

BRIDGNORTH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of Bridgnorth Town Council held in the Annexe, College House on Tuesday 14th December 2021 at 7.15pm

Present:

Councillors:

Aked
Baines MBE
Barlow (Chair)
Buckley
Buffey
Chetter
Connolly
Neal
Sawbridge
Wellings

In Attendance:

L Jakeman, Town Clerk
R Follette, Finance Officer

0259/2122 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Members noted the apologies from:

Councillor D Cooper – self-isolating
Councillor N Cooper – self-isolating
Councillor L Rochelle – personal commitment
Councillor R Seabright - unwell

0260/2122 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Nil

0261/2122 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

- i) Members noted the responses sent to the unanswered public questions previously raised at the Town Council meeting of 16th November 2021, namely:

Questions received from Mr A Daniels

- 1) Can the Council give a firm undertaking that the Arts Trail Statues will be removed?

Response: Yes

- 2) Can the Council give a firm date by which, if not earlier, the statues will be removed?

Response: The statues were originally due to be in-situ until Autumn 2022. However, the Town Council resolved, later in the meeting, to extend the Arts Trail by 12 months. Please see the extract below from the draft minutes under minute number 0241/2122:

‘RESOLVED: to extend the trail period from 2022 to 2023 subject to permission being granted by both Shropshire Council and Historic England.’

- 3) Does the Council have a recent estimate for the cost of removal of the statues and making good the ground on which they stand?

Response: No. We have, however, just been informed by the Arts Trail working group that there is currently £4,000 in the budget with a further contingency of £2,000 which is being held as a hedge against additional removal costs should they occur. Indicative removal costs are also being sought, by the working group, from appropriate contractors.

Question from Mr E Marshall

This is a question about preparation of the Councils budget for next year. It is noted that the Town Council seems to be looking at:

1. Increasing Council Tax by 10.53%
2. Not increasing most or all the fees paid for council services

This means that residents of the town will be paying by their Council Tax all the increases in costs being imposed on the Council. Residents do not have a choice; they have to pay their Council Tax charges.

The current rate of consumer price inflation is around 3.1%.

The Town Council does not provide the important care services such as the collection of rubbish, highways, education and social services.

It is very easy and lazy to impose taxes on residents. But an organisation such as Bridgnorth Town Council should be looking at ways to improve efficiency, productivity, reduce costs, increase income from services other than residents and explore ways of working jointly with other organisations.

Response:

You noted two points:

- Increasing Council Tax by 10.53%
- Not increasing most or all the fees paid for council services

You are aware that the first part was answered at the meeting prior to your question. With regards to point number two, please be advised that fees were discussed at length later on in the meeting under agenda item number 10 i) where Council asked Officers to bring back costings, for inclusion in the 2022/2023 budget, for the increase of fees for Severn Park parking and Cemetery in line with general inflation. All commercial costs are to be reviewed early in the next financial year to include but not restricted to: use of the slipway.

ii) Members noted a public question received in the lead up to this meeting

a. Question(s) received Mr Anthony Daniels of St Leonard's Close

- Is the Town Council responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the grassed area around St Leonards' Church?
- If it is not, could it inform us as to who is responsible?
- Does the Council agree that vehicles should not be parked or driven over this area, which is part of a conservation area, including any employees of the Council? (for the benefit of Councillors, I have sent photographs of the Mayor).

Response

- Yes, the Town Council is responsible for the upkeep of the closed churchyard at St Leonards Close. This in turn negates the need to answer the 2nd question posed.
- The Town Council has not as far as we are aware previously expressed a view on the use of the land in question. The land itself is owned by the Church as part of the ancient 'ecclesiastical corporation sole' which means that it is owned by the Rector of the parish and any decision regarding its use lays with the Rector and Churchwardens in accordance with the Canons of the Church of England. The Rector has asked that any questions relating to land for which he has responsibility be directed to him.

- i) **RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the Meeting of Bridgnorth Town Council held on 16th November 2021 and authorise them being signed by the Town Mayor.**
- ii) Members noted receipt of the minutes of the Events & Christmas Committee meeting held on 24th November 2021.

And

- a. Members noted the recommendations and agreed to consider the budgetary recommendations later and when setting the budget as a whole those being:
 - i) That the Town Council budget for 2022/23 should include
 - a. £2.5k to effect essential repairs to the current lights in FY 2022/23.
 - b. At least £1k to support an event related to the Platinum Jubilee
 - b. With regard to the other remaining recommendations **RESOLVED:**
 - ii) **That the Town Council Fees for the Commercial Hire of Severn Park are inappropriate and should be decided 'by negotiation' with that responsibility being delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chair of the Events & Christmas Committee and the Mayor.**
 - iii) **To approve in principle the use of Severn Park for large scale commercial activity on 24th April and 3rd August 2022. (Noting that the approval of the 3rd August event would be subject to any event on the 24th April being successful and without incident or as yet unanticipated consequences)**
 - iv) **To delegate responsibility to approve the events to Town Council officers who should satisfy themselves that the event can be held safely and with due consideration to the impact on Severn Park and its neighbours.**

0263/2122 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- i) Members noted the Mayor and Deputy Mayor's Diary detailing recent events:

Mayor's Diary

22/10 - Opening Board Room cafe, West Castle St.
28/10 - Visiting Reach Out Arts
1/11- Opening Ian Charles jewellers, Central Court.
2/11- Evening of celebration at St Mary's Church for the Bridgnorth Youth and Schools Project.
6/11 - Awarding prizes to the winners of the Halloween Arts Trial competition.
7/11- Full Monty charity night for Asthma UK.
10/11 - Celebration evening at the Himalaya restaurant. Recipients of the Curry Life Best Customers choice award. With Deputy Mayor.
11/11 - Remembrance service in the Town Hall.
19/11- Christmas light up evening.
26/11 - Senior citizens Christmas lunch.
28/11 - Northgate Swimming club awards evening.

- ii) SALC Area Committee Meeting 13th December 2021.

Cllrs Connolly and Wellings informed members that they had attended the SALC area committee meeting on 13th Dec 2021. There had been a number of useful discussions. Members were advised that the Leader of Shropshire Council, Councillor Lesley Picton along with fellow cabinet member Councillor Cecilia Motley had been at the meeting topics had included; improving working relationships with parish and town councils, the £60m Highways budget and the need to upgrade the A44s heading out of Bridgnorth as opposed to sporadic patching repairs; proposed electoral boundary changes. The minutes of the meeting would be distributed in due course and more accurately reflect all topics discussed, these will presented to Full Town Council, once received and where the matters might be discussed formally.

- iii) Town Council Casual Vacancies

Members were advised that the 2 current vacancies on the Council (one in Morfe Ward and one in Castle Ward) would be the subject of a contested poll to be held on Thursday 6th January 2022. Details of the candidates standing for election have been published on the Town Council's website.

0264/2122 **MEMBERS QUESTION TIME**

Nil

0265/2122 **FINANCE**

i) Accounts Paid – November 2021

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

RESOLVED: that the accounts amounting to £51,617.86 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 30th November 2021 (£798,075) comprising:

General Fund	£483,476
Ear Marked Reserves	£141,966
Useable Capital Receipts	£172,633

(* Sub totals combined do not necessarily agree with overall total due to roundings)

v) Town Council Bank Reconciliation Statements

Members noted the bank reconciliation statements as at 30th November 2021. (Reconciled sum of all bank accounts £612,822.38).

vi) Accounts for Payment

Members noted receipt of a list of payments for approval.

- i) **RESOLVED: that the accounts amounting to £19,037.65 be approved for payment.**
- ii) **RESOLVED: to authorise Councillors Chetter and Sawbridge to sign the cheques** (on Friday 17th December 2021 at 10:30am)

vii) Accounting and Audit

Members noted that Councillors R Connolly and N Cooper, on Thursday/Friday 18th and 19th November 2021, verified/signed the bank statements for October 2021 and signed those cheques approved by Council at the meeting held on 16th November 2021. Councillors Connolly and Cooper authorised payroll for November 2021

0266/2122 **BUDGET SETTING 2022/2023**

Members considered a report from the RFO and any recommendations contained therein.

RESOLVED

- i) **To defer any provisional decision on the budget and precept until it could explore the use of capital receipts and earmarked reserves** (with the RFO to provide a break down on the current earmarked reserves and some commentary on their intended uses).
- ii) **To reconvene (the previously established) Budget Working Group with a revised remit to explore the use of capital receipts and earmarked reserves to develop a proposal for Full Town Council that will inform the level of precept and the general reserve in time for consideration at the Full Town Council meeting scheduled for January 2022.**

0267/2122 **BRIDGNORTH COMMUNITY HALL**

Members noted (as the Sole Trustee of the Charity) the minutes of a Management Committee meeting held on 29th October 2021.

0268/2122 **BRIDGNORTH ARTS TRAIL WORKING GROUP MINUTES**

Members noted the minutes of the Bridgnorth Arts Trail Working Group meeting held on 22nd November 2021 and a copy of its latest budget.

0269/2122 **FLOOD REACTION WORKING GROUP**

Members noted a report from the Working Group and were pleased that the community had established its own self-help group (the aim of the Working Group) and some appropriate links with the right agencies, notably the Environment Agency and National Flood Forum and as a direct result of support from Shropshire Council.

RESOLVED:

That The Town Council approve the deployment of the Direct Labour Force (DLF) in providing pre flood assistance to previously effected & identified vulnerable properties (namely the distribution of sandbags) on receipt of an official warning from the Environment Agency of the imminent danger of serious Flooding in the Bridgnorth Area.

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