

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

28th August 2003

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Southern (Chair), Councillor Lauro (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Carroll, Isham, Jones, Mulgrew, Taylor and Whyman M.B.E.

Conservative Group

Councillors Mrs. Hood, Harrison, Mrs. Renwick, Shaw and Mrs. Walton.

In Attendance

Councillor Mrs Wheeler (Conservative Group).

HCS/32. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 17th July 2003 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

HCS/33. **MEMBERS QUESTIONS AND REPORTS**

(a) Rosliston Forestry Centre

The Chair thanked the Forestry Centre for hosting this Meeting and the hospitality provided. The Leader of the Council felt that the developing forest was a credit to South Derbyshire and the people involved in the scheme.

(b) Redesignation of Social Housing

The Leader of the Council referred to long term void properties within the Hatton Ward that were currently designated as Sheltered Housing. There was significant demand within the area for social housing and he questioned when the planned redesignation of certain properties would take place. The Housing Services Manager informed that a needs and market demand analysis had recently been completed by an external consultant. It was hoped to submit draft proposals to Members before the end of the calendar year. Councillor Whyman stressed the urgency of this issue by referring to an example. Members spoke of the demand for sheltered accommodation and the conflicting information received from the County Council as the leading authority on Supporting People, that there were too many units of sheltered accommodation within the District. Members were also mindful of the need for care when allocating this type of accommodation.

(c) The Festival of Leisure

The Chair referred to the success of the annual Festival of Leisure held on the Maurice Lea Memorial Park in Church Gresley. He hoped that a similar event could be organised for rural areas of the District and it was agreed that a report be submitted to a future Meeting of the Committee on the feasibility of organising such an event.

MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE**HCS/34. PRESENTATION BY AURORA COUNTRY DEVELOPMENTS**

The Committee received a presentation from Debbie Chesterman of Aurora Country Developments. She advised that Aurora had entered into a management contract for a further ten years, which would see the Forestry Centre develop into a mature woodland site. An outline was given of recent projects and developments. The major development had been the restructuring of the car park, including the installation of CCTV cameras and the introduction of car park charges. She spoke about the completion of the cycle route and the 'Rascals After School Club', which had received the highest possible grading after its recent OFSTED inspection. The 'Walking for Health' initiative had received the three heart accreditation and was one of only 36 schemes in the United Kingdom to receive this quality mark. Mrs. Chesterman gave examples of the groups which benefited from this initiative and the training she had recently completed to enable her to deliver the Walk Leader training herself.

The sensory garden continued to be a popular attraction and this year a well dressing had been created by the children from 'Rascals'. She paid tribute to volunteers and Moira Replan for their help with maintenance work. The Green Heart Lake was beginning to attract fishermen and angling for the disabled had been promoted following a grant from the Derbyshire Rural Community Council. A forum for local attractions had recently been established to explore ways of working together on issues like marketing, promotion and staff training.

In terms of future developments, an approach had been made by 'Replay'. This was a local company that worked with community groups to provide drama and art therapy initiatives. Providing accommodation on site, in the form of log cabins was a further initiative being pursued.

The Chair and Vice-Chair thanked Debbie Chesterman for the presentation, paid tribute to Aurora's tremendous achievements in developing this exemplar site and helping the Council to realise its ambitions.

RESOLVED:-

That the presentation by Aurora Country Developments be received.

HCS/35. BRETBY CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE - SCRUTINY PANEL

With the approval of the Chair, Councillor Mrs. Wheeler spoke to this item.

RESOLVED:-

That the Open Minutes of the Bretby Crematorium Scrutiny Panel Meeting held on 18th June 2003 be received.

HCS/36. FURTHER IMPROVEMENT WORKS - SWADLINCOTE WOODLAND FOREST PARK

It was reported that an allocation of £25,000 was included in the current year's capital programme for access improvements at the Swadlincote

Woodland Forest Park. A list of projects had been prepared at the conclusion of the SRB Scheme in 2001 and the total value of these works was in the region of £195,500. The provision of an artificial boulder, a footpath link to the access road and provision of additional boardwalks and decking were identified as the highest priorities.

Various applications were made for external funding and it had been possible to finance the boardwalk and decking provision over the balancing pond in late 2001/02, using a £5,000 grant from the National Forest Company. Success was also achieved in 2002/03 when WREN allocated £25,000 towards a project to provide new footpath links and a new distinctive play feature at the Site. Unfortunately, the offer of grant aid and the allocation of partnership funding came too late for the project to be delivered in 2002/03.

Faulks Perry Culley and Rech undertook all of the original site design work and had been commissioned to design, procure and supervise the work on site. The individual elements of the project were reported, together with budget estimates.

Attached to the report were details of the climbing boulder and a plan showing the proposed layout of the new surfaced footpaths. In normal circumstances, the project would have been managed through a single contract, but given the wide diversity of the tasks involved, it was proposed to seek separate tenders for the footpath and specialist play provision works. The proposed project timetable was reported.

The Leader of the Council referred to the completion of the skateboard park on the adjacent Woodhouses Site. He commented on the artificial climbing boulder and felt sure that this play provision would be popular with young people. However, he felt there would be some merit in a small number of Members undertaking a visit, possibly to Sheffield, to see this type of play provision. The Council's Health and Safety Officer should also be invited, to assess any potential safety issues for the Council. A Woodville Ward Member commented on the benefits of partnership working and the funding secured from Waste Recycling Environmental, towards this project.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee notes the content of the report.***
- (2) That a small group of Members and the Council's Health and Safety Officer visit an existing artificial climbing boulder to assess its suitability and that subject to there being no concerns, the Committee approves the way forward submitted.***

HCS/37. **ROSLISTON FORESTRY CENTRE**

It was reported that in 1998, the Rosliston Forestry Centre Executive was established to consider the options available for the future management of the Forestry Centre site. It concluded that seeking a private sector partner was the most appropriate option and Aurora Country Developments were subsequently appointed on a two year contract. The basis of the contract was to develop the visitor base and the Centre's long-term sustainability. The contract was extended to allow the current negotiations to be completed

and a financial settlement had now been agreed with Aurora County Developments.

As part of the contract negotiations, Aurora presented its business plan, which was approved by the Executive. It was clear that if the Centre was to continue its development and meet the aspirations of partners, a shared vision and plan were required. This planning process had been enabled by Rolls Royce as the Company had seconded an employee to the National Forest Company to undertake a number of projects. Considerable work and consultation had been undertaken. A strategic vision report had been produced, which the Executive had agreed as the first stage in producing a development and business plan for the Centre. The vision report had been circulated with the agenda. It provided a comprehensive review of the partners' aims and values for the site, a list of strategic priorities and specific site activities. These were summarised in a number of key themes, key values and key issues.

It had been the intention of the Executive to develop log cabin visitor accommodation on the site. Feasibility work had been undertaken and there was an opportunity to apply to the Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership for funding in the current financial year. Partners were considering the feasibility of providing one cabin by February 2004. The cabin would be designed to accommodate school and disabled groups and provide up to ten berths. Groups could use the Centre for its ancillary facilities and services. The Council's capital programme included an allocation of £25,000 as a contribution towards the log cabin. Once constructed, it would provide a significant revenue source for the Centre. Rolls Royce had confirmed its funding commitment for £20,000 per year for at least another 2 years.

Members voiced their support for the proposals, whilst questioning the costs of providing the log cabins. The construction costs were estimated to be £100,000 and with the supply of services, the total likely scheme costs were up to £160,000. Potential funding sources were discussed. The Leader of the Council wished to ensure that all South Derbyshire funding bids were not focused on the urban core and he would give his support to this project.

Consideration was given to the Strategic Vision Report and a Member felt that it could be improved in some areas. He asked when the Centre's business plan would be completed and was sure that it would address some of his concerns. The Officer secondment from Rolls Royce had another 6 months to run and it was hoped that the business plan would be produced as the next project. It was noted that the Forestry Commission would become responsible for client monitoring of the site. This would enable Council Officers to concentrate on other areas.

The Vice-Chair commented that until now, development of the Centre had been on an ad-hoc basis. He recognised the benefits of the long-term vision, questioned the running costs for the Centre, spoke of the opportunity for radio advertising and the need continue the Centre's development. Other Members voiced their enthusiasm for the Site and its future development potential.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee accepts the Strategic Vision report recommended by the Executive as the way forward for the development of the Centre.***
- (2) That the Council supports the Executive's bid for EMDA funding towards log cabin visitor accommodation on the site.***
- (3) That the Council records its thanks to Paul Watts, the Engineer seconded by Rolls Royce, for his assistance.***

HCS/38. **NEIGHBOURHOOD RISK ASSESSMENTS**

It was reported that the purpose of a Neighbourhood Risk Assessment (NRA) was to identify areas at risk of crime and disorder or where there was a “fear of crime”. Improvements could be identified and works undertaken to reduce this risk. A pilot project had been undertaken in residential crime ‘hot-spots’ in Newhall and Midway, at Council managed parks and sheltered housing complexes. Details were provided of the work undertaken. Once the areas had been assessed, the Crime Reduction Officer visited each site and recommended a series of improvement works. These were prioritised by the Crime and Disorder Support Team and key works were approved, with details given of the resources allocated to each area.

Overall, evaluation of the pilot project had shown it to be successful. It was proposed to mainstream the use of NRA's to Council services. The crime reduction work of other partners included a number of recommendations, which were set out within the report.

The Chair praised the success of the Crime and Disorder Partnership and the external funding secured. The Leader of the Council echoed these sentiments and congratulated the staff involved. A Member commented that the Police Officer seconded to the Partnership often had to undertake other policing duties. It was questioned whether cover could be provided by the Constabulary at these times to ensure continuity on crime and disorder initiatives. Another Member commented that Councillors, as community leaders had not been involved in the pilot project.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee notes the success of the pilot scheme and agrees the future mainstream use of community safety assessments within the work of Council Services.***
- (2) That a letter be sent to Divisional Commander Hurrell of the Derbyshire Constabulary, seeking appropriate cover when the seconded Officer is required for other policing duties.***

HCS/39. **DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS FOR FORMER SHELTERED HOUSING UNITS AT BASS'S CRESCENT AND SMALLTHORNE PLACE**

It was reported that these two sheltered housing sites had been decommissioned. Members were reminded of the decision taken by the Committee at its Meeting on 13th March, regarding the Bass's Crescent

scheme. It was hoped to utilise the vacant premises for a Police training initiative or suitable alternative use, but if this could not be formalised, authority was given to demolish the premises. The Police and Fire Service had made minimal use of the building and it was left unattended for long periods of time. No formal contract had been completed and the concerns regarding vandalism of the building remained.

The property would be marketed until the end of the calendar year and marketing costs were not expected to exceed £2,500. Three Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) associations had been invited to express an interest in the building. All were of the view that the existing property could not be altered or refurbished cost effectively. It was proposed that unless a cost effective expression of interest was received by 31st December, the previous Committee decision be implemented and the property demolished. Members were reminded of the structural stability works required to an adjoining bungalow and noted that there was now the opportunity to seek formal tenders for the demolition works. Any cost effective expressions of interest would be reported to the Committee for consideration. Otherwise, once demolition had been undertaken, development options would be progressed and RSL's would be invited to submit competitive, detailed proposals for social housing on the site. The options resulting from this process would be reported to the Committee.

No decision had been taken regarding the future development of the former Smallthorne Place sheltered scheme. The same development issues outlined for Bass's Crescent also applied to this property. Three RSL's had been invited to look at the development potential of the building and/or a cleared site. All felt that the existing building had limited potential and that demolition and redevelopment was a more cost effective option. There was a large adjacent area of grassland which enhanced the development potential of the site. However, in August 2000, the former Housing and Environment Committee agreed to lease this land to Woodville Parish Council. The Parish Council hoped to secure lottery funding to enable the construction of a sports pavilion, with associated car parking. There had been no material progress with this scheme and it was proposed that if the site was cleared, the adjacent land be incorporated into the redevelopment consideration. To ensure that there was no other cost effective use for the current buildings, it would be marketed in its current form, with marketing costs not expected to exceed £2,500. However, this property was, to a degree, distanced from other buildings and there was a high risk of vandalism with resultant costs. Therefore, the proposed marketing period was three months. The redevelopment options would take into consideration housing demand generally as well as specific social housing demand and any aspirations of the Parish Council for part of the site.

Consideration was given to the financial implications. There were substantial costs in altering the current properties to make them adequate in modern housing terms. If the buildings remained, it should be on the basis that they would generate a market income for the HRA or a Capital Receipt if they were proposed to be demolished by a developer. The total demolition costs for both properties was expected to be approximately £150,000. If the Council had to undertake these works itself, it was proposed that the cost be met from general capital resources, as receipts from the sale of HRA assets currently went into that general capital resources account. This would require the approval of the Finance and Management Committee. Members

were advised of the three year forecast for HRA balances and potential additional costs for gas servicing and maintenance. This supported the case for demolition costs to be met from general capital resources. Information was also provided on the Government's proposals to alter the way that receipts from Right to Buy sales were treated from April 2004.

In response to a Member's question, it was confirmed that both sites were being marketed by specialist agents. A Woodville Ward Member thanked Officers for the way in which this sensitive issue had been handled and he suggested a minor modification to the report recommendations. Members were mindful of the potential vandalism problems and concerned for neighbouring residents. Demolition of these properties would be progressed immediately after the close of the marketing period, if no cost effective offers were submitted. It was noted that given the recent changes to policy committees' terms of reference, the Committee's recommendations would be submitted to Finance and Management.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee recommends the following process to the Finance and Management Committee for developing the former sheltered housing sites at Bass's Crescent, Castle Gresley and Smallthorne Place, Woodville:

- ***The existing properties at Bass's Crescent and Smallthorne Place be marketed on the open market until the end of the calendar year. Any expressions of interest to be reported to and determined by the Committee process. The costs of marketing will be met from HRA balances.***
- ***If no expressions of interest come forward, that both properties be demolished and, subject to the approval of the Finance and Management Committee, costs be met from the Council's capital resources budget. Building works, resultant from the demolition, to an adjoining bungalow at Bass's Crescent also to be progressed on the same basis.***
- ***That the redevelopment of the two areas be progressed and proposals to include new housing provision reflecting the housing needs of the District to be reported to the Committee as soon as possible.***

HCS/40. **SUPPORTING PEOPLE – TRANSITIONAL PROTECTION FOR WARDEN SERVICE CHARGES**

Members were reminded of the introduction of Supporting People legislation and the changes to Housing Benefit rules. For South Derbyshire, this related to the costs associated with providing the Community Warden and Careline Services. An exercise was undertaken to determine the costs of providing the Sheltered Housing Service and the total support costs equated to £521,517 each year. The Council received a 'windfall' totalling £381,000 and this money was ring fenced within the HRA for certain activities around housing service provision and improvement. In August 2002, the Committee was advised of Supporting People guidance, that all sheltered housing tenants at 31st March 2003 should not face an increase in rent costs above the annual

rent increase. This meant that the Council must subsidise tenants that were not entitled to Supporting People funding. The 'Transitional Protection' as it was known must be paid for the duration of the tenancy and funded from the 'windfall'. The Transitional Protection would cease where a qualifying tenant sought to move to another sheltered housing unit. This had applied to 14 tenants' transfers within the sheltered housing stock in the last year and it did not include tenants relocated from the two decommissioned sheltered housing schemes.

In order to ensure that existing sheltered housing tenants were not required to pay this additional amount, it was proposed that the Transitional Protection remain with the tenant if they transferred within sheltered housing accommodation. This would not incur any additional costs to the Council, but transitional protection would be provided for a longer period. The 'windfall' amount remained ring fenced and was currently used only for the Transitional Protection payments. The Chief Finance Officer had made a recommendation to retain this position until November, when subsidy implications should become clearer.

Members supported the proposal and recognised the potential costs of adapting properties to meet tenants' needs, if they were discouraged from moving into more suitable sheltered accommodation. A suggestion was submitted to highlight these costs separately within the accounts, to enable monitoring to take place.

RESOLVED:-

That Members approve the proposed eligibility criteria change for Transitional Protection in respect of charges made for sheltered housing services.

HCS/41. **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 as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that there would be disclosed exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of the Schedule 12A of the Act indicated in brackets after each item.

MINUTES

The Exempt Minutes of the Meeting held on 17th July 2003 were received.

GAS SERVICING AND MAINTENANCE CONTRACT (Paragraph 8/9)

The Committee approved a tendering and contract appointment process for the servicing and maintenance of gas appliances.

R. W. SOUTHERN

CHAIR