

To: Council

Date: 22nd April 2013

Report of: Head of Law and Governance

Title of Report: PETITIONS SCHEME – SAVE R&R DANCE STUDIOS – HOME OF DANCE CONNECTION

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To advise on the procedure that Council needs to follow under the Council's Petitions Scheme in respect of large petitions, and to provide information specifically on the petition entitled 'Save R&R Dance Studios – Home of Dance Connection'.

Report Approved by:

Legal: Jeremy Thomas, Head of Law and Governance

Policy Framework: Not applicable

Recommendation(s): Council is RECOMMENDED to follow the procedure for large petitions in the Council's Petitions Scheme by hearing the head petitioner for the petition entitled "Save R&R Dance Studios – Home of Dance Connection" and to then debate the petition and decide how to advise the Executive.

1. A petition entitled "Save R&R Dance Studios – Home of Dance Connection" has been received by the Council. The petition contains 1,552 signatures. The petition reads as follows:-

"Our dance school is DANCE CONNECTION and we are under threat of losing our premises, R&R Studios on the Oxford Greyhound Stadium site, if the company that wants to build houses on the site cannot be persuaded to keep this facility for the community alongside the proposed housing development. This facility is unique in the Oxford area, providing three dance studios. We are a very active and inclusive school with 350 pupils, and if we lose our premises the local area loses too. There is nowhere else comparable that our school can operate in this area."

2. Council adopted a Petitions Scheme (as required by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009) in July 2010. The scheme says that petitions containing over 1,500 signatures will be debated by full Council. The 2009 Act says that in order for signatures on a petition to count, they must give the signatories name and address and those people so signing must live, work or study in the authority's area. A sufficient number of signatures to achieve the 1,500 mark have accompanying names and addresses. It is not of course possible to check whether any signatories from outside Oxford work or study in the City.
3. The Petitions Scheme says that the petition organiser will be given five minutes at Council to present the petition and that Council will then debate the petition. Where the issue is one on which the Council's Executive is responsible for reaching the final decision, the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision.
4. Council is asked to follow the procedure for large petitions in the Council's Petitions Scheme and decide how it wishes to proceed.
5. Dance connection is located at R&R Studios which uses much of the former fitness studios at Oxford Stadium. The studios are located towards the rear of the stadium building underneath the foyer and bar areas where spectators previously watched the greyhound racing and speedway. Speedway ceased at the stadium around five years ago and greyhound racing ceased on 29th December 2012. The stadium complex has the capacity to offer a wide range of facilities and the building was extended around 10 years ago to provide executive suites and enhanced facilities to cater for a wide array of social functions. In addition to Dance Connection, a range of other recreational activities are still carried on at the stadium building including street dance and martial arts within the same R&R Studios along with a local church group. Within the wider stadium complex the central part of the track area is still used by Oxford Karting along with their offices in the former 'Tote' building and the car park is used by the Lightning Motorcycle School conducting motorcycle training on a not-for-profit basis.
6. The Council has received a planning application for the demolition of the existing buildings at the stadium and the redevelopment of the whole site for 220 flats and houses and this application has recently been made valid following receipt of further information assessing the heritage significance of the site as an example of recreational facilities associated with local residents and car workers. A separate application has also been submitted seeking approval from the Council for the demolition of the existing buildings at the site without relying on planning permission being granted for the housing redevelopment. These applications are both currently under consideration.

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