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POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

7 November 2005 – 6.30 pm

PRESENT:

Councillor Hodds (in the Chair); Councillors Ames, Blyth, Howard, Peck, Tate, Taylor, D Thompson, C Walker and Watts.

Councillor B Walker attended as substitute for Councillor Barker.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barker and Garrod and Mr A Carr (Head of Tourism).

Mr D Cole (Principal Valuation Surveyor), Mr E Gilder (Development Control Officer), Mr B Harris (Engineering and Building Manager) and Miss S Davis (Senior Member Services Officer).

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 19 September 2005 were confirmed, subject to the estimated cost to repair and make the Esplanade safe, as detailed on page two, being amended to £95,000.

Councillor C Walker declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in the following item, on the grounds that she was a County Councillor and on the Norfolk Police Authority, but in accordance with the provisions of the Members' Code of Conduct was allowed to speak and vote:-

2. INVESTIGATION INTO THE POSSIBLE PROVISION OF BEACH CHALETS

(a) Draft Report

The Committee considered the draft report and received an additional letter submitted by a member of the public objecting to the proposal.

Members were reminded that, at the last meeting, it had been agreed that a Sub-Group would be established to consider three options for the siting of the chalets, namely on the Esplanade, on the area between the Esplanade and the dunes and also between the dunes and the sea. Attention was drawn to the notes from that Sub-Group and also a matrix summarising the issues identified for each of the three options, including:

- A head lease could be conditioned to ensure uniformity but, taking into account maintenance costs etc, leasing the site was not likely to generate measurable income.

- A franchise arrangement would mean that the Council only had to deal with one person and responsibility for leasing the chalets would then pass to them.
- Leasing chalets individually would probably leave the Council with high costs for managing and maintaining the chalets.
- Planning policy TR21 stated that the northern part of the beach should remain uncommercialised so a decision would need to be made on whether this proposal would lead to its commercialisation.
- The chalets would have a significant visual impact as they would be 1½ m higher than the existing wall surrounding the Boating Lake/Waterways.
- If the chalets were less than 15m² they would be exempt from Building Regulations but if they were built in a terrace exceeding that area then approval would be required and proper foundations and drainage would be needed.
- All chalets would require planning permission – the Council could grant permission for, say, three designs and the siting, or each chalet owner would have to individually submit an application which would be more onerous.
- Need to consider the impact on the nature reserve to the north and consultations would need to be carried out with English Nature etc.
- Vandalism was highlighted as a major concern and although it was stressed that this part of town did not suffer unduly from this type of behaviour, it needed to be borne in mind that these lightweight structures were more vulnerable to damage.
- Repairs to the Esplanade (costing £95,000) were not required for sea defence purposes but **would** need to be carried out if chalets were erected on it as the Council would be inviting people to the area and, therefore, needed to provide a safe environment. Presently, the Council could, if it wished, fence off the area but once chalets were erected this would create a right of way which could not be fenced off.
- Railings (at £50 per linear metre) could be erected on the Esplanade edge but this would narrow the width and force pedestrians into the chalet owners' space which could lead to various management issues.
- The provision of CCTV raised issues such as cabling, installation and maintenance costs, and lighting levels would need to be increased which could lead to objections from the Port Authority and English Nature.
- If the chalets were erected on the beach issues needed to be considered such as stability including anchoring down without turning them into a trip hazard, pedestrian access, how the chalets would be removed over winter, how to prevent waste water being tipped into the sand which could affect the foundations and if wooden walkways were provided for easier access/wheelchair users would this be perceived as a type of privatisation by the chalet owners and discourage other beach users.
- If the chalets were erected on the beach between the Esplanade and the dunes, people would have little view of the sea, they would need to be far enough away from the Esplanade to prevent people jumping on the roofs and provision would need to be made in the lease to enable access for maintenance/emergency works to the sea wall.
- If the chalets were erected on the beach between the dunes and the sea, the Environment Agency and English Nature would need to be contacted and consideration would need to be given to the fact that it would be out of CCTV range and accessing the chalets might lead to erosion of the beach and dunes which could then affect the sea defences.
- For all the options, the costs would need to be carefully worked out and then passed onto the operators.
- The issue of chalets at Gorleston was discussed briefly.
- The Sub-Group concluded that, if the proposal went ahead, the most practical of the three options would be to site chalets on the Esplanade in small groups.

In relation to Appendix C, the Chairman reported that the Head of Architectural Services had pointed out that the last four bullet points were not his own comments but had actually been received from nearby traders.

Concern was expressed at the level of negativity contained within the letters received from members of the public and the effect this could have on people's perception of the town. It was added that this Committee had carried out the review in response to a request to investigate the possibility of providing beach chalets and, contrary to some reports, no decision had been made to date.

A discussion ensued on whether there would be any merit in conducting any further advertising for an individual to lease the site, however, the point was made that there had been a large amount of press coverage of the issue over the last few months and this had not resulted in any speculative offers from entrepreneurs wishing to pursue the idea.

A query was raised as to whether the likely initial costs for providing the chalets, ie repairs to the Esplanade and the provision of CCTV, would be value for money bearing in mind that, although the money could be recoverable through ground rents, this could take approximately ten years even if 100 chalets were leased out. The point was made that the Council had a duty to protect the resources of the Borough, both financial and natural and it was suggested that this proposal should not be progressed.

RESOLVED:

(i) That the Executive be recommended to take no further action at this time due to the reasons outlined below:

- it could be contrary to Policy TR21
- existing beach hut owners could not lease their huts
- there was no identifiable public demand for the provision of beach huts in this location
- there was potential conservation opposition
- safety and security issues would need to be resolved
- existing privately provided huts adjacent to the Sea Life centre in Gt Yarmouth were under utilised and those at Gorleston, owned by the Borough Council, were presently vacant.

(ii) That Councillor Castle and everyone who contributed towards the review be thanked for their assistance.

3. CLOSURE OF MEETING

The meeting ended at 7.20 pm.