

Minutes

Cabinet

Tuesday, 17 August 2021



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

The Leader: Councillor Kelham Cooke, The Leader of the Council (Chairman)

The Deputy Leader: Councillor Barry Dobson, The Deputy Leader of the Council (Vice-Chairman)

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Annie Mason, Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities
Councillor Robert Reid, Cabinet Member for Housing and Property
Councillor Adam Stokes, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources
Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew, Cabinet Member for Culture and Visitor Economy
Councillor Linda Wootten, Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance

Non-Cabinet Members present

Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor Phil Dilks
Councillor Breda-Rae Griffin
Councillor Gloria Johnson
Councillor Penny Milnes
Councillor Virginia Moran
Councillor Jacky Smith
Councillor Judy Stevens
Councillor Jill Thomas
Councillor Amanda Wheeler
Councillor Ray Wootten

Officers

Chief Executive (Karen Bradford)
Deputy Chief Executive (Alan Robinson)
Director of Growth and Culture (Nicola M^cCoy-Brown)
Assistant Director of Finance, Section 151 Officer (Richard Wyles)
Head of Leisure (Karen Whitfield)
Head of Finance (Alison HallWright)
Head of Democratic Services (Graham Watts)
Democratic Officer (Amy Pryde)
Local Government Association Graduate (Alice Atkins)

20. Register of attendance and apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Nick Robins and Councillor Dr Peter Moseley. All other Cabinet Members were in attendance.

21. Disclosure of Interests (if any)

No interests were disclosed.

Councillor Ashley Baxter requested that it be included on record that he had family members who regularly attended Deepings Leisure Centre.

22. Deepings Leisure Centre

Purpose of report

To consider the potential cessation of the management and operation of the Deepings Leisure Centre following the temporary closure of the centre due to its current condition and the significant health and safety risks this presents to the public and staff.

Decision

On being put to the vote, it was **AGREED:**

- (1) That the report be deferred to a meeting of Council and that Cabinet formally requests the Chairman of the Council to ask the Chief Executive to arrange an extraordinary meeting of Council at the earliest convenience in accordance with paragraph 4.4.3(a) of the Constitution.
- (2) That the Deepings Leisure Centre remains closed on health and safety grounds until this matter has been fully considered at the extraordinary meeting of Council.

Other options considered and rejected

- a) Re-open the leisure centre and continue with the current management and operational arrangements.
- b) Invest in the current facility
- c) Develop a new leisure centre in the Deepings.

Reason for the decision

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Leisure presented the report which set out the current condition and challenges facing Deepings Leisure Centre. The Centre had experienced preventative and reactive repairs and, in line with its age of 47 years, would be rapidly approaching the end of its life. As a result of heavy rainfall on 27 July 2021 there were a number of leaks in the roof of the building and as a result

the Chief Executive, using emergency powers, made the decision to close the Centre to the public due to serious health and safety concerns. In undertaking a review of the facility, the report outlined a total cost of £1.2million of investment that would be required to bring the Centre back into operation, as well as the addition of ongoing maintenance work costs. As such, the Deputy Leader's initial view was that an investment would not enhance the Centre, the Council would not be able to make use of capital funding and any costs would need to come from the revenue budget. In line with these reasons, the report recommended the cessation of the management and operation of Deepings Leisure Centre.

Taking into account the significance and contentious nature of this decision, the Deputy Leader proposed that the report be deferred to a meeting of Council and that Cabinet formally requested the Chairman of the Council to ask the Chief Executive to arrange an extraordinary meeting of Council at the earliest convenience in accordance with paragraph 4.4.3(a) of the Constitution. In addition, he proposed that the Deepings Leisure Centre remained closed on health and safety grounds until this matter had been fully considered at the extraordinary meeting of Council. The Leader of the Council seconded this proposal.

The Leader of the Council used his discretion to allow members of the public in attendance at the meeting to speak. The following points made by Mr I Stygall and Mr J Little were noted as follows:

- The Centre had been relied upon by many in the Deepings, including vulnerable residents.
- Concerns were raised regarding the timeline of the development of a new leisure centre in The Deepings.
- Concerns were raised regarding the management of the existing Centre.
- A query was raised as to why the reserves could not be spent on repairs to the existing Centre.
- Examples were given of local people of all ages using the Centre and how important it was in supporting their physical and mental health.

During debate Members of Cabinet and other Members of the Council in attendance made the following comments:

- The Leader referred to the Leisure Improvement Plan; stating that poor management and scrutiny over the last twenty years had led to the current situation. The Leader advised that any decision made would have to be weighted by available finances, noting that leisure would always be heavily subsidised.
- Members welcomed the proposal to defer any decisions regarding the report's recommendations to an extraordinary meeting of Full Council.
- Reference was made to the impact of Covid-19 on residents' mental health. It was stated that access to a leisure centre would be vital to the physical and mental health of Deepings residents.
- One Member considered the practicality of investing in the existing centre rather than the development a new one. It was noted that the permanent closure of the Centre would be unpopular in the Deepings.

- Concerns were raised regarding the closure of the Centre. Members stated that this would disadvantage residents with lower incomes.
- The Local Plan was discussed, with some Members raising concerns that the proposed reallocation of land for a new Centre would mean further delays regarding its development.
- Comments were made relating to the total figure of £1.2million to cover the costs of repairs to the building. Some Members noted that local businesses in The Deepings had offered to undertake the repairs at cost. The Chief Executive advised that the correct procurement processes would need to be undertaken in reference to works to public buildings to ensure that the appropriate standards were met. She highlighted that it was unlikely that repair works would be completed for at least twelve months.
- One Member queried as to whether there was a need for brand new boilers. The Chief Executive advised that one of the boilers was beyond repair and therefore required a full replacement.
- It was stated by one Member that the sports hall floor need only be repaired rather than fully replaced, as no bowing of the floor had been found.
- It was stated that a drone had found that the car park would not need to be resurfaced and that it was perfectly adequate. One Member claimed that the costs of repairs had been exaggerated within the report. The Chief Executive confirmed that the correct processes had been undertaken. The Leisure Centre had been closed due to serious health and safety concerns, because large amounts of water had come through most areas of the building. Reference was made to broken tiles in the swimming pool which posed a serious threat of injury to swimmers. A 1,000-litre bin had been full of dirty water since closure of the building following recent rainfall, windows had blown, grout was missing, brick work was damaged, and parts of the roof had fallen into parts of the building and the pool itself. The principal reason for closing the Centre had been to protect members of the public and staff as it could not be guaranteed that leisure activities in that venue could take place in a safe environment.
- Comments were made which described how many in the community had felt let down by the closure of the Centre. Reference was made to a previous election pledge regarding the development of a new leisure centre in The Deepings, with one Member questioning as to whether this pledge was likely to be fulfilled.
- Concerns were raised regarding the detrimental impact the closure of the Centre would have on the Council's reputation.
- A query was raised regarding the loss of £40,000 - £50,000 in charges from the swimming club.
- It was requested that any funding bids be delayed.
- A query was raised regarding the provision of sports facilities for the local Academy. The Chief Executive advised that Lincolnshire County Council had met with the Academy and would be looking at the provision of a temporary building to be put on site for the Academy students.
- Members commented that robust discussions would need to take place regarding any costings going forward, due to the high use of Council reserves.
- One Member suggested that an inquiry should be undertaken to prevent the closure of leisure centres in the future.

- Concerns were raised regarding the shared ambition to build a new leisure centre, as no concrete plans had been shared. The Leader advised that it remained the Council's ambition and commitment to build a new leisure centre in The Deepings. He noted that this would be the largest spend by the Council in decades, and that a new centre would cost approximately £21million.
- The Leader emphasised that the available information would be reviewed prior to Full Council. He advised that the undertaking of renovation works often resulted in greater renovation costs than originally anticipated.
- One Member noted that other leisure centres which had been built around the same time as the Deepings Leisure Centre were also in poor condition. It was suggested that the building had not been made to last, and that a more effective solution would be to invest in a new centre.
- One Member asked where the figure for the subsidy the Centre received could be found, as well as where the equivalent figure for the Meres Leisure Centre in Grantham could be found.
- One Member requested confirmation that those using the playing fields would be able to continue to do so whilst the centre remained shut. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Council would be looking at how it could ensure that the playing fields remained operational. It was noted that these were owned by Lincolnshire County Council.
- One Member asked whether it was legal for sports clubs to be charged for using land that the Council did not own. It was advised that the Council operated and managed the land, and so picked up both the costs and income of this.
- One Member asked for assurance to be given that the fees for the sports club would not be raised. It was confirmed that no discussions relating to this had taken place.

The Leader invited all Council Members to visit Deepings Leisure Centre prior to Full Council in September and such visits would be arranged in due course.

Close of the Meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 15:18.