

31 March, 2015

LLANELLI RURAL COUNCIL

Minute Nos: 456 – 461

At a **SPECIAL COUNCIL** Meeting of the Llanelli Rural Council held at the Council Chamber, Vauxhall Buildings, Vauxhall, Llanelli, on Tuesday, 31 March, 2015, at 6.00 p.m.

Present: Cllr. M. V. Davies (Vice Chairman (in the Chair))

Cllrs.

F. Akhtar	R. E. Evans
S. M. Caiach	S. N. Lewis
D. M. Cundy	A. G. Morgan
S. L. Davies	J. S. Phillips
T. Devichand	C. A. Rees
S. M. Donoghue	A. J. Rogers
H. J. Evans	W. V. Thomas

Together with: Mr Mark Davies, Property Services and Mr Jonathan Fearn, Head of Corporate Property, Carmarthenshire County Council as well as sports clubs representatives from Dafen, Pwll and Trallwm.

456. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. L. A. Beer, T. Bowen, L. J. Butler, M. L. Evans, T. J. Jones and G. H. Wooldridge.

457. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were made:

<i>Minute No:</i>	<i>Councillor</i>	<i>Interest</i>
459	D. M. Cundy	Personal interest – committee member – Trallwm Community Hall
459	S. L. Davies	Personal interest – Secretary, Dafen Welfare Committee
459	T. Devichand	Personal interest – Chairman, Dafen Welfare Committee
459	S. N. Lewis	Personal interest – committee member – Dafen Welfare Hall
460	T. Devichand	Personal and prejudicial interest – Member of the Executive Board for Housing, Carmarthenshire County Council

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458. SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

The Chairman announced in order to engage in full debate, it would be necessary to suspend Standing Orders in part. This was necessary to lift restrictions on time limits for making points, asking questions and generally speaking on issues as well as allowing representatives of the sports clubs to participate openly in the meeting and it was

RESOLVED that Standing Orders 12.2, 12.3, 12.4, 12.5 and 12.6 be suspended.

459. TRANSFER OF ASSETS PROGRAMME

Cllr. D. M. Cundy declared a personal interest in the following item, as he was a committee member, Trallwm Community Hall. Cllr. S. L. Davies declared a personal interest in the following item, as she was Secretary, Dafen Welfare Committee. Cllr. T. Devichand declared a personal interest in the following item as she was Chairman, Dafen Welfare Committee. Cllr. S. N. Lewis declared a personal interest in the following item as she was a committee member, Dafen Welfare Committee.

Further to Minute No. 354, Members considered email correspondence from Mr Jonathan Fearn, Head of Corporate Property, Carmarthenshire County Council in response to the Clerk's letter dated 27 January, 2015. In addition to this County Council representatives had agreed to attend the special meeting to speak in more detail about general progress with the asset transfer programme and the pitch hire policy.

Prior to inviting the County Council representatives into the Chamber to participate in the meeting the Chairman invited the Clerk to summarise the purpose of the meeting and to outline key points on asset transfer and the proposed pricing strategy for pitch hire fees.

The Chairman then invited comments from the floor on the matters before the Council and in light of the information provided by the Clerk. Both the Members and representatives from the various sporting organisations then asked questions about the Council's role and involvement with the asset transfer programme. At this juncture, the Chairman of Dafen Cricket Club, requested the Council to take on the transfer of Dafen Park. By way of response, the Clerk stated it was a little premature to make any firm decision over further asset transfers at tonight's meeting other than those already being pursued by the Council. A view could not be taken until the County Council's pricing strategy for using its sports pitches had been finalised. The Clerk briefly commented that the Council had increased its grants budget in anticipation of offering additional support. Although the County Council had frozen its decision to substantially increase the charges for using its sports pitches; once so determined it might transpire that the most economic and sensible option for the Council to pursue would be to simply increase the level of grant support to those groups currently supported under the Council's policy as opposed to asset transferring the likes of Dafen park.

Having received and dealt with all preliminary questions and comments, the Chairman then invited the County Council representatives into the Chamber to participate in the debate. He welcomed to the meeting Mr Jonathan Fearn, Head of Corporate Property and Mr Mark Davies, Property Services, Carmarthenshire County Council and invited them to provide a general overview of the transfer of assets programme and proposals for introducing pitch hire fees for sporting organisations.

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Prior to providing a general progress report the County representatives extended apologies on behalf of County Cllrs Colin Evans and Jeff Edmunds (Executive Board Members) for their non-attendance. Cllr. Edmunds had arrived for the meeting but had general mobility problems and was unable to walk up the stairs preventing him from entering the Chamber.

Mr Davies then proceeded to talk about the progress made with the County Council's pitch hire fees in so far as proposals related to sporting activities in the Rural Council's area namely football, bowls and cricket.

Mr Davies stated that for the sporting organisations, the football clubs were still in negotiations between the Carmarthenshire league, West Wales League and the F. A. W. Trust. In the main however, discussions had been held with the Carmarthenshire League. The proposal was to have a single point of contact via the league who in turn would make arrangements with the clubs. The league was looking to optimise the number of pitches in use in the Llanelli area; the principle being that for every pitch available for hire a junior game would be played in the morning and a senior game played in the afternoon. The league was looking at increasing the number of games per division to 30 a season for each club and using around 16 pitches in the process. As a result some pitches would be decommissioned but those that were would still be maintained as general amenity areas.

Mr Davies then briefly turned his attention to bowls and cricket. There wasn't a great deal to report on bowls. However, he was aware that it looked as though bowls clubs were going to establish a Carmarthenshire Association and he believed a meeting of the bowls clubs was to take place imminently. Mr Davies commented the bowls clubs were seeking a reduction in pitch specification based on the model currently employed by Swansea City Council in the West Glamorgan area. He confirmed clubs were also willing to litter pick and dig out the gulleys etc around the greens but more work and negotiations were needed before agreeing a final solution. In so far as cricket was concerned clubs had expressed an interest in maintaining the square with the County Council maintaining the outfield. The County Council was amenable to the idea to help reduce costs in this way but further work was needed because of insurance and health and safety implications.

Turning attention back to football, some of the football clubs had expressed interest in self-help whereby they would mark the pitches themselves. The County Council would do the first mark and then the clubs would take over for the rest of the season. This would work out to be a cheaper arrangement dropping the pitch hire fee from £2,500 to £2,000 per season. However, under optimisation proposals if teams shared one of the pitches at Penywaer they would only pay 50% of the pitch hire fee.

General discussion followed and the various football representatives made several points about the proposed arrangements and how the pitch hire fees had been formulated. The prices quoted by Mr Davies reflected the pitch optimisation arrangement of using 14 pitches not 16 pitches as mentioned during tonight's meeting. The fees would increase if ultimately all pitches were retained as maintenance costs would increase.

The Clerk enquired what was the pricing strategy and when were proposals to be finalised. The Rural Council currently grant aided sports clubs using County facilities in the Rural area. Grant support would continue while the changes were being made.

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Mr Davies responded, stating the County Council was waiting for the football association to come back to it, after fine tuning the proposals. It was difficult to give a time line to the Rural Council. The officers would know more by the end of the summer period.

A representative from one of the sporting organisations stated that games were called off due to the pitches not being up to standard based on the current level of maintenance. How could 30 games per pitch be justified when at the moment it was a struggle to facilitate 22 games on a pitch based on the current league structure. Playing more games on fewer pitches would have an adverse impact on the condition of the pitches.

In response, Mr Davies confirmed that it was the Carmarthenshire League that had made the decision to reduce the number of pitches not the County Council. Carmarthenshire League had decided it wanted to use 16 pitches.

Representatives from Trallwm AFC spoke about how pitch optimisation might affect their ongoing arrangements particularly the notion of playing at Penygaer playing fields if the pitch at Trallwm was decommissioned. The club would be in danger of losing its identity and affinity if it had to move home to Penygaer. Furthermore, it was noted that this would have repercussions for Trallwm Hall. The hall was used by the football club because it had a changing room facility. Any decision to decommission the Trallwm football pitch would potentially affect the ongoing sustainability of the hall.

Discussion then broadened to look at the general proposals for local groups and town and community councils to take up asset transfer. Members were confused and frustrated at the lack of progress over the last 12 months and with the level of grant support now on offer to transfer assets from the County Council; this wasn't a big incentive.

Members enquired how sports teams were meant to realistically budget for their season when the County Council hadn't finalised its pricing mechanism for pitch hire fees. A year had passed with no further progress. Mr Fearn responded by stating he was keen for the sporting assets and recreational assets to be kept open with a 99 year lease structure to retain and safeguard assets as green open space. Mr Davies commented that it had been a drawn out process. However, the sporting organisations that were willing to take on the asset themselves would receive help from the County Council. Despite issues with health and safety and insurance, the County Council was keen to find a solution to help teams.

Members then queried the amount of grant support on offer. From earlier meetings with Cllr. Kevin Madge, Leader, Carmarthenshire County Council, the Council was informed it was at the front of the queue to receive grant support for pursuing the assets it was interested in transferring. The amount of funding now on offer had decreased from what was originally understood to be on offer. In the past there was no mention of limiting payment to a one off payment per organisation. It was understood that each asset would attract an improvement grant. The maximum improvement grant per organisation of £10,000 now available was insufficient to finance refurbishing play areas in Cilsaig, Dafen and at Pontyates Park. Both sites needed major capital investment to replace the existing playground equipment with brand new equipment at each site. Fortunately the Rural Council had secured £50,000 external grant support for the transfer of the play area at Swiss Valley. The £10,000 improvement grant on offer from the County Council could theoretically be used in its entirety to fund the shortfall required to fully complete this scheme. The scheme was valued at £80,000 and so far the Council had accrued £70,000 to fund the project including the grants. Mr Fearn conceded that

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circumstances had changed. The County Council's Executive Board had reviewed the amount of grant support to be made available and had decided to limit a payment of up to £10,000 per organisation. This was the maximum amount on offer depending on the number of asset transfers being pursued by organisations. It didn't necessarily follow that organisations would automatically receive a £10,000 improvement grant for transferring an asset.

Discussion then moved on to focus on the County Council's offer to provide two years' worth of maintenance grant to the transferring body. Sports representatives were keen to discover what would happen to the funding in year three given the County Council received this money from Welsh Government as part of its Revenue Support Grant settlement to complement the money collected from Council Tax payments. Mr Fearn confirmed that no further grant support would be made available in year three. The money would not be passed on; it would be retained by the County Council to fund other budget areas.

Members commented that pitch hire fees needed to be resolved as soon as possible. The situation was far from satisfactory and had a bearing on asset transfers. If certain assets were discontinued it would have a detrimental impact on communities. Reference was made to the unreasonableness of the County Council imposing a deadline for expressions of interest in asset transfers by 2016 and then having to complete transfers by 2018 and yet to date the County Council was no closer to finalising its pitch hire fees. How could groups make reasonable and informed decisions about asset transfer without knowing first what the alternative cost options were for pitch hire. The situation was very confusing and unhelpful. The cricket season was due to start in five weeks' time and clubs had no idea what to budget for going forward.

Members then sought the County Council's view about sports groups deciding to pursue the asset transfer of pitches only, with them having no interest in the other areas of the park. Mr Fearn confirmed this patchwork approach would not be permitted. It wouldn't be sensible to agree to this. A park would have to be transferred in totality either by a town or community council or a community group and this would be done via a lease. Members from the Dafen ward queried the status of Dafen Park which was gifted to the former Llanelli Borough Council by the public so then why couldn't the freehold interest in the park be given back to the likes of the Rural Council. Mr Fearn confirmed that the County Council's Executive Board had decided that the freehold interest would be retained in the ownership of the County Council because it was keen to safeguard these spaces for future use as sporting and recreational assets.

Members expressed general dissatisfaction with the amount of annual maintenance grant itemised for the assets referred to in Mr Fearn's email correspondence. Reference was also made to alternative sources of money being made available via section 106 agreements for supporting assets such as the Cilsaig play area. It may have been better to separate how transfers of particular sites were packaged. In reply, Mr Fearn acknowledged that the maintenance grant available for some sites wasn't substantial but the figures had been compiled from the County Council's 2013/14 budget. In respect of section 106 money; if money was available there would be liaison with the local county councillor to agree its distribution. However, in all probability any money raised via a section 106 agreement for Cilsaig had probably now run out.

Attention briefly turned to the Felinfoel Recreation Ground and ancillary land occupied by the former school building and to the possibility of the Rural Council submitting an expression of interest to develop part of the parcel of land into a play area. Mr Fearn confirmed the procedure for pursuing such interest if the Council was so minded. The Clerk then briefly responded and

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stated a community group had already submitted an interest in the land and was looking to make grant bids to various outside bodies. However, he recognised the history of what had previously been envisaged for the area and it might be that the Rural Council would need to intervene in some capacity if the community group was unsuccessful in obtaining grant support going forward. This matter had already been earmarked as something to keep a watchful eye on. He confirmed that the Rural Council had previously agreed to support the endeavours of the local group by taking on the annual maintenance responsibilities for a new play area on that site.

Attention then turned back to the amount of grant funding on offer from the County Council. Members felt the County Council's current policy was unfair; particularly as the Rural Council was looking to transfer a number of assets. Financial support should be made on a per asset basis; £10,000 was simply not enough money. In response to a question, Mr Fearn confirmed the County Council currently had a budget pot of £240,000 available. Members commented that under the capping limit this would only be enough to fund up to a maximum of 24 organisations and despite this 11 projects had provisionally been earmarked in the email correspondence for the Rural Council to take on. Members expressed the view that the County Council ought to rethink its approach and come up with another plan; there was a clear need for a further meeting with County representatives as matters evolved and unfolded. The position over asset transfer and the issue of pitch hire fees was no closer to being resolved and the present delays were unhelpful for all stakeholders. The delays were certainly not assisting the Rural Council as it had been at the forefront in looking to progress asset transfers and in offering grant support to sporting organisations using County run facilities. Given the Rural Council's positioning it needed to have options and relevant information on costs to best assess how to proceed.

Mr Fearn in response confirmed that the delays surrounding the asset transfer programme and entering into leases had now been resolved with the County Council now having a robust framework in place. In terms of providing up to date information, unfortunately he was not in a position yet to provide next year's maintenance costs for scrutiny. In response to a question on whether any community groups within the Rural Council area had expressed an interest in asset transfer, Mr Fearn stated no groups had applied.

The Chairman then looked to close debate and during which it was confirmed that although the County Council's strategy had yet to be finalised, the meeting itself had provided an important and useful opportunity to share information and to garner views from respective stakeholders. Reference was made to retaining recreational space as important amenity areas to sustain community general well-being: Welsh Government was offering £5 million to local authorities in interest free loans to invest capital in parks and buildings and it was

RESOLVED that:

1. A letter be sent to Carmarthenshire County Council's Executive Board asking it to revisit how it allocated grant monies towards its asset transfer programme as the current system was deemed unreasonable.
2. The matter of pitch hire fees be revisited once the position became clearer and in view of County Council officers having a clearer view on strategy after the summer of 2015.

Mr Mark Davies thereupon withdrew from the meeting, along with the sporting organisations from Dafen, Pwll and Trallwm.

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460. BRYNMAEN COMMUNITY HALL

Cllr. T. Devichand declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the following item as she was the Executive Board Member for Housing, Carmarthenshire County Council.

Members considered email correspondence from Mr I Llewellyn, Forward Planning Manager and Mr J Fearn, Head of Corporate Property, Carmarthenshire County Council regarding the Planning Brief for Brynmefys Estate, Furnace, Llanelli.

The Forward Planning Section was preparing a Planning Brief on behalf of the Housing Division and Corporate Property, Carmarthenshire County Council to inform of any future proposals for the residential development at Brynmefys, Furnace. The brief would provide interested parties with a clear indication of the County Council's likely requirements in relation to obtaining planning permission for a housing led regeneration scheme as well as assist in the understanding of issues on site ahead of its potential disposal.

The Clerk informed Members that a site meeting had been held with Planning Officers and also a subsequent meeting with Mr Fearn to discuss the Council's community hall being retained on site. Mr Fearn's email correspondence referred to the Council being compensated for the potential demolition of the hall. However, it had been communicated to Mr Fearn that while discussing potential compensation terms for the demolition of the hall, this would only be pursued if ultimately there was no prospect of the hall being retained as part of the Planning Brief for the disposal of the site: The Council's first preference would be to retain the hall insitu but if this was not possible then the hall ought to be relocated (at no cost to the Rural Council) to another part of the site when the new estate was developed.

Members then discussed the Council's long standing interest in the site with Mr Fearn. The Council had occupied the site since 1979 when it constructed the community hall but no formal lease was put in place with the former Llanelli Borough Council. Since 2003 the hall had been mothballed because the Council had waited patiently to discover what the future had in store for the estate. It was always the Council's intention to re-open the hall to service the community needs of the Maengwynne and Brynmefys estates. Recently the Maengwynne Residents Association visited the Council expressing an interest for the hall to be re-opened.

Following discussion with Mr Fearn of the potential options for the redesign of the estate and the inclusion of community facilities going forward it was

RESOLVED that the community hall shall be retained insitu on the existing parcel of land at the Brynmefys Estate, Furnace.

Cllr. H. J. Evans withdrew from the meeting midway through the discussion of Minute No. 460 above.

461. PARC HOWARD ASSOCIATION

Correspondence was received from the Acting Secretary, Parc Howard Association informing the Council of the uncertainty of Parc Howard. The Acting Secretary was enquiring if Llanelli Rural Council together with Llanelli Town Council would take on the responsibility and ownership of Parc Howard.

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Members recognised the importance of Parc Howard but also acknowledged that there were a number of potential asset transfers within the Council's administrative area which would take priority should there be a risk that maintenance to various parks and amenity spaces in the Llanelli area was discontinued by the County Council.

The current annual maintenance cost of Parc Howard amounted to £171,000. Members stated this would require a significant funding commitment from the Council to meet the running costs of Parc Howard even if the Town Council was agreeable to entering into a joint partnership to share the costs. If that had proved to be the case, the contribution from the Rural Council would still amount to £85,500 in order to meet its share. This equated to £12 per 'band D' property for every household in the Council's administrative area. This would be additional money raised via the Council Tax precept and this was simply unaffordable given the circumstances and in potentially having to safeguard other parks in the Rural area in the first instance and it was

RESOLVED that the request be declined.

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The Meeting concluded at 8.25 p.m.

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The afore-mentioned Minutes were declared to be a true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chairman presiding thereat and were, on 14 April, 2015, adopted by the Council.