

AT A MEETING of the Countryside, Culture and Communities Select Committee
of HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL held at the castle, Winchester on
Wednesday, 7th December, 2022

Chairman:

* Councillor Rob Mocatta

* Councillor Jackie Branson	Councillor Alexis McEvoy
* Councillor Lulu Bowerman	Councillor Tanya Park
* Councillor Steven Broomfield	* Councillor Stephen Reid
* Councillor Pamela Bryant	* Councillor Ann Briggs
* Councillor Peter Chegwyn	
* Councillor Rod Cooper	
* Councillor Alex Crawford	
* Councillor Barry Dunning	
* Councillor Dominic Hiscock	
Councillor Hugh Lumby	

*Present

Also present with the agreement of the Chairman:

Councillor Russell Oppenheimer, Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities.

Councillor Rob Humby, Executive Member for Policy, Resources and Economic Development

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Hugh Lumby and Tanya Park.

Councillor Ann Briggs was in attendance and substituting as the Conservative Deputy Member.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were mindful that where they believed they had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter considered at the meeting they must declare that interest at the time of the relevant debate and, having regard to the circumstances described in Part 3, Paragraph 1.5 of the County Council's Members' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with Paragraph 1.6 of the Code. Furthermore Members were mindful that where they believed they had a Personal interest in a matter being considered at the meeting they considered whether such interest should be declared, and having regard to Part 5, Paragraph 5 of the Code, considered whether it was appropriate to leave the meeting whilst the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with the Code.

There were no interests declared at this point in the meeting.

12. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

13. **DEPUTATIONS**

The Committee received five deputations relating to the item on the agenda about future proposals relating to Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve:

Caroline Herbert

Caroline as a local resident, spoke against the proposals and highlighted the petition which had been submitted to save the Haven Centre (Haven House), and that the Centre had recently been listed as an Asset of Community Value (ACV), and the Hill Head Residents Association (HHRA) were in the process of registering as a charity to take over the Centre. HHRA had also been in communication with the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIWWT). She highlighted that the proposals had ignored the public's views and showed a lack of understanding for those who regularly visited the Centre, the residents who were dependent on it and the proposals were open to Judicial Review. Caroline stated that Alver Valley Country Park was not geographically close or offered the same experience as an alternative for residents to visit, and Haven House was a warm, safe and tranquil place.

Tracey Viney

Tracey as a local resident, and volunteer at the Nature Reserve, spoke against the proposals. She spoke about how many of the volunteers were local residents, elderly and living on their own, who value the Centre for social contact. She highlighted that the proposals were ill conceived, and would not be able to be delivered, such as the proposed hut, uncertainty of seasonal catering provision and future income from donations. Tracey stated that the findings of the recent Hampshire County Council (HCC) visitor survey indicated that some existing members would not renew their membership, visitor numbers would fall, and it was unrealistic to assume visitor numbers would remain high. She also highlighted that HCC would only achieve an annual saving of £60,000, which does not provide a best value solution. She emphasised that the volunteers were extremely concerned about the proposals, but if the sale of the properties did go ahead then it was essential that the proceeds did go to the Nature Reserve. Tracey concluded by requesting that the proposals should be rejected and the Service undertake a more robust options appraisal, complete a full cost benefits analysis on all the options and develop a more robust financial proposal.

Lynne Murray

Lynne Murray spoke as a local resident opposed to the proposals and referenced the four options which were part of the original business case. She highlighted that transferring Haven House to a third party was dismissed originally and now this has become an option in the decision report. Lynne stated that the HIWWT had confirmed in writing their interest, and she highlighted that Councillors should be asking for more information on the

proposals. She spoke about the projected savings as a result of the proposals, and spoke about this being dependent on donations received, and it was likely that some membership income would stop, this would mean that any projected SP23 savings for HCC would be reduced. HCC's net cash contribution figure was also queried as this had increased from the original business case to £76,000. Lynne concluded by emphasising the opposition of local residents, the proposals should be rejected, and that Haven House should be kept open for an extra six months whilst more communication takes place with HIWWT. She also highlighted that more information on income generating opportunities should be sought.

Councillor Pal Hayre (HCC Councillor for Fareham Crofton division)

Councillor Hayre, as the local HCC Councillor for the Fareham Crofton area, spoke against the proposals and emphasised that she spoke on behalf of many families and residents of the area. She highlighted that the area needed places like the café which brought people together, was a valued facility, and benefitted people's mental health. Councillor Hayre understood the budget concerns for HCC but stressed that this shouldn't be on the agenda for closure. As the local HCC Councillor, Councillor Hayre was unhappy not to be consulted on the proposals and had received hundreds of letters of concern about the proposals. She also queried why Haven Cottage had stayed empty for so long, and why Haven House had been neglected. In concluding, Councillor Hayre emphasised that an extension should be agreed to keep Haven House and its facilities open for another six months to explore alternative options.

Councillor Louise Parker-Jones (HCC Councillor for Bishopstoke and Fair Oak division)

Councillor Parker-Jones spoke against the proposals and highlighted the importance of the Nature Reserve and how much the café was valued by local residents, and the impact, particularly on the elderly, if the café closed. Councillor Parker-Jones also highlighted that the potential cost savings were low compared to other areas that HCC were looking at. She concluded by welcoming the potential opportunities with the HIWWT and HHRA but highlighted that the Executive Member decisions shouldn't be taken without HCC exploring further what these opportunities would mean.

14. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman was delighted to announce that Hampshire Library Service had been awarded the 'Library of Sanctuary' accreditation. Members heard that this award recognised the work of the Library Service to provide welcoming places of safety for all, and its work to offer sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution. The judging panel, which included individuals with lived experience of coming to Hampshire as refugees, were unanimous in their praise for the work that Hampshire's Library Service was doing, and commented particularly on the impressive connections that Hampshire's Library Service has made with partners across the region.

The Chairman also extended his gratitude to Sue Lapham and Felicity Roe who would both be leaving Hampshire County Council (HCC) this month. Members heard that Sue has worked at HCC for 36 years, and in the last few years has served the Committee in her capacity as Finance Business Partner for Culture,

Communities and Business Services (CCBS), whilst Felicity has worked at HCC for 29 years and held the role of Director of CCBS for four years. The Chairman highlighted that both will be very much missed, and on behalf of the Committee he thanked them for their dedication, sound advice and excellent leadership, and wished them well in the future.

15. **TITCHFIELD HAVEN NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE - FUTURE PROPOSALS (LESS EXEMPT APPENDIX)**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services for pre-scrutiny, seeking the support of the Committee on proposals regarding the future of Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve following a period of staff consultation and public engagement (Item 6 in the Minute Book). Support of the Committee was sought on proposals which would be considered by the Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities and by the Executive Member for Policy, Resources and Economic Development at their respective Decision Days on 8 December 2022.

Members of the Committee were shown a presentation which highlighted key areas of the report. It was explained that the current operating model of the Nature Reserve was financially unsustainable with a net cost of £136,000 for the 2022/23 financial year. Attention was also drawn to the estimated running costs over the next three years and the level of investment needed for the Nature Reserve, Haven House and Haven Cottage. If no changes were made to the current operating model, and it was forecast that with costs increasing, this would mean a total pressure against budget of £1,831,000. Members heard that the option recommended was 'Option 4 – Change Focus' which would prioritise the Nature Reserve and manage without the café, visitor centre and shop. This would also reduce revenue costs, improve access and was the most viable option. Officers explained that by closing these facilities and selling Haven House and Haven Cottage, an estimated £2million of capital receipt would be generated. It was proposed that this would help to reduce revenue costs towards SP23, and invest in longer term management of the Nature Reserve by improved access, visitor experience and retaining a strong customer and volunteer offer.

Officers also presented details relating to the staff consultation which commenced on 27 September 2022, and Appendix C to the report outlined the main feedback and outcome of this consultation. In terms of staffing impact, it was highlighted that 50% of staff would retain their employment, and 50% would remain at risk of redundancy, and it was emphasised that officers had done their best to limit the impact on staff and find alternative employment for some. Members also heard details about the public engagement approach and the high level of feedback and good breadth of responses received from the public engagement survey. Members noted that a signed petition of 9991 signatories had been received opposing the closure of the visitor centre and café, but it was important to stress that the Nature Reserve itself wouldn't be closing and very few Nature Reserves have a café as part of their offer.

Officers highlighted the engagement that had taken place with organisations and elected representatives in order to explore any viable solutions. It was heard that the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) had confirmed that to enter into a partnership was not a strategic priority for them, whilst there had been contact with the National Trust no further communication had been received from them. In relation to the HIWWT, the Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities confirmed that he had very recently received correspondence from the Chief Executive of the Trust which reinforced that the going concern of the café would make it difficult for them to develop their business plan, therefore ruling out taking this on, but they would put forward an Expression of Interest (EOI). The position of the HHRA was that they would put forward an EOI and proposals to work with the HIWWT.

Members of the Committee also heard that Haven House had recently been nominated as an ACV by HHRA, and Fareham Borough Council (FBC) had approved this on 11 November 2022 and the details relating to this were explained to Members, which could mean the disposal of Haven House could be delayed by up to six months. Officers concluded by highlighting amendments to the proposed recommendations as a result of public engagement feedback which included; provision of bike racks, exploring options for a seasonal catering offer, ensuring appropriate covenants and consideration of transferring to a third party.

In response to Members questions, it was confirmed that:

- There are currently nine National Nature Reserves in Hampshire, of which five are managed by HCC and four are managed by Natural England. An organisation must be approved by Natural England as being competent to manage a National Nature Reserve.
- The questions asked as part of the public engagement survey sought detailed responses and feedback to the proposals, rather than 'yes' or 'no' answers in support of the proposals.
- The ACV process would involve HCC informing FBC of the intention to sell Haven House which would then commence a six week period for an EOI to be received. If an EOI was received then a six month moratorium period commences, which would include the initial six weeks.
- The proposals will enhance visits to the Nature Reserve by the use of online ticketing, and maintaining engagement and working with visitors.
- The site is larger than the footprint of the Nature Reserve, with the future intention to create a wider land management plan for the area, support biodiversity and access to County farmland. Some minor investment would be needed to enable this.
- HCC do manage other Nature Reserves without cafes, and these Nature Reserves experience high number of visitors. The statutory requirement for HCC is to ensure the running and management of the National Nature Reserve only.
- The location of Haven House and Haven Cottage is unique, and if the proposals are agreed, then the expectation is that there will be strong interest in these buildings, but sensible offers would need to be made to HCC.

- One of the changes made to the initial proposals was to ensure more engagement with volunteer workers at the Nature Reserve, and to meet their needs whilst ensuring visitor support.

Councillor Pamela Bryant declared an interest at this point in proceedings as a Member of Fareham Borough Council.

- The overall energy costs generated by Haven House outweigh any income generated by the solar panels on the roof of the House, and the income from the solar panels goes directly to the National Grid.
- Officers confirmed that if any organisations came forward with an EOI and viable proposals for the running of Haven House and a café, then HCC would work with any third party organisation or community/residents association in taking this forward. Any such organisation/association would have to be proven competent to take this on, and any proposals be cost-neutral to HCC as set out in the report recommendations.
- Discussions have taken place with FBC around the impact on visitors of parking charges and possible parking passes for volunteers, but no proposals have been offered from FBC.
- HCC would welcome any proposals from HIWWT taking over liability and ownership of Haven House and the HHRA taking responsibility of running the café, but there hasn't been a viable proposal as yet put forward, and HCC can't be certain that this will happen.
- If a third party organisation submitted a proposal, then there would be potential to transfer proceeds from the sale of Haven Cottage as part of the negotiations.

Before the Chairman moved to debate, an additional recommended was proposed by Councillor Jackie Branson and seconded by Councillor Rod Cooper:

'That the Countryside, Culture and Communities Select Committee recommends to the Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities and the Executive Member for Policy, Resources and Economic Development: that if Haven House and the Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve are transferred to another party as a result of proposal made under paragraph 5 then that transfer should include Haven Cottage or the net proceeds of sale of Haven Cottage, subject to negotiations with the parties involved'.

Members of the Committee seemed supportive of this additional recommendation, but before a vote was taken on the additional recommendation and the other substantive recommendations, the Chairman moved to debate and the following points were made by Members:

- That the Committee had done its job well in pre-scrutinising the proposals, and there could be a window of opportunity to save the facilities through proposals from other parties, which would be welcomed by the wider public and users of the facilities.
- That it's recognised that HCC is in a difficult position with budgetary problems and trying to balance the books, but it does seem that there

could be a constructive way forward with potential proposals that may be submitted from other parties which don't involve costs to HCC.

- That there were concerns about closing Haven House whilst negotiations were taking place with interested parties, and it would be welcomed if this was kept open and the café run by volunteers.
- This is a good opportunity to involve the community going forward, and supporting the recommendations, with the additional recommendation, would be a good move towards this.

Following the debate, the Chairman thanked officers for their work and presentation of the report. The Chairman put forward the additional recommendation which was voted on and agreed unanimously.

The Chairman then put forward the recommendations as given in the report to the Select Committee, that the Countryside, Culture and Communities Select Committee support:

‘the recommendations being proposed to the Executive Member for Countryside, Culture & Communities as detailed in paragraphs 3 to 9 of the Decision Report’.

‘and the recommendations being proposed to the Executive Member for Policy, Resources and Economic Development as detailed in paragraphs 10 to 13 of the Decision Report’.

This was voted on and agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Countryside, Culture and Communities Select Committee supports the recommendations being proposed to the Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities as detailed in paragraphs 3 to 9 of the Decision Report.
- b) That the Countryside, Culture and Communities Select Committee supports the recommendations being proposed to the Executive Member for Policy, Resources and Economic Development as detailed in paragraphs 10 to 13 of the Decision Report.
- c) That the Countryside, Culture and Communities Select Committee recommends to the Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities and the Executive Member for Policy, Resources and Economic Development that if Haven House and the Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve are transferred to another party as a result of proposal made under paragraph 5 then that transfer should include Haven Cottage or the net proceeds of sale of Haven Cottage, subject to negotiations with the parties involved.

16. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

As there was no requirement to go into exempt session, the press and public were not excluded from the meeting.

17. **TITCHFIELD HAVEN NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE - FUTURE PROPOSALS - EXEMPT APPENDIX**

The exempt appendix was considered as part of item 6 on the agenda without being directly referenced, and therefore there was no requirement to go into exempt session.

Chairman,