn whether any other 'yet to be adopted' play areas – of which it was perhaps unaware - had been provided in the town in the period since March 2008.

4. Insurance Cover for Play Equipment

The Town Council wanted to know whether it could assume that, for as long as the Serco contract applied, the Town Council would have no direct responsibility for play equipment.

414/09 TOILET MANAGEMENT UPDATE

It was confirmed that the cost-effectiveness of the 2010/11 operation was predicated on a significantly reduced labour cost arising from the engagement of direct labour. The intention was to keep all the existing public toilets in the town open.

The Town Clerk clarified the position regarding the guaranteeing of operational income in 2009/10 and 2010/11 through the provision of a 'compensatory' sum from Reserves, amounting to the projected loss of income arising from the fall in money-market interest rates.

RESOLVED that the means of achieving this income provision be noted.

415/09 YOUR PARISH YOUR DECISION: FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

RESOLVED that the contents of the letter received from the Norfolk Association of Local Councils, dated 11th January 2010, be noted. The Committee expressed disappointed at the Town Council's application failing to succeed on this occasion, but looked forward to being in position to bid for similar funding in future years.

416/09 FUNDING APPLICATIONS TO THE TOWN COUNCIL

The Chairman went through some outline proposals he had been working on; these won general support.

RESOLVED that the Council's officers 'work up' the Chairman's proposals and present a draft document to the Committee's next meeting but one.

417/09 BINS AND BENCHES

Some Committee members had met in informal session with the Town Clerk, Works Supervisor and a Breckland Council officer back in December 2009.

The Works Supervisor was present to update the meeting on progress made to date with bin installations, making use of a computer mapping package.

The Town Manager reported that the proprietor of SFC Chicken was not willing to provide a bin outside his shop. As for McDonald's, discussions were ongoing about the best way to address the London Road litter problem.

It was agreed to include an item on bins in the next edition of the Town Council newsletter.

The Town Manager raised the prospect of rearranging the street furniture in the area in front of Boots' main branch, where bins, seats and cycle stands were rather haphazardly located. She was asked to give further thought to this and report back to a future meeting.

Councillor R F W Brame was keen for there to be a clear, concise policy adopted by the Council when it came to agreeing to the siting of memorial benches/seats, not only in the traditional areas of King's House Gardens and the London Road Cemetery, but also in areas of open space. It was agreed that the Council's officers would prepare a draft document for formal consideration at the Committee's next meeting.

418/09 GRITTING SERVICE PROVISION

There was general acknowledgement that the entire local government sector had been found wanting during the recent cold spell and that there was a role for the Town Council to play in meeting some of the community expectation.

RESOLVED that the Town Clerk and Works Supervisor look into the feasibility of a stock of grit, supplied by the County Council, being held at the Council's Telford Way Depot for eventual distribution in a controlled manner.

419/09 MARKET PLACE ROUNDABOUT: PLANTING OPTIONS

It was noted that the onus was on the Town Council to produce a solution that would not give rise to any electrical safety risk. Thought would be given another time to agreeing the choice of plants.

420/09

MARKET PLACE PARKING PROVISION / SPACE MARKING

The Town Manager updated the meeting on where matters stood.

RESOLVED that Councillor R F W Brame, together with the Town Manager, meet with Breckland Council officers to agree a final layout, a net loss of spaces having been acknowledged to be an unavoidable outcome.

421/09

PARKING ON COMMON LAND

RESOLVED that, in response to the letter received from the Thetford Society, dated 27th January 2010, the Town Clerk and Works Supervisor research the cost of achieving lasting solutions to vehicle encroachment along Mill Lane and the boundary of Melford Common and report their findings to a future meeting.

422/09

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the Committee should aim to meet twice a year, in April and November. Wednesday, 21st April 2010, was the date favoured for the next meeting, which the Town Clerk would confirm in due course. The agenda would include items on the following:

- Barnham Cross Common Football Pitches: Quality of Service Provision
- Dog Control in the town
- Memorial Bench Policy.

Chairman