

TO: ECONOMIC AND OVERVIEW SCRUTINY – 14 DECEMBER 2004

SUBJECT: MODEL AIRCRAFT FLYING

FROM: LEISURE AND AMENITIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This Committee supported the Executive's decision to restrict the flying hours for model aircraft at St. Mary's Lands at its meeting on the 4th November 2003, but called for the decision to be reviewed after 12 months.

The report outlines how the new arrangements have worked and comments that have been received on them.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Model aircraft flying has been a popular pastime at St. Mary's Lands for a number of years, but because of the noise of the planes and potential danger to users of the area and residents, either a ban or restriction of hours was asked for by local residents.

At its meeting on the 23rd July 2003, the Executive agreed to:-

"allow model aircraft to continue flying on St. Mary's Lands subject to the hours of flying being reduced to a) Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, 10.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. and b) Saturdays and Bank Holidays 11.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. and no flying permitted on Sundays."

Whilst this decision was a compromise between those residents that wanted a total ban and those flyers that wished to continue without restriction, it did at least allow the flyers to continue but made some concessions to local residents.

- 2.2 This committee has called for a report back on how the decision has worked in practice and it would appear to have been relatively successful. Clearly residents have been able to enjoy at least one day during the weekend without the irritant of model aircraft engines, and as stated earlier, model aircraft flyers have been able to continue with their pastime. It is also worth noting that with the odd exception, the model aircraft flyers have complied with the new hours, without coercion, even though this clearly inconvenienced some of them for a variety of reasons.
- 2.3 To assist the committee with their review, a letter was sent out to interested parties and the results collated. Predictably, those from the model aircraft fraternity wish the restriction on flying hours to be removed, whilst residents either want the restrictions to remain or a total ban. In other words, the same issue that confronted the Council twelve months ago remains the central issue, with the only slight change being that residents appear slightly more inclined to accept the restricted hours as a reasonable compromise than ask for a total ban.
- 2.4 In total 44 letters have been received, of which 14 letters call for the status quo, 7 letters ask for further restrictions, 5 letters call for the restrictions to be removed entirely and 18 ask for the restrictions on silent flight only to be removed. Despite the large number of letters received, in view of the effort some people have taken to record their views, all the letters will be sent to Members for their perusal prior to the meeting.

- 2.5 Included in the letters are a host of issues which Members may or may not wish to address, but one issue that does merit particular mention is 'silent' flight.

There were a number of reasons why some residents called for restricted hours, including safety fears due to the size and weight of some planes, but undoubtedly noise was the major motivator.

Proponents of 'silent model aircraft' felt very strongly that the decision made was very unfair to them, as it lumped them in with all model aircraft, some of which are admittedly noisy, when they felt their particular part of the pastime was not contributing to the problem.

There is an argument that it is simpler for the Council to control a ban on flying if it is ALL planes, rather than differentiate between what is noisy and what isn't, but equally there does appear to be a fair point here that Members may wish to re-consider.

After discussions with some members of the noiseless aircraft group, many of which are free flight, it would appear that fairly quiet periods with little or no wind are required to successfully fly, and consequently one option could be to remove the time restrictions for these categories of planes only on the days that are currently permitted. In other words, noiseless planes could fly during daylight hours, but motor powered planes only during the currently specified times. Alternatively, Members may prefer to recommend that all time restrictions are removed for noiseless planes so they can fly at any time.

Your officers feel either suggestion would be practical, as there is a code between the flyers which would appear to mean any such changes to the hours would be self regulated by the model aircraft flyers themselves without the need for a great deal of Council intervention.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1 The options are discussed within the bulk of the report.

4. POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK

- 4.1 The suggestions by flyers accord with the Council's policy to increase participation in sporting events, but residents point to policies concerning the environment (noise pollution) and health and safety issues as counter proposals.
- 4.2 On the subject of noise, the planes have been monitored by your Environmental Health Officers and whilst the noisiest planes are very close to the legal limits, the bulk of them comply with current legislation. However, residents complain about the CONSTANT "droning" of the planes as opposed to the sheer noise of them.

5. OUTCOME(S) REQUIRED

- (a) Members are asked to decide if they wish to consider recommending any changes to the decision made by the Executive relating to model aircraft flying at its meeting on the 23rd June 2003; and
- (b) specifically if they wish to relax the restrictions completely on silent flight planes or to daylight hours on the current flying days; or
- (c) a further report back on any issue raised by review.

Background Papers

Executive – June 23rd 2003

Economic and Overview Scrutiny Committee – 7th October and 4th November 2003

Recreation and Amenities Committee – 8th March 1988

Letters/emails from model aircraft flyers/residents/local organisations/councillors.

Areas in District affected: Warwick North

Executive Portfolio Area and Holder: Councillor Cheryl Flanagan

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