

Present: Mayor, Councillor Mrs P A Phillips (presiding)
Deputy Mayor, Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin
Councillor M S Akehurst
Councillor J Bland
Councillor D Clenshaw
Councillor S J Gawrysiak
Councillor Miss K L Gehrman
Councillor W Hamilton
Councillor Miss L M Hillier
Councillor Ms L A Meachin
Councillor D R Nimmo Smith
Councillor I Reissmann
Councillor D M Silvester
Councillor Mrs J Wood

In Attendance: Mr M W Kennedy – Town Clerk

Also Present: 1 member of the press
7 members of the public

The Town Clerk explained the fire evacuation procedure.

27. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Miss S Evans and D Hinke.

28. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Miss K L Gehrman declared a personal interest as an acquaintance of Miss S Taylor, one of the interested parties in the proposal before the Council.

29. **STEPPING STONES NURSERY, LEICHLINGEN PAVILION**

Members had before them the report of the Town Clerk concerning the closure of the Stepping Stones Nursery on 15 August 2011. The Council considered the appointment of an alternative provider so that the existence of a nursery and after school club could be maintained.

Members were invited to give their opinion on the current and future use of the building. The following views were expressed:

- The pavilion building should not be used for commercial activities;
- The space could be better used for community purposes such as a festivals office/fund raising activities throughout the year;
- The building should be brought back into public use;
- A ten year commercial lease is too long, a 2 year lease with an option to continue would be preferable enabling the Council to explore other options;
- A Nursery was an ideal facility and provides a good use of the building and its existence should be reaffirmed;
- Who would take over the building if it is returned to public use; the town council or a community organisation?
- It would not be possible for the town council to profitably run the building;
- The location is ideal for a nursery adjacent to the children's play area;
- The building is set out as a nursery and should continue to be used as such;
- It would require a capital injection to convert the space for other uses:

- The Council benefits from rental income of £12,000pa;
- The Nursery provides a wonderful service for Henley families and therefore makes good community use of the building;
- A Nursery at the pavilion has served the community for many years. The Council should select one of the two prospective tenants based on the merits of their respective business plans;
- Closure of the nursery could drive up the cost of nursery provision elsewhere in the town;
- It is important that the nursery continues and that the matter be delegated to the Clerk with the proviso that the length of the lease be approved by the Legal Group;
- The Pavilion is the wrong building in the wrong place. The Council has struggled to find a sustainable community use for the building in the past;
- The Tony Lane Room was furnished and used as a community room but was underused and could not be used both as a nursery and for community purposes;
- The Council should advertise the premises for a month in the local newspaper instead of rushing into a decision;
- The absence of a Council 4 year plan has left the Clerk seeking a quick decision even though the previous administration had agreed a 10 year lease with Stepping Stones; and
- The Tony Lane Room is a non-functioning function room; it is disappointing that no new ideas have come forward for its use.

Clarification was sought on the cost of the Pavilion to the Council. The Clerk outlined the income generated from the Nursery including service charges plus the apportionment of electricity charges payable by the Nursery and Henley Bowls Club.

Concern was expressed as to whether the Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) could recover, in part or in total, the Early Years Capital Grant awarded to Bonham Carter Childcare Limited to enable essential refurbishment and alterations to the Nursery to take place. Members were reassured that OCC would not be pursuing this debt

Members considered that the length of the proposed lease should be reviewed. It was further suggested that an up to date valuation of the building be obtained. The Clerk explained that the District Valuer had in fact assessed the premises in August 2010.

Following a lengthy debate it was proposed that the Council endorses the continuation of the Tony Lane Room in the Leichlingen Pavilion for a Nursery School and After School Club and authorises the Town Clerk and the Legal Group to seek the best possible terms from those interested in providing this service.

An amendment to the motion was put that the opportunity be taken to advertise the premises in the Henley Standard. The motion was lost whereupon it was moved by Councillor Gawrysiak, seconded by Councillor Nimmo-Smith and

RESOLVED that the Council endorses the continuation of the Tony Lane Room in the Leichlingen Pavilion for a Nursery School and After School Club and authorises the Town Clerk and the Legal Group to seek the best possible terms from those interested in providing this service.

The meeting closed at 8.50pm.

mk

Mayor