

MINUTES OF THE FORWARD PLAN SELECT COMMITTEE
Tuesday, 6th January 2004 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor R Blackman (Chair), Councillor Dromey (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Davies, Harrod, Hughes, Moher and Taylor.

Also present were Councillors Coughlin, Fox, Jones, Kagan, Lorber and Lyon.

There were no apologies for absence.

1. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Harrod declared an interest regarding the briefing note on the Consultants' Study on Civic Centre Options due to his position on the Planning Committee and the discussion that took place under item 7 about specific planning applications. Councillor Taylor advised the Select Committee of his interest as a ward councillor for Preston Park regarding item 7 (ii) Conservation Areas Review.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 26th November 2003

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on 26th November 2003 be received and approved as an accurate record subject to an amendment on p.6, item 10 (i), which should read as:

- (i) 2003/2004 Capital Budget Monitoring Report and Section 106 Update Report**

3. Matters Arising

There were none.

4. Change of Order of Business

RESOLVED:-

that the order of business be changed to that as set out below.

5. Deputations

RESOLVED:-

that the two requests to make deputations be considered at the start of the relevant items.

6. **Briefing Note – Consultants’ Study on Civic Centre Options**

The Chief Executive outlined the key points raised in the briefing note that had been circulated to the Select Committee in advance of the meeting.

7. **Call-in of Executive Decisions**

(i) **Dollis Hill House**

On 8th December 2003, the Executive considered a report detailing proposals to reinstate Dollis Hill House, Gladstone Park, as a community facility managed by the Dollis Hill House Trust [DHHT]. The report also considered improvement works to the Stables art gallery. Following the Executive’s recommendations, this item was called in to enable Scrutiny to play its full part in considering how this historic building might be saved from demolition and restored.

Adam Lively (Dollis Hill House Trust) advised the Select Committee that since the meeting of the Executive on 8th December 2003, the Trust had met with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to discuss the Trust’s Business Plan. A copy of a letter from English Heritage was circulated in advance of the meeting outlining the organisation’s interest in the matter and an acknowledgement of the Trust’s attempts to develop a scheme for the repair and restoration of Dollis Hill House. A letter from the Heritage Lottery Fund was also circulated to the Select Committee suggesting a number of key points that should be addressed in the Trust’s future bid for funding. Mr Lively advised the Select Committee that a Feasibility Study had been produced following the last meeting of the Executive and had been sent to English Heritage for consideration. He confirmed that Members of the Executive had not been sent the document.

Mr Lively explained that the Trust felt that it should be given the opportunity to submit a bid for funding to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) but that an on-going interim commitment from the Council was necessary. The Select Committee noted that the Trust was hoping to secure funding on the basis of providing educational outreach projects at the site as well as anchor uses such as a wedding venue, as highlighted in the Business Plan. Mr Lively commented on financial concerns that had been raised by Council officers following consideration of the Trust’s earlier proposal but stressed that these issues were being addressed and that English Heritage had been impressed by the Business Plan.

The Trust requested that the Executive defer its decision of the 8th December 2003 to the end of April 2004 so as to give the Trust more time to prepare the access bid (Stage 1). At this time, it would be clear whether the Trust’s bid for HLF funding would be successful. Mr Lively

acknowledged that a successful bid was not guaranteed but that all efforts should be made by all parties to try and identify a suitable proposal to ensure that the historic building be saved from demolition and restored.

The Lead Member for Environment and Planning advised the Select Committee that the Executive had considered this matter at length and had previously set a deadline of August 2003 for receipt of all bids. Referring to the Feasibility Study prepared by the Trust, the Lead Member explained that this document had not been available to either the Executive or officers prior to the Executive's last meeting and therefore Members had been unable to consider details of the Trust's current proposals. Likewise a number of other documents had not been submitted and important information was omitted from some of those documents that had been made available to the Executive. The Chair stressed the importance of the documents and the significance of the Executive not being able to view the relevant papers before reaching its decision on 8th December 2003. The Lead Member also commented on English Heritage's recent change of view regarding the bidding process.

The Lead Member for Corporate Resources advised the Select Committee that whilst the Executive stood by its decision of the 8th December 2003 and the criteria for reaching this decision, the Executive was exploring a joint proposal between Lord Toby Harris and the Council regarding funding for the restoration and repair of Dollis Hill House. He stressed that this option would have to be considered further before any further details could be clarified but that this option was roughly in line with the Trust's proposals and highlighted the Council's on-going support to retain the building. The Trustees present at the meeting welcomed the Executive's attempts to find an alternative option and asked that they be invited to participate in all future dialogue.

At this point the Chair highlighted the major points of the discussion and Members of the Select Committee were invited to comment. Members recommended a deferral of the Executive's decision on the basis that the Trust had not yet exhausted its attempts to secure funding and that new material regarding the Trust's proposal had become available since the last meeting of the Executive on 8th December 2003. Members welcomed the GLA's input and stressed that a deferral of the Executive's earlier decision was necessary to enable further discussion about alternative proposals concerning the site, although Members stressed the need to ensure that certain issues such as security at the site were addressed in the interim period. It was acknowledged that the Feasibility Study should be appraised by Brent officers to ensure that Members could be sufficiently updated and that all parties involved in the matter should endeavour to facilitate greater dialogue between all parties.

RECOMMENDED:-

- (i) that the Executive defer its decision taken at its meeting on 8th December 2003 in light of the new material prepared by the Dollis Hill House Trust that had already been submitted to English Heritage and is to be submitted to the Executive in due course for consideration;
- (ii) that Dollis Hill House Trust be supplied with a statement of support from the Council in pursuit of its bid to the Heritage Lottery fund (HLF) to at least Stage 1 of the bidding process; and
- (iii) that all other options regarding the restoration and repair of Dollis Hill House be pursued in parallel to the Trust's attempts to secure funding.

(ii) *Conservation Areas Review*

On the 31st March 2003, a report was submitted to Executive regarding the review of the Borough's Conservation Areas, the report explained the Council's duty under the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to review its historic areas and develop proposals for their long term preservation and enhancement. The report outlined the significant issues and highlighted that the review had identified that a number of the Borough's Conservation Areas had lost the character that led to their designation. The Executive noted the recommendation within the report to remove Conservation Area status from these areas but instructed officers to carry out a thorough consultation exercise with the results reported back to Planning Committee (29th October 2003) and subsequently to the Executive.

The report outlined the methodology for the consultation exercise and the responses received by the Council's Planning Service. It analysed the responses, discussed the technical and legal considerations and outlined recommendations for the future of the Borough's Conservation Areas. The Executive on 8th December 2003 considered the report and referred the matter to Scrutiny to consider carefully the impact of de-designation on each relevant area.

Mr Frank Treviss (South Kenton and Preston Park Residents' Association) spoke on behalf of residents in the Preston Park conservation area; the majority of whom did not support the de-designation of conservation area status, as agreed by the Executive at its meeting on 8th December 2003. The Select Committee noted that a petition had been submitted with over 500 signatures supporting the retention of conservation area status in Preston Park. Mr Treviss went

on to highlight local concerns including the loss of value to properties as a result of de-designation and the implications of further reduced planning enforcement in the area. Consequently, Mr Treviss requested that the Select Committee recommend that the Executive agree to the retention of conservation area status in the Preston Park area. The Director for Environment confirmed that Preston Park continued to retain conservation area status until such time that the Executive reconsidered its original decision.

The Lead Member for Environment and Planning advised the Select Committee that the Executive stood by its decision taken on the 8th December 2003 for a number of reasons but that it had carefully considered the views of local residents. The Select Committee noted that the review had been undertaken as part of the Council's responsibility to adhere to national standards for maintaining conservation areas. The Lead Member explained that Brent had a higher number of conservation areas compared to other authorities and that English Heritage was pleased with the Executive's decision and the Council's effective utilisation of the budget to ensure that the borough's conservation areas complied with national standards. Whilst acknowledging Mr Treviss' concerns about the lack of planning enforcement officers, the Lead Member stressed that this was a London-wide problem and that more money was being made available to counteract recruitment and retention difficulties.

In response to queries from Members of the Select Committee, Mark Smith (Principal Design and Conservation Officer) explained that the review had initially been undertaken as an assessment of areas to determine whether they complied with the national criteria, after which the report was circulated as a consultation document to local residents to enable them to comment on the de-designation of conservation area status in certain areas throughout the borough. The views of local residents and adjoining boroughs such as Harrow were then included in the final report to the Executive on 8th December 2003, including recommendations to re-designate two areas. Mark Smith explained that the main difference between conservation area status and an area of distinctive residential character was that conservation area status was statutory and permitted development rights were slightly reduced. He stressed however that areas of distinctive residential character were still deemed to contribute to the borough and should therefore be afforded certain protections as stipulated in the UDP policy. Mark Smith acknowledged concerns that the removal of conservation area status would lead to reduced planning restrictions but stressed that this was not the case as the UDP policy imposed numerous constraints on planning so that areas continued to be protected. He stressed that fundamental controls would remain in de-designated areas despite the loss of some more stringent restrictions.

Regarding the views of local residents and the overwhelming support to retain conservation area status in certain areas, the Lead Member stated that all views had been taken into consideration, as highlighted by the re-designation of certain areas. Some Members commented on the lack of effective consultation with local residents and queried why the Executive had taken its decision regarding de-designation in certain areas where the majority of residents did not support the proposal. Mark Smith explained that the Council was not required to consult on de-designation but had consulted in variety of ways to ensure that the views of local residents were taken into consideration in the final report. Members of the Select Committee acknowledged that local residents had different needs and that their planning requirements greatly shaped their views towards de-designation.

Upon consideration of the Slough Lane conservation area, some Members of the Select Committee queried why this area had been de-designated when few planning alterations had been undertaken on the majority of properties. Mark Smith explained that due to the make up of this particular area the majority of properties were naturally afforded a number of planning protections and therefore the retention of conservation area status was not necessary as the Council had other mechanisms at its disposal to preserve the character of properties. Some Members expressed concern that the potential imposition of GLA policies in the future could further reduce planning restrictions. Consequently, Members acknowledged that de-designation could have significant implications in the future. Mark Smith advised the Select Committee that Listed Building Legislation (Listed Buildings Act) was very powerful and more stringent than other planning enforcement powers and stressed that conservation area status did not automatically prevent development. Consequently, whilst resident's views were considered a technical decision had to be made and national standards applied. The Chair queried how officers had established which areas should be de-designated especially in those areas where the majority of residents had expressed a desire to retain conservation area status, such as Butlers Green. The Select Committee noted that certain areas had been de-designated for technical reasons despite objections from local residents.

Some Members commented on the need for clear explanations to local residents about the de-designation/ re-designation of conservation area status and the implications for residents in terms of planning matters. Mark Smith confirmed that a letter would be circulated to all residents following the Executive's final decision outlining the decision and the ramifications of de-designation/ re-designation. The Select Committee then voted on a proposal to ask the Executive to reconsider its earlier decision which was put to the vote and CARRIED on the Chair's casting vote.

RECOMMENDED:-

that the Executive reconsider its earlier decision taken on the 8th December 2003 regarding de-designation of conservation area status and reinstate the status of those conservation areas where residents supported the retention of conservation area status in line with the reasons given for the call-in.

(iii) Authority to Award Contract for the Supply of Standard and Kosher Meals and to Negotiate for the Supply of Asian Vegetarian and Halal and Caribbean Frozen Meals

On 8th December 2003, the Select Committee received a report requesting authority to award contracts as required by Contract Standing Order No 89. The report summarised the process undertaken in tendering this contract and, following the completion of the evaluation of the tenders, recommended to whom the contract should be awarded. The report also requested approval to negotiate with contractors in respect of the procurement of Asian Vegetarian, Asian Halal and Caribbean frozen meals, due to the unacceptability of the tender submission.

Following consideration of this item by the Executive on 8th December 2003, the item was, in accordance with Standing Order 21, called-in for consideration by the Forward Plan Select Committee.

The Lead Member for Health and Social Care advised the Select Committee that the decision to move the supply of all meals to frozen meals was taken in February 2003 and that there was some confusion as to why the item had been called-in when the report to the Executive on 8th December 2003 related to the tendering of contracts rather than the type of meal being supplied. Some Members expressed on going concerns by a number of residents, particularly those in the Asian and Caribbean communities about the quantity and quality of the frozen meals being supplied by the Council. The Select Committee noted that a number of organisations such as the Brent Indian Association had opted to have fresh meals supplied to residents at a cheaper cost and where quantity, quality and nutritional issues were not a concern. The Lead Member referred to the recommendation following the Best Value Review that the Council move to the provision of frozen meals rather than fresh, taking into account health and safety considerations, practice in other authorities and the financial ramifications. He explained that most local authorities supplied frozen foods and that fresh food was far more costly. The Select Committee noted that in February 2003, a number of other options had been considered

regarding the supply of meals and that the situation was being closely monitored hence the report to the Executive on the 8th December 2003. He acknowledged those concerns raised by Members but stressed that the nutritional content of all food was monitored closely to ensure that legislative standards were maintained.

The Director of Social Services stressed that the quality, quantity and nutritional content of all food was laid down in national guidance and that all meals had to comply with these standards. The Director acknowledged that the move to frozen meals had raised concerns with a number of people especially those within the Asian and Caribbean communities. However, the Best Value Review highlighted the Council's responsibility to ensure the provision of a good service to all sections of the community within allocated budgets. Consequently, whilst the Council was committed to quality it remained mindful of good value and £187,000 had been saved since the transfer to frozen meals. The Select Committee noted that the Department had listened to and responded to complaints and concerns such as by improving the turnover of the menu. The Director of Social Services explained that with ¼ million meals supplied annually, the service was constrained to a large number of people over a vast area and consequently the service needed to meet majority needs. Thus, it was understandable that some clubs and organisations would choose to have meals delivered by an alternative supplier. The Director explained that the Department was looking at the various options available regarding the food service in the longer term in order to meet people's changing needs.

In response to questions regarding the tender, the Director explained that the contract was for two years with the option to extend for a further year. The Select Committee was advised that the Department did not envisage any difficulties in identifying a suitable supplier of frozen Asian vegetarian and Halal and Caribbean frozen meals but that if difficulties were encountered the matter could be brought back to the Select Committee for further consideration.

Regarding the re-warming of food, Members were advised that food was heated in advance of delivery and that the temperature of all meals was closely monitored. In response to queries about the cost differences between fresh and frozen food, the Director explained that the difference in food costs was minimal but that the preparation costs were far more significant. Some Members commented on the importance of monitoring client satisfaction to ensure that the service continued to meet majority needs and were assured by the Lead Member that such monitoring was regularly undertaken.

Additional information had also been circulated as appendices to the report, marked not for publication because they contained exempt

information as specified in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, namely:

“The amount of any expenditure proposed to be incurred by the Authority under any particular contract for the acquisition of property or the supply of goods or services.”

“Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (other than the Authority).”

“Any terms proposed or to be proposed by or to the authority in the course of negotiations for a contract for the acquisition or disposal of property or the supply of goods or services.”

RECOMMENDED:-

- (i) that it be agreed the contract for the supply of frozen Standard meals be awarded to Apetito Ltd, as per the Executive’s decision on 8th December 2003;
- (ii) that it be agreed the contract for the supply of frozen Kosher Meals be awarded to Hermolis & Co Ltd; and
- (iii) that a review of the contract to supply Asian vegetarian and Halal and Caribbean frozen meals be undertaken before the letting of a contract and the points raised by the Forward Plan Select Committee during its discussion be taken into consideration.

8. Information Updates requested by the Select Committee at its meeting on 26th November 2003

- *Youth and Community Review*

In response to questions, Philip Churton (Head of Estate Management) advised the Select Committee that repayments to cover the debt owed by the group in occupation at the Learie Constantine Centre were due to commence on 31st January 2004 and that no defaults on the payments would be possible.

RESOLVED:-

that the information updates on Youth and Community Review and 522-524 Kingsbury Road – Lease Renewal be noted.

9. **Briefing Notes requested by the Select Committee arising from consideration of the Forward Plan (*Issue 14 – 2003/04*)**

• **IT for Councillors**

Members of the Select Committee had a brief discussion regarding the issues outlined in the briefing note including the details about the ASDL connection, the benefits of using lap tops and restrictions on Member usage of the facilities. The Lead Member for Corporate Resources advised Members that in order to offer a scheme with no disincentives, the Council had agreed to pay all ASDL connections costs. Regarding the benefits of issuing lap tops rather than hard tops, the Lead Member explained that laptops had been chosen as the preferred option for reasons of portability and reduced repair costs. In response to questions concerning the success of the pilot scheme, Members were advised that a number of Councillors had been issued with laptops and the scheme had proven to be quite popular. The focus now would be to improve IT access in other Council sites such as Brent House to increase portability and usage. Some Members commented on usage restrictions and suggested that these were unnecessary. The Select Committee was advised that use of the laptops was restricted to facilitating Council business only in order to ensure that there could not be any discrepancies over use of the laptop for political reasons such as facilitating political publicity. Some Members indicated that the restrictions were unjust given that Members were themselves contributing financially to the scheme. The Select Committee noted that firewalls and other security procedures were necessary but that the matter would continue to be monitored.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the briefing note on IT for Councillors as circulated to the Select Committee be noted;
- (ii) that the issue of IT for Councillors be considered further at a future date following a fuller review of the project to enable the Select Committee to consider the ramifications for Members; and
- (iii) that consideration of the briefing notes on Stonebridge School Accommodation, John Billam and Street Trees – Proposed Removal and Replacement be deferred to the next meeting on 27th January 2004.

10. **The Executive List of Decisions – 8th December 2003**

RESOLVED:-

that the Executive List of Decisions for the meeting of the Executive on 8th December 2003 be noted.

11. The Forward Plan (Issue 16 2003 – 2004)

Members of the Forward Plan Select Committee considered the latest version of the Forward Plan (29th December 2003 to 23rd April 2004) and highlighted a number of issues where further information was requested.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that briefing notes on the following items be presented at the next meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee on 27th January 2004:-
 - (a) Willesden Sports Centre PFI – Final Business Case
 - (b) Future Direction of Bridge Park; and
- (ii) that a briefing note on South Kilburn Master Plan – Effect of Impact Assessments be presented to the Select Committee at its meeting in March 2004.

12. Items considered by the Executive that were not included in the Forward Plan

There were none at this meeting.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee is scheduled to take place on 27th January 2004.

14. Any Other Urgent Business

There was none at this meeting.

In accordance with Standing Order 67, the guillotine procedure was applied so as to enable the Select Committee to identify and consider those of items of business to be transacted before the conclusion of the meeting.

The meeting ended at 11.00pm

R BLACKMAN
Chair

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