

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 4 June 2003)

1. BREAMORE VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT (REPORT D) (MINUTE NO. 9)

In line with the Countryside Agency's initiative to encourage communities to prepare Village Design Statements (VDS), Breamore Parish Council has produced a VDS for their parish. The Cabinet has agreed that the Statement (incorporating the amended Conservation Area boundary and the statement of consultation undertaken) be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the adopted New Forest District Local Plan and the deposited First Alteration.

2. STILLWATER PARK (REPORT E) (MINUTE NO. 10)

The Cabinet has reviewed the discussions to date and the terms negotiated for the sale of the Stillwater Park to a Residents' Co-operative. Members noted the detail of the current financial position and the implications for the Council with regard to the disposal of the site. Following changes to the local government financing regulations and the increase in the cost of housing provision, the position has altered significantly since negotiations were first entered into.

The Corporate & Finance and Housing, Health & Social Inclusion Review Panels met concurrently on 3 June 2003 to consider the issue. The Panels' recommendation, reported to the Cabinet, was that the sale of the Park should not be pursued. The Panel's were of the view that the residents concerns on the permanence and future stability of the site should be addressed urgently and measures put in place to reassure residents and give them greater control over the management of the site.

The Panels also felt that the Council should consider reimbursing reasonable costs that the residents had incurred with the preparation for taking over the site.

The Cabinet was addressed by Mr Ian Monks, of Independent Commercial Finance; Mr Norman Rides, representing the Co-operative Assistance Network Limited and Mr Brian Terry, Chairman of the Co-operative.

Mr Monks confirmed that in terms of debt servicing, on-going management and maintenance, the lending institutions involved in the negotiations were all satisfied with the arrangements proposed by the Co-operative. A business plan was in place and satisfactory research had been undertaken in terms of the marketability of new homes.

Mr Rides said that there were a number of examples of local control of businesses and co-operatives led by the workforce. Over time these types of arrangement could achieve great efficiencies. There were a great many advantages to control being held by those whose livelihoods were directly affected.

Mr Terry said that best value was not always reflected in best price. He understood the changes that the Government had made to social housing grant funding but felt that the proposed six new homes for the site would address this position as well as providing additional low cost homes. Mr Terry also said it was unfair that the residents remained uncertain as to their future.

A resident also spoke and said that since 1966 Stillwater Park had been up for sale 7 times and, as a result, the residents felt very insecure. Residents needed security and the co-operative is the only way this could happen.

The Cabinet agreed that the residents deserved a secure future. In terms of the residents' reaction if the Council retained the site but pursued the option to increase the number of homes on the site, Mr Terry responded that the residents had not voted on this specific issue. His view however, was that they would not support that course of action. The only reason they had supported the loss of open space was to assist in financing the Co-operative's loan. It was the price they were prepared to pay for their independence.

In private session members then discussed in detail the advantages and disadvantages of the sale of Stillwater Park.

The Cabinet noted that there are 2,500 people on the Council's housing register and that the Council has a duty to consider the provision of housing across the district. Members felt that they could not ignore the financial realities following the change of Government rules for Social Housing Grant. However, they are also very concerned over security for the residents. The more profitable the site becomes the more secure its future will be. Whilst the Cabinet had confidence in the ability of the Co-operative to manage the business, members did not feel that sale of the site to the residents would produce a greater degree of security than if the Council retained the site.

After further discussion the Cabinet agreed that the sale of Stillwater Park should not be pursued. However, Members were of the view that, in the future, the residents should have a larger role in managing and controlling the site. In the light of that decision, members asked officers to explore the possibility of reimbursing the residents for reasonable costs that they had incurred in progressing the arrangements to date.

**Cllr M J Kendal
CHAIRMAN**

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