

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cabinet Member for Prosperity**
held on Monday, 22nd August, 2011 at Committee Suite 1 & 2, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor Jamie Macrae, Cabinet Member for Prosperity

In attendance

Councillors Rachel Bailey, Roy Cartlidge, Les Gilbert (Environment and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee Chairman), Peter Groves and Steven Hogben

Officers

Peter Hall, Head of Property Services
Caroline Simpson, Head of Regeneration
Paul Mountford, Democratic Services Officer

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

2 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

Mr Peter Barnard of the Crewe Heritage Trust made the following statement:

“My name is Peter Barnard, I am a Trustee of Crewe Heritage Trust.

As you will know after reading the various background documents , the Heritage centre started to be re-vitalised after appointing a new manager in 2007.

These improvements started to be hampered in 2009 when Mr. Waterman’s Company took possession of further parts of the site and Main Exhibition hall without the permission of the Trustees although their staff repeatedly said that “the Council has given us permission.”

Cheshire East Officers have consistently denied encouraging LNWHR Ltd to encroach and have confirmed this in writing.

The Trust has recently given notice to LNWHR Ltd to give up the land and building spaces they took over in 2009. To our dismay their Solicitors (Messrs Russells) in a very recent letter dated only 10 days ago (12th August) state that “ Our Client’s occupation of the disputed areas arose at the behest of the owners on the freehold of the site, Cheshire East

Council". Whether they will use this information in any future Court proceedings I do not know.

I ask if a copy of the statement I have just made be minuted in the record of this meeting."

3 CREWE HERITAGE CENTRE

The Cabinet Member for Prosperity gave further consideration to a proposal to declare the site of the Crewe Heritage Centre surplus to the requirements of the Council and to offer a 125 year lease for sale on the open market with a restrictive covenant which will preserve the site for the rail heritage of Crewe.

The Cabinet Member had originally considered the matter at a meeting held on 27th June 2011. Having considered the Officers' report, and a letter from the Chairman of Crewe Heritage Trust dated 21st June 2011 which was read at the meeting, the Cabinet Member had resolved as follows:

"That the site of the Crewe Heritage Centre be declared surplus to the requirements of Cheshire East Council and that a 125 year lease be offered for sale on the open market with a restrictive covenant to preserve the site for the rail heritage of Crewe, the lease to be subject to such terms and conditions as are determined by the Assets Manager, Borough Solicitor and Head of Regeneration."

The Cabinet Member's decision was subsequently called in by eight Members, as provided by the Scrutiny Procedure Rules, and was considered at a meeting of the Environment and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee on 25th July 2011. Having considered the matter, the Scrutiny Committee had decided to offer advice to the Cabinet Member. The Scrutiny Committee's minutes had been circulated with the agenda for this meeting.

Having given further consideration to the matter in the light of the advice of the Environment and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet Member made the following statement at the meeting:

"I would like to firstly thank my colleagues on the Environment Scrutiny Committee for their considered comments and advice with respect to my decision on the way forward for Crewe Heritage Centre.

I acknowledge the importance of the decision, particularly for Crewe local members, and the longstanding ambitions for a first class rail heritage visitor attraction in the heart of the town.

However, I must stress again that this is not what we have currently on the site and I would like to explain more fully my original rationale for taking the action to market a head lease for the site.

The current visitor offer at the Crewe Rail Heritage Centre is poor and does not reflect the wider ambitions of the town nor adequately represent the proud industrial rail heritage that we know was the foundation of Crewe's economic success.

The current management arrangements have failed, in my opinion, to deliver the original concept and ambitions, and we are now in a particularly difficult position where there are a number of irregularities with regards to our lease arrangements which must be addressed as part of our role as a landlord as well as to provide a sustainable future for the site.

As I stated in previous meetings, the Council has tried repeatedly over the last twelve months to rectify the position through dialogue and negotiation between both the Heritage Trustees and LNR. Unfortunately, this has not produced an amicable solution which regularises the situation, which has led to the current proposal and decision to market a head lease and see if a party will come forward to manage the site for the future – linked to strong covenants to protect the site for heritage uses in the long-term.

I would now like to address some specific points raised by the Scrutiny Committee:

The recommendation to delay a decision for two years would send, in my opinion, the wrong message to all parties currently operating on the site and the wider public of Crewe that the Council is accepting of the current position. This is not the case.

The Committee specifically made the point that a delay would assist in drawing public money such as Heritage Lottery funding into the site. I have to disagree. In fact I think a delay would actively work against any bids for lottery funding as the current position would deter any funder from investing.

There has also been a very valid suggestion from the Scrutiny Committee that the Heritage Trust is given a deadline to complete a business plan and masterplan for the site. I can state that the Council has already had these discussions with the Trustees and a final deadline was given by the Council to regularise the lease and provide a sustainable masterplan for the site by April 2011 following discussions with local members. I am sorry to say that this deadline was not met by the Trust, and I have little confidence that any further deadlines will be met.

There was also a suggestion that Cheshire East Council elect a Councillor to become a Trustee. I do not see that any course of action proposed precludes this from happening although that would be a decision to be addressed elsewhere and my personal view is that the Trustees should remain independent from the Council.

In conclusion, whilst I fully respect my colleagues' efforts in trying to provide an alternative course of action which still achieves our joint agreed objective, I do not believe a delay of two years is the right decision for the Council at this time.

The Council has spent a considerable amount of time trying to broker a solution between the current parties, and deadlines have been given to the Heritage trustees to regularise their position with regards to the lease.

I have therefore decided to proceed with the original recommendations as set out in the report."

RESOLVED

That having reconsidered the matter in the light of advice received from the Environment and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet Member for Prosperity reaffirms his original decision, namely

"That the site of the Crewe Heritage Centre be declared surplus to the requirements of Cheshire East Council and that a 125 year lease be offered for sale on the open market with a restrictive covenant to preserve the site for the rail heritage of Crewe, the lease to be subject to such terms and conditions as are determined by the Assets Manager, Borough Solicitor and Head of Regeneration."

The meeting commenced at 9.00 am and concluded at 9.18 am

Councillor Jamie Macrae (presiding)