



Woodley Town Council
The Oakwood Centre
Headley Road
Woodley
Berkshire RG5 4JZ

To: **Members of the Strategy & Resources Committee**

Councillors K. Baker (Chairman); P. Challis; J. Cheng; K. Haines; L. Hayward;
C. Lawley; D. Mills; S. Outen; E. Rowland

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that an extraordinary meeting of the Strategy & Resources Committee will be held at the Oakwood Centre at 4.00 pm on Wednesday 26 March 2014, at which your attendance is requested.

Deborah Mander
Town Clerk

AGENDA

1. **APOLOGIES**
2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**
To receive any declarations of interest from Members relating to the business of the meeting.
3. **BULMERSHE LEISURE CENTRE**
To consider **Report No. SR 10/14.** Page 3
4. **PUBLIC TOILETS WORKING PARTY**
To consider **Report No. SR 11/14.** Page 13

Extraordinary meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee to be held on 26 March 2014 at 4.00 pm.

Additional Item

Agenda Item 5: WAR MEMORIAL AND CIVIC SPACE – FUNDING
To consider **Report No. SR 12/14.**

Woodley Town Council

BULMERSHE LEISURE CENTRE

REPORT OF THE TOWN CLERK

Purpose of Report

To inform Members of the proposal from Wokingham Borough Council that the Council consider entering into negotiations on terms for an early surrender of the lease on Bulmershe Leisure Centre.

Background

The Town Council has managed the leisure centre area of the building since 1995 under a lease agreed with the then Berkshire County Council, continued with its successor, Wokingham Borough Council. This followed a refurbishment of the leisure facilities funded jointly by the County Council, Wokingham District Council and the Town Council.

The Lease includes the following main terms for the Town Council:

- to make the centre available for the use of Bulmershe School in term time – for which a set percentage of specific budget spending is recharged to the education authority
- to provide utility services and cleaning to the upstairs area (formerly run by Wokingham BC as a youth and community centre) for a which a sum, increased by the Retail Price Index each year, is charged to Wokingham BC
- to make the sports hall available to the youth centre (formerly based upstairs) for a set number of hours a week for which a charge, increased by the Retail Price Index is payable by Wokingham BC
- to maintain the premises, carrying out internal repairs, redecoration etc – Wokingham BC to be responsible for the building envelope for which the Town Council is liable for a 'due and fair' proportion of any repair cost

The Council also has a lease agreement over the same period for the bungalow next to the centre which the leisure centre lease only allows staff employed at the centre to occupy.

The 20 year leases come to an end on 26 March 2015.

Information

The attached report (**Appendix A**) was considered and agreed by the Executive at Wokingham Borough Council on 30 January 2014. Although the report has not correctly represented this Council's position (a written apology for this has since been received), underpinning the report is a proposal that the Town Council be offered an early surrender of the lease.

The Wokingham Borough Council Executive decisions were:

1. C-Salt/Leisure Connection take over the operation of Bulmershe Leisure Centre from Woodley Town council
2. The takeover be effective from April 2014, subject to detailed negotiations, or as soon as possible after that date.
3. The issue of building dilapidations be the subject of ongoing discussions between the Borough Council and Woodley Town Council.

Stuart Rowbotham, Director of Health and Wellbeing at the Borough Council has written to the Council setting out the decisions of the Executive and asking that the Town Council consider the

principle of entering into negotiations on the early surrender of the lease. (**Appendix B**). Agreement to the final terms of such an arrangement would be presented for approval to this Committee.

The key issues for negotiation would be:

Dilapidations – what may be due in the circumstances and under the lease terms. Legal advice will be required and, if the Council agrees to negotiations being conducted, it is proposed that this be sought from an experienced property solicitor with local government experience.

Employees – the arrangements that need to be in place for such a transfer and the terms. Peninsula is able to advise the Council on this matter within its existing contract for human resources support.

Handover arrangements – including administrative and bookings arrangements, customer information, transfer of some activities to other venues, contract arrangements/transfers, financial records.

Timing – any handover and staff transfer arrangements would benefit from there being an agreed target date for any handover between the parties.

All of these issues will require to be addressed when the lease is up. Early surrender brings forward the date by which negotiations would need to be concluded.

Resources

Legal advice costs in respect of dilapidations/lease terms will be required. It is not possible to estimate the potential costs at this point. While human resources advice will be provided under the Council's existing arrangements it is possible that some other specialist advice may be required, again this cannot be costed at present.

Considerable staff time on negotiations and any handover process will be required from the following officers; Town Clerk, Service Support Manager, Leisure Services Manager, admin staff at both leisure centres, Finance Officer and Maintenance Manager.

It is also possible that additional time from the Council's accountant/internal auditor will be required during any handover process.

Most of the above resource costs will be required this year, whether or not the lease is surrendered early or at full term on 26 March 2015.

Other implications

An early surrender of the lease may enable the council's withdrawal of the management of the centre to be a more considered and planned process than might be the case if this is started later on this year to meet the end date of the lease, 26 March 2015. This may also prevent a possible customer/staff drift which could impact the centre's ability to maintain the quality and level of existing services as well as income.

It is not known, as yet, what any final dilapidations costs may be due and more specific advice on this is required. If the Borough Council plans to demolish the centre and build a new facility dilapidations would not normally be due; if a refurbishment was planned low liability could also be argued, depending on the extent of the refurbishment. The Borough Council is reviewing its leisure strategy and the options being considered for centre's future will be part of that review. This being the case, it is possible that final agreement on this matter may not be able to be reached for some time. However, early discussions in the context of this initiative from Wokingham Borough Council would give the Council time to consider the advice it receives and may strengthen its position on the matter of dilapidations.

Importantly, an agreement in place on the immediate future arrangements for the centre before the lease ends will ensure that the public and local schools, in particular Bulmershe School, will continue to have access to local leisure facilities, going forward.

There are likely to be activities that will no longer be part of the programme of sports at the centre following a handover and effort will be required to transfer these to another venue, where possible, also with the potential of having to rearrange existing hirers' bookings, depending on circumstances.

Proposed negotiation arrangements

Should the Council agree to enter into negotiations on the terms of an early surrender of the lease in respect of Bulmershe Leisure Centre it is proposed that these be conducted by the Town Clerk, Service Support Manager and the Leisure Services Manager, with ongoing reference to the Leadership.

Proposed terms for consideration

Within the terms to be discussed it is proposed these would include:

- Setting a realistic date for any handover to work to.
- As far as possible, ensure arrangements for hirers, customers and schools are protected.
- Protect the rights of staff in any transfer to a new employer.

Dilapidations negotiations will require legal advice, yet to be commissioned.

Recommendation:

- ◆ **That Members consider entering into negotiations on the terms for an early surrender of the lease on Bulmershe Leisure Centre in line with the proposals set out in the report.**

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| TITLE | Bulmershe Leisure Centre |
| FOR CONSIDERATION BY | Executive on 30 January 2014 |
| WARD | Bulmershe and Whitegates, Coronation, Loddon and South Lake |
| DIRECTOR | Stuart Rowbotham, Director of Health and Wellbeing |
| LEAD MEMBER | Angus Ross, Executive Member for Environment |

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Bulmershe Leisure Centre is an important local facility for the residents of Woodley. The centre requires investment to bring it up to a modern standard in order to support delivery of the Council's Vision and the borough-wide Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The strategic outcome is the delivery of 21st century sport and leisure facilities for residents of Woodley and the wider area within limited financial resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive:

- 1) agrees that C-Salt/Leisure Connection take over the operation of Bulmershe Leisure Centre from Woodley Town Council;
- 2) agrees that the takeover be effective from April 2014, subject to detailed negotiations, or as soon as possible after that date;
- 3) agrees that the issue of building dilapidations be the subject of ongoing discussions between the Borough Council and Woodley Town Council.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Bulmershe Leisure Centre is a 1970's leisure facility which is owned by the Borough Council and has been operated under lease by Woodley Town Council since 1995. The current lease ends in March 2015. The centre is a dual use facility which is used extensively by Bulmershe Secondary School and by local primary schools. It also currently hosts daytime activities for the Learning Disability Day Service (run by Optalis) and is used by a number of external hirers.

At its meeting on 31 October 2013 the Executive agreed a 3 year extension of the borough-wide leisure management contract with C-Salt/Leisure Connection. As part of the discussions on the contract extension C-Salt/Leisure Connection indicated a willingness to take on the running of Bulmershe Leisure Centre. At the same time Woodley Town Council indicated a willingness to surrender the current lease a year early which means that C-Salt/Leisure Connection could take over from April 2014.

Moving to this new arrangement would bring all the Borough Council's leisure facilities (Loddon Valley, Carnival Pool, St Crispins and Bulmershe) under the same

management and which would enable a more consistent approach in terms of marketing and membership offers.

If the new arrangement is approved the issue of dilapidations would be the subject of ongoing discussions between the Borough Council and Woodley Town Council. Dilapidations are the "exit costs" to the tenant of putting a property (in this case the leisure centre) into a fit state for handing back in line with the repairing clause(s) in the lease. The dilapidations issue would be influenced by strategic decisions on the future modernisation of the leisure centre.

At its meeting on 31 October 2013 the Executive noted that a key factor in extending the leisure management contract was the need to address a number of strategic leisure issues including:

- Bulmershe Leisure Centre
- Wokingham Town Centre – Carnival Pool Leisure Quarter
- Ryeish Green Leisure Centre
- Other Strategic Development Location (SDL) Leisure Facilities.

In order to address these issues work has commenced on the development of a Leisure Facilities Strategy for the borough. This strategy will assess local needs and recommend investment into the various sites to ensure that new or improved facilities are in the correct location and provide the correct facility mix to deliver the Council's Vision and strategic outcomes.

The Leisure Facilities Strategy will examine the modernisation options for Bulmershe Leisure Centre. The main options are refurbishment on the current building footprint, refurbishment with appropriate building extensions or demolition and new build. Each of the options has service and financial implications which will be analysed to identify the solution which delivers a modernised facility within the tight financial constraints facing the Council. The modernisation proposals will be the subject of consultation with the local community, leisure centre users and other key stakeholders.

Background

Bulmershe Leisure Centre was opened in 1971. The leisure centre has been managed (since 1995) by Woodley Town Council on a lease from the Borough Council which expires in March 2015. The leisure centre provides the following facilities/services:

- 25 metre, 5 lane swimming pool - swimming lessons, swimming clubs (including Bracknell and Wokingham Swimming Club), swimming parties training courses and water-based activities
- 4 court Sports Hall – badminton, netball, basketball, cricket and football
- Small Hall – suitable for smaller groups and activities such as aerobics and judo
- Offices, meeting rooms and activity area on the first floor
- Car parking spaces for approximately 40 vehicles
- There is a bungalow on the site which is currently used by a member of staff at the leisure centre.

The leisure centre is used extensively by Bulmershe Secondary School and hosts a number of activities including the Learning Disability Day Service (delivered by Optalis).

Reading Vineyard Church, a Pilates fitness group on Monday evening and Zumba for young people on Tuesday evening. The Thames Valley Police Schools Officer also has an office on the first floor.

Bulmershe Leisure Centre is sited close to the new entrance to Bulmershe Secondary School. WBC is currently investing £6m in the school including a complete re-design of the entrance. It is important that a suitable leisure centre complements the school, in terms of physical appearance and service delivery. The school has its own small fitness suite and 2 large spaces used for drama classes, but is reliant on the leisure centre for the delivery of indoor sport and physical activity.

Management of the Leisure Centre

Woodley Town Council has indicated that it would like to give up the Bulmershe lease before March 2015. In the meantime, the main leisure management contract for the Borough has been extended until May 2018.

Incorporating Bulmershe into the main leisure management contract will mean that all the Council's facilities are under the same management. This will allow a more consistent approach in terms of marketing, advertising and the development of special offers for users of the facilities. C-Salt/Leisure Connection will also bring the benefits of a major leisure provider with extensive knowledge of the leisure market.

Transferring the management of Bulmershe Leisure Centre to C-Salt/Leisure Connection would follow the process of a business transfer or the outsourcing of a service, but it is made more complicated by the involvement of two Councils in the process. In effect there are two processes happening at the same time:

- Early surrender of the lease by Woodley Town Council. Items to be considered include dilapidations to be reimbursed under the lease; transfer of contractual liabilities, etc.
- Outsourcing of Bulmershe Leisure Centre management by Wokingham Borough Council. Items to be considered include legal agreement to include Bulmershe in the leisure management contract; transfer of staff under TUPE; transfer of contractual commitments; customer contracts; and outstanding liabilities.

Dilapidations

Dilapidations are the "exit costs" to the tenant of putting the property into a fit state for handing back in line with the repairing clause(s) in the lease. The level of dilapidations can be limited by Section 18 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1927.

The issue of dilapidations at Bulmershe is linked to the strategic decisions on the future modernisation of the leisure centre.

If the Executive agrees to a new management arrangement, it is proposed that discussions continue with Woodley Town Council to ensure that the leisure centre is handed over in a reasonable state and that the longer term dilapidations issues are kept under review.

Leisure Facilities Strategy

A key factor in the decision to extend the existing borough-wide leisure management contract for 3 years (up to 2018) was the need to address a number of strategic leisure issues before retendering a long term contract or considering other management options. The issues pertinent to Bulmershe Leisure Centre are:

- All modernisation options will be considered including refurbishment on the existing building footprint.

In order to take these issues forward, work has commenced on the development of a borough-wide Leisure Facilities Strategy. This will build on the findings of the Open Space, Sports and Recreation Audit and Strategy (2013) to identify the best leisure facilities mix for the borough.

The Leisure Facilities Strategy will examine:

- Current leisure facilities and services
- Benchmarking of current facility performance
- Impact of population growth (including SDLs)
- New facility requirements and proposed allocations
- Cost and income projections for new and existing facilities
- Capital investment and financial modelling.

The proposals in the strategy (including Bulmershe Leisure Centre) will be the subject of consultation with local communities, leisure centre users and key local stakeholders (Town and Parish Councils, schools and user groups).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

| | How much will it Cost/ (Save) | Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall | Revenue or Capital? |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|---------------------|
| Current Financial Year (Year 1) | £0 | NA | NA |
| Next Financial Year (Year 2) | Depends on modernisation option chosen | TBC | Capital |
| Following Financial Year (Year 3) | Depends on modernisation option chosen | TBC | Capital |

| |
|--|
| Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision |
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- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The financial risks relating to the early surrender of the lease and dilapidations issues will be the subject of ongoing discussions between the Borough Council, Woodley Town Council and C-Salt/Leisure Connection.• Detailed financial implications relating to the modernisation of the leisure centre will be considered in the borough-wide Leisure Facilities Strategy.• New development in the four SDLs and Woodley will generate additional S106 for indoor leisure facilities and swimming pool improvements. |
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| Cross-Council Implications |
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| Links to Health and Wellbeing and Children's Services. |
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| List of Background Papers |
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| WBC Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013 |
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| Contact Neil Carr | Service Environment |
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| | |
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| Telephone No 0118 9746349 | Email neil.carr@wokingham.gov.uk |
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| | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Date 20 January 2014 | Version No. 2 |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|

Appendix B

Tel: 0118 974 6762(Direct Line)
Email: stuart.rowbotham@wokingham.gov.uk
Fax: 0118 974 6135
Date: 18 February 2014
My ref: SR/te
Your ref:
File ref:

Woodley Town Council

24 FEB 2014



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Deborah Mander
Town Clerk
Woodley Town Council
The Oakwood Centre
Headley Road
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Woodley Town Council

24 FEB 2014

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Dear Deborah,

BULMERSHE LEISURE CENTRE

Further to your letter of 12 February 2014 addressed to Andy Couldrick, I am writing to set out the Council's position.

Firstly, please accept my apologies for any misunderstanding on this issue. Borough Council officers understood that the Town Council would consider a report on Bulmershe at the Strategy and Resources Committee on 4 February 2014. The expectation was that both Councils would agree to the early surrender of the Bulmershe lease in principle subject to detailed negotiations and final ratification by the Town Council. Clearly this did not happen. I hope, however, that we can work together to recover the position and reach a satisfactory conclusion.

As you are aware, the Borough Council's Executive considered a report at its meeting on 30 January 2014. The report noted that the current lease with Woodley Town Council was due to expire in March 2015 and considered the potential benefits of an early surrender of the lease. The Executive resolved as follows:

1. That C/Salt/Leisure Connection take over the operation of Bulmershe Leisure Centre from Woodley Town Council;
2. That the takeover be effective from April 2014, subject to detailed negotiations, or as soon as possible after that date;
3. That the issue of building dilapidations be the subject of ongoing discussions between the Borough Council and Woodley Town Council.

As discussed above, in order to progress the Executive's decision I would be grateful if you could facilitate a similar discussion at the Town Council's Strategy and Resources Committee or other appropriate decision making body.

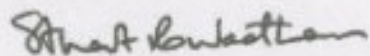
As you are aware, there are a number of detailed issues which will require negotiation before a final agreement is reached. These include the transfer of staff (TUPE), the future of current leisure centre hirers, dilapidations and the ongoing arrangements with Bulmershe Secondary School.



Initially, however, it may be useful if Town Council Members receive a high level report which seeks agreement to the principle of negotiations on the early surrender of the lease. This will enable us to progress the negotiations before a second, more detailed report, is submitted with details of the final proposed agreement.

I hope you agree that this is a sensible way forward. Please let me know if I can provide any more clarification or information. I acknowledge your point regarding liaison prior to any media release and I will ensure we collaborate in future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stuart Rowbotham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Stuart Rowbotham

Director, Health & Wellbeing

Report of a meeting of the Public Toilets Working Party held at the Oakwood Centre on Thursday 20 February 2014 at 4pm

Present: *Councillors M. Holmes (Chairman), L. Hayward, E. Rowland*

Also present: *Councillor K. Baker*

Officers: *D. Mander, Town Clerk, J. Lherbier, Town Centre Manager*

Apologies: *Councillor K. Haines*

1. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2013 were agreed as a correct record.

3. **PUBLIC TOILETS**

3.1 Potential sites consultation

Members noted the results of the consultation that had taken place in the town centre in November 2013 and afterwards on the website. Of the 336 people who responded, 325 supported the provision of a public toilet in the centre and 5 did not. Only a small number of people had given a preference for the site by the Chequers car park and it was generally agreed that this would not be a suitable place for the toilet given the plans the Town Centre Management Initiative was developing to improve that part of the town centre.

The site in the town centre, where the existing mushroom is, received the highest votes, 166, with the site next to Waitrose, in the car park, receiving 121 votes.

In response to the question on preferred charges for the toilet 209 said 20p, with 64 preferring there to be no charge. The full results are attached to this report at **Appendix A**.

It was noted that there were advantages and disadvantages to the sites in the middle of the centre and the car park and that the Manager at Waitrose had responded to the Town Centre Manager expressing concerns at a toilet being placed next to the supermarket.

3.2 Information from Danfo and Healthmatic

This was noted and it was confirmed that the working party continued to support a stainless steel/modern design.

3.3 Invitation to tender

It was noted that as the likely cost of the toilet would be above £50,000 a tender process would be required under the Council's financial regulations. The Town Clerk would seek advice on producing an invitation to tender document for this purpose and would include the following requirements in the specification:

- Costs for a single and double stand alone toilet – fully accessible and DDA compliant in stainless steel/modern design
- The toilet to be fully or semi automatic (prices to be supplied for both types where available)
- Maintenance requirements and costs
- Any requirement in terms of consumables
- Estimated running costs for fuel and water
- Also to seek information on radar key access and baby changing facilities

Members also agreed that there may be further matters that would need to be included in the invitation to tender documents and agreed that the Town Clerk add these as necessary.

Also Cllr Baker confirmed that £100,000 Section 106 money had been allocated for the project and should soon be available. It was noted that, if not all the funds allocated were required, the Council could seek permission from the Borough Council for this to be transferred to another project.

RECOMMENDED:

- ◆ **That a tender process for the provision and installation of a public toilet at the town centre, as proposed in the report, be undertaken.**

Meeting closed at 5.10pm

Appendix A

Public Toilet Consultation - Summary of Results

| | Best Location | | | In favour? | | Preferred Charge | | | | |
|----------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| | A | B | C | Yes | No | 20p | 30p | 50p | £1 | Free |
| Thursday 7 Nov | 9 | 17 | 23 | 50 | 2 | 31 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 13 |
| Friday 8 Nov | 4 | 43 | 25 | 72 | 0 | 38 | 12 | 5 | 0 | 22 |
| Saturday 9 Nov | 12 | 44 | 28 | 83 | 3 | 60 | 5 | 8 | 0 | 8 |
| Sunday 10 Nov | 15 | 61 | 45 | 118 | 0 | 78 | 11 | 5 | 0 | 21 |
| Website | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | <u>41</u> | <u>166</u> | <u>121</u> | <u>325</u> | <u>5</u> | <u>209</u> | <u>32</u> | <u>23</u> | <u>0</u> | <u>64</u> |

Total number of respondents = 336
(Some respondents did not answer all the questions)

WAR MEMORIAL AND CIVIC SPACE - FUNDING

REPORT OF THE TOWN CLERK

Purpose of Report

To seek approval to allocate general reserve funds of £55,400 to fund the installation costs of the civic space in which the new war memorial will sit until Section 106 funds of £68,000, to cover the design and installation costs and approved by Wokingham Borough for these purposes are paid to the Council.

Background

The Council is working with the Woodley War Memorial Project (WWMP) group to provide the site and civic space for a public war memorial in Woodley. The Woodley War Memorial Project group is raising funds towards the costs of the memorial and is hopeful that the full amount required will be achieved.

The Council has allocated £12,600 of funds from the Special Projects earmarked reserve to fund the design, tender process and installation management of the civic space and has made an application to Wokingham Borough Council for Section 106 funds to cover the costs of these and the installation of the civic space, in total £68,000. The war memorial will sit on the Headley Road side of the Memorial Ground, between the Oakwood Centre and Coronation Hall and officers have been delegated to progress the project in liaison with the Chairman of the WWMP groups and the two Council Member representatives on that group.

Information

On 25 March 2014 the Resources Manager at Wokingham Borough Council informed the Council that the requested funding of £68,000 from Section 106 monies had been approved. The funds allocated are part of the £200,000 Section 106 funds agreed in respect of the development at Sandford Farm. However, payment is dependent on certain milestones being achieved at the development and it is not known when these will be reached at this point.

The Council and the WWMP group are aiming to install the memorial in June, in good time for the nationwide commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War. Given the uncertain timing of the Section 106 funds being made available and the time constraints to meet the aimed for deadline, it is proposed that the Council fund the cost of the installation, estimated to be £55,400, from its general reserve and that this reserve and the Special Projects earmarked reserve both be reimbursed once the Section 106 funds of £68,000 are paid over.

Resources

The Council will have sufficient funds available to fund this expense. It may mean that there are lower funds available to place in a fixed short term deposit, with lower income from the interest payable, although interest payable on these kind of deposits are presently around 0.6%. This will depend on when the Section 106 funds are paid to the Council. The Council will benefit from the costs of £12,600 it had committed from the Special Projects earmarked reserve for the design, tender process and installation management now being met by the Section 106 funding agreed by the Borough Council.

Recommendation:

- ◆ **That Members approve the allocation of funds of up to £55,400 from the general reserve to fund the installation costs for the civic space in which the war memorial will sit and that, on receipt of the Section 106 funds of £68,000, these be allocated to refund the general reserve and the Special Projects earmarked reserve accordingly.**

Written submission from Cllr P. Challis to the Extraordinary Strategy and Resources Committee meeting on 26/3/14 - Agenda Item 3 – Bulmershe Leisure Centre

The Pre-emptive decision by Wokingham Borough Council

The fact that the WBC Executive made a decision on the future of the a Woodley Town Council managed facility before this had been discussed by any town council committee shows a total contempt for the town council and the need for the borough and parishes to work in partnership.

This Council sent a letter to WBC (see appendix) on 11th Feb and received the reply included with the agenda.

I think that the WBC response exposes that the major problem may lie with dual-hatted members inadvertently bypassing officer to officer communication

The letter says “Borough Council officers understood that the town council would consider a report on Bulmershe at the Strategy and Resources Committee on the 4th February”. I am quite confident that this advice to borough officers did not come from the town clerk.

Without assigning any blame, it is a natural consequence of Keith being on the Executive at the borough and Leader of Woodley Town Council that it is difficult for borough officers to recognise in what capacity he is speaking in bodies such as Executive briefings.

To avoid this council being embarrassed again, officers of both councils should only recognise decisions by the other council if and when they are communicated between officers - both councils need an audit trail for the future.

Even though Keith’s two positions mean that decisions in both councils can be communicated by him, I would contend that Borough/town council relationships will only work if there are correct and appropriate contact between the officers of the two councils and that all involved are aware of the special situation that Keith finds himself in. .

I propose that this council contacts Andy Couldrick and explains the need to maintain effective officer to officer communications in order to avoid similar problems in the future.

In this context I would like to bring members attention to the last paragraph of the report on the Toilet Working parting where it says “Also Cllr Baker confirmed that £100,000 Section106 had been allocated...” Our Town Council officers really must insist that such communication is confirmed by Wokingham Borough officers before acting on the information.

The Need for a Full Council decision

Although S&R may have delegated responsibility for leases this is one of the biggest decisions the town council are likely to make in the near future. I feel that is important that this decision is made by the Full Council following a recommendation from this committee.

There are many issues to consider that go beyond the simple transfer of a lease. There are considerations regarding

- Staff issues – transfer of staff
- The range of services being offered. The second paragraph on page 5 says “*There are likely to activities that will no longer be part of the programme of sports*”
- The impact on Woodford Park Leisure Centre.
- Budget implications

The town council is being pushed into taking this early decision by the pre-emptive nature of the borough council decision that they want to take over the operation from April this year.

This accelerated process means that we are being asked to make the decision in a S&R meeting at 4pm on a Wednesday. The impact of this is that we are disenfranchising many councillors

Why does this need to be effective from 2014

No logical reason has been put forward for the need to make this decision effective from April 2014 either from a WBC or a WTC perspective.

In the last paragraph of page 4 the report says “*An early surrender of the lease may enable the council’s withdrawal of the management of the centre to be a more considered and planned process...*” I find this to be a perverse statement – this process is neither considered nor planned – members are being “bounced” into decision.

By transferring the lease early we will lose all control and will have no influence over the transition negotiation or process.

In the absence of any information on tangible reasons why an early surrender is of benefit to both WBC and WTC...

I propose that this council takes the alternative approach of confirming its intent to withdraw from the lease at end of the lease to enable the transition to be truly considered and planned.

Setting our terms

I believe we need to say something about the terms of our early surrender.

- Continued provision of a swimming pool
- Continuation of Bulmershe Youth Club
- Maintenance of full range of sports until March 2015
- Prices maintained at WTC agreed levels for 2015/15
- Continued access to groups and clubs at agreed prices set by WTC for the year 2014/15

Budget provision

It is clear from the section entitled resources that there is a cost implication in this financial year.

I believe that members should be provided with estimates for loss of income and additional costs before they are asked to make this important decision.



Woodley Town Council

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Mr A. Couldrick
Chief Executive
Wokingham Borough Council
Shute End
Wokingham
RG40

11 February, 2014

Dear Andy

Bulmershe Leisure Centre - future

I am writing on behalf of the Council to tell you of the serious concerns expressed by Members about the way in which the Bulmershe Leisure Centre report to the Executive on 30 January and the subsequent press release were worded. Both imply that the Town Council had agreed to the proposals the Executive was discussing, which is not the case.

I believe that I have made it clear during confidential discussions about the centre's future that the Town Council would have to consider any proposals formally before any agreement could be reached. Two phrases in the report imply that the Town Council had already confirmed agreement:

In the summary it states '...Woodley Town Council has indicated a willingness to surrender the current lease a year early...'

Under the section entitled Management of the Centre it states "Woodley Town Council has indicated that it would like to give up the Bulmershe lease before March 2015."

The press release refers to C-Salt and the Town Council 'both supporting the management transfer in principle'.

Members of Council would like to understand how the documents came to be written with the indication that the Town Council had already agreed to the proposals. This situation has already led to concerns from staff and hasn't provided the best basis for Members to consider the centre's future.

A way to avoid future similar incidents on this matter would be for the Borough Council's public relations team to ensure I receive copies of all press releases which refer to the Town Council with the opportunity to amend inaccuracies. I hope this can be arranged and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Mander
Town Clerk

Town Clerk
Deborah Mander BA MA