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## **Climate Change and Leisure Committee MINUTES**

**Of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth, on  
Wednesday, 9 September 2026 from 7.31 pm - 9.59 pm.**

**Present:** Councillors

Chris Lloyd (Chair), Aidan Bentley, Andrea Fraser, Raj Khiroya, Kerry Milliken, Chris Mitchell, Mike Sims, Jon Tankard and Kavan Trivedi

**Also in Attendance:** Councillors

Oliver Cooper, Stephen Giles-Medhurst OBE, Narinder Sian and Cheryl Stungo

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### **Officers in Attendance:**

Alison Betts, Director of Finance  
Charlotte Gomes, Head of Leisure and Natural Infrastructure  
Tom Harrop, Watersmeet Theatre Manager  
Emma Sheridan, Associate Director - Environment  
Josh Sills, Head of Communications, Customer & Culture  
Anita Hibbs, Committee Officer

### **External in Attendance:**

Sara Blackmore, Associate Director – Technical from RSK Asbestos

## **11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None received.

## **12 MINUTES**

The committee considered the minutes of its meeting held on 24 June 2026. The Committee Officer thanked Councillor Andrea Fraser for her feedback on the minutes and confirmed that she will amend the minutes to record Councillor Fraser's seconding of one of Councillor Kerry Milliken's proposals in accordance with the minutes standard guidelines.

The Chair called for a vote on the minutes. On being put to the committee, the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chair, the voting being For: 6, Against: 0, Abstention: 3.

With that amendment to the minutes, the committee approved the minutes of its meeting of 24 June 2026 and authorised the Chair to sign them as a correct record.

## **13 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

There were no items of other business.

## 14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mike Sims declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 5 – RSK Asbestos, as a member of the Rickmansworth and District Residents' Association. Councillor Sims advised that he had collated a number of questions and submitted them to Councillor Chris Lloyd on behalf of residents.

## 15 RSK ASBESTOS

The Director of Finance introduced Sara Blackmore from RSK Asbestos who delivered a presentation covering the following points:

- Brief Introduction to Asbestos & Risk
  - What is asbestos
  - Types of Products
  - Relative Risk
  - Uses of Asbestos
  - Health Effects
- Duty to Manage and Legal Responsibilities
  - The Duty to Manage
  - Legislation & Guidance
  - Managing the Risk
  - Prosecutions
- The Asbestos at the Aquadrome

Councillor Mike Sims asked the Chair how the committee can take a note of the 16 questions from the residents that had been submitted in writing and the answers received. The Director of Finance responded confirming that they can be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

**Action – Committee Officer to include the questions in the minutes.**

The Chair also requested that the questions and the presentation slides be published on the relevant section of the Council's website, so they can be available this week before the public meeting the following week. **Action – TRDC Leisure Officers.**

The following questions were raised by members:

1. If there wasn't public interference, would the RSK recommendation of a higher and more robust permanent fence still be maintained?

Response:

*The RSK representative explained that first they need to establish where the risk lies. If the public is kept away, there is no risk to them, which is the main priority. Therefore, to conclude that the action was not warranted, there would need to be a guarantee that there was no potential for asbestos exposure or spread.*

2. If an improved visitor experience increases attendance ten times more, could it worsen the problem enough to justify reconsidering the entire Aquadrome project?

Response:

*Officers clarified that the Aquadrome project is not intended to increase visitor numbers. Its aim is to balance the site's biodiversity with the needs of visitors while improving accessibility. Visitors will be encouraged to use designated pathways and avoid high-risk areas. The project's vision has always focused on enhancement and balance, and this approach is fully supported by the Lottery. When members of the public ignore temporary fencing or safety warnings, the Council has a duty to act.*

*Following the recent incursion, access must be firmly restricted to high-risk areas to keep the public safe.*

3. At the last closed meeting with RSK Asbestos, councillors asked to see the brief the Council had provided to them, but the committee has not yet received it. Councillors also requested examples of RSK Asbestos' work with other councils on similar issues, and these have also not been received. Councillor Fraser clarified here her understanding of the legal case of James Pitt and Sean Thomas Faulkner (cited in the presentation), were convicted not because of the asbestos risk itself, but because they had falsified documents and falsely told the HSC that they had complied.

Response:

*Officers explained that RSK Asbestos are contracted to help officers to develop the asbestos management plan. That asbestos management plan shows the extent of the work RSK are doing with officers. The summary of the brief has been published. Officers appointed RSK, given that they have very strong background in asbestos, they're quite unique. It's the duty for officers to manage the asbestos risk. Officers are liable for managing those health and safety risks. Therefore, it is an officer decision as to the support they need to make sure they have the right people in place to advise them as in any other area, where needed. Officers also clarified that there was a selection process. Furthermore, the Council's procurement follows the normal procurement rules and officers draw down RSK services from a procurement framework. Officers confirmed that the information is published on the framework and publicly available here: [Rickmansworth Aquadrome Site Wide Asbestos Works for the Aquadrome Project | Delta](#)*

*Furthermore, the Council's procurement follows the normal Contract Procedure Rules. RSK were appointed to develop the Asbestos Management Plan in accordance with the small value (sub-£25,000) process. Officers confirmed that subsequent 'pick' activity was procured via the small value process and further tendered works have been procured via the Delta eSourcing Portal.*

4. The proposed solution is to install a higher fence. This is linked to the existing fence having been breached and informal routes crossing high-risk areas. These routes might not have been formed if people had known the areas contained asbestos. Would clearly marking the high-risk areas on site not be enough to deter access and redirect people around them?

Response:

*Officers stressed that the site is open to the public. It's open to unaccompanied young people, children, people walking their dogs. Officers have a duty to stop the spread of asbestos fibres. Therefore, they have to take account of the whole public access and control that public access if there is a danger to them. Regrettably, the public has proved, with their action, that we have to put something significant in place because the temporary fencing in place was not stopping public access to the path.*

5. Can the hotspots be segregated and areas around them be opened up, or is the entire woodland path a hotspot?

Response:

*That's why officers are proposing to fence off the hotspot areas to stop access to the high-risk asbestos. The woodland path also requires other works, such as surface work, but the asbestos has been dealt with and that's why officers are proposing the fencing. There's also fencing along the canal to actually control that asbestos, and controlling those asbestos hotspot areas entirely.*

6. The Chair requested a map showing where the hotspot areas are located in the Aquadrome.

Response:

*The Director of Finance clarified that there are two issues with the woodland path; one is the path itself and the other is the asbestos. The officer confirmed that there is a map that can be shared, however, the map is constantly being updated as the investigation turn up different materials on site.*

The Chair requested that this is explained when the map is shared with the public at the meeting next week. **Action – TRDC Leisure Officers.**

7. Is it possible to see what the cost difference is against the risk analysis of the two different options; the option of a membrane in clear fill and the temporary fencing?

Response:

*The officer confirmed that it was part of the urgent decision that was taken, and is publicly available.*

8. The Aquadrome is a floodplain. What affect does the flooding have on the way that asbestos could come to the surface? Is that something that affects it and is that a big risk?

Response:

*The officer explained that from what they have already seen at the Aquadrome, flooding events, heavy rainfall is a primary reason why further asbestos comes to the surface. That would also present more of a challenge with the geomembrane and clean fill, because it could get washed away, which has happened in other areas of the Aquadrome already, where this has been attempted. It definitely has the potential to bring more asbestos to the surface. And this is the reason why the maintenance team do regular walkovers after heavy rainfall and periods of flooding, to check the areas.*

Councillor Kerry Milliken requested access to the brief to RSK, and for it to be publicly available. The Associate Director for Environment responded explaining that the brief is simply to advise the Council on how to be compliant with asbestos regulations and the Health and Safety at Work Act with regard to asbestos at the Aquadrome. The Director of Finance explained that there is a very clear contract with RSK which is under a framework, and the framework will be available. Furthermore, she reiterated that the brief details how RSK will help the Council to manage and be compliant with health and safety legislation in the Aquadrome.

9. Why can't all the asbestos be removed? What is the criteria for the secure fencing option versus the full removal, and who certifies the fencing to be safe?

Response:

*The officer explained that the reason is cost. The cost of remediation is too high for the Council to be able to afford it. The cost could run into millions.*

10. Who would pay for the removal of all the asbestos?

Response:

*The officer responded confirming that the Council pays for it and taxpayers' money would need to be used if we chose to remove all the asbestos.*

The Chair asked if the Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst had any questions at this stage. Councillor Giles-Medhurst thanked the representative from RSK for attending the meeting. He also advised that the cost to remove asbestos in a small area at the Aquadrome was quoted over a million pounds, against the fencing of £130,000.

11. The urgent decision notice that were given to councillors did not have any costings or alternatives except removal of the asbestos. It did not cover an alternative course of action that wasn't removal, for example; membrane bearing was not included in that. Has that been costed up? Can we make sure that what is shared with the committee, group leaders, councillors and the public, has as much information about the instructions given both before and after procurement took place.

Response:

*The RSK representative explained that the geomembrane would be suitable only in certain areas. Previous flooding and erosion have displaced clean fill, requiring ongoing maintenance, an issue likely to persist at the Aquadrome, particularly in the woodland floodplain, which floods regularly. Laying geotextile and covering it with clean fill is therefore unlikely to provide a long lasting solution and would require constant maintenance. The costings consequently allowed for fencing as the preferred option, recognising that further asbestos may surface. However, if the area is inaccessible to the public, it poses no risk; alternatively, the asbestos could be removed, although this would be considerably more expensive.*

*The Director of Finance added that the purpose of our relationship with RSK, the asbestos management plan, is to balance as best we can our duties, under health and safety legislation, to keep the public safe, taxpayers' money and access to the Aquadrome.*

12. Members raised concerns about the current strategy of fencing off permanently areas of the Aquadrome when high-risk asbestos is found, which might result in the whole of the Aquadrome being fenced off and visitors won't have access to it. Another concern is that if the asbestos is airborne, what's the risk to the houses that are neighbouring the Aquadrome?

Response:

*The RSK representative explained that cement is generally the main product, although other materials have also been found at the Aquadrome. These materials will not release fibres unless they are disturbed or damaged. Studies available online show natural background levels of asbestos in the air. If airborne asbestos fibres posed a risk to the neighbouring properties, more extensive action would be taken at the Aquadrome. The fencing and geotextile options have been decided upon as the areas have very extensive surface contamination. There is another area adjacent to the canal path where there is a desire line, and the Council have endeavoured to keep it open, but certain distance of the path is going to be covered with tarmac as an encapsulant. This means that the area will not need to be fenced off as the risk is being managed in other ways. As part of the lottery project initial investigations, officers did an extensive walkover of the surface area of the entire Aquadrome, and these are the only two hotspot areas that have been found at the moment. Currently, from the surface, there is no evidence of further hotspot areas.*

13. We're designing a raised woodland walk in the Aquadrome, which we need to dig holes for to make a boardwalk. If we've got a no dig policy in place, why would we design a boardwalk that requires digging in the area with asbestos?

Response:

*The areas of surface contamination weren't created from any of the ground investigations undertaken. It's due to the extensive works that officers have now identified this area, which was unknown of before.*

*As far as a no dig policy, that's general. It's members of the public and it's grounds maintenance teams that are going to avoid digging in the area. They're adapting their methodologies for day-to-day maintenance, day-to-day running. Digging can be done with appropriately trained and competent contractors. The right controls must be in place with appropriate risk assessment, method statements, fibre suppressants. All of the ground investigation works that were completed had a suitable and sufficient risk*

*assessment. The workmen wore Personal Protective Equipment, and Respiratory Protective Equipment. They used fibre suppressants and certain techniques to avoid disturbance and degradation and to control fibre release. It was carried out in a controlled manner, and it certainly didn't cause this contamination. The Director of Finance reiterated again that officers are trying to balance the access to the Aquadrome, and access can't be maintained without carrying out works there to maintain the access. Therefore, there is always the risk that Asbestos will be found there.*

Members argued that the asbestos wasn't discovered during the access investigation. It was discovered during the ground investigations for the proposed boardwalk, and was therefore unrelated to access to the Aquadrome. The Associate Director for Environment responded by explaining that to reopen the woodland walk, the path needs to be repaired first. Before beginning those works, an investigation needs to be carried out under the asbestos management plan to confirm that the work can be undertaken safely. If asbestos is found, it must be remediated before existing path can be repaired or build a new one. The asbestos was therefore identified as part of this necessary process, the alternative would have been to leave the woodland walk permanently closed.

14. Is there a way, in the plan that we can direct floodwater away from the hotspots?

Response:

*The Director of Finance reiterated that officers manage the Aquadrome by balancing public access with the risks posed by asbestos. Maintaining paths and creating features such as the woodland board walk can uncover asbestos, so they assess each find and respond appropriately. Some types require fencing, while others can be managed differently. The asbestos management plan helps protect the public, meet the Council's legal obligations and maintain access without undertaking disproportionate work that could cost millions and severely disrupt the site.*

Councillor Andrea Fraser emphasised that the decision making process should sit with councillors. The Director of Finance stated in response that the responsibility for management of asbestos remains with officers of the Council. It is officers of the Council that are responsible for maintaining health and safety within the Council. Therefore, officers have to develop the management plan and decide what happens to the asbestos. Ultimately, if officers fail to follow health and safety legislation, it is officers that are at fault, not members.

15. How do we change the responsibility to councillors?

Response:

*It can't be changed; it is required by law. The legal duty is on officers to manage health and safety requirements.*

16. What would be the law which make it only officers' responsibility?

Response:

*The officer responded that it is the Health and Safety legislation.*

Councillor Giles-Medhurst requested that RSK confirm his understanding that around 12 areas containing asbestos were identified, including two hotspots; one beside the woodland walk and one beside the canal. RSK recommended fencing these two areas, one with palisade fencing and the other with lighter fencing, while the remaining areas would be handpicked. The report estimates that excavating the two hotspots to 1 metre would cost £1.3 million, rising to £2.7 million for 2 meters, with substantial tree removal and associated works. Once the hotspots are fenced, the Council could reconsider reopening the woodland walk. The RSK representative confirmed that this was correct; only those two areas have been identified as

hotspots. There are three main options for remediation; handpick, excavation and installing fencing around the sites. In this case, fencing is the most cost effective option.

The Director of Finance responded to a statement from members regarding the options on remediation and confirmed that the option had been given to councillors and was made by councillors. It was an urgent decision due to time constraints but it is in the public domain and it was made by urgent decision through leaders in line with the Constitution.

Councillor Mike Sims requested to correct the Director of Finance by stating that the initial woodland walk was a considerable repair work which was done in 2015, and therefore it does not make sense that the asbestos is now such a challenge. The Associate Director for Environment responded explaining that the works done in 2015 predates her and other Council officers however, her understanding is that mainly tarmac was put down on top of the path, and it wasn't accompanied by a full-sized walkover because that work has been funded by the lottery. Furthermore, this particular area of the Aquadrome floods three times a year on average. In a year with heavy rainfall, it is under water for months and can flood significantly. Every flood event removes the top layer, and the site evolves over time. The asbestos not being visible in 2015 doesn't mean it wasn't visible in 2026.

17. Can we confirm when the path was originally closed and we were told it was flooded, was it because asbestos had been found or was it because the Council was saying that it was flooded?

Response:

*The Associate Director for Environment confirmed that when the path was first closed, it was closed because it was under water.*

The presentation by the RSK representative was noted by the committee.

The Chair declared a two-minute comfort break at 21:13. The meeting resumed at 21:15.

## **16      WATERSMEET ANNUAL REVIEW 2025-26**

The Head of Communications, Customer & Culture introduced himself and his colleague, Tom Harrop, Watersmeet Theatre Manager.

The Watersmeet Theatre Manager delivered a presentation.

The Chair requested further information on how to navigate to the business plan on the Watersmeet Theatre website. The officer explained that one of the main changes that he wanted to implement was to make the website more accessible and user friendly. The officer then explained that the business plan can be found under the About Us menu option. The Chair requested that the link to the business plan is included in the minutes.

[About Us | Watersmeet](#)

Link to the Business Plan:

[https://irp.cdn-website.com/1eebd979/files/uploaded/WATERSMEET\\_BUSINESS\\_PLAN\\_FINAL.pdf](https://irp.cdn-website.com/1eebd979/files/uploaded/WATERSMEET_BUSINESS_PLAN_FINAL.pdf)

Members inquired about financial information and whether the presentation should have included a brief income and expenditure summary, broken down by key categories, to help the committee understand the theatre's financial position. The Head of Communications, Customer & Culture explained that budget information is available through the budget monitoring process and in greater detail within the business plan. Officers acknowledged that the business plan could be made more visible on the website. It was agreed that a summary

breakdown of income streams, such as ticket sales and secondary sales will be shared with the committee. **Action – Head of Communications, Customer & Culture.**

The Watersmeet Theatre Manager emphasised the importance of using trackable information to guide both marketing and venue management. Data reporting is being strengthened, including for the pantomime, and this approach will be developed further. The officer also confirmed that a financial summary would be included in the next annual review presentation when it comes before the committee next year. **Action – Watersmeet Theatre Manager.**

Members questioned the projected £15,000 cost to the Council and asked whether the theatre should aim to break even, and ideally make a profit, particularly, after 50 years of operation. The officer explained that UK theatre programming is planned 12 to 18 months in advance. The 2027 programme had been inherited and was already fixed, while bookings now being made are primarily for 2028. Future plans will prioritise a stronger programme, with fewer single-night productions and more two-night runs, followed by venue hire opportunities. The officer also highlighted the three options for proposed income initiatives:

**Sponsor a Seat:** a sponsoring scheme that could generate around £30,000 in its first year, based on experience at comparable UK venues, although this level of income will not recur annually.

**Restoration Levy:** a clearly identified levy would be added separately to ticket prices and ring fenced for venue improvements. This would help strengthen the venue's financial resilience and reduce the cost to the Council.

**Order at Seat:** an at-seat ordering service would expand the bar offer and provide a premium customer experience, creating an additional source of revenue.

Members noted that establishing the theatre as a trust could provide business rates relief, and they requested more detailed budget monitoring, including a breakdown of income from memberships, pantomime, films and other events.

Officers explained that each governance model, including a trust, had advantages and disadvantages. Any change to the theatre's operating model would be a matter for the Policy & Resources Committee. Officers are also reviewing the venue's commercial potential. The 2027-30 business plan would enable the committee to shape and approve the proposed approach and risks. The Watersmeet theatre report is to be added to the work programme.

**Action – Committee Officer.**

Members encouraged officers to pursue commercial advertising and partnerships with local businesses. Officers agreed this will be explored and proposed securing a main local sponsor for the pantomime next year as a first step.

Members noted that over 13,000 tickets sold across 43 shows with 15,000 tickets sold alone for the pantomime, highlighting the pantomime's strong performance. Officers explained that the pantomime had a four-week uninterrupted run. Furthermore, producing, co-promoting and hosting a temporary show could also generate more income than a venue hire, particularly on Friday and Saturday evenings.

Members requested utilisation data by activity, including ticket sales for film screenings and theatre productions. Officers agreed to provide a more detailed breakdown in the next annual review. **Action – Watersmeet Theatre Manager.**

Members asked that the theatre's future ownership and governance structure be reviewed. They noted that the postponement of local government reorganisation provided additional time to consider options, but expressed concern that a larger authority might not prioritise the venue if it also operated a larger venue elsewhere. Members emphasised that establishing a

trust could help protect the theatre. The Chair cautioned that the process is not straightforward but confirmed his commitment to securing the venue's future.

The committee noted the report.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

## **17 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair noted that several items were missing from the work programme and asked officers to review it. Officers confirmed that the Climate Change and Sustainability Bi-annual report would be scheduled for the next committee in December and again in May. **Action – Committee Officer to add to the work programme.**

The Chair requested the following items be added:

- Everyone Active report 2027
- Watersmeet Theatre Annual Review 2027
- Alternative Grassland Management review
- All recurring Budget Monitoring reports

Officers confirmed that the Grassland Management review would be added with a 'to be confirmed' on the work programme. Officers are currently prioritising the lottery bid, but a verbal update on the review plan would be provided in December. **Action – Committee Officer to add to the work programme.**

Members asked whether the alternative Grassland Management item was the same as the Green Space Strategy. Officers explained that they were separate but linked to each other. The Green Space Strategy was expected early next year, the Alternative Grassland Management review arose from a Council motion, therefore requiring a different process. Officers would return with recommendations, but any proposal for changing the motion would need to be approved by Full Council. Officers confirmed that a verbal update in December would set out how the Alternative Grassland Management review would be undertaken and a timetable.

Members asked about adding the Parking on the Green item, but officers advised that this item falls within the remit of the General Public Services & Community Engagement Committee, which would need to request any report. The Chair agreed to contact the Chair of that committee. **Action – Councillor Chris Lloyd.**

The Chair emphasised that the work programme should show items coming to the committee for the full year ahead.

Officers confirmed that the Panto Gala Night, formerly known as Civic Night, was scheduled for 5 December.

The committee noted the work programme.

## **18 OTHER BUSINESS - IF APPROVED UNDER ITEM 3 ABOVE**

None

**CHAIR**