



MOUSEHOLD HEATH CONSERVATORS

2.00 p.m. – 3.50 p.m.

14 January 2011

Present: Councillors Bradford, Bremner, Collishaw, Lay, Little, Mrs M Bush and Mr C Southgate

Also Present: A member of the public was also in attendance

Apologies: Councillors Brociek-Coulton and Grahame and Mr M Davies

1. NOMINATION OF CHAIR FOR PART OF THE MEETING

In the absence of the chair, Mr Chris Southgate, conservator, was nominated as Chair for the initial part of the meeting:-

RESOLVED to nominate Mr Chris Southgate as Chair for the initial part of the meeting.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2010, subject to an amendment to the fifth paragraph in item 5 to read 'They would take a percentage of the cuts. The exact percentage of such cuts could be based on the government information on the revenue support grant once released and the conservators judgement of their priorities.'

3. PUBLIC QUESTION

Request permission for a plaque on a picnic bench

A member, on behalf of Ms Gill Webb, Secretary of the mousehold heath defenders, said that the mousehold heath defenders would like to thank Paul Holley for his assistance with the placing of a picnic bench at the picnic area near to Zaks. She asked for their appreciation to be passed on to the contractors and whether the bench could be marked with a plaque.

RESOLVED to ask the mousehold heath sub-group to review the request for a plaque.

4. BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2011/12

Mark Smith, Finance control manager, presented the report and took members through the two budget setting options.

Bob Cronk, the head of local neighbourhood services reminded members that he had provided an overview of the budget setting process at the previous meeting. A large proportion of the budget was fixed and the existing staff posts were considered to be of high value. Therefore, potential reductions were identified in just two areas 1) day works and 2) day-to-day repair works, which had been reflected in the two options presented for consideration. Members were informed that these were historical budget titles and that future budget documents would be presented to members with amended budget headings.

Option one would make a contribution towards the council's overall savings through a reduction in the day-to-day repairs budget by £9,000 and day works budget by £3,000. The reduction could be managed through the work programme and the public would not see a physical difference in service provision. An example of day-to-day repairs would be the discretionary works carried out such as the repair of bollards in car parks, resurfacing of car parks and repair work to fencing. A reduction in the budget in this area could result in less repairs taking place throughout the year. A report on the contractor's performance would be presented at a future meeting in June 2011, where members would be able to challenge service delivery and the flexibility within the contract.

Option two considered an increase in the precept by 3.45%.

In response to a question, the finance control manager explained that any under-spend in the budget would roll forward into the next financial year and that a contingency budget had not been identified. Members were informed that the financial risks were the responsibility of the council and would form part of the council wide risk management strategy. For example if emergency repairs were required, the council would need to access its reserves. In terms of good practice, the conservators should be aware of the risks and the head of local neighbourhood services would produce a report for consideration at the next meeting.

(Councillor Bradford joined the meeting at this point and resumed the role of Chair)

In response to members' questions regarding access to other grants, Paul Holley, natural areas officer, informed the conservators that he had recently attended a positive meeting with the local Forestry Commission office regarding funding from the Woodland Grant Scheme. The Higher Level Stewardship Scheme and various lottery funds were also being investigated. He also informed members that the mousehold heath defenders had previously been successful in accessing small grants and that the conservators might wish to consider working with the defenders to access funding otherwise unobtainable by the city council. For example, lottery funding of £50,000 for Marston Marshes had been applied for by a local residents association working in partnership with the city council.

In response to members' questions regarding the reduced level of sports provision and the poor standard of some facilities, the head of local neighbourhood services said that there had been a reduction in the council's budget during the last round of

efficiency savings. He advised against re-establishing football pitches due to the cost of maintenance and the apparent decline in usage. A member suggested that obtaining a sports grant could help to develop some of the sites, reducing anti-social behaviour and making better use of the recreation space.

(Councillor Bremner retired from the meeting at this point)

Chris Southgate proposed that budget option one would show that the conservators were willing to assist the council to achieve its savings. Councillor Little said that he generally supported the proposal and that the conservators were in a position to choose option one for the financial year 2011-12. He said that flexibility should be built into the contracts for future years.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) approve the precept for the mousehold heath conservators budget for 2011/12 as set out in option one; and
- (2) ask the head of local neighbourhood services to produce a financial risk report for consideration at the next meeting.

5. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12

The natural areas officer presented the proposed annual work programme which was prepared in light of the reduced budget. The affect of any reduction in the budget would be reduced due to the increased involvement of volunteers, having an additional warden to the area since 2008 and increased value for money through the new contractor.

Areas of BMX activity were being monitored on the heath and an options paper considering allowing BMX activity on a permanent basis, would be presented to the conservators at a future meeting.

Members proposed that work on the heath-land areas should be a priority one on the work programme due to the importance of encouraging heath-land regeneration. It could potentially cease to exist if not managed.

Members were informed that the safety work around the woodlands was also a priority, to ensure that the woods were in a suitable condition to cope with stormy weather. A management plan would be developed for the whole area, which could then be used to apply for further funding. With regard to visitor management, a specialist would be required for the geological interpretation, however revised interpretation boards should be achievable during 2011. It was proposed that the same level of events would continue to be delivered, with the desire to maintain and potentially improve the quality of the walks.

A member said that the continued surveying, collation and reporting of information regarding the plants and animals could be used to promote the heath. The natural areas officer said that articles relating to mousehold heath had been published in the citizen magazine and that another article was planned for June 2011. He said that production of an illustrated report would be a useful tool and could be used to increase the level of income to the heath. In response to a member's question, he

said that a mousehold heath pamphlet for visitors to Norwich did exist and was available at libraries and tourist information centres.

(Councillor Collishaw retired from the meeting at this point)

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) approve the annual work programme subject to re-prioritising the 'habitat management – heath' actions to priority level one; and
- (2) ask the natural areas officer to provide an aerial map of the heath to Margaret Bush.

6. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED to approve and note the dates of future meetings as follows:-

- Friday 11 March 2011 at 2.00pm
- Friday 24 June 2011 at 2.00pm
- Friday 7 October 2011 at 2.00pm
- Friday 13 January 2012 at 2.00pm
- Friday 30 March 2012 at 2.00pm

CHAIR