

COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

Item under consideration: MAGNA CARTA PROPOSALS

Date Considered: 11 July 2013

Introduction

1. At its meeting on 11 July 2013 the Communities Select Committee considered a report on the regeneration plans for the Egham area and the proposals for celebrating the 800th anniversary of the sealing of the Magna Carta. Subsequently, the Committee has had sight of the report to Cabinet published on 12 July 2013 which contained further information on these proposals.
2. This report reflects the views expressed by the Committee on 11 July 2013 and subsequently in response to the information contained in the report to Cabinet.
3. The Committee recognised the national and international significance of the Magna Carta anniversary, and its importance to Surrey's heritage. The Committee could also see a potential for tourism by creating a legacy around marking this historic occasion. The majority of the Committee were in support of marking the occasion in principle. In fact, some members of the Committee felt that the Council would be criticised if they did not do anything to mark this occasion.

Key concerns of the Committee

4. However, the Committee raised the following key concerns around the masterplan proposals and financial information presented to them:
 - i. the receipt by the Committee of the financial information concerning these proposals on the day of the Select Committee meeting, which made it difficult for them to scrutinise the proposals in light of the financial information,
 - ii. the capacity of the highways budget to cover the costs of works required in the area to complement the celebration proposals,
 - iii. the absence of a detailed business case justifying the expenditure by the County Council of £1.2m (in addition to the highways provision) on these proposals at a time when there is considerable pressure on the Council's resources,
 - iv. the absence of information on projected visitor numbers,
 - v. the absence of detailed assessments on the impact of these proposals to include economic, environmental, and equality,
 - vi. the absence of a detailed explanation of the concept ideas and events planning behind the proposals including the necessity for a new commission in the landscape,
 - vii. the lack of private sponsorship committed to these plans,

- viii. that the estimated £200,000 annual staffing costs for this project, from existing resources, could potentially delay achievement of proposed efficiency savings elsewhere in the Council.

Additional concerns of some members of the Committee

5. Some members of the Committee expressed the following additional concerns about the Magna Carta proposals:
 - i. the report to Cabinet does not make it clear that the County Council previously withdrew its financial support of up to £5m to fund a new visitor centre in Runnymede to mark the 800th anniversary,
 - ii. the economic and health information used to support the proposals is incomplete and does not compare the Egham statistics with neighbouring areas as a means of benchmarking,
 - iii. whether the proposed changes to the highways in the area would provide adequate infrastructure to support the celebration proposals,
 - iv. the need for better assurances that the proposals will be a joint venture including Runnymede, Spelthorne, and Windsor and Maidenhead Councils.

Recommendation:

The Committee recommends:

- a) that prior to a decision being taken on any financial contribution from the County Council to the proposals for celebrating the 800th anniversary of the sealing of the Magna Carta, the Cabinet be provided with a detailed business case, concept idea and impact assessment.
- b) that the Cabinet ensures that any financial contribution which the County Council makes is conditional upon the proposed financial contributions being made by its partners; if there are changes to the proposed investment by partners, then the County Council's financial contribution is to be reassessed by Cabinet.

DENISE SALIAGOPOULOS
Chairman of the Communities Select Committee