

FORDINGBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance & Policy Committee held on Wednesday 30th September 2020 at 7.30pm

held remotely using appropriate technology in accordance with The Local Authorities and Police and Crimes Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 ("the 2020 Regulations") which came into force on 4th April 2020

(Minutes subject to approval at the next meeting of the Committee)

Present: Cllr Adams – Chair;

Cllrs Anstey, Goldsmith, Hale, Jackson, Lewendon, Paton, White & Wilson

In attendance: Mr P Goddard, Town Clerk
Mrs M Coatham, Finance Officer (RFO)

1. To receive any apologies for absence

Apologies received from Cllrs Earth, Mouland & Perkins.

2. To receive any Declarations of Interest

The following declarations of interest were made:

Cllr Adams declared a pecuniary interest in item no. 5 Monies Collected and Payment of Accounts as a supplier to the Council and would remain in the room but not speak or vote.

Cllr Wilson declared an interest in item no. 6 To consider grant applications under s137/CIL as she is a trustee of the Fordingbridge Museum. She said she would leave the meeting while that item was considered.

3. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 26th August 2020 and report any matters arising

Cllr Hale proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Goldsmith and therefore **RESOLVED**: that the minutes of the meeting held on the 26th August 2020 be signed as a true record. All in favour.

Matters arising: Agenda point 6 – The Clerk advised that he had provided information to solicitors regarding the proposed lease for the toilet block and was awaiting a first draft.

Agenda point 7 – The Clerk advised that he had not yet received a grant application from Avonway but understood that this was likely to be forthcoming prior to October's Finance & Policy Committee meeting.

Agenda point 12 – The Clerk had asked the NFDC whether the Town Council could apply for NFDC CIL funds and was advised that in principle that was possible but the system to apply was not yet in place. **Action: Clerk to liaise with District Cllrs regarding the process of applying for CIL from the NFDC**

4. To receive any matters raised by Members of the Public

No matters raised.

5. To receive details of Monies Collected & Payment of Accounts

Cllr Adams referred to the RFO's report for September and said that the Seemore Graphics invoice had not yet been paid as the Clerk had a query in relation to it. Cllr Hale queried the quantum of the Christmas Lights payment and was advised that it included VAT. The RFO advised that the Lengthsman had just submitted invoices for August and September for £1,080 which were not on the schedule of payments but this comes from the Lengthsman funds so the RFO proposes to pay these as well. Cllr Paton proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Lewendon and therefore **RESOLVED**: to approve the schedule of payments of account and that the amounts collected are correct. All in favour. The RFO noted that half year financial reports for each of the committees had been circulated to Cllrs.

6. To consider grant applications under Section 137/CIL

- Fordingbridge Museum

[Cllr Wilson left the meeting]

Cllr Adams commented that the Town Council had not made any direct grants to the Fordingbridge Museum for some time. Cllr Hale commented that this was a good cause to donate to and the Museum was only asking for £333 for the digital photo frame, so Cllr Hale thought it was something the Town Council should support. Cllr Jackson proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Paton and therefore RESOLVED: to approve the grant application from Fordingbridge Museum for £333. All in favour.

[Cllr Wilson returned to the meeting]

7. To receive any Finance & Policy matters referred from sub-committees

- Staff & Remuneration Committee – To approve the 2.75% Public Sector Pay Increase for all staff.

Cllr Lewendon advised that the proposal was to approve the 2.75% Public Sector pay increase which would cost approximately £3,000 over the year. He advised that there has been an allowance for inflation which was budgeted at 2% so the remaining 0.75%, which Cllr Lewendon estimated would be around £700, would need to be found. Cllr Lewendon proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Adams and therefore RESOLVED: to approve the 2.75% Public Sector Pay Increase for all staff. All in favour.

8. To receive a report on building matters:

- Town Hall – revised plans for review

The Clerk advised that Sheerin Bettle had submitted the plans for the Town Hall to the NFDC planning department for pre application advice in order to get the views of the conservation officer on 24th August 2020. The architects met the Conservation Officer at the Town Hall on 24th September 2020 and were awaiting her formal views. The architect reported that the meeting was positive, the officer liked a number of the proposals, understood the concept and recognised the need for and supported the principle of the development. However before commenting on whether the proposed layout is acceptable it is likely that she will need further supporting evidence based on the report of a buildings' historian, which Sheerin Bettle would expect, and the architect is looking to obtain quotes. He advised that there was little point submitting an application until the views of a buildings' historian had been obtained.

K&B Builders had undertaken their 12 months snagging work early last week, which has been inspected by Sheerin Bettle. Sheerin Bettle are happy with the work and will formally confirm the release of the retention that the Town Council is holding.

- Changing rooms update

The Clerk advised that the asbestos report had identified low risk asbestos in most of the rooms. The refurbishment work was placed on the contracts finder website on 18th September and there has been one expression of interest for the groundworks and seven expressions of interest for the full tender package in addition to the three local contractors that had already expressed an interest. The Clerk had hoped that the full tender packages would be issued at the end of last week but there have been some delays finalising the package. A designer's risk assessment is needed to complete the package but the tender package should be issued this week, with the risk assessment to follow. The closing date for tenders is the 30th October 2020 but due to the delay in issuing the package it may be necessary to extend the deadline by a week. The proposed contract start date is 23rd November and the buildings' manager estimates that the work will take 16 weeks which would mean an end date of early to mid March 2021. Cllr Adams asked whether the interested contractors were local to Fordingbridge. The Clerk advised that the three builders who had indicated they would wish to tender for the work were local or known by the Town Council. The other contractors were generally relatively local and the furthest contractor was based in Essex.

9. To approve the installation of a second height barrier at the Recreation Ground and repairs to the skate park fencing

The Clerk advised that only one quote had been obtained from RM Smith Fencing, the contractor that put up the first barrier on the basis that the Town Council had already been through a competitive quotes process for the first barrier and the price quoted by RM Smith Fencing for the second barrier (£1,120) was broadly the same as the quote for the first barrier. The RFO advised that the expense was within the Town Council's grounds maintenance budget. Cllr Paton proposed and it was

seconded by Cllr White and therefore RESOLVED: to approve the installation of a second height barrier at the Recreation Ground and repairs to the skate park fencing. All in favour.

10. CIL Expenditure: progress update and to agree allocation of responsibility

The RFO advised that the only matter on the short term list of projects that had not been taken on was the installation of a permanent toilet at the allotments. The Clerk advised that this had been looked into and was not financially a good option. Cllr Jackson volunteered to review the children's play equipment, to work with the Environment Agency to look at what could be done with the river bank and to look at the possibility of extending the riverside walk at the Recreation Ground so that there is a circuit. The RFO noted that Cllr Wilson had already undertaken to look at the Parsonage Park area including the play equipment there.

11. To review the following policies

- Reserves Policy

Cllr Adams advised that the current Reserves Policy was put in place in 2017. Cllr Wilson said that the Town Council will have an updated Pavilion, an updated Town Hall, a skate park, the kiosk and these will all require future expenditure. Currently the Town Council has CIL that can be utilised for these projects but Cllr Wilson wondered whether it would be prudent to build up some specific reserves to maintain each of these assets. Cllr Adams agreed it should be looked at and also commented that policies should have a back stop date by which they should be reviewed, albeit they could be reviewed earlier if deemed necessary. Cllr Wilson thought that specifically earmarked reserves should be reviewed annually. Cllr Jackson agreed with Cllr Wilson and said the Town Council now has greater assets and so consideration should be given to either allocating funds to a buildings maintenance budget or having a depreciation policy so that there were sufficient funds to properly maintain the Council's buildings. The RFO suggested a meeting with one or two Cllrs as the auditor has clear views regarding reserves and their parameters within which a council should operate, including holding reserves of between three and twelve months of expenditure. The RFO said that currently the reserves, which were queried by the auditor, are skewed due to the level of CIL the Council currently holds. The RFO said the Council should be careful not to be seen to be holding too much money by the public and should think through what the guidance is and why it is being held. The Clerk commented that if the Council had not been allocated the CIL that it was holding, in terms of a general reserve the Council would be holding only around three months of funds which is at the low end of recommended levels and would be looking at earmarking reserves to ensure adequate funding was available. Cllr Paton suggested that distinction should be made between CIL and general reserves and pointed out that CIL could not be used for general expenditure. The Clerk suggested that this was a conversation to be had with the auditor. He said at the current time consideration should be given to whether the Council should be looking to accrue reserves which are funded by the taxpayer. The Town Hall repair work was primarily funded by a PWLB loan rather than from reserves and some councils may almost as policy fund capital projects by way of PWLB loans, which currently attract a low rate of interest. Cllr Adams suggested that consideration of the reserves policy should be considered again next month. Cllr Jackson advised that he was going on a course regarding finance for councillors and suggested he could raise the issue of reserves at that course. The RFO said that it is possible to increase reserves but the Council would need to justify this increase to residents, particularly given the level of CIL currently held. Cllr Adams suggested and Cllr Wilson agreed that CIL should be used for expenditure where possible. The RFO advised that, for example, the new height barrier could be paid for from CIL funds and there is some flexibility in terms of what CIL could be used for and also pointed out that it needs to be used within five years. The RFO will discuss with the auditor the treatment of CIL funds as one of the distinctions between CIL and s106 funds is that it is held by the Town Councils whereas the Town Council did not hold the s106 funds. Cllr Jackson would also raise the issue of reserves at the course he was attending and the issue of reserves could then be revisited at the next Finance & Policy committee meeting.

12. To agree responses to the following consultations

- "Planning for the Future" White Paper (29th October 2020)
- "Changes to the current planning system" (1st October 2020)

The Clerk said that the Town Council would need to consider whether it wished to submit a response. The consultations are running concurrently but there is a very short period within which to submit a response. The consultations were raised in the NFDC cabinet papers that were previously circulated and the NFDC are submitting a response so the Town Council could rely on that submission. Cllr Wilson felt the Town Council should submit something as reducing the ability of the public to have a say in any system must conflict with the principle of localism. Cllrs said that the proposed changes limit the ability to object to or comment on proposed development. Cllr Adams suggested that the Council should try and raise its concerns that it diminishes any input that it has regarding development. Cllrs discussed the changes in the context of localism and noted that the district councillors had expressed some concerns regarding the proposed changes. Cllr Hale suggested that the Town Council should write expressing concerns about the reduction in localism. Cllr Anstey advised that the paper required twenty six questions to be considered regarding cutting red tape, not standards and just having three designated land categories, growth, renewal or protected. Cllr Anstey suggested that perhaps the Town Council should look at ways to get more sites designated as protected and perhaps this paper gives the Council an opportunity that it has not previously had. Cllr Lewendon thought that part of the problem was that some of the growth sites are not brownfield sites but greenfield sites. Based on the information he has seen Cllr Lewendon thought you may be able make a case for protected designation for quite a lot of land around Fordingbridge. Cllr Jackson said that Fordingbridge does not have green belt so is susceptible to more growth. He felt the protected designation would be the green belt and he was not sure that any areas around Fordingbridge would be designated as protected. Cllr Jackson felt that it would not be possible to submit a detailed response to the twenty six questions. Cllr Paton suggested a letter setting out concerns and the Council should then consider whether it wanted to submit a detailed response to the next consultation.

Action: Clerk to submit comment expressing concerns.

13. To note any items of Correspondence

The Clerk noted correspondence from Surfers Against Sewage who are arranging a litter pick in the town on 17th October 2020 between 10am and 1pm. The pick will end at the Recreation Ground where the recyclable waste will be separated and all the litter collected photographed. They will then take the recyclable waste and are looking for the Council to dispose of the non-recyclable waste.

14. To receive a report from the Clerk or any other relevant business

Cllr Lewendon raised the issue of the new sewer in Whitsbury Road. There is subsidence around it and the concrete plinth is now standing proud. **Action: Clerk to write to Wessex Water**

Cllr Wilson raised the matter of Christmas Lights. The Clerk advised that they were being put up on 9th & 10th of November and the intention was to switch them on on the 27th November 2020. Cllr Wilson suggested that, on the basis there was unlikely to be an official switching on, that the lights could be switched on earlier which she felt residents would appreciate. Cllrs discussed switching on the lights earlier subject to any plans by the Events Group. Cllr Lewendon raised the matter of Remembrance Day and Cllr Goldsmith advised that there was going to be a gathering at Stuckton Road at 11am on 11th November 2020 and potentially a small gathering at the Memorial Gates on the previous Sunday. The RFO said the church had sent an email to local groups with some suggestions for the Sunday, which the Clerk said he would circulate.

15. To note the date of the next meeting as 21st October 2020

The meeting closed at 8:20 pm