

BRIDGNORTH TOWN COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Meeting of Bridgnorth Town Council held remotely via Zoom
Video-Conferencing on Tuesday 27th April 2021 at 7.15pm**

Present:

Councillors:

K Hurst-Knight (Chair)
S Barlow
C Baines (in part)
J Buckley
D Cooper
G Davies
C Dyson
R Fox (in part)
H Howell
E Marshall
K Sawbridge
C Walden
C Whittle
R Whittle

In Attendance:

L Jakeman, Town Clerk

(Note: 1 member of the public attended virtually)

0261/2021 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Councillor S Stevens – Personal commitments

0262/2021 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Nil

0263/2021 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

Question from Mr R Richards

In view of the way in which public questions have been conducted of late, can the Town Council assure the public that henceforth public questions will be conducted in accordance with standing orders?

Response

Yes, the matter will be expanded upon later in the meeting upon as it relates to a Member's question.

0264/2021 **MINUTES**

- i) Members noted receipt of the draft minutes of the Meeting of Bridgnorth Town Council held on Tuesday 23rd March 2021.

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the Meeting of Bridgnorth Town Council held on 23rd March 2021.

0265/2021 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- i) Mayor's Diary

Members noted the Mayor diary since the last meeting:

Mayor's Diary

1/4 - presentation of gift to Lynn Gardner leaving BTC
4/4 - "be a good egg and help crack loneliness this Easter" visit / delivery of donated eggs to veterans
9/4 - site visit Re Bridgnorth High street Market re opening
11/4 - Reading St Mary's Church service in remembrance of HRH Duke of Edinburgh
12/4 - Official opening Faded Barbers, High Street Bridgnorth
13/4 - Meeting with Community Policing Team
14/4 - Present fundraising cheque to Innage Lane day care centre (Mayoral charity this year)
Meeting re agenda review with Town Clerk and Mayor elect
Meeting with police at College House
15/4 - Mayoral visit to Little Greenhouse Childcare
20/4 - Bridgnorth High Street / Saturday market review meeting

- ii) Annual Town Meeting

Members noted that the Annual Town Meeting for the electors of the parish took place remotely via Zoom on Wednesday 21st April 2021. One question was asked before the meeting was adjourned to a later date when social distancing measures have been relaxed to allow group meetings in person. The minutes of the meeting are available via the Town Council's website.

Question from Councillor E Marshall – Public Question Time

Public Question Time is an extremely useful and interesting agenda item which provides an opportunity for the electors of Bridgnorth to be directly involved in publicly raising matters directly with the Town Council. At recent Council meetings I have noted that questions and other issues are being mentioned during Public Question Time which, in my opinion, do not comply with the procedures or intended spirit for this agenda item.

Examples include:

1. A member of the public praised an activity that had no connection with Bridgnorth Town Council, and this could set a precedent for others to follow.
2. A young person, who because of age could not be an elector, asked a question.
3. A member of the public who had submitted a Freedom of Information Request and had received a full reply, then asked basically the same questions in Public Question Time.

Furthermore, occasionally a Member has felt inclined to add further comments after a question has been answered by the person designated by the Chair. If other Members also wanted to add their comments, then it could develop into a debate, perhaps even on an item not on the agenda.

Through the Chair, I would like the Town Clerk to clarify the basic rules and procedures associated with this agenda item, for the benefit of both Members and the public.

Response from the Clerk

Public question time is an important standing item on our full Council meeting agendas which demonstrates the Council’s commitment to transparency, openness and accessibility in the democratic process. The National Association of Local Council provides the following advice in its Legal Topic Note No. 5 (from paragraph 44)

When the public attend meetings, they have no right to participate in them, unless permission is given. It is good practice for councils to set aside time (e.g. 15 or 20 minutes) at meetings for the public to make statements and ask questions. It is advisable for a council to permit public participation at meetings of the full council (and the meetings of committees) that are likely to be of most interest to the public e.g. a planning committee. Councils are recommended to adopt standing orders to structure public participation sessions and may refer to NALC’s model standing orders 3e-h. Standing orders may confirm that public participation at a meeting is restricted to items of business on the agenda for the meeting. Members of the public who wish to communicate about business

which is not included in the agenda for a meeting may communicate with the council in alternative ways e.g. by written correspondence of attending councillors' surgeries.

The Town Council's standing orders refer to public participation twice:

Standing Order 3 (paragraphs 'e' through to 'k'):

- e. Members of the public may make representations, answer questions and give evidence at a meeting which they are entitled to attend in respect of the business on the agenda.
- g. The period of time designated for public participation at a meeting in accordance with standing order 3(e) shall not exceed (15) minutes unless directed by the chairman of the meeting.
- h. Subject to standing order 3(f), a member of the public shall not speak for more than (2) minutes.
- i. In accordance with standing order 3(e), a question shall not require a response at the meeting nor start a debate on the question. The chairman of the meeting may direct that a written or oral response be given.
- j. A person shall raise his hand when requesting to speak.
- k. A person who speaks at a meeting shall direct his comments to the chairman of the meeting.

And

Standing Order 3 (paragraph 'y'):

- y. Questions from Residents
 - i. Each meeting of the Town Council, the Planning Committee, the Property and Grounds Committee or Administration and General Purposes Committee shall include a period of 'Public Question time' not exceeding fifteen minutes.
 - ii. Each questioner must be a resident living within the town boundary and shall be allowed to present a question (not a statement) for a maximum of three minutes (at the Chairman's discretion).
 - iii. Written questions for answering at a meeting should normally be submitted to the Town Council Office by noon preceding two clear days prior to the meeting, and may relate to an item included on the agenda of the meeting or to any matter within the remit of the relevant Committee or the Town Council, as the case may be.
 - iv. residents may ask oral questions at a meeting relating to items included on the agenda of that meeting.

- v. Questions shall be directed to the Chair of the meeting who may request the Town Clerk or another member to reply.
- vi. Answers to questions may take the form of:
 - A direct oral response,
 - or
 - When the desired information is contained in a publication, reference to that publication,
 - or
 - When it is more convenient to do so a written answer subsequent to the meeting.
- vii. Every question shall be put and answered without discussion, although the questioner shall be permitted to ask one supplementary question directly related to the answer, if the question is answered at the meeting.
- viii. Questions shall not be permitted that relate to the individual affairs of either the questioner or any other named person, but should only relate to matters of policy or practice, i.e. matters of a general nature rather than individual concern.
- ix. The Chair of the meeting shall disallow any question that is in his or her opinion, scurrilous, improper, pernicious, irrelevant, vexatious or otherwise objectionable.
- x. Questions and the answers are to be minuted at the meeting where the questions are asked or at a subsequent meeting.

(Clerk's Note: Having 2 similar but different standing orders for much the same purpose is probably unhelpful. Standing order 3 (paragraphs e through k) are in line with the NALC model, whereas sub paragraph y (i through x) is a bespoke addition created at some time in the past by the Town Council.)

Questions from Councillor R Whittle

1. We currently have some £8000 in EMR for bus shelters erection that came to us as a grant and, I understand, cannot be spent on anything else. Can I ask Council if we can spend this money on replacing the carbuncle bike shed being used as a bus shelter on Old Smithfield Way that is a blight on our Town's appearance?

Response from the Clerk

The Earmarked fund (EMR 337 Grants which stands at £8,680) referred to appears to be as a result of grant funding before 2013 and the precise details of the payment are not readily available at short notice. However, in the past some of the funding has been spent on repairs to bus shelters. As such it would appear that the suggested spend might well be appropriate. If the original paperwork cannot be found (because financial records only need to be kept for 7 years) then it is probably wise to obtain a view from the internal

auditor to confirm identifying appropriate spending from this Ear Marked Reserve.

2. We received a grant of (I think) £10,000 for Covid support that was intended for work within the town, and in particular the High St. Has this grant been spent and if so on what?

Response from the Clerk

The actual grant funding received was £20,000 and is provided through Shropshire Council from the Marches Local Economic Partnership. We have recently submitted a return to Shropshire Council regarding the spend to date. The report identifies an underspend of some £8k which is intended to be spent on improving some of the tired street furniture. We had intended to proceed with those works at the beginning of the year however, the national lockdown has slowed down the delivery. We await a response from the grant funding body to confirm that we can carry forward the costs of that work. Much of the immediate costs have been spent on marshalling costs to ensure the safe opening of the Town's High Street market.

A full breakdown of costs to date and the response to allocation of the current underspend will be shared with councillors before the end of the week.

0267/2021 **FINANCE**

- i) Accounts Paid – March 2021

Members received notification of items which had been paid in accordance with Financial Regulation 5.5.

Members noted that the reports presented below are not the Year End figures for 2020/2021 as the end of year closedown, to include pre-payments and accruals, took place on Friday 16th April 2021.

RESOLVED: that the accounts amounting to £60,539.51 be retrospectively approved for payment.

- ii) Cashbooks 1, 2 & 3

Members noted receipt of Cashbooks 1, 2 & 3.

- iii) Budget Report

Members noted the Budget Summary report, including Earmarked Reserves.

iv) Balance Sheet

Members noted the balance sheet as at 31st March 2021 (£590,429) comprising:

General Fund	£251,283
Ear Marked Reserves	£166,513
Useable Capital Receipts	£172,633

(Clerk's Note: the 3 elements do not necessarily equal the summary figure due to rounding.)

v) Town Council Bank Reconciliation Statements

Members noted the bank reconciliation statements as at 31st March 2021.

vi) Receipts and Payments Summary

Members noted the in-year receipts and payments summary as at 31st March 2021.

vii) Accounts for Payment

Members noted receipt of a list of payments for approval.

RESOLVED: that the accounts amounting to £36,140.55 be approved for payment.

(Clerk's Note: Cllrs S Stevens and C Whittle signed cheques on behalf of Town Council)

viii) Accounting and Audit

Members are noted that Councillors S Stevens and C Walden, on Friday 26th March 2021, verified/signed the bank statements for February 2021, authorised payroll for March 2021 and signed those cheques approved by Council at the meeting held on 23rd March 2021.

0268/2021 **BANK MANDATES**

RESOLVED: to authorise the necessary amendments to bank mandates for Unity Trust, HSBC and CCLA. (i.e. the removal of retiring councillors as signatories).

0269/2021 **OUTDOORS AND PROPERTIES MANAGER'S REPORT**

Members considered a report from the Outdoor and Property Manager and noted ongoing activities.

0270/2021 **CO-OPTION POLICY**

RESOLVED: to adopt the Co-option Policy.

Subject to the following amendments:

In Paragraph headed **At the Meeting**, change Standing Order 12(a) to 8.

And

That amendments be made to specify that any selection process is held in public session of the appropriate Town Council meeting and voting is by a show of hands.

0271/2021 **COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW(S)**

i) Members considered a motion from Councillor Marshall that:

Based on current and proposed future developments on the boundaries of the town, and a petition of residents that raised over 800 signatures in support, BTC informs Shropshire Council that it wants a Community Governance Review of the town's boundaries, and undertakes preparatory work for this review. As this Review will or might affect the neighbouring parishes of Tasley, Astley Abbots, Worfield & Rudge and Eardington, BTC would like to discuss our proposals with their Parish Councils.

ii) Councillor Buckley proposed and amendment that:

The matter be deferred for the new Council (which forms in May 2021) to consider.

iii) Councillor Dyson proposed and amendment (to the amendment) that:

The Bridgnorth Town Council agrees with the proposal submitted by Councillor Marshall but feels that any formal decision should be made by the new Town Council and that it [the current Town Council] recommends that it proceeds with the motion presented.

(Clerk's note: A recorded vote was requested:

Voting on (iii) the amendment to the amendment: For (7) Cllrs; Baines, Barlow, Cooper, Dyson, Howell, Sawbridge and Walden: Against (6) Cllrs; Buckley, Davies, Fox, Marshall, C Whittle and R Whittle: Abstention(1) : Cllr Hurst-Knight)

The amendment was carried and became the substantive motion. Members **RESOLVED that**

The Bridgnorth Town Council agrees with the proposal submitted by Councillor Marshall

Based on current and proposed future developments on the boundaries of the town, and a petition of residents that raised over 800 signatures in support, BTC informs Shropshire Council that it wants a Community Governance Review of the town's boundaries, and undertakes preparatory work for this review. As this Review will or might affect the neighbouring parishes of Tasley, Astley Abbots, Worfield & Rudge and Eardington, BTC would like to discuss our proposals with their Parish Councils.

But feels that any formal decision should be made by the new Town Council and that it [the current Town Council] recommends that it proceeds with the motion presented.

(Clerk's note: A recorded vote was requested:

Voting on (iii) the amendment to the amendment: For (7) Cllrs; Baines, Barlow, Cooper, Dyson, Fox, Howell and Sawbridge: Against (5) Cllrs; Buckley, Davies, Marshall, C Whittle and R Whittle: Abstention(2) : Cllrs; Hurst-Knight and Walden)

0272/2021 LOCAL POLICING CHARTER

Members noted receipt of the Local Policing Community Charter and identified the following priorities:

1. Establish a regular community engagement meeting.
2. Commit to attending the Annual Town Meeting (which has been adjourned to late summer, with the date to be confirmed
3. Increase in physical presence.

0273/2021 SALC BRIDGNORTH AND SHIFNAL AREA COMMITTEE

Members noted the draft minutes from the Bridgnorth and Shifnal Area Committee meeting held on 22nd March 2021.

0274/2021 **BRIDGNORTH PLAN**

Members noted the minutes of the Bridgnorth Plan Steering Group held on 30th March 2021 and considered the recommendations therein, **RESOLVED:**

- i) **A recommendation that Bridgnorth Town Council and supporting local parish councils arrange an early meeting with Mark Barrow to discuss, in principle, the formation of ‘Future Bridgnorth’. The meeting could involve the Marches LEP and should consider the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan, referred to above. This meeting can be held prior to the local elections, making recommendations (but no decisions) to be considered by councils after the elections.**

And

- ii) **A request that as soon as possible after the local elections, Bridgnorth Town Council and supporting local parish councils review their position on the Bridgnorth Plan and, if supportive, appoint representatives to the Steering Group.**

Cllr Dyson acknowledged the significant contributions of the members of the public on the Town Plan Steering Group.

0275/2021 **PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSION TO MEETINGS) ACT 1960**

RESOLVED in terms of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, the following items will be likely to disclose exempt information relating to establishment and contractual matters and it is, therefore, **RESOLVED** that pursuant to the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 the public and press be excluded.

(Clerk’s note: While the discussions are confidential the decisions made are documented for the public record)

0276/2021 **TOWN COUNCIL DEBTORS**

Members considered a report from the Responsible Financial Officer.

RESOLVED: to note a debtors report and approve the actions being undertaken to address unpaid invoices due to the Town Council.

0277/2021 **THE GROVE INDUSTRIAL ESTATE (THE HIVE WORKS) – LEASE**

Members noted a report regarding the current lease of the land in question and approved of the Clerk’s initial pieces of correspondence with the Town Council’s solicitors and the likely options.

RESOLVED: That the Town Clerk instruct the solicitor to write to the current tenant and ask that they clarify their position in writing with no definitive actions be taken without referral to the Town Council.

0278/2021 **PERSONNEL AND CONTRACTUAL MATTERS**

- i) Members considered a report. **RESOLVED to follow the legal advice** (the sending of an agreed letter) (option b of the confidential report)

- ii) Members considered a report. **RESOLVED: to amend the title of the current post PA to Town Clerk to that of Democratic Services Officer and approve the salary review as agreed at the meeting.**