

IN THE MATTER OF ITEM 10 of SCC's CABINET AGENDA FOR 23/10/12 REGARDING FUNDING FOR A VISITOR CENTRE AT RUNNYMEDE

1. The Surrey branch of CPRE has the third largest county membership in the country, and exists to protect Surrey open spaces in both town and country.
2. CPRE Surrey has visited the Runnymede Pleasure Grounds – the proposed site, the wider site, and the local area, and submits that the decision to provide £5m funding for this project should be called in for scrutiny by the Communities Select Committee on the grounds that the Cabinet has not had regard to all material considerations in making this decision, and the decision is therefore Wednesbury unreasonable. In particular the Cabinet has not had regard to:
 - The future of Runnymede Common as an open space if this proposal were to go ahead, the principal concern being the detrimental effect that the increased visitor numbers and traffic will have on the wider site and local infrastructure, and the detrimental effect that the 'improvements' and 'productisation' proposed will have on the wider site, in particular, its heritage.
 - The fact that nearly all land outside the intended Pleasure Grounds site is registered common land, and the severe constraints imposed on the wider site by the Egham Inclosure Act 1814, the Law of Property Act 1925, the NT Acts 1907-1971, the Surrey Act 1985, and the Commons Act 2006.
 - That the case for this heritage centre is based on desire, expectation and aspiration rather than need and a demonstrated evidential demand for such a centre, and to build a centre on an anticipated subsequential take up of use is clearly not a wise use of public money.
 - That the Cabinet has not recognised that, following an application by RBC to the Heritage Lottery Fund, justified by a £50,000 feasibility study by JDD consultants, public funding was withheld when the application was considered against HLF's criteria for conservation, learning and participation benefits, need, and value for money, "*as the Trustees considered this project was not a strong match against these criteria.*"
 - That both the provision of a centre and the matter of charging for parking on the proposed site are contrary to the terms of the bequest of the land to RBC.
 - That longstanding tenants will be evicted from their homes to facilitate the project.
 - That the NT already operate a facility on the Runnymede site where coaches can park. This and the NT land at Runnymede is advertised on the NT website. It is difficult to see how tourist organisations, both domestic and international, could not already be aware of Runnymede and the American Bar Association and JFK memorials. Furthermore, the NT facility is within easy walking distance of both memorials. There is no need for another such facility, particularly one that is remote from these memorials - the NT already operates a facility in the Lodges.

- That the common and proposed site are subject to flooding throughout the year (eg 200mm deep water on the common on the afternoon of 13/5/12).
- The adverse effect of increased tourist numbers on the nearby Air Forces Memorial in Englefield Green, which RBC intend to be part of the 'visitor experience'. The Memorial car park in Englefield Green is unable to cope with more parking. Furthermore the access immediately before the car park is a narrow rural lane crossing a registered village green, Englefield Green, where parking is unlawful.
- That it is perverse to spend this sort of public money on this project near to Runnymede Borough's Englefield Green West Ward, in which Ward the Bar Association and Kennedy Memorials are situated, when, as RBC has only recently reminded us, Englefield Green was rated as the second most socially deprived village in Surrey in the most recent census figures available. It is the worst Ward for crime in Runnymede Borough, and there are serious poverty issues.
- That SCC has just made cutbacks in the Countryside Access department and it is particularly perverse to spend public money on a project that will have an adverse impact on land that this department safeguards.
- That the centre will attract more visitors to this site situated in an already traffic clogged area. The Highway Authority recognises that '*Egham is surrounded to the north by major junctions [including the Runnymede roundabout] and the area is congested ...*',¹ and '*There is significant congestion at this [Runnymede Roundabout] location that affects traffic movements in the area...*'². Measures for improving traffic flow at this roundabout would cost £4 million (in 2010)³.
- That, notwithstanding that the CEO of RBC, in his opening remarks in RBC's Sustainable Community Strategy states⁴ that '*We are the borough where the Magna Carta was sealed almost 800 years ago.*' he is almost certainly incorrect. As JDD state, in their feasibility study⁵, and most historians agree, the Magna Carta was most likely to have been sealed near the Yew at Ankerwyke Priory, which is not in Runnymede Borough or even Surrey.

Andrew Telford. Chairman CPRE Surrey Runnymede District

30/10/2012

¹ SCC Local Committee (Runnymede) 1.11.10 Agenda at 3.10

² SCC Local Committee (Runnymede) 1.11.10 Agenda at 4.3(a)

³ SCC Local Committee (Runnymede) 1.11.10 Minutes at 51/10(1)

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⁵ Outline Conservation Statement 2.4