



Executive Committee

26th November 2013

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Bill Hartnett (Chair), Councillor Greg Chance (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Rebecca Blake, Juliet Brunner, Brandon Clayton, John Fisher, Phil Mould and Debbie Taylor

Also Present:

Councillors David Bush, Pattie Hill, Gay Hopkins, Yvonne Smith and Pat Witherspoon.

Officers:

K Dicks, C Felton, J Godwin, S Hanley, S Jones, J Pickering and P McLaughlin

Democratic Services Officer:

I Westmore

84. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Leader welcomed the many members of the public to the meeting and explained the arrangements and procedure for the meeting. It had been agreed with representatives of Redditch United Football Club that 15 minutes be allocated at the start of that item for the Club to present its petition and to ask questions and make a statement or presentation to members of the Executive Committee.

85. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Mark Shurmer.

86. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

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Chair

87. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 12th November 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

88. REDDITCH UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB - GROUND RELOCATION

The Leader of the Council accepted a petition containing over 2,000 signatures from representatives of Redditch United Football Club, Mr Pat Bray, Mr Tim Bray and Mr Jim Mutton, in the following terms:

“We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens who urge Councillors to act now on the relocation of Redditch United Football Club.”

There followed a number of questions posed by representatives of the Football Club to Officers and the Committee and statements, as detailed below:

(Question from Mr Lee Daykin, Coach, Under 8s)

Mr Godwin, you have disclosed a letter from Ms Hanley to the Club on Council Letterhead and signed in her capacity as Deputy Chief Executive – it says that Members and Officers have considered the proposal for relocation, discussed it at great length and given ten main reasons why the Council will not be going ahead.

What Members have been involved in this decision?

Isn't tonight's meeting a sham as the proposals and decision not to proceed has already been taken by the Council?

Will the overwhelming support from this petition make the Council properly engage with the club with all its elected Members to provide a solution to the problems the club faces with its facilities not being fit for purpose for the community?

(Question from Mr Tim Le Roux, Coach, Girls)

I see Mr Godwin you major on club finances, I would like to suggest you have missed the main point. You have limited hiring options for a junior pitch anywhere in Redditch on a Sunday morning due to the adult football leagues. Surely this move is about providing adequate facilities for juniors of all abilities and gender who want to play football and be proud to wear the Redditch United shirt?

(Question from Mr Martin Bassett, Manager, Under 9s)

Mr Godwin, you talk about the District Valuation being seriously at odds with what a developer is prepared to pay for the Valley Stadium site. Basic common sense says that a price someone is prepared to pay is defined at a price which is set between a willing buyer and a willing seller.

Who are the three developers and have you met them to hear them explain their valuation?

(Question from Mr Mick Pearce, Coach, Under 14s Girls & Under 6s Boys)

Ms Hanley, in 3.14 of Mr Godwin's report you talk about expending considerable sums in a facility that would be of limited functionality.

What other sporting facilities would you like to see at the new stadium?

In the same paragraph you talk about the Council managing a facility that is underused, costly to maintain and potentially difficult to dispose of.

I would like to put to you there will be no risk as there will be at least 1,000 local youngsters using the facility and I ask you the question why would you consider disposing of a club with over one hundred years of history?

(Question from Miss Ella Rowberry, Junior Player)

I love playing for Redditch United. Why won't you help and support the club?

I want to join the big team when I am older.

(Statement from Miss Charlotte Smith, Junior Player)

With the growing interest in women's football we feel the changing facilities need to be updated if we are to attract more young ladies into sport.

We hope to keep children healthy, active and taking part in outdoor activities, but feel the lack of female changing facilities could prevent this from happening.

(Statement from Mr Darren Veness, Manager, Disabled Team, Coach, Under 13's, School Liaison Officer, Holiday Camp Co-ordinator)

After partnering with Redditch United to provide local children and adults with a disability the opportunity to play football, we have formed a seven-a-side football development programme that now has 28 affiliated adult players and over 100 participants attending coaching sessions each week within schools and the community. We play in the Birmingham Ability Counts League and are currently the Premiership and FA Cup Champions.

However, the players, due to the nature of their disabilities, need to have a facility that provides a safe and friendly environment where they do not constantly have to find another venue due to cost or safety. I strongly believe that the disabled people of Redditch deserve a venue where they can play, watch and socialise through football, which Chris Swan's vision will provide us – Let's get behind it!

The Chair undertook to answer these questions during the course of the meeting, where possible. Members of the Committee took the opportunity to ask several questions of clarification of representatives of the Club. The Committee was informed that the present clubhouse was not compliant with current disabilities legislation resulting in the Disabled Team training at Trinity High School and playing at a variety of locations. In response to a question as to why the Club had not made a presentation to the Committee it was noted that as much information had been made public as possible in view of the fact that the Club did not feel able to place their detailed business proposals in the public domain at the present time.

Mr Chris Swan, in response to a request from a Member, made a short submission to the Committee, highlighting that he had worked tirelessly to come up with a real solution to the problems faced by the Club. He wanted to create a sustainable club which served the needs of its junior members in particular. Mr Swan believed his proposal would provide the scope to serve 72 teams and concluded by contending that he was not after charity but wished to see an example of localism in action from the Council.

Following the comments and questions from the Club, an amended set of recommendations was circulated by the Leader.

Officers provided additional information on the course of events and the nature of the papers which were before Members at the meeting. Members were informed that a number of discussions had been held with the Football Club, culminating in a meeting of key

Members of the Controlling Group at which the Club's Business Case had been presented. It was noted that initial proposals for relocation had first been forthcoming from the Club in 2012 and subsequent meetings had sought to work up the proposals into a form that might be suitable for consideration by Members. Following consideration of the scheme, a response had been sent to the Club from Officers stating that the Members concerned could not support the proposal as it stood. The key issues identified by the Council were around the valuation of the Valley Stadium site, the legal and planning implications and the potential risk to the Council.

It was made clear that Officers would have liked to have been able to provide the full business case to Members for consideration at the present meeting but the Club had not consented to this. The Council's over-riding duties and responsibilities were highlighted and it was stressed that Members should operate within those guidelines. In response to some of the specific questions which had been asked earlier in the meeting by representatives of the Club, it was stated that the position set out in the written response from the Council was not a formal decision. As for the meeting being a sham, it was noted that the meeting had come about in order that the Council might formally consider and respond to the Club's business case. In respect of the weight of public support, the Council saw the benefits of relocation but also saw the risks and it was considered these outweighed the benefits at present.

It was contended by a Member that proceedings might not look open as much of the information available to Members was exempt and it seemed that a decision had already been reached. Given that Mr Swan had previously been invited to address the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss the proposals it was suggested that the present meeting was a waste of Council resources. Councillor Brunner requested information on the cost of the present meeting. A motion to defer any decision on these proposals pending consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was lost.

The majority of Members did not consider it appropriate to delay a decision on the future of the Club any further. The Council wished to see the Football Club thrive and there was a role foreseen for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in exploring alternatives to the current proposals. The overall context for the Council with very significant cuts in grant funding from central Government was touched upon. The meeting was also reminded that Councillors needed to represent the views and interests of everyone across the Borough.

Certain specific points were raised. The restrictive covenants on the land within the Arrow Valley Park were considered in the light of various other developments taking place over the years, such as

the Countryside Centre and the Fitness Gym. Officers were not able to provide a definitive legal opinion on each development but restated the broader position that development ancillary to the public space use of the Park was permissible. The valuation of the Valley Stadium site was clearly a key point and Officers provided additional clarification on the conflicting figures presented by the Club and Council. The Club had initially furnished the Council with details of an offer for the land which had not accounted for affordable housing, Section 106 planning obligations and Highways issues which could limit the extent of house-building without significant improvements to access to the site. Officers considered the District Valuer's valuation as a more realistic assessment of the value of the land. It was also noted that Property Services Officers had not been made aware of the other two offers which the Club reported they had received. The scope for working around existing facilities was briefly discussed. Officers pointed out that the Arrow Valley Stadium was a land-locked site other than for areas of open space which were either in private hands or which had further restrictive covenants upon them.

The point was made that the recommendation before the Committee was for continuation of an on-going process to support the Club but that further work was needed to ensure that the right solution was reached.

The Leader thanked the speakers and petitioners for their questions and statements and confirmed with them that the questions they had asked had been answered insofar as Members and Officers had been able during the course of the meeting. The Leader also thanked the members of the public for attending the meeting and for listening so attentively to the debate.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Council's assets should not be deployed to support the implementation of the business plan of the Redditch United Football Club;**

and that

- 2) for the Executive Committee to properly assess the community needs in relation to footballing provision within the Borough and the extent to which the Council can continue to work with the Club and other providers to deliver this, that the Executive Committee requests that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee engage in an exercise with Officers that will seek to establish the demand for future provision within the Borough and that the Portfolio Holder and Officers hold a public**

consultation event to engage with residents and clubs to help to inform this exercise;

and RECOMMENDED that

- 3) in the meantime, in order to ensure the continued community benefits currently being afforded to the Borough, that the Executive Committee acknowledges the justification for there to be no increase of rent applied in the current rent review of the Valley Stadium site and the rent of £2,000 per annum be maintained until the expiry of the Lease in 2017.

The Meeting commenced at 7.09 pm
and closed at 9.08 pm

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Chair