

CASTLEREAGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of the proceedings of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held, in committee, in the Function Room, Civic & Administrative Offices, Bradford Court, Upper Galwally, Castlereagh, BT8 6RB on Thursday 13th September 2007 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor J Beattie
(in the chair)

ALDERMEN: M Copeland
J Norris MBE

COUNCILLORS: Mrs A M Beattie
Ms J Bunting (until 8.40 p.m.)
Mrs M Chambers
Mrs J Cochrane
D Drysdale (until 7.15 p.m.)
T Jeffers (until 7.28 p.m.)
M Long (until 7.38 p.m.)
G Robinson (until 7.15 p.m.)

IN ATTENDANCE: Director of Administration & Community Services,
Director of Finance, Economic Development
Manager, Planning Officer and Assistant Members'
Services Officer

APOLOGIES: Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors
Hanvey, Henderson, Duncan, White and Spratt

REPORT FROM THE PLANNING OFFICER (copy previously circulated)

F&GP/2007/233 : UPDATE ON THE DISPOSAL OF COUNCIL LANDS SURPLUS TO REQUIREMENTS

Councillor Beattie advised that a number of queries in relation to land sales had been raised at last evening's Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting, and the Planning Officer had been asked to come along this evening to address these queries.

The Planning Officer provided Members with an update on various lands that the Council was disposing of in respect of the following:

- Ladas Drive, Castlereagh
- Geary Road, Tullycarnet
- East Link Road, Dundonald

- Cregagh Park, Cregagh
- Scout Field, Carryduff
- Edgar Avenue, Carryduff
- Comber Road, Carryduff

The Officer then addressed Members' queries in relation to the following:

Ladas Drive

Councillor Robinson enquired if it would be possible to offer the site for sale again, given that planning permission had been refused on the site.

The Planning Officer advised that there was a standard condition on the contract of sale requiring the purchaser to lodge an appeal if planning permission had been refused. She explained that if the appeal was successful, the purchaser would then have to buy the land.

She outlined that, prior to making a recommendation to Council, she had obtained advice from the Roads Service. She added that she was of the view that the advice from the Roads Service should have been consistent, whether the land in question was located within Castlereagh or Belfast, however, the application had now been refused on Road Safety issues. She outlined that if it suited both parties she did not see any reason why the sale could not be abandoned, but this would require to be investigated with the Council's Solicitor.

Councillor Robinson proposed that the Council writes to the applicant to ascertain if he was going to appeal.

The Planning Officer advised that she would liaise with the Council's solicitor in this respect.

Alderman Copeland expressed the view that a stipulation should be placed enabling the Council to withdraw an application before it was refused.

The Planning Officer outlined that most of the clauses within the Council's contracts for the sale of land were standard, but if Members wished, this could be reviewed.

Councillor Chambers advised that she had received a letter from the Minister advising that all Council owned land deemed to be surplus to requirements should be disposed of. She suggested writing to the Minister advising her of the difficulties the Council was experiencing in disposing of its surplus land. She outlined that the Council should review its procedure for selling land, with a view to drawing up conditions of sale specific to each piece of land for sale.

Councillor Robinson sought clarification as to whether it would be feasible for the Council to obtain planning permission for land suitable for housing, prior to putting it on the market.

The Planning Officer advised that this had previously been considered, but the difficulty was that an application for outline planning permission required detailed concept plans, which would be time consuming and costly. She added that a lot of the land being offered for sale by the Council was open space and it was therefore subject to the restrictions of PPS8.

Edgar Avenue

The Planning Officer advised Members that a draft contract of sale had been sent to the Purchaser's Solicitor and she was awaiting a response.

Scout Field

Following a query from Councillor Mrs Beattie, the Planning Officer advised Members that it had been agreed at the July Council meeting that the planning application for a new football pitch would not be submitted until such time as planning permission to develop the existing informal kickabout area was being applied for.

She advised that as a developer would be applying for planning permission on an area, subject to a proposal for a new and improved football pitch would provide a possible exception under the restrictive policy. She continued by stating that if the land was not sold for development there may not be a need to provide a new football pitch to the rear, but this would be a matter for Members to consider.

RESOLVED : That the Planning Officer

- (a) prepare a report outlining Council owned surplus land suitable for social housing
- (b) liaise with the Council's solicitor to ascertain if the purchaser of land at Ladas Drive wished to withdraw at this stage.

F&GP/2007/234 : PRESENTATION BY MR. PAUL MULLAN, HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND

Mr Mullan advised Members that he was visiting certain Councils to inform them of the continuing work of the Heritage Lottery Fund and to discuss grants that were now available for suitable projects. He added that funding ranged from large-scale grants up to £5 million to cover major type projects such as the Ulster Museum and the Albert Clock, to smaller grants up to £5,000 to cover for example, local history projects/research. He stated that all projects needed to meet key criteria, which included the following:

- conserve and enhance our diverse heritage;

- encourage more people to be involved in their heritage;
- ensure that everyone could learn about, have access to and enjoy their heritage;
- encourage communities to identify, look after and celebrate their heritage.

He added that a significant number of groups within the Castlereagh/East Belfast area had not previously been successful in attracting funding, and as a result, the Heritage Lottery Fund had identified this as being a priority area.

Members discussed with Mr Mullan a number of potential projects within the Borough, which included:

- Craigavon House
- Ancient Monuments
- Motte, Dundonald
- Orange Halls
- Knockbreda Cemetery

Councillor Bunting outlined that she was very keen to see a project in respect of Craigavon House being pursued.

Mr Mullan advised that if Members wished they could discuss specific project ideas with Officers within the Heritage Lottery Fund, and where appropriate, advice would be provided as to how a potential project could be shaped to meet the required criteria.

Councillor Long outlined that as Members liaised closely with the community groups within the Borough on a regular basis, it would be useful if Mr Mullan could forward to Members details on the required criteria for HLF funding.

Councillor Chambers expressed the view that it may be difficult for groups within the unionist community to apply to HLF funding as a great deal of their heritage had either been destroyed during the Troubles or many listed buildings demolished due to inadequate planning policy.

Councillor Bunting expressed concern that when such funding initiatives were launched, it was always the same community groups within the Borough that secured funding, given that they were knowledgeable as to exactly what funders were looking for within a funding application.

The Economic Development Manager advised Members that it was her understanding that the Grants Officer and the Community Services Manager were currently investigating the feasibility of funding a conference for community groups to provide advice on sourcing funding, completing funding applications, etc., and that it had been hoped that the Heritage Lottery would be one of the funders in attendance.

Following further discussion, Members thanked Mr Mullan for his very informative presentation.

RESOLVED : That

- (a) Mr Mullan forward to Members detailed information on the required criteria for applying for Heritage Lottery funding
- (b) Officers forward details of the conference being organised by the Community Services Manager and Grants Officer on funding issues, once arrangements had been finalised

TABLED : MINUTES OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 13TH JUNE 2007 AND SPECIAL FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD ON 14TH AND 28TH JUNE 2007

F&GP/2007235 : MINUTES OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUB COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD ON 31ST JULY 2007 AND 5TH SEPTEMBER 2007

RESOLVED : That the Minutes of the Economic Development Sub Committee meetings held on 31st July 2007 and 5th September 2007 be approved as a true record.

F&GP/2007/236 : MINUTES OF THE IT STRATEGY WORKING GROUP MEETINGS HELD ON 2ND AND 8TH AUGUST 2007

RESOLVED : That the Minutes of the IT Strategy Working Group meetings held on 2nd and 8th August 2007 be approved as a true record.

Councillor Drysdale and Robinson left the meeting at this point at 7.15 p.m.

F&GP/2007/237 : DRAFT DEPARTMENTAL ESTIMATES FOR 2008/2009

The Director of Finance gave a brief overview of the above, and advised that he would be making a number of adjustments. He reported that the estimates would be tabled again for Members' information at the December Committee meeting.

Noted.

VERBAL REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

F&GP/2007/238 : CORRESPONDENCE FROM RATEPAYER FROM MONEYREAGH SEEKING SUPPORT FOR HER DAUGHTER (tabled at the meeting)

The Director of Finance advised that a Moneyreagh ratepayer was seeking support from the Council for the costs involved in her daughter travelling to London with her dog to participate in the London International Horse Show - Dog Agility Final, being held in London on 21st December 2007.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to agree that

- (a) subject to the request for financial support meeting the Council's criteria, that a donation of a maximum of £100.00 be provided towards the costs involved in Miss Jess travelling to London with her dog to participate in the London International Horse Show - Dog Agility Final, being held in London on 21st December 2007
- (b) the correspondence also be forwarded to the Sports Development Committee for consideration

Councillor Jeffers left the meeting at this point at 7.28 p.m.

F&GP/2007/239 : PART-TIME POST WITHIN FINANCE DEPARTMENT

The Director of Finance outlined that following the Committee's approval for the Finance Clerk/Credit Controller to reduce her working hours from 37 hours to 22 hours per week, he was now seeking approval to progress with the recruitment of someone to work the remaining 15 hours per week.

Councillor Mrs Beattie expressed the view that as the current postholder's hours had already been reduced, it may put unfair pressure on remaining staff within the Department during the interim recruitment period of someone to fill the remaining 15 hours.

Councillor Chambers expressed her concern at the increasing number of requests from staff to change to part time working.

Councillor Beattie expressed the view that on this occasion the Committee authorise agree this request, whilst bearing in mind Members' comments.

Following discussion, it was proposed by Councillor Long, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, and

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to agree to the recruitment of a Part Time Finance Clerk/Credit Controller, on the basis of 15 hours per week, whilst bearing in mind the Committee's views as outlined above.

F&GP/2007/240 : CORRESPONDENCE FROM LAGAN COLLEGE SEEKING FINANCIAL SUPPORT TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CHAPLAINCY CENTRE WITHIN THE EXTENSION TO THE COLLEGE

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That consideration of the correspondence from Lagan College seeking financial support towards the development of a Chaplaincy be deferred to the October Committee meeting to enable the Director of Finance to seek further clarification on the request.

F&GP/2007/241 : REQUEST TO OPEN TWO ADDITIONAL ACCOUNTS – ONE FOR THE OUTGOING MAYOR AND ONE FOR THE OUTGOING DEPUTY MAYOR

The Director of Finance explained that this would enable timely payments of any outstanding expenditure relating to an outgoing Mayor/Deputy Mayor, and proper financial control of the current Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to agree that an additional account be opened for the outgoing Mayor and outgoing Deputy Mayor.

F&GP/2007/242 : AUDIT SUB COMMITTEE MEETING

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That a meeting of the Audit Sub Committee be convened on Wednesday 19th September 2007 at 3.00 p.m.

Councillor Long left the meeting at this point at 7.38 p.m.

F&GP/2007/243 : SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY ALLOWANCE

The Director of Finance sought approval for the transfer of £6,000.00 from the Mayor's account and £3,000.00 from the Deputy Mayor's account to the Special Responsibility Account.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to approve the transfer of £6,000.00 from the Mayor's account and £3,000.00 from the Deputy Mayor's account to the Special Responsibility Account

**REPORT FROM THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MANAGER
(copy previously circulated)**

F&GP/2007/244 : DETI EXPENDITURE

The Economic Development Manager detailed the current status of the Council's EU BSP grant funding support. She added that a meeting had been held on 29th August 2007 between DETI Officials, the Committee Chairman, the Director of Finance and the Economic Development Manager to discuss concerns over the Council's ability to spend its entire funding allocation in advance of the pre-agreed December 2007 deadline.

She reported that whilst all expenditure in respect of the Lock Keeper's Cottage and the Business Seminars would be met by that time, no guarantee could be made in respect of Hanwood's ability to have a contractor on site in sufficient time to spend the full allocation of Council/EU funds (by mid December 2007). She added that every effort was being made by the Hanwood Trust to meet the required deadlines and she advised that Members would be kept fully informed of all progress in this area.

Noted.

F&GP/2007/245 : SECTION RE-ORGANISATION

The Economic Development Manager reported that the Economic Development Unit currently comprised two staff, i.e. the Economic Development Manager and a part-time Business Officer.

She reported that following consultation with the Chairman and Director of Finance, it had been agreed that, with immediate effect, she would work 100% of her time on furthering the Hanwood project, with the Business Officer taking full managerial responsibility (on a part-time basis) for all other Economic Development projects.

She outlined that this arrangement would be reviewed bi-monthly to ensure that operational requirements within the section were being met effectively.

Noted.

F&GP/2007/246 : ABC REGENERATION COMMITTEE UPDATE

The Economic Development Manager advised Members that the next meeting of the ABC Regeneration Committee had been postponed and a further meeting re-scheduled for 6th November 2007. She reported that, in the interim, Committee representatives were seeking meetings with key Government Ministers to ensure an increased focus and support for the East Belfast travel-to-work area.

She further advised that the Committee had also secured coverage in the current Agenda NI magazine, a copy of which she had attached to her report for Members' information.

Noted.

F&GP/2007/247 : COMET - MULTI-ANNUAL PLAN

The Economic Development Manager outlined that the Comet Interreg Partnership intended to submit its Multi-Annual Plan for 2007-2013 for the Comet region to the SEUPB for Interreg core funding. She added that to facilitate this, each Council had been asked to endorse the content of the final plan, which she had attached to her report for Members' information.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That the Committee endorse the content and submission of the Multi-Annual Plan to the SEUPB for Interreg core funding for the period 2007-2013.

F&GP/2007/248 : BALLYORAN - LIQUIDATION PROCESS

The Economic Development Manager advised Members that a meeting had been scheduled for 14th September 2007 between the Directors of the Ballyoran Company, Ballybeen Ltd and the Council's Consultants – KPMG. She added that the meeting would focus on how best to liquidate the Ballyoran Company and return full responsibility for its management and control to Castlereaugh Borough Council.

She outlined that although the actual legal transfer was a Central Services' issue, she was responsible for managing the leasing of the units and therefore wanted to advise Members of a number of matters relating to debt collection.

She advised that whilst all units at the Ballyoran Centre had been fully let, difficulties were currently being experienced in collecting rentals due from a number of tenants. She outlined that she had therefore asked the Business Officer to instigate an aggressive debt collection procedure, ensuring that tenants take all possible steps to repay outstanding arrears or face eviction and formal debt collection procedures.

The Economic Development Manager continued by stating that an update on this process would be provided to the Committee on an ongoing basis.

Councillor Chambers asked why there were no mechanisms in place through the Finance Department to prevent this kind of situation occurring.

The Economic Development Manager advised that invoices could not be issued from nor managed through the credit control section of the Finance Department as they were issued in the name of the Ballyoran Centre (and not that of the Council). She advised that once the legalities had been finalised, invoices would be issued from the Council and thus subjected to the Council's rigorous credit control systems.

Noted.

F&GP/2007/249 : LOCK KEEPER'S COTTAGE AND VISITORS' CENTRE PROGRESS UPDATE

The Economic Development Manager advised that work on the Lock Keeper's Cottage and Visitors' Centre was progressing well, with work on the restoration of the Cottage due to commence in the forthcoming weeks.

She outlined that the Economic Development Sub Committee had visited the site with the project architect on 10th September 2007, and had been very pleased to see the construction moving forward so effectively.

Noted.

F&GP/2007/250 : LOCK KEEPER'S COTTAGE – INTERPRETATIVE MATERIALS

The Economic Development Manager reported that progress would now have to be made in securing appropriate interpretative materials and information for use within the restored Lock Keeper's Cottage and adjacent Visitors' Centre. She added that whilst Mrs McBride (former Lock Keeper's daughter) would prove an invaluable source of information in this respect, it might also be beneficial to seek information from a wide range of other possible sources.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That the Economic Development unit be authorised to launch a public appeal for information/photos etc., and also explore the possibility of sponsoring a short history project on the Lock Keeper's Cottage through Belvoir Primary School

F&GP/2007/251 : LOCK KEEPER'S COTTAGE VISITORS' CENTRE – POTENTIAL FRANCHISEE

The Economic Development Manager reported that the Economic Development Sub-Committee had met separately with the two organisations expressing an interest in franchising the Lock Keeper's Cottage Visitors' Centre on Monday 10 September 2007. She outlined that it had been decided that before making a final decision, that consideration be deferred until the Committee had a better

understanding of what exactly it wanted to see at the Visitors' Centre (in terms of service provision, opening hours etc.) before re-interviewing both potential franchisees and asking each to make an appropriate bid.

Noted.

F&GP/2007/252 : LOCK KEEPER'S COTTAGE – PUBLICITY : BBC COVERAGE

The Economic Development Manager outlined that the BBC, through its Environmental Correspondent, had agreed to record the restoration of the Lock Keeper's Cottage on a regular basis, with a view to using the completed footage in future television and radio programmes.

She reported that a similar request had been made to the production company responsible for the series of Restoration programmes, but to date a response had not been received.

Noted.

F&GP/2007/253 : LOCK NO. 2 RESTORATION PROPOSALS – PRESENTATION BY ULSTER GARDEN VILLAGES

The Economic Development Manager reported that Erskine Holmes of Ulster Garden Villages had recently attended the Economic Development Sub Committee meeting to provide Members with an overview of his plans to lodge a funding application for approximately £900,000 towards the renovation costs of Lock No. 2 on the Lagan Canal.

She advised that this application would be made to the DSD Modernisation Fund, and if successful, would allow 100% of the renovation costs of this Lock to be met. She added that it was expected that the project would also complement Belfast City Council's proposals to restore Lock No. 1 at Stranmillis and DCAL's restoration plans for Lock No. 3, adjacent to the Lock Keeper's Cottage.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to agree to forward a letter of support to Ulster Garden Villages endorsing the funding application and the impact the restoration of Lock No. 2 would have on the overall re-navigation of the Lagan Canal.

F&GP/2007/254 : LAGAN CANAL TRUST – APPOINTMENT OF OFFICER

The Economic Development Manager outlined that the Council had previously committed to the establishment of a Lagan Canal Trust to focus on the eventual restoration of the Lagan Canal from Belfast to Lough Neagh. She advised that

the next meeting of the Trust Partnership had been scheduled for 19th September 2007, at which, arrangements would be finalised in respect of the appointment of a Lagan Canal Trust Development Manager to move the associated processes forward.

Noted.

STAFF IN COMMITTEE

The Assistant Members' Services Officer returned to the meeting.

F&GP/2007/256 : MEMBERSHIP OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE FOR 2007/2008

Councillor J Beattie sought nominations from the Members of the Committee to sit on the Economic Development Committee for 2007/2008.

Councillor Chambers proposed Alderman Copeland, Councillors J Beattie, A Beattie, Tosh, White and Duncan, and this was seconded by Councillor Cochrane.

RESOLVED : That the Council be recommended to agree that Alderman Copeland, Councillors J Beattie, A Beattie, Tosh, White and Duncan be represented on the Economic Development Sub Committee for 2007/2008.

F&GP/2007/257 : COUNCIL REPRESENTATION ON THE SOUTH EASTERN BUILDING CONTROL GROUP

Councillor J Beattie outlined that at the Annual General Meeting, Councillor Hall had been nominated to represent the Council on the above Committee. He outlined that the Council had previously agreed that representation should be sought from the Members of the Technical & Environmental Services Committee, but Councillor Hall was no longer a Member of that Committee.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That Alderman Copeland liaise with the Ulster Unionist Party Whip to discuss representation on the South Eastern Building Control Group for 2007/2008, with a view to the Party putting forward at the September Council meeting a nomination to replace Councillor Hall on the Group.

Councillor Bunting left the meeting at this point at 8.40 p.m.

CORRESPONDENCE

**F&GP/2007/258 : CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE NORTHERN IRELAND
AUDIT OFFICER DATED 17 AUGUST 2007 RE: HIGH LEVEL
MANAGEMENT LETTER 2005/06 (copy previously circulated)**

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED : That the correspondence from the Northern Ireland Audit Officer re: High Level Management Letter 2005/2006 be referred for consideration to the Audit Sub Committee meeting being held on Wednesday 19th September 2007 at 3.00 p.m..

**F&GP/2007/259 : EMAIL RE: EFFECTIVE PUBLIC MEETINGS –
CONFERENCE BEING HELD AT THE MOUNT BUSINESS & CONFERENCE
CENTRE, BELFAST ON 25 SEPTEMBER 2007 (copy previously circulated)**

Noted.

**F&GP/2007/260 : SEMINAR RE: “THE CHANGING IRELAND – ARE LOCAL
AUTHORITIES PREPARED” – 28th 30th SEPTEMBER 2007 (copy previously
circulated)**

Noted.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 9.00 p.m.

CHAIRMAN

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Adopted by the Council this _____ day of
_____ 2007 with the exception of
Minute Nos. _____

MAYOR