

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CABINET
MONDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2004 AT 2.00 P.M.**

Agenda Item No.

3

**RESPONSE TO THE MOTION CARRIED AT FULL COUNCIL RELATING
TO BARTON TURF SAILING BASE**

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

Author: - Justin Donovan, Deputy Director – Learning & School Effectiveness
Tel: - 01992 555764
Executive Member: Robert Gordon

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 At its meeting on 12 July 2004 the Cabinet authorised the Director of Children, Schools and Families to implement proposals for the reorganisation of Herts Outdoors, with closures of the services at Astonbury, Barton, Pelham and Herts Environment Centre (HEC). The Director was authorised to continue discussions with Hertfordshire Educational Foundation (HEF), Groundwork Trust and others to establish if any third party was willing to make appropriate use of the sites designated for closure, at no cost to the County Council.

At the meeting of the full Council on 20 July the following motion was carried:

“That the Council ask the Cabinet not to go ahead with the closure of Barton Turf Sailing Base until the Herts Educational Foundation and the schools who use the base have had an opportunity to explore ways of keeping the sailing base open”.

- 1.2 This report sets out the steps taken to consult on the future of Barton Turf with the Herts Educational Foundation (HEF) and the schools making use of the base.

2. Summary

- 2.1 As part of the reorganisation process, and in line with the Cabinet decision on 12 July 2004, the Director of CSF had already put in place arrangements to receive and consider any proposal which might make a viable case for the retention of one or more of the Herts Outdoors Centres, including Barton Turf. Additional steps have been taken, however, specifically to ensure that the motion carried at the full

Council meeting of 20 July, relating to Barton Turf, has been addressed in full.

- 2.2 Senior officers have been consulting and collaborating with a working group of HEF members to construct a possible business plan.
- 2.3 Many schools and other interested parties have taken the opportunity to make their views on the issue known to officers of the Council. Steps have been taken to ensure that the views of those schools making use of the base are specifically sought and considered.

3. Conclusions

Steps have been taken to ensure that the motion carried at the meeting of the full Council on 20 July has been addressed in full.

The Director of CSF will be assessing the business case for the retention of Barton Turf in the light of the criteria set out at Appendix 1, and will provide a further report to Cabinet at its meeting on 11th October 2004.

4. Background

- 4.1 At its meeting on 12 July 2004 Cabinet authorised the Director of CSF to reorganise Herts Outdoors by closing the four centres at Astonbury, Pelham, HEC and Barton Turf. This would reduce the overall deficit of the service by £127,000 to approximately £75,000 per annum. By enhancing the provision and restructuring the charges on the remaining sites at Cuffley and Hudnall the deficit was expected to fall further and to be eliminated in the near future.
- 4.2 At the full meeting of the Council of 20 July the motion set out in paragraph 1.1 of this report was carried. Officers have, therefore, worked to ensure that the motion has been addressed in full.

5. Steps taken to consult with HEF

- 5.1 A working group was established by HEF and given the task of producing a business plan which could possibly secure a viable financial basis for the continued operation of Barton Turf. Senior officers from CSF have met with this working group to discuss and agree a procedure and timescale for the production of a business plan. A set of criteria against which a business plan can be fairly judged were agreed (summarised at Appendix 1). A range of proposals to reduce costs and raise income were also discussed.

- 5.2 Senior planning and finance officers re-prioritised their work programmes to create the time needed to work with HEF to produce the business plan.
- 5.3 The Deputy Director – Learning and School Effectiveness made an extended visit to Barton Turf. During this visit he met with the Centre Manager, a member of HEF and a primary headteacher in charge of a school trip to the centre. The Deputy Director walked the site, looked at the resources and spent time on the broad observing a group of pupils under supervision. The views and concerns expressed during the visit were carefully noted and used to inform the business case.
- 5.4 Arrangements are in place to explore with Stevenage Leisure the possibility of a partnership with the private sector in order to secure the long term future of the Centre. A representative from HEF is involved in these discussions.

6. Steps taken to consult with schools making use of the Centre

- 6.1 A number of the schools making use of Barton Turf have already taken the opportunity to make their views known to officers. In the case of two schools, a large number of pupils were encouraged to write in. All those who have responded to the re-organisation proposals, including the pupils, have received written responses. The table below sets out the schools making use of the Centre in the last year and identifies those who have already responded to the proposals to reorganise Herts Outdoors.

Schools actively using the Centre	Response previously received
Collett	
Fairfields	
Flamstead End	√
Howe Dell	
Hurst Drive	
Leventhorpe	√
Marlborough School	√
Meridian	
Middleton	
Morgans	√ + pupils
Neatishead (out of County)	
Nobel	√
North Hertfordshire Education Support Centre	
Roundwood Primary	√
Sacred Heart	
Simon Balle	√
Wheatcroft	√
Woodside	√

- 6.2 The motion carried at the full Council meeting in July proposed that all schools making use of the centre should be consulted. In order to address the motion in full, these schools have received a reminder of the proposals to restructure Herts Outdoors and have been invited to respond. This correspondence is attached at appendix 2. This letter has also been sent to other organisations who make use of the centre:

Hertfordshire Youth and Community Service
Hertfordshire Schools Sailing and Canoeing Association
Hertfordshire Young Mariners Youth Adventure Club,
Rickmansworth and Chorleywood Scouts
Bury Lake Young Mariners

7. Financial Implications

One of the criteria used to evaluate any proposal to secure the future of Barton Turf is the extent to which income matches expenditure (see appendix 1). However, a viable long-term business case might necessitate a continued but much reduced deficit in the first year of its operation.

8 Next Steps

- 8.1 The Director of CSF will be assessing the business case for the retention of Barton Turf in the light of the criteria set out at Appendix 1, and will provide a further report to Cabinet at its meeting on 11 October 2004.

APPENDIX 1

SUMMARY OF THE AGREED FRAMEWORK FOR A BUSINESS PLAN

The two key criteria against which a business case will be evaluated are:-

- The benefits the Centre offers to Hertfordshire's children, particularly in terms of education.
- The extent to which the income matches expenditure and the operation of the Centre is sustainable over the longer term.

The business case is to cover four key areas:

- An income and expenditure statement over a 3 year period with assumptions and risks clearly identified.
- A financial statement which covers the areas listed below

Expenditure	Income
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff costs (Management) (Operational) (Caretaking)• Premises and maintenance costs• Equipment• Other operating costs• Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trading• Donations• Other income

- Business assumptions which deal with the areas listed below:
 - The management and operational arrangements.
 - How the centre will be staffed.
 - The required investment and how this will be resourced.
 - The mix and projected volumes of trading activities, detailing how these will be split between Hertfordshire schools and others.
 - Any limitations of the service such as length of sessions.
- A risk analysis of the business plan to include the best and worst case scenarios around the trading activities. Specific risks to the service, such as weather, business competition or availability of qualified staff, to be covered.

APPENDIX 2

Letter to Schools

Dear

BARTON TURF

I am writing to your school as one of the recent users of Barton Turf Centre in Norfolk. You will know that a proposal has been made to close four Hertfordshire Outdoors service centres, including Barton Turf, with effect from 31st December 2004. The best value review in 1999 recommended that the Herts Outdoors service could become self-financing, but evidence over the past three years has shown that this is unlikely to be possible. At a recent meeting of the County Council a motion was carried that the closure of Barton should not go ahead until the Herts Education Foundation (HEF) and schools who use the centre have had the opportunity to explore ways of keeping the sailing base open.

A number of schools have already written to us and a working group has been established with HEF to try to produce a business plan which could possibly secure a viable financial basis for the continued operation of Barton Turf.

The purpose of this letter is to ask those schools who are regular users for their views on the future of the centre. Any letters previously sent will be considered so please do not feel that you have to write again, but we would be interested to hear any specific ideas users have about how the centre could be made more financially viable. It may be possible to build these ideas into the business plan.

You may wish to comment on such issues as more flexibility over the length of bookings, the facilities, the range of activities, the viability of a significant price increase, the catering arrangements and the use of the environmental education facilities, etc.

A simple response form is attached, but do not feel restricted by it. We will be pleased to receive any form of response, by Friday 17th September.

Yours sincerely,



Andy Cunningham
Head of School Effectiveness - Secondary

Barton Turf Response Form

Please return to Andy Cunningham, Wheathampstead Development Centre, Butterfield Road, Wheathampstead, St Albans. AL4 8PY, by Friday 17th September.

Please feel free to comment on any issue, but the suggestions below may help your thoughts.

What ideas do you have to develop the work of the centre and make it more financially viable?

Would you be able to accept a substantial price rise e.g. 50% or 100%?

How might activities at the centre be broadened?

Would you prefer more flexibility over the length of bookings e.g. 2 days or 3 days?