

Witham Town Council

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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Town Council**

Date: **Monday, 14th January 2019**

Present:	Councillors		T. A.	Pleasance	(Town Mayor)
		Mrs	S.C.	Lager	(Deputy Town Mayor)
			P.R.	Barlow	
			J.C.	Bayford	
			J.C.	Goodman	
			P.	Horner	
		Mrs	J.A.	Kempf	(arrived 7.25 p.m.)
		Mrs	A.	Kilmartin	
			M.C. M	Lager	
			J.R.	Pullen	
			R.P.	Ramage	
			W.J.	Rose	
		Mrs	J.	Williams	
			R.	Williams	

Essex County Council	Cllr	J.	Abbott	(Witham North)	
		M.	Squire	(Town Clerk)	
		J.	Sheehy	(Deputy Town Clerk)	
		Mrs	K.	Lumb	(Community Manager)
		Mrs	G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)

52. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs J.M. Money and P.M. Ryland who had previous engagements and Councillor Mrs J.A. Kempf who would be late.

53. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Town Council held 29th October 2018 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Town Mayor.

54. INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

55. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no members of the press or public present.

56. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Town Clerk's Report on matters arising was received.

The Town Clerk explained that there would be a Press Release concerning Janet Gyford being granted the Freedom of Witham.

RESOLVED That the Report be received and noted.

57. ESSEX COUNTY AND BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL UPDATES

County Council Report

The Town Mayor welcomed Councillor James Abbott to the Meeting.

Councillor J. Abbott explained that each Councillor had now been appointed a dedicated Liaison Officer for Highways, this had been an excellent step as longstanding issues had now been dealt with. He said that the footpaths in Collingwood Road and Mulberry Gardens had been repaired. Since the scheme of the highways related 'top 20 defects', many had now been dealt with and there was a definite improvement. He was pleased that a scheme was being devised this year to resolve the flooding issues in Guithavon Valley/Mill Lane. He had spoken to the Liaison Officer about the myriad of developer signs some erected at a dangerous height. All are being removed except those where permission had been granted. He was pleased to report that the pedestrian refuge had been reinstated in Cypress Road.

He had met with concerned residents regarding the proposed Gimsons site regarding the access road. He was particularly concerned about the number of trees, that are likely to be removed and had asked the District Council for its formal position on this matter, specifically on the number of Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's) that would be enforced.

He said that the Rivenhall Management Waste Site was in planning limbo at the moment as the potential stack height had now decreased. This was out for informal consultation.

He said that he continued to pursue health issues with the District Council but there is an impasse as some GPs do not wish to be part of a hub in a central location in Witham. He said that other towns have far better medical facilities despite smaller populations and he would push for a Community Hospital.

Councillor J. Abbot said that the County Council would be setting its budget in February 2019. It would be challenging and he hoped that the Local Highways Panel budget would not be cut particularly as the County Council were drawing on it for other items. He referred

to the need for crossings in Cressing Road and Rickstones Road, particularly with the 500 new homes proposed in the area and the costs involved.

He said he was concerned about the harshness of the LED lights which should be dimmed and turned off at 1 a.m. All the District Council car parks in Witham were having new lighting but the one at Mill Lane has been put on hold whilst an environment impact study is carried out as there is 3,000 % light trespass onto the River Walk.

He had asked for a traffic study to include pedestrians, around the railway station as an holistic approach was needed as the car park was being enlarged.

In answer to a question Councillor J. Abbott explained that whilst a number of nearby libraries were threatened with closure, Witham's library was not. The County Council is re-imagining the library service but nothing will be done before the summer of 2019. There have been 13,000 responses to the consultation so far.

The A120 will be funded through National Investment Funding but there will be various detailed appraisals of the route and Highways England will need to sign it off. He added that the West Tey development would have up to 28,000 new homes and residents would use the old A120 if they wished to get to Braintree.

In answer to a question Councillor J. Abbott explained that he had raised the flooding issues in Avenue Road repeatedly, but it was thought that the issue had been resolved.

He also explained that any new development is subject to archaeological survey as standard.

The Town Mayor thanked Councillor J. Abbott for his comprehensive report.

District Council Report

Councillor W.J. Rose said that he had met with Robin Thompson, the consultant appointed by the District Council to ascertain what residents would wish in the community facility on Maltings Lane and this consultation is still ongoing. He said that a new contractor had been appointed to cut the grass and Members would see an improvement. Spa Road car park has been completed with the white lining for 73 spaces. The area by the shops has been paved and awaiting tree planting. Greenfields were going out to tender for repairs to the tiled roof canopy and hoped to complete the work by the end of March 2019. There was a dedicated car park for shoppers with ten places. Railings would be erected on the high step and a couple of litter bins would soon be installed.

Members asked about the promised rejuvenation of the Town Centre and the £570,000 in the budget. The Town Clerk explained that he had recently spoken to Stephen Wenlock, Town Centre and Public Realm Manager, at Braintree District Council (BDC) and a meeting will be arranged shortly with Councillor Tom Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Economic Development (BDC). It was understood that a similar meeting is being organised with the Witham Chamber of Commerce.

Councillor J.C. Goodman reported that the District would be a pilot area for voter ID at the local elections. He said that District Council officers had been reviewing the success of the first 'artisan' street market when apparently there had been a 20% increase in footfall which

belied local residents' comments. The Economic Development Team had met with Witham Industrial Watch to discuss the renewal proposal of the Business Improvement Bid. 150 new affordable homes will be available in Witham and Halstead. The footpath at the Cut Throat Lane allotment site had been upgraded and standpipe tap cases replaced. Confirmation had been received that new outdoor exercising equipment had been installed in Witham.

The Town Mayor thanked Members for their input.

It was agreed to bring forward the item on Polling District and Polling Place Review.

58. BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL (BDC) POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACE REVIEW

A letter was received from Rivenhall Parish Council taking exception to the Town Council's comments that people living in the area of Rickstones Road and Rectory Lane should vote at a different polling station on the basis that it would save them travelling to Rivenhall.

Members recognised that only a few residents would have been affected by this proposal and there had been no intention to cause upset with the Parish Council.

It was agreed that a letter would be sent to Rivenhall Parish Council expressing these sentiments.

RESOLVED That the letter be received and the Town Clerk write to Rivenhall Parish Council explaining the Town Council's stance.

Councillor J. Abbott then left the Meeting.

59. PRESENTATION – INFORMATION CENTRE

The Town Clerk explained that Information Centre sales and footfall had peaked some years ago, citing reasons such as lower footfall (due to internet usage), demographic changes and agencies such as some bus companies cutting back on commission available. The Cost and Revenue Task and Finish Group had agreed that the Information Centre required rejuvenation and enhanced community use.

The purpose of this presentation was to obtain unanimous consent from the full Town Council and councillors of the proposed way forward, before any detailed costings are provided.

The Community Manager (in conjunction with the Town Clerk) had prepared a presentation to give initial proposals on the way forward.

The Community Manager explained that in consultation with the Town Clerk, she had been given a clear vision of how the Information Centre should be developed. She said that with the appointment of the Community Officer they would now be responsible for the Community Day, Puppet Festival, website management and the quarterly 'Voice' newsletter. She had spent time listening to residents and Members to evolve this plan. She then detailed the slide presentation.

She gave ideas about refurbishment which included –

- a new layout in the centre which would be dependent on budget,
- increased commissions, which are now in place,
- new memorabilia and local produce,
- increase community engagement, including schools, competitions etc.

She planned to focus on –

- advertising through Facebook,
- explore the potential VAT implications element with an expert consultant, who would be invited in,
- increase income,
- new doors and lights to make the centre welcoming,
- improve access,
- better signage to the centre.

The recommendation is to deliver the refurbishment in 3 phases:

She explained that phase 1 of the project has been largely completed but is ongoing, phase 2 will be to gain approval and to agree a budget and phase 3 are the longer term plans to complete the transformation. She said that she wished to keep the Town Council involved and in agreement with her plans on an ongoing basis.

The Community Manager said that she had made strong relationships with other Tourist Information Centres and by advertising through The Voice she had reached new customers. She recognised that with the Town Hall being a Listed Building there may be planning constraints and gave an idea of what could be achieved in the centre with a new office space, repositioned front desk and display units whilst still leaving room for meetings and exhibitions.

Members welcomed the presentation and asked questions about the proposals. It was recognised that this is still at an early stage and more detailed work was needed. Members suggested that the project should be managed through the Community Committee.

RESOLVED That the presentation be received and implementation adopted by the Town Council, up to phase 2 of the project (subject to costings presented along the way) and moved forward through the Community Committee.

The Town Mayor then thanked the Community Manager for her presentation and she then left the Meeting.

During the presentation, Councillor Mrs J.A. Kempf arrived at the Meeting.

60. LETTER FROM LOCAL RESIDENT

A letter was received from a local resident regarding the need to be friendly to foreigners.

Members considered that the Town Council has always been supportive and welcoming to foreigners.

RESOLVED That the letter be received and the resident thanked for his letter.

61. POP-UP STALLS WITH SPECIAL CONSTABLES

Members of the Community Safety Task and Finish Group gave proposals on other ‘pop-up’ stalls, with the Special Constables, promoting the work of the Town Council.

Members thought that the ‘pop-up’ stalls could be every month alternating between the Grove and Newlands Centres. The importance of every Member being involved was stressed. Members wondered whether it would be appropriate to involve other groups as well as the Special Constables but essentially it is a Town Council initiative to not only promote Special Constables and for them to be seen in the community.

RESOLVED That a regular monthly ‘pop-up’ stall be organised alternating between the Grove and Newlands Precinct.

62. TOWN MAYOR’S ENGAGEMENTS

The Town Mayor’s Engagements were received.

RESOLVED That the Town Mayor’s Engagements be received and noted.

63. STAFFING AND ACCOMMODATION SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes held in Open Session of the Staffing and Accommodation Sub-Committee held 18th December 2018 were received.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be received and noted.

64. COMMITTEE REPORTS

(a) **Community Committee Meeting held 26th November 2018**

Minutes 57 – 73 (inclusive).

Councillor R. Williams, Chairman of the Community Committee, gave his Report en bloc.

RESOLVED That the Report be received.

(b) **Environment Committee Meeting held 12th November 2018**

Minutes 56 – 73 (inclusive).

Councillor J.C. Goodman, Chairman of the Environment Committee, gave his Report en bloc.

RESOLVED That the Report be received.

(c) **Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held 11th December 2018**

Minutes 50 – 63 (inclusive) to include parts of Minute 65.

Councillor M.C.M. Lager, Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee, gave his Report en bloc.

RESOLVED That the Report be received.

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED That under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the Meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest.

65. **COMMITTEE REPORTS (cont'd)**

(a) **Community Committee Meeting held 26th November 2018**

Minutes 74 and 75.

Councillor R. Williams continued his Report.

RESOLVED That the Report of the Community Committee be received.

(b) **Environment Committee Meeting held 12th November 2018**

Minutes 74 – 76 (inclusive).

Councillor J.C. Goodman continued his Report.

RESOLVED That the Report of the Environment Committee be received.

(c) **Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held 11th December 2018**

Minutes 64 – 66 (inclusive).

Councillor M.C.M. Lager continued his Report.

RESOLVED That the Report of the Policy and Resources Committee be received.

66. CONTRACTUAL MATTERS

A report was received.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

RESOLVED That regarding the storm damage and partial collapse of the Heritage Garden wall, to accept the insurance settlement figure of £12,239.00 from WPS Insurance Brokers.

RESOLVED To accept the quotation from Danbury Fencing for £2,007.20 for some new wooden panels for the Heritage Garden.

The Committee Clerk then left the Meeting.

67. STAFFING AND ACCOMMODATION SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes held in Private Session of the Staffing and Accommodation Sub-Committee held 18th December 2018 were received.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be received and noted.

68. STAFFING MATTERS

A report was received.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

69. PUBLIC DOMAIN

It was agreed that no item discussed in Private Session should be moved into the Public Domain.

RESOLVED That no item discussed in Private Session be moved into the Public Domain.

There being no further business the Town Mayor closed the Meeting at 9.24 p.m.

Councillor T.A. Pleasance
Town Mayor

MS/GK/18.1.2019