



## CABINET

5pm to 5:45pm

17 April 2013

Present: Councillors Arthur (chair), Waters (vice chair), Bremner, Brociek-Coulton, Driver, Gihawi and MacDonald

Also present: Councillor Stephenson

### 1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

### 2. PUBLIC QUESTIONS / PETITIONS

One petition was received in relation to the proposed sale of Train Wood by Norfolk County Council. A representative of the Friends of Norwich City Station, Mr Stuart McPherson, introduced the petition:

“Thank you for accepting this petition today. At over 1,600 signatures I am told it is the largest you have had here at City Hall.

It is not surprising that that it has a lot of support. Train Wood lies at the start of the Marriots Way and is a precious resource for the citizens of Norwich on many levels.

I am Mr Stuart McPherson, a representative of the Friends of Norwich City Station, and I know the area well, having worked there over many months restoring the railway heritage using the cycleway for commuting and for leisurely walks into the countryside.

But all sorts of other people also want this wood to remain in public hands: pensioners, young people, families, dog walkers, runners, joggers, cyclists, commuters, train history enthusiasts, bird watchers, local residents and conservationists.

They are very concerned that if this short-sighted county plan goes ahead, and it is sold to the highest bidder in May, the wood could end up badly maintained, fenced off, developed, or even sold on to speculators.

The wonderful railway heritage, riverside path, national cycleway and rich nature is at huge risk. The council will have to spend money chasing the maintenance and will lose control of the future enhancement of the area.

This is a key cycle and pedestrian route as well as being an historic and natural gem. The county council may be turning their backs on the people of Norwich, but we are asking the city council to step forward at this critical point.

This petition asks you to save Train Wood from being sold and the wording is as follows:

"We the undersigned call on Norfolk county and Norwich city councils to work together to ensure train wood stays in public ownership for the people of Norwich to use and enjoy."

Councillor Arthur and cabinet members, please do what you can to help. Thank you."

Councillor Waters, portfolio holder for resources, provided a response:

"Thank you for your petition. I want to make three main points. The first point: whoever owns Train Wood in the future (assuming someone wants to buy it) it will still be available to the people of Norwich and those who live outside the city, to use and enjoy.

This is because there are strict conditions on its use and the character of the land has a number of constraints.

It's protected by -

- The woodland policy
- It's in a functional flood plain
- It's in the River Valley Environmental asset area
- It's a site of nature reservation being designated as a County Wildlife Site
- It's in a main area of archaeological interest
- It's a publicly accessible open space.

So should there be a change of ownership of Train Wood – the County Council has stated that community interest groups have expressed an interest and they may be able to attract funding not normally available to local authorities - it will still be there for the continued free use of Marriott's Way for the enjoyment of walkers, cyclists and horse riders. So, the important factor in all of this is not about public ownership but about the preservation of the site's biodiversity which can be done through the right conditions being put on the sale.

My second point relates to cost -

It is estimated that the costs of basic maintenance to the site would be around £1,500 per year. In the next 10 -15 years many of the trees will come to the end of their natural lives. So there is likely to be a need for a major investment in tree works at that time.

I need to set this in the context of the wider position of our budget. The city council is facing budget reductions over the next four years of at least £8million on top of the £20 million already taken out of our budgets since 2008. We cannot afford additional financial pressures which would arise should we take from the County Council responsibilities for maintaining Train Wood.

This links directly to my third point – about the investment and commitments we already have in maintaining a wide range of green spaces and facilities throughout the city.

On average we cut over 5.5 million square metres of grass every two/three weeks during the growing period and maintain 23 formal parks, over 50 natural areas (including woodland and marshland habitats), 84 play areas, 12 football pitches, 9 bowling greens, 3 cricket squares, 14 games courts, 10 grass tennis courts, 15 hard courts, 1 putting greens and 2 pitch & putt courses. In all, we maintain over 1,200 locations across the City; not forgetting 74.5 hectares at Mousehold Heath and 1450 Allotment plots.

Our first priority as a council, in very straightened times, is to ensure that we have the resources to maintain the assets that we hold as a council “for the people of Norwich to use and enjoy”.

### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **4. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2013.

### **5. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2012 - 13 – PERIOD 11**

Councillor Waters, deputy leader, introduced the report.

In response to a members question, he clarified that the approximate £9M under spend mentioned in the report resulted from a delay in works being carried out. He stated that this could be made clearer in future reports.

**RESOLVED** to note the financial position as at 28 February 2013 and the forecast outturn 2012- 13.

## 6. DISABLED AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS POLICY

Councillor MacDonald, portfolio holder for housing, introduced the report.

In response to a member's question, she explained that there were a number of complex issues surrounding the use, storage and charging of mobility scooters. She said that a separate policy, designed specifically to address the needs and practicalities around mobility scooters, would be brought before cabinet later in the year.

**RESOLVED** to approve the disabled aids and adaptations policy for tenants of Norwich City Council as shown in appendix 1 of the report.

## 7. 'CYCLE CITY AMBITION GRANT'

Councillor Bremner, portfolio holder for environment and development, introduced the report.

In response to a member's question, the head of city development services explained that the choice of which line on the cycle route to develop would be tied to the City Deal work. He said it made sense to focus the investment on the Norwich Research Park area and the area of potential growth at Rackheath. He stated that the route was already well used and as such offered great potential to further develop the rate of cycling within Norwich.

**RESOLVED** to:-

- (1) support the bid being made to the Department for Transport to bid for a Cycle City Ambition Grant (subject to securing the required match funding); and,
- (2) delegate authority to the deputy chief executive (in consultation with the portfolio holder for environment and development) to submit an application to the Department for Transport for a Cycle City Ambition Grant.

## 8. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

**RESOLVED** to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of item \*12 on the grounds contained in the relevant paragraphs of schedule 12a of the local government act 1972 (as amended).

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## \*9. IMPLEMENTING THE COUNCIL'S NEIGHBOURHOOD MODEL

Councillor Driver, portfolio holder for environment and neighbourhoods, introduced the report.

The head of local neighbourhood services explained that staff involved and Unison had been briefed about the potential changes and that the formal consultation period had started.

**RESOLVED to:-**

- (1) endorse the proposed changes to the council's neighbourhood working model which will enhance the effectiveness of a number of front line services;
- (2) approve the establishment and disestablishment of the posts detailed in the report; and,
- (3) to delegate any required budget adjustments to the deputy chief executive (operations).

**\*10. GOLDSMITH STREET REDEVELOPMENT**

Councillor MacDonald, portfolio holder for housing, introduced the report.

In response to a member's question, she explained that the £11M to fund the redevelopment came from the re-financing of the housing revenue account and that the proposed housing mix on the site would be confirmed as the project moved forward. She also said that, although the report was relatively short, it represented the opportunity to exploring spending the £11M, rather than committing to it at this stage. A more detailed report would be bought before cabinet when that time came.

The head of city development services said that the proposal would end the relationship with the development partner of the site and that this gave the council opportunities to work up new plans.

**RESOLVED to:-**

- (1) approve the construction of up to 100 new dwellings on land at Goldsmith Street subject to planning consent and approval of a full business case, at an estimated cost of £11,000,000;
- (2) note the development costs incurred to date will no longer be recovered through a land sale;
- (3) instruct officers to prepare a business plan for cabinet's approval to determine dwelling numbers, costings, and the most appropriate property and tenure mix to ensure the viability of the development; and,
- (4) agree in principle to recommend to council the inclusion of £11,000,000 in the capital plan and programme (subject to approval of the business case).

**\*11. MANAGING ASSETS**

Councillor Waters, deputy leader, introduced the report.

**RESOLVED** to approve the disposal of land at Bull Close and land adjacent to Timberhill, in accordance with the terms set out in the report.

**\*12. MANAGING HOUSING ASSETS**

Councillor MacDonald, portfolio holder for housing, introduced the report.

**RESOLVED** to:-

- (1) approve the purchase of the dwellings highlighted in this report under the mortgage rescue scheme; and,
- (2) instruct the deputy chief executive (operations) to take all necessary and ancillary steps to achieve the above (including the funding to be used in the purchase of the mortgage rescue property).

CHAIR