

West Wiltshire District Council

Cabinet

9 March 2005

Notice of Motion

<p>To consider a notice of motion referred to Cabinet by Council on 23 February 2005</p>
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Hope Nature Centre, Southwick – Cllrs Content and Osborn

“At the Cabinet meeting on Wednesday 9 February, Ernie Clark Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Community Issues and Rural Affairs proposed that Cabinet reinstate forthwith the conditional offer of a lease to the Hope Nature Centre (HNC) on a site on Southwick Country Park.

HNC already have planning permission for the construction of the centre on this site. the said lease has a series of stringent conditions that ensure the council's interest are fully secured.

Regretfully, the remainder of the Cabinet ignored the Portfolio Holder's considered view and voted for an amendment that made the granting of any lease subject to the outcome in May 2005 of the Recreational Needs Analysis.

HNC has raised over £200,000 to proceed with their project, however much of this is in the form of grants that require work on the project starts within this financial year.

In ignoring the Portfolio Holder's advice and refusing to grant the lease these grants and the whole project are seriously put at risk.

This council backs the Portfolio Holder and requires that HNC be granted their lease, subject to all the necessary conditions listed in the Cabinet Papers”.

Comments of Council:

In referring the motion to Cabinet, Council made the following comments:

Reference was made to letter sent to Hope Nature Centre from the Chief Executive copied to all Members which gave some optimism. Praised the efforts of the HNC Trustees for their fundraising efforts. Should consider proposal in the context of the future of Southwick Country Park a decision about which is due in May. The Park cannot be developed for housing and is not appropriate for football

pitches other than in the Wildlife Meadow in the north west end. Details of the Bond required and conditions would be considered by Cabinet. Council should not go back on previous promises made to the HNC and therefore should not reduce the area earmarked to HNC. Emphasised that the role of the Council in this project was one of landlord. Council should protect it's position. Council should await the outcome of the Local Recreational Needs Assessment (LRNA) study and the decision on the future of the Southwick Country Park. Doubt was cast over the need to await for the LRNA as it was felt that this would not provide any further information. What else could that area of land be used for? Delay in Council making a decision was hampering HNC's ability to secure further funding.

Update report from Chris Waters, Technical and Professional Services Manager

At its meeting on 9 February 2005 Cabinet considered a report on whether or not to reinstate the offer of a lease of land at Southwick to Hope Nature Centre. Cabinet resolved as follows:

- That having considered the report presented, the question of whether or not to reinstate the conditional offer of a lease of land at Southwick be deferred. This was to enable Cabinet to consider the matter at the same time as considering the options for the future of Southwick Country Park.
- That the Chief Executive be requested to write to the Hope Nature Centre funders to advise them of the timetable for considering the lease and to encourage the funders to remain engaged whilst the Council continued to actively consider this issue.

It is planned to consider all options in May 2005 following completion of the Leisure and Recreational Needs Assessment.

The letter from the Chief Executive to Hope Nature Centre, referred to at the Council meeting, which requested some additional information and offered to write to potential funders regarding likely timescales is attached.

A report on the response to the letter will be presented to Cabinet on 30 March 2005.

Recommendations

- (a) Cabinet considers the Notice of Motion and determines how it wishes to respond to Council**
- (b) Officers be requested to liaise with the Hope Nature Centre group with regard to the additional information requested and submit a report to Cabinet on 30 March 2005 for consideration.**

Plain English Guidance Given 

27 February 2005

