

MINUTES of the MEETING of the
SOUTH DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
held at Civic Offices, Civic Way,
Swadlincote on 20th September 2001
at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Rose (Chair), Councillor Mrs. Mead (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Bambrick, Brooks, Dunn, Evens, Ford, Harrington, Lauro, Pabla, Richards, Mrs. Rose, Routledge, Shepherd, Sherratt, Southerd, Southern, Stone, Taylor, Whyman and Wilkins.

Conservative Group

Councillors Bale, Bladen, Douglas, Harrison, Hood, Mrs. Robbins, Shaw, Mrs. Walton and Mrs. Wheeler.

CL/52. **RECENT TERRORIST ATROCITIES IN AMERICA**

Following the terrorist atrocities in America on 11th September 2001, Members stood in silence as a mark of respect. The Leader then addressed Members on this matter, advising that on 14th September 2001, several hundred persons, including Members and officers of the Council, had attended a ceremony on The Delph, Swadlincote at 11 a.m. for the official three minutes' silence. The Leader proposed letters of sympathy to the President of the United States of America and the Mayor of New York, which was seconded and agreed unanimously.

CL/53. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillors Bell, Carroll and Knight (Labour Group) and Councillor Lemmon (Conservative Group).

CL/54. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 9th August 2001 (Minutes Nos. CL/40 - CL/49) were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

CL/55. **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair advised that the Charity Revival Night on 15th September 2001 had raised the sum of £665 and he expressed his thanks to all those who had supported the event. The Chair reminded Members that his Civic Service would be held on 7th October 2001 at the Catholic Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Swadlincote.

The Chair, together with the Leader, the Chair of the Development Services Committee and the Chief Executive would shortly be visiting Skövde Municipal Town Council in Sweden. The visit would include the opening of the extension to the Volvo Motor Engine plant together with the celebration of

a new Science Park. It was noted that the trip was to be sponsored in part by Speeds of Derby and Freeman Travel of Swadlincote.

Councillor Routledge advised Members of the various categories in the County Council's Young Achievers Award 2001, for which it was hoped to receive more applications this year.

CL/56. **PRESENTATION BY YOUTH INFORMATION SHOP**

Linda Rose of the Youth Information Shop attended the Meeting and made a detailed presentation on its activities and facilities. Members congratulated her on the excellent presentation and expressed their admiration at the services offered.

(Councillor Douglas left the Meeting at 6.55 p.m.)

CL/57. **REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

RESOLVED:-

That the Open reports of the following Committees be received and noted and any recommendations contained therein be approved and adopted, subject to any matters annotated:-

***] Overview Committee, 9th August 2001 (Minute No. OV/1)
(Minute No. OV/1, Sheltered Housing Service - Following a query whether all properties within the Council's ownership were inspected annually by CORGI Inspectors, the Chair of the Community Services Committee confirmed that the approved contractor was required to undertake annual inspections. However, problems had arisen previously when cards had been left at properties and the occupiers had not contacted the contractor to arrange a convenient time for the inspection).***

Development Control Committee, 14th August 2001 (Minutes Nos. DC/17 – DC/28)

Joint Consultative Committee, 16th August 2001 (Minutes Nos. JCC/1 – JCC/6)

(Minute No. JC/4, Concessionary Day at Christmas/New Year – The Council agreed to grant employees an additional day's leave on Friday, 28th December 2001, subject to the necessary flexibility for emergency cover and refuse collection, in which case the additional day be carried forward for these employees. Members also expressed their gratitude to the staff for their co-operation during the difficulties of the previous year).

Development Services Committee, 16th August 2001 (Minutes Nos. DS/6 – DS/10)

(Minute No. DS/8, Settlement Hierarchy – A detailed discussion ensued on this issue and it was noted that there would be further opportunities in due course to comment on the content of the Local Plan).

Standards Committee, 21st August 2001 (Minutes Nos. SC/1 – SC/2)

(The Council approved the appointment of the Parish Members to the Committee, Mrs. C. Barker of Barrow-on-Trent Parish Council and Mr. R. Buxton of Hatton Parish Council, as nominated through the Derbyshire Association of Local Councils).

(Councillor Pabla left the Meeting at 7.15 p.m.)

Community Services Committee, 23rd August 2001 (Minutes Nos. CS/21 -CS/26)

Finance and Management Committee, 30th August 2001 (Minutes Nos. FM/23 - FM/32)

Development Control Committee, 4th September 2001 (Minutes Nos. DC/29 – DC/36)

Community Scrutiny Committee, 6th September 2001 (Minutes Nos. CYS/5 - CYS/6)

Corporate Scrutiny Committee, 10th September 2001 (Minutes Nos. COS/5 - COS/7)

(Councillor Wilkins left the Meeting at 6.20 p.m.)

Area Meetings

Linton, 31st July 2001 (Minutes Nos. LA/1 – LA/11)

Repton, 8th August 2001 (Minutes Nos. RA/1 – RA/12)

Melbourne, 15th August 2001 (Minutes Nos. MA/1 – MA/11)

Etwall, 22nd August 2001 (Minutes Nos. EA/1 – EA/10)

(The Chair of the Etwall Area Meeting expressed his dismay at the amount of litter along the A50 trunk road and it was agreed to pursue this issue with the Highways Agency. It was noted that no litter bins were provided in lay-bys on this highway.

Swadlincote, 28th August 2001 (Minutes Nos. SA/1 – SA/13)

Newhall, 6th September 2001 (Minutes Nos. NA/1 - NA/13)

(Minute No. NA/6, Land at the former Horse and Jockey Public House – Councillor Richards advised that many residents had walked across this land for twenty years or more and encouraged any such resident to contact the Council, as an application could be submitted to the County Highways Authority for a public right of way across the land).

CL/58. **SEALING OF DOCUMENTS**

RESOLVED:-

That the Sealed Documents listed at Annexe SMB1 to the Signed Minute Book, which have no specific authority, be duly authorised.

CL/59. **STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2000/01**

It was reported in 1996, new Regulations were introduced which required the Statement of Accounts to be approved by Members by 30th September. For some time, this Council had found it difficult to achieve this deadline and last year, the financial crisis was a major contributory reason. At the beginning of this year, officers had prepared a programme to enable the accounts to be produced and available for approval within the statutory deadline. In part, this was in response to concerns raised by the Council's external auditors at the Council's failure to achieve the statutory deadline, albeit in very difficult circumstances. However, greater importance was attached to closing the accounts within the statutory deadline as a method of signalling to the residents of South Derbyshire that the Council's finances were well managed and administered and that another step had been taken away from the previous financial crisis.

The accounts had been closed and the Statement of Accounts prepared by 25th August 2001. This was slightly in advance of the Council's timetable and represented a considerable level of commitment from staff within the Financial Services section together with the Accountancy Manager. The accounts had been submitted to Members for approval considerably in advance of the statutory deadline and the early closure had also enabled an out-turn report to be submitted to the Finance and Management Committee on 30th August 2001. District Audit was scheduled to commence the audit of accounts in October and the Chief Finance Officer was also required to provide a letter of representation to the external auditors. This would confirm that there were no significant events that had occurred after the end of the accounting period (31st March 2001) that would materially affect the accounts for 2000/01. Members considered a draft of the letter of representation for approval, following consultation with the Monitoring Officer to ensure that there were no legal matters that fell within this category. It was understood that there were no post balance sheet items that fell within the scope of the letter.

Members received details of the key points within the Statement of Accounts and it was noted that actual net spending for 2000/01 was £6,593,865, compared to the probable estimate of £7,370,260. This was equivalent to savings of £776,395, arising predominantly from staff savings, rent allowances, telecoms and the DSO. However, many of these savings were not continuous ongoing savings that would carry forward into next year and this had been reflected in the revised forecast.

During the closedown process, it had been evident that some of the savings would need to be set aside to meet future known commitments. Earmarked reserves had therefore been increased by £235,000 to provide resources for future spending commitments, including the pay award for 2001/02, the Bellwin Scheme, pension fund costs and IT costs. After taking into account transfers to earmarked reserves, general reserves had increased by £546,797 to £1,135,897, compared to the anticipated level of reserves of £589,000. In accordance with the agreed budget for 2001/02, the Council had agreed to reduce general reserves by £122,000 to address the commutation adjustment.

The Council was committed to phasing out its reliance on the commutation adjustment over the next two financial years and had agreed to make

contributions of £321,000 and £266,000 in each of the next two financial years to the commutation reserve. This policy would contribute to a reduction in reserves of £729,000 over a period of three years, regardless of any new spending pressures that the council sought to address. Accordingly, the Council was now embarking on an exercise to refocus and reprioritise its spending as a means of identifying savings to contribute to longer term stability and also to identify resources to be redirected to new spending priorities. The three-year forecast had been revised to take account of some of the known changes from the out-turn and the opportunity had also been taken to extend the projection for a further year, which was summarised to Members. This indicated that it would be necessary to withdraw a total of £460,000 during the current and the following three years, taking balances from their current level of £1,135,000 down to £675,000 by the end of 2004/05. However, any projection should be viewed with caution and several factors affecting this current projection were outlined to Members. Nevertheless, the three-year forecast provided considerable reassurance that the Council's finances were being stabilised.

Members were reminded that the Council's Housing Revenue Account had a working balance of £204,540 at the beginning of the financial year 2000/01. The external auditors had expressed concern at the level of these balances in relation to the number of Council properties and the position had now improved considerably. Overall, the Housing Revenue account achieved a surplus of £724,000, approximately £568,000 above the level anticipated to begin to rebuild reserves. This improved position was due mainly to factors relating to housing repairs, rent rebates and a DSO surplus. Working balances were now at £929,000, with a further £97,000 earmarked within the covenant repayment reserve.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That, in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 8 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996, the Council's Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2000 be approved.***
- (2) That the Chief Finance Officer be authorised to sign the letter of representation attached to the report.***

CL/60. **MAURICE LEA MEMORIAL PARK – RESTORATION PROPOSALS**

It was reported that the restoration proposals for Maurice Lea Memorial Park had now been awarded a Stage 1 Pass by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), under its Urban Parks Programme. The main requirements of this award involved the further development of the scheme to produce detailed specifications, firm costings, option appraisal for some individual elements of the project and a ten year management plan for the site. In monetary terms, the offer related to a development grant of £32,900, representing 75% of the eligible development work cost of £43,943. The Stage 1 Pass was based on eligible final project costs of £547,552, with the HLF awarding a maximum of £410,500. The HLF had stressed that this approval did not guarantee a grant for the final project.

It was considered that the major new work generated by the approval involved the production of a ten-year Management Plan for the Park. From the HLF's viewpoint, this was intended to safeguard the investment of Lottery

funding and to make recipients consider the longer-term management of their parks as a valuable community asset. The Management Plan was likely to concentrate on areas concerning community involvement, capital investment, development programmes and management/staffing arrangements.

In previous reports, the uncertainty over the Council's contribution to the final project had been highlighted. One area of concern relating to whether capital works already undertaken could be included as part of this Council's partnership funding contribution had now been clarified by the HLF. It had been agreed that the sum of £30,000 already spent on refurbishing the tennis courts could be included as part of the Council's partnership funding contribution. In terms of partnership funding contributions to a final project, the majority of this remained unsecured. In the 'best case' scenario, the Council's capital contribution to the final project would be £47,052. The 'worst case' scenario, if all other bids were unsuccessful, would involve a contribution by the Council of £107,052. The Stage 1 Pass would now allow time to explore other funding options, particularly new initiatives that may become available.

The financial implications indicated that during the first three years of managing the restored park, additional revenue costs of £24,000 per annum were likely to be generated. Discussions had taken place with the HLF over concerns at meeting the increased revenue costs and it had been indicated that, providing the Council gave a formal undertaking to meet the additional running costs, the HLF may be able to treat these costs as partnership funding towards the total cost of the scheme. The HLF had also suggested that it may be able to fund the total cost of a Park Manager for a period of up to five years, where such a post would become permanent. Whilst it was difficult to translate these offers into firm costs, their impact in the short-term (next five years) would be a significant reduction in the revenue impact of managing the restored park.

Members expressed their gratitude to Chris Mason, Facilities and Development Manager for his considerable efforts on this matter.

RESOLVED:-

That the offer of the Heritage Lottery Fund for development funding of £32,900 towards the restoration of Maurice Lea Memorial Park be approved.

CL/61. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 (AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT [ACCESS TO INFORMATION] ACT 1985**

RESOLVED:-

That, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the Meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined under the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as indicated in the reports of Committees.

MINUTES

The Exempt Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 9th August 2001 were duly received and approved.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Exempt reports of the following Committees on delegated matters were received and noted:-

Development Control Committee, 14th August 2001

Joint Consultative Committee, 16th August 2001

Development Services Committee, 16th August 2001

Community Services Committee, 23rd August 2001

Finance and Management Committee, 30th August 2001

C.H. ROSE

CHAIR