



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HERITAGE, LEISURE AND SPORT SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: WEDNESDAY, 1 MAY 2013 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Dr Barton (Chair)

Councillor Fonseca

Councillor Joshi

Also In Attendance

Assistant Mayor Clair – Assistant Mayor for Culture, Heritage and Sport

Councillor Willmott

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23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Grant, Naylor and Newcombe.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

25. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 April 2013 were agreed as a correct record.

26. PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

27. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS, STATEMENTS OF CASE

There were no questions, representations or statements of case.

28. BELGRAVE HALL AND GARDENS REVISED PROJECT

The Director of Culture and Neighbourhoods submitted a report that set out how the proposed changes to Belgrave Hall and Gardens had been revised in light of consultations, and confirmed completion of the Equalities Impact Assessment.

The Chair stated that she had agreed for Councillor Willmott as well as several members of the Belgrave Hall Conservation Area Society to address the Scrutiny Commission.

By way of introducing the item to the Scrutiny Commission, officers provided a PowerPoint presentation. The Head of Arts and Museums covered the following as part of her presentation:

- The initial report presented to the Scrutiny Commission in May 2012 detailed the proposals and the arrangements for consultation. The report provided to the Commission at this meeting set out how the proposals had been revised in light of the consultation exercises.
- The reasons behind for proposals formed.
- A reminder of the original proposals – the reprioritisation of £40,000 in 2013/14.
- A summary of the consultation responses, which largely reflected a desire to retain the status quo, and the perception from the public that Belgrave Hall was closing.
- The use of the EIA in helping to assess positive or negative equality impacts on people affected by proposed change with ‘protected characteristics’.
- An overview of the revisions following consultation:
 - Number of days open and events increased to around 40 from ‘at least ten’.
 - An emphasis of weekly activities in forthcoming publicity.
 - The opening of the gardens on the first Saturday and Sunday of every month and every Wednesday from April to September 2014.
 - The offering of school visits on Wednesday during term-time between April and September 2014.
 - Publicity aimed at targeted audiences for income generation purposes.
 - Publicity to generally reflect that Belgrave Hall and Gardens was a heritage site open regularly for the public.
 - Information about opening times and events to be clearly detailed in the Belgrave Hall and Gardens brochure.
 - The publicity to be distributed in the immediate neighbourhood.
 - Information about the programme of events to be more easily available online.
 - More attention required in terms of interpreting the history of the site and the neighbourhood.

- A recognition of the need to formally register the change of use from a 'museum' to a 'heritage site'.
- A delay in the launch of commercial activities.
- An acknowledgement that income generation would be slower than anticipated.

This was followed by a short presentation by the Chair, who displayed a series of photographs taken during a recent visit to Belgrave Hall and Gardens. She expressed a preference to extend the opening hours of the site once the building works had been completed.

Councillor Clair, Assistant City Mayor for Culture, Heritage, Leisure and Sport informed the Scrutiny Commission that the report had been prepared following the previous request from the Commission. He explained that in spite of significant budgetary pressures, all sites in Leicester had remained open, but that some, including Belgrave Hall and Gardens, were to experience a reduction in opening hours. He stated that the proposed decision was in the best interests of the site, and would allow it to remain open and operational for at least a further twenty years. He was thankful for the comments and feedback provided by the Belgrave Hall Conservation Area Society.

Mr David Holding of the Belgrave Hall Conservation Area Society was invited to address the Scrutiny Commission. He questioned the level of consultation carried out by the City Council, citing no direct consultation to both himself or other members of the society. He also generally felt that views publicly expressed had not been taken into consideration, and referred to a petition submitted by over 600 people.

Mr Holding was of the view that the report inaccurately illustrated the number of visits to the site by members of the public, stating that the true figure was significantly higher. Mr Holding also stressed that Belgrave Hall was the only of its kind accessible to the public and spoke of its value to the heritage of Leicester.

Councillor Willmott contributed further to the discussion, stating that the building had been held in great affection over many generations, and questioned the robustness of the proposed business plan.

Officers agreed to follow up a claim from Mr Holding that staff had indicated to members of the public that donations to the Hall were not accepted. Concerns were also raised with regards to the existing publicity strategy, with members of the society stating that it was insufficient to publicise the programme of activities on the website and in the brochure only, and that the site noticeboard had not been regularly updated nor stated the opening hours.

There was a view from both Mr Holding, other members of the society and Councillor Willmott that the deregistration of the Hall as a museum would be essentially down-grading its importance. In response, the Head of Arts and

Museums explained that it was beneficial for marketing purposes for the site to be classified as a heritage site. She also pointed out that if it was classified as a museum but did not receive an accreditation, then funding provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund could potentially be in jeopardy.

Members of the Scrutiny Commission generally felt that Belgrave Hall was seen as a historical building which was central to Leicester's heritage, and that an increase in overall resource was required.

Members of the Belgrave Hall Conservation Area Society referred to some inaccuracies contained within a leaflet which had been distributed to those residing close to the site. Officers confirmed that this was not official communication from the City Council. In response to a further suggestion, officers stated that they could explore ways of showcasing artefacts in possession of the City Council at Belgrave Hall which were currently not displayed elsewhere.

Members of the Belgrave Hall Conservation Area Society asked the Scrutiny Commission to consider the following:

- (i) That the Scrutiny Commission look more closely at the robustness of the business plan.
- (ii) To ask the Executive if there was any prospect for reconsidering an extension of the public opening hours of the hall and gardens.
- (iii) To explore other options for site usage, such as the establishment of an Art Gallery or a Sculpture Park
- (iv) To ask officers to look at the possibility of showcasing artefacts at Belgrave Hall in possession of the City Council which were currently not displayed elsewhere.
- (v) To ask officers to convene a meeting with the Belgrave Hall Conservation Area Society to discuss the potential of developing volunteering opportunities.
- (vi) To ask officers to explore the potential to form links between Belgrave Hall and the proposed Railway Museum.
- (vii) To ask officers to explore the possibility of establishing a local history museum within the Belgrave Hall site.
- (viii) To consider using Belgrave Hall to stage weddings and other ceremonial events.

Councillor Joshi, seconded by Councillor Fonseca, moved that the above suggestions put forward by Members and the Belgrave Hall Conservation Area Society be endorsed by the Scrutiny Commission, and that these be forwarded to relevant officers and the Executive for their consideration.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive be asked to consider the recommendations of the Scrutiny Commission as outlined above (points (i) – (viii)).

29. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7:20pm.

