

COUNCIL

19 OCTOBER 2011

Present :- Councillor Helen Chuah (the Mayor) (Chairman)
Councillors Christopher Arnold, Nick Barlow,
Lyn Barton, Mary Blandon, Elizabeth Blundell,
John Bouckley, Nigel Chapman, Peter Chillingworth,
Barrie Cook, Nick Cope, Mark Cory, Beverly Davies,
Tina Dopson, John Elliott, Andrew Ellis,
Margaret Fairley-Crowe, Annie Feltham, Stephen Ford,
Bill Frame, Ray Gamble, Martin Goss, Scott Greenhill,
Mike Hardy, Marcus Harrington, Dave Harris,
Pauline Hazell, Peter Higgins, Theresa Higgins,
Mike Hogg, Martin Hunt (Deputy Leader) , John Jowers,
Justin Knight, Sonia Lewis, Michael Lilley,
Jackie Maclean, Jon Manning, Richard Martin,
Colin Mudie, Kim Naish, Nigel Offen, Beverley Oxford,
Gerard Oxford, Philip Oxford, Ann Quarrie, Will Quince,
Lesley Scott-Boutell, Paul Smith, Henry Spyvee,
Terry Sutton, Colin Sykes, Laura Sykes, Anne Turrell
(Leader of the Council) , Dennis Willetts, Julie Young
and Tim Young

The meeting was opened with prayers by the Mayor's Chaplain, the Reverend Mark Thompson.

Councillor Mike Hogg (in respect of his role as a director and trustee of the Oak Tree Centre) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor Bill Frame (in respect of) declared a personal interest in the following item which is also a prejudicial interest pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(10) and left the meeting during its consideration and determination

Councillor Mary Blandon (in respect of) declared a personal interest in the following item which is also a prejudicial interest pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(10) She made representations on the item in accordance with paragraph 12(2) of the Code of Conduct for Members and left the meeting during its consideration and determination.

23. Abbots Activity Centre

It was PROPOSED by Councillor Lewis that:-

“This Council resolves to inform Cabinet that its proposed closure of the Abbots Activity Centre is ill-judged and contrary to the wishes of the people of Colchester. The

Council further resolves to ask Cabinet to set up an all party Task and Finish Group to look into this decision and protect services for older people at Abbots Centre and it report back to Cabinet before any final decision is taken.”

A MAIN AMENDMENT was moved by Councillor Dopson that the MOTION be approved and adopted subject to the deletion of the word “its” and all following wording and its replacement with the following words:-

“the consultation over the proposed closure of the Abbots Activity Centre has raised many concerns. The Council recognises the efforts of the Cabinet in bringing forward alternative options for continuing to provide services for older people and the wider community from this building. The Council further resolves to ask Cabinet to ensure the decision, when taken, protects a level of service for older people at the Abbots Centre.”

The Lead Petitioner, Iris Thompson, presented the Mayor with a petition in the following terms containing 5593 signatures:-

“We the undersigned urgently request that Colchester Borough Council withdraw their plans to close Abbots Activity Centre.”

Iris Thompson addressed the Council to explain the beneficial impact that the Abbots Activity Centre had had on her life. It had given her confidence and a new lease of life. It provided good food, an opportunity to make new friends, day trips and an annual holiday. It provided a particularly useful service for those members whose families lived away from Colchester. She was proud to be a volunteer at Abbots.

Have Your Say

Mr Lockyer addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(1). The service provided by Abbots Activity Centre was a credit to the Council and expressed concern that this excellent service might be removed. He urged Councillors to vote with their conscience, rather than on political lines. He stressed in particular the benefit that stroke victims gained from attending sessions at Abbots and trips arranged by Abbots.

Nick Chilvers addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(1) on behalf of Alan Thomas, who was unable to address the Council personally due to a recent operation. Mr Thomas led conversation groups for stroke survivors at Abbots, which would be irreplaceable. The closure would affect the most vulnerable in society such as those with disabilities or those on benefits. It was a purpose built facility that had been built by a forward looking Council. It had been funded by the people of Colchester and should remain open for the benefit of the people of Colchester.

Nick Chilvers addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(1). The proposal to close Abbots was a strategic mistake. The alternative of the Centre being run by a volunteer trust would not work. There were few facilities for people nearing the end of their lives. The need for such a facility would only increase. The Council should be devising a proper business plan for Abbots. Whist the

establishment of a Task and Finish Group would be a positive step, it would need to approach the issue with a positive attitude and would only work if properly resourced.

Colleen Cain addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(1). Joining Abbots had given a purpose to her life again particularly as a result of her involvement with the stroke group. She called on her ward councillors to ensure that Abbots remained open.

Nicola Hopkins addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(1) to express her concern that a purpose built facility such as Abbots could be considered for closure. This would have a tremendous impact on the stroke group which had more than fifty members. The members of Abbots deserved the opportunity to continue to use the Centre as they had helped fund it through council tax contributions and the work they had put into maintaining and improving the building. The transfer of the services to another building was not feasible. There were access problems at Lion Walk which could not be accessed directly by car and was not on a bus route. The staff at Abbots were very caring. Councillors should vote with their conscience and not on party lines and she called on her ward councillors to ensure that Abbots remained open.

Elaine Rogers, Co-ordinator for Colne Communication Stoke Group, addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(1). Abbots had provided an excellent venue for the group to meet and provided facilities such as storage and computers. She worked with members of the group to maintain and improve their communication skills. If Abbots were to close, members of the group would be put into the community with no help or only very limited speech therapy as other stroke groups were closing. At Abbots members of the group were treated as members of a family and given all the support they needed.

Carla Mason addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(1) to express her concern about the way the possible closure of Abbots had been handled. The process of transferring Abbots to a third party needed to be swift as delays caused considerable anxiety to the users of Abbots. The Council was under a responsibility to ensure it used public funds responsibly and ensure that frontline services for the elderly were protected. The services at Abbots were particularly valuable for those of seventy and over for which there was little alternative provision.

Nicola Bailey addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(1). She explained that her mother was a member of the Colne Communication Stroke Group. Members of such groups could not simply be transferred to other groups and she asked how such transfers would happen. Clarification was sought as to what was meant by the phrase "protects a level of service" in the Main Amendment. She asked on what basis the Council believed that Abbots should not be Council run. The Council had not fairly considered ways of keeping Abbots open. Contrary to what was asserted, Abbots was not difficult to reach and more could be done to increase membership. The Council should engage in intelligent forward planning.

Raph Piggott addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(1). Many of the users of Abbots were of the generation that had fought in the

Second World War. Their reward was a poor pension and few facilities. Abbots was one of the few decent facilities available to this generation. Users of Abbots were being asked to pay for the mistakes of others. The Main Amendment to the motion was so vague as to be meaningless. Abbots should remain in Council control to ensure that that decisions on its future remained subject to democratic control.

Andy Abbott addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(1) to pay tribute to the work of the staff at Abbots and to stress the importance of Abbots being maintained in its current format and with the existing staff.

Tim Oxtan addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(1). Closing or reducing the service at Abbots would only save a small amount of money. This decision, along with the proposed closures of Abbeygate House and Joyce Brooks House, were causing great stress. The wording of the Main Amendment was open ended and if agreed would allow services to be reduced to almost nothing.

Mary Blandon addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(1) to stress the difference services at Abbots made to its members' lives. It improved the health and well being of its members. The wording of the Main Amendment was open ended. More time should be provided to allow a business plan to be agreed to protect the services Abbots provided.

Jon Avery addressed the Council pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 6(1) and highlighted the great difference the services provided at Abbots made to his life. The Council should respect the democratic wishes of the members and keep Abbots open under Council control. Respect should be shown to the generation that had helped rebuild the country after the Second World War.

Determination of Main Amendment and Motion

Pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 14(10) Councillor Lewis indicated that that the MAIN AMENDMENT was not accepted.

On being put to the vote the MAIN AMENDMENT was CARRIED and the original motion was deemed amended accordingly.

A named vote having been requested pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 15(2) the voting was as follows:-

Those who voted FOR were:-

Councillors Barlow, Barton, Cook, Cope, Cory, Dopson, Feltham, Ford, Gamble, Goss, Greenhill, Harris, P. Higgins, T. Higgins, Hogg, Hunt, Knight, Lilley, Manning, Mudie, Naish, Offen, B. Oxford, G. Oxford, P. Oxford, Scott-Boutell, Smith, Spyvee, C. Sykes, L. Sykes, Turrell, J. Young and T. Young.

Those who voted AGAINST were:-

Councillors Blundell, Bouckley, Chapman, Chillingworth, Davies, Elliott, Ellis, Fairley-Crowe, Hardy, Harrington, Hazell, Jowers, Lewis, Maclean, Martin, Quarrie, Quince,

Sutton and Willetts.

Those who ABSTAINED from voting were:-

The Deputy Mayor (Arnold) and the Mayor (Chuah).

The MOTION as amended was thereupon approved and adopted (MAJORITY voted FOR).