

Witham Town Council

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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Town Council**

Date: **Monday, 4th March 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	
	Mrs	A.	Kilmartin	
		M.C. M	Lager	
		J.R.	Pullen	
		R.P.	Ramage	
		W.J.	Rose	
		P.M.	Ryland	
	Mrs	J.	Williams	
		R.	Williams	
Essex County Council	Cllr	J.	Abbott	(Witham Northern)
	Mr	J.	King	(Society of Friends)
		J.	Sheehy	(Town Clerk)
	Mrs	G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)

And two members of the public.

76. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs J.M. Money who had a previous engagement.

Councillor Mrs A. Kilmartin explained that she had another engagement and would need to leave at 7.45 p.m.

Essex County Councillor D. Louis had also given his apologies as he had a previous engagement.

77. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Town Council Meetings held 14th and 21st January 2019 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Town Mayor.

78. INTERESTS

There were no interests declared at this time but later in the Meeting at Minute 89 - James Cooke Wood, Councillor P.M. Ryland declared a non-pecuniary interest as he regularly uses the woodland.

79. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no questions or statements made by the members of public present.

80. ESSEX COUNTY AND BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL UPDATES

(a) Essex County Councillors

The Mayor welcomed Councillor James Abbott to the Meeting.

Councillor Abbott explained that Essex County Council had set its budget on 12th February 2019 with an increase of 3.99%, the maximum allowed. It was stated that County Council finances remained under extreme pressure with £100M savings required over the next two years to meet its statutory obligations. He said that there would be a special meeting of the Cabinet on 12th March 2019 concerning library closures which had proven to be a highly contentious issue with over 50,000 petitioners responding to the library consultation.

He had spoken at the Gimsons Opposition Walk event on 24th February 2019 conducted by the Heart of Witham preservation group and was concerned about the ecology and access of the site, including the loss of a safe pedestrian route into the town centre and vehicular access onto Maldon Road. Members were further updated on the proposed A12 widening which had been delayed in part due to the outstanding local plan implementation but it was understood that the Liaison Groups set up by Highways England would meet again to progress the proposals. There had been a Braintree District Local Highways Panel meeting on 4th February and another would be held on 28th March 2019.

Councillor Abbott said that a generic planning notice had been put up by Chipping Hill regarding widening, both he and County Councillor Louis would seek clarity but he thought it was a small section of footpath subject to highways works. He said that the proposed Braintree Road pedestrian crossing for Templars School was still ongoing with funding being the primary stumbling block. He was going to raise with the Cabinet Member the question of pedestrian crossings as another is needed in Rickstones Road yet the County Council had not sought Section 106 funding from the developers.

£700,000 of funding had been allocated for footway repairs and Members will be asked again to report the worst twenty in need of repair. He considered this to be an excellent initiative for local councils to deal with well-known problem spots.

Councillor P.R. Barlow spoke about the District Council's scrutiny into Highways and whether value for money is achieved using Ringway Jacobs who perform highways works on behalf of the County Council. He urged Members to look at the report which will be considered on 6th March 2019. Councillor Abbott responded by saying that Essex County Council is also scrutinising whether the contract with Ringway Jacobs should continue as many questions were outstanding as to whether value for money was being achieved.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Abbott for his report.

Councillor Mrs A. Kilmartin left the Meeting whilst the above item was being discussed.

(b) Braintree District Councillors

Councillor J.C. Goodman gave a report on the full District Council Meeting on 25th February 2019. He said that Braintree District Council would receive a sum of £113,625 from the Council Tax Collection Fund and £21,040 surplus would be available to Town and Parish Councils, of which Witham's allocation of the surplus fund was noted and agreed as part of the budgeting process in January. A package of actions had been agreed to develop and grow Witham Market and District Council officers were working on proposals relating to signage, street furniture and event infrastructure. He said that the District Council's Tourism Plan for the District had been agreed by Cabinet and it will now work with Town Centre Partnerships, Town and Parish Councils and independently owned Tourist Information Centres. There had been a Braintree District Sports Award in November 2018 with the Unsung Hero Award going to Ed Booker who runs the Witham Town under 11's football team and similarly Services to Disability Award went to Sport for Confidence running activities at the Fusion Leisure Centre. Members were also notified that Witham's Valero Lounge has been hosting 'Meet Up Monday' sessions aimed at residents who may not have had any social contact over the weekend as part of a commendable wider District initiative to combat loneliness in communities.

The Town Mayor thanked Councillor J.C. Goodman for his report.

81. SOCIETY OF FRIENDS BURIAL GROUND

A report was received.

The Town Mayor welcomed Mr Jonathan King to the Meeting.

Mr King thanked Members for the opportunity to talk about the Society of Friends Burial Ground in Church Street. Mr King explained that the Society was currently investigating what to do with the burial ground which had leased to a neighbour at a peppercorn rent but was becoming increasingly neglected over time. The Society had thought the area could become a Peace Garden or Public Open Space and sought the help of the Town Council in facilitating this.

Members discussed the implications and whether the Town Council might be obliged to take over the maintenance as it would seem to be a 'closed churchyard'.

The Town Clerk advised Members that the definition of a 'Closed Churchyard' relates to the space that encloses of a Church of England parish church and that other cemeteries regardless of denomination appeared to fall outside the scope of the Town Council's legal duty of maintenance. Members discussed the implications of taking over responsibility for this open space and agreed that the acquisition of the burial ground currently falls outside the scope of the Council's agreed business plans. Although it was recognised that such spaces can be taken over by the Council under the Open Spaces Act; it was noted that budgetary capabilities and staffing resources were unlikely to cover reasonable maintenance of the site.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted and the Town Council take no further action at this time.

The Town Mayor thanked Mr King for attending.

82. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Town Clerk explained that there are currently two public consultations in progress, the proposed play equipment at Ebenezer Close commissioned by the Community Committee and proposed parking restrictions in The Paddocks commissioned by the Environment Committee. He was working with the Community Manager to create a timeline for foundation work to refurbish the Information Centre with a further detailed report of options to be referred back to the Community Committee.

RESOLVED That the Town Clerk's report be received and noted.

83. BANK MANDATES AND ONLINE BANKING

A report was received from the Town Clerk and Members asked to approve an online banking mandate to allow the Town Council to begin making BACS payments.

The Town Clerk explained that this was necessary to move away from a cheque based payments system but care had to be exercised to satisfy the Town Council's financial risk assessments and internal control procedures. Governance changes to the Financial Regulations will be required. Members were notified it was possible for signatories to receive text messages when payments are made or that a secondary system whereby staff can set up authorised payments lists and signatories can complete; this would however require each individual signatory to open an account for online banking and require the Town Clerk to be listed as an authorised signatory to create a schedule of payments.

It was agreed that the implementation of BACS and Online Banking should proceed but referred back to Policy and Resources Committee to review.

RESOLVED That the report be received and the implementation of BACS and Online Banking proceed.

84. DEVOLUTION OF HIGHWAY SERVICES

Notes from the Highways Devolution presentation held 4th February 2019 were received and Members asked to consider signing the Grant Agreement.

Members agreed that the Agreement should be signed and establish what contractors should be used. The Town Clerk explained that it was only a pilot scheme which would establish the pitfalls. He suggested that the matter revert to the Environment Committee to take the matter forward.

Concern was expressed about the viability to taking part in the scheme and whether the statutory duties would be devolved to the Town Council. The Town Clerk gave the assurance that these duties cannot be passed down to the Town Council.

RESOLVED That the Highways Devolution be agreed and the Grant Agreement signed.

RESOLVED That authorisation be given to seal the Grant Agreement.

85. DRAFT MEETING SCHEDULE

The draft Meeting Schedule for 2019/2020 Civic Year was received.

The Town Clerk explained that it was proposed to hold an Induction Training for Members on Tuesday, 7th May 2019 which was open to both newly elected and re-elected Members.

RESOLVED That the Meeting Schedule for 2019/2020 be agreed.

86. TOWN MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS

Details of the Town Mayor's Engagements were received.

RESOLVED That the details be received and noted.

87. COMMITTEE REPORTS

(a) **Community Committee Meeting held 4th February 2019**

Minutes 76 – 92 (inclusive).

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

Minute 86 – Silver Cinema

Councillor R. Williams reported that the Silver Cinema is proceeding well.

Minute 90 – Event Brands

The Recommendation – That the proposed branding incorporating the Town Council logo, should be agreed and used at Town Council events, was received. The Town Clerk said that it had been impossible to use the logo without losing the simplicity of the branding. For each brand, members were given an option ‘A’ or ‘B’ to select as the final brand choice.

RESOLVED That the proposed brandings selected, without the Town Council logo, be agreed and used at Town Council events.

Minute 91 – Witham Town Council Branding

The Recommendation – That the proposed Town Council corporate rebranding be agreed and used on all future corporate documents and policies was received.

RESOLVED That the proposed Town Council corporate rebranding be agreed and used on all future corporate documents and policies, be agreed.

RESOLVED That the Report of the Community Committee be received.

(b) **Environment Committee Meeting held 22nd January 2019**

Minutes 77 to 96 (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 19th February 2019**

Minutes 67 to 80 (inclusive).

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 and legal proceedings.

88. COMMITTEE REPORTS (cont'd)

(a) **Environment Committee Meeting held 22nd January 2019**

Minutes 97 to 99 (inclusive).

Councillor J.C. Goodman continued his Report en bloc.

RESOLVED That the Report of the Environment Committee be received.

(b) **Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held 19th February 2019**

Minutes 81 – 85 (inclusive).

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

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

89. JAMES COOKE WOOD

A report was received from the Town Clerk who had been instructed to conduct a survey and valuation of the wood in order to ascertain its general market value.

Members were divided as to whether the wood should be sold and the proceeds spent elsewhere or whether it be retained. Members discussed the amenity the wood provides which was used regularly by dog walkers but further funding and resources would need to be deployed to better manage the site and promote its use for the public benefit. After much discussion a vote was taken and there was a majority decision to retain the wood.

RESOLVED That the report be received and James Cooke Wood be retained as an asset of Witham Town Council

90. PUBLIC DOMAIN

Members agreed that Minute 89 – James Cooke Wood, discussed in Private Session, should be moved into the Public Domain.

RESOLVED That Minute 89 – James Cooke Wood be moved into the Public Domain.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 9.05 p.m.

Councillor T.A. Pleasance
Town Mayor

JS/GK/11.3.2019