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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Town Council**

Date: **Tuesday, 2nd June 2020**

Present:	Councillors	Mrs S.C.	Lager	(Town Mayor)
		R.P.	Ramage	(Deputy Town Mayor)
		Mrs S.	Ager	
		K.L.	Atwill	
		P.R.	Barlow	
		J.C.	Bayford	
		J.C.	Goodman	
		S.E.	Hicks	
	Miss C.		Jay	
	Mrs A.		Kilmartin	
		M.C.M.	Lager	
		C.S.	Livermore	
		T.A.	Pleasance	
	Miss M.L.		Weeks	
		R.	Williams	
		J.	Sheehy	(Town Clerk)
	Mrs H.		Andrews	(Assistant Proper Officer)
	Mrs G.		Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)
	Miss N.		Smith	(Assistant RFO)

And one member of the public.

The Town Mayor welcomed everyone to the Meeting and explained that she and Councillor M.C.M. Lager, as Leader of the Council, attended a remote meeting last week with Greater Anglia about the redevelopment of the railway station and car park. She said that whilst these changes could have been under the umbrella of permitted development Greater Anglia had tried to resolve the issues the Town Council had raised. There would be both access and egress from the car park via Station Road as well as alterations to the entrance at Easton Road. The tiered car park would not only be set further back from the flats but would be staged and lighting would be via a motion sensor. The work was proposed to start in August 2020 and finish by September 2021.

110. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P.M. Ryland who had a previous engagement.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and accepted.

111. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meetings of the Town Council held 9th March, 25th March and 5th May 2020 were received.

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Town Council Meetings held 9th March, 25th March and 5th May 2020 be received, confirmed as a true record and to be signed by the Town Mayor when Covid-19 Restrictions allow.

112. INTERESTS

Councillor M.C.M. Lager declared non-pecuniary interests in Minute 122(a) – Grant Aid – The Hub, as he knows Tina Townsend, Minute 122(c) – Grant Aid - Royal British Legion, as he is a member of that organisation and Minute 122(d) – Grant Aid – Boys’ Brigade, as he knows John Boon.

Councillor Mrs S.C. Lager declared non-pecuniary interesst in Minute 122(a) – Grant Aid – The Hub, as she knows Tina Townsend, Minute 122(c) – Grant Aid - Royal British Legion, as she is a member of that organisation and Minute 122(d) – Grant Aid – Boys’ Brigade, as she knows John Boon.

Councillor J.C. Goodman declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute 122(c) – Grant Aid - Royal British Legion, as he is a member of that organisation but he would not take part in the discussion and abstain from voting.

Councillor T.A. Pleasance declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute 122(c) – Grant Aid - Royal British Legion, as he is a member of that organisation.

Councillor Mrs S. Ager declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute 122(a) and (b) – Grant Aid – The Hub, as she knows Tina Townsend.

Councillor J.C. Bayford declared non-pecuniary interests in Minute 122(c) – Grant Aid - Royal British Legion as he is a member of that organisation and Minute 122(d) – Boys’ Brigade, as he knows John Boon.

Councillor R.P. Ramage declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute 122(a) and (b) – Grant Aid – The Hub, as he knows Tina Townsend.

Councillor Mrs A. Kilmartin declared non-pecuniary interests in Minute 122(a) and (b) – Grant Aid – The Hub, and Minute 123 – Vote of Recognition, as she knows Tina Townsend.

Councillor K.L. Atwill declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute 122 (a) – Grant Aid – The Hub, as he knows Tina Townsend.

Councillor P.R. Barlow declared non-pecuniary interests in Minute 122(a) – Grant Aid – The Hub, as he knows Tina Townsend, Minute 122(c) – Grant Aid - Royal British Legion, as he is a member of that organisation and Minute 122(d) – Grant Aid – Boys’ Brigade, as he knows John Boon and his grandson is a member of that organisation.

Councillor S.E. Hicks declared non-pecuniary interests in Minute 122(a) – Grant Aid – The Hub, as he knows Tina Townsend.

113. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Mrs Tina Townsend was listening to the Meeting remotely and did not wish to make a comment.

114. ESSEX COUNTY AND BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL UPDATE

Councillor S.E. Hicks, in his capacity as a Braintree District Councillor, explained that he had dealt with an illegally erected net on a hedgerow during the bird-nesting season.

115. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

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

In answer to a question, the Town Clerk explained that the next issue of The Voice was currently being distributed but could take longer than usual to deliver. It was noted that some isolated distribution issues were occurring which were currently being resolved between officers and the Council's distributors.

RESOLVED That the Report be received and information noted.

116. COVID-19 GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The current governance and meeting arrangements were received and Members asked to review the arrangements.

It was noted that the provisions apply until the week beginning 15th June 2020 and the suggestion was made that they could be extended at each Town Council Meeting. It was thought that it would only be necessary to review the provisions every two months until the situation changed.

RESOLVED That the Covid-19: Emergency Provisions for Governance be received, extended and reviewed every two months.

117. INTERNAL AUDITOR'S REPORT 2019/20

The contents of the Internal Audit Report for the financial year ending 31st March 2020 were received.

It was noted that the Financial Regulations would need to be updated to incorporate the new process for authorising electronic payments as current regulations no longer reflected the Council's financial practices in relation to cheques and BACS. Members were also informed of a minor change in accounting to remove the Mayor's Appeal charity funds raised from the Council's balance sheet as an 'asset' to instead be recorded as a perpetual creditor.

Members asked that their thanks to the Town Clerk and staff be recorded for the high quality and accuracy of the accounts and satisfactory audit.

RESOLVED That the contents of the Internal Audit Report for the financial year ending 31st March 2020 be received and accepted.

118. ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2019/2020

The Draft Annual Accounts for the year ended March 2020 were received.

The Town Clerk explained that the Reserves Page had been omitted from this year's Annual Accounts in order to avoid double reporting of balances held by the Council, which were now represented in the supporting Earmarked Reserve balances and Income & Expenditure accounts.

Members considered that the Town Council was good value for money and appropriate safety measures were in place to safeguard ratepayers' money.

The Town Clerk explained that he would be delighted to run a training course for interested Members on the accounts and in answer to a question regarding funding for the Puppet Festival and other events which have been cancelled, he said that all unspent money would go into the General Reserves.

RESOLVED That the Annual Accounts for the year ended March 2020 be received and adopted.

119. ANNUAL RETURN AND GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

(i) The Annual Governance Statement (Section 1) for the year ended 31st March 2020 was received.

RESOLVED That the Annual Governance Statement be received, approved and signed by the Town Mayor.

(ii) Section 2 Accounting Statements for the Year Ended 31st March 2020 were received.

RESOLVED That the Section 2 Accounting Statements for the Year Ended 31st March 2020 be received, approved and signed by the Town Mayor.

120. DELEGATED DECISIONS

Delegated decisions from 28th April to 22nd May 2020 were received.

RESOLVED That the delegated decisions be received and noted.

121. PLANNING APPLICATIONS AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

(a) **District Council's Local Plan**

Members noted the Planning Inspectorate's decision with regard to the District Council's Local Plan and Garden Communities strategy.

Members recognised that in view of the Planning Inspector's decision, more housing would be required and without a Local Plan delivering a five year housing stock, the District was at greater risk of speculative development with the Local Planning Authority at higher risk of being unable to reject unsuitable applications on un-allocated sites. In light of the Planning Inspectorate's ruling on the Draft Local Plan, Members considered the advancement of a Neighbourhood Plan for Witham an important step to defend the community against inappropriate development.

It was important to ensure that development was commensurate with infrastructure and it was agreed that the Environment Committee should take forward the proposals for a Neighbourhood Plan and contact made with Mrs Jan Stobart, Rural Community Council of Essex, to assist.

RESOLVED That the information be received and the Environment Committee proceed with the commissioning of a Neighbourhood Plan as a matter of urgency.¹

(b) **No Waiting Order – Forest Road junctions with Evans Way and Flemming Way**

The Order for junction protections at the above locations was received.

RESOLVED That the Order be received and noted.

(c) **Decisions**

The decisions for planning consent in particular 18/02304/FUL – Churchill Retirement Homes and its Section 106 contribution, were received.

RESOLVED That the decision be received and noted.

122. GRANT AID SUPPORT

a) A grant application form for The Hub and supporting report were received.

Councillors Mrs S. Ager, K.L. Atwill, P.R. Barlow, S.E. Hicks, Mrs A. Kilmartin, M.C.M. Lager and Mrs S.C. Lager, T.A. Pleasance and R.P. Ramage had declared non-pecuniary interests.

Councillor K.L. Atwill explained that the motion at (b) had been withdrawn. It was explained to Members that following the Town Clerk’s advice it was apparent that the proposal was no longer pertinent and a new proposal to support The Hub’s ‘Pay it Forward’ scheme by up to £5,000 by payment on receipts was now proposed. It was also suggested that some of the funding could be used towards the repair or replacement of the air conditioning unit.

Members recognised the importance of the ‘Pay it Forward’ scheme and the vital help it was giving to the vulnerable of Witham. Members understood that the applicant’s current lease arrangement placed the liability for repairs upon the tenant. Members were advised that funding for the repair was outside the scope of the application. In addition, Members were advised of officer concerns over the initial governance arrangements the applicant had in place as a new charity, which would pose difficulties in ensuring adequate safeguarding of public funds would be met during the Council’s audit process.

After further discussion it was suggested that The General Power of Competence could be used to pay for the food bought for the vulnerable on submission of receipts and paid invoices.

A proposal was laid before Members under a recorded vote: ‘That using The General Power of Competence a sum of up to £5,000 for The Hub’s ‘Pay it Forward’ scheme to buy food for the vulnerable on submission of receipts and paid invoices be agreed’. It was so recorded that Members voted:

Councillors:	Mrs	S.	Ager	-FOR
		K.L.	Atwill	-FOR
		P.R.	Barlow	-FOR
		J.C.	Bayford	-FOR
		J.C.	Goodman	-FOR
		S.E.	Hicks	-FOR
	Miss	C.	Jay	-FOR
	Mrs	A.	Kilmartin	-FOR
		M.C.M.	Lager	-FOR

Mrs	S.C.	Lager	-FOR
	C.	Livermore	-FOR
	T.A.	Pleasance	-FOR
	R.P.	Ramage	-FOR
Miss	M.L.	Weeks	-FOR
	R.	Williams	-FOR

RESOLVED That using The General Power of Competence a sum of up to £5,000 for The Hub’s ‘Pay it Forward’ scheme to buy food for the vulnerable on submission of receipts and paid invoices be agreed.²

- b) The motion laid before the Council by Councillor K.L Atwill for ‘funds (*to be made available*) for the Witham Hub ie £200 per month, reviewed on an annual basis for their ongoing efforts to support the people of Witham, plus an emergency one off payment now of £2600 ie £5000 for 20/21 had been withdrawn.

RESOLVED That the information be received and noted.

- c) A grant application from for the Royal British Legion towards it Film Group project was received.

Councillors P.R. Barlow, J.C. Bayford, J.C. Goodman, M.C.M. Lager, Mrs S.C. Lager and T.A. Pleasance had declared interests.

Members considered that this valuable scheme which would be open to all Witham residents should be supported.

RESOLVED That a grant of £2,000 be made to the Royal British Legion (Witham) towards its Film Group project.

- d) A grant application from for the Boys’ Brigade towards its technology project was received.

Councillors P.R. Barlow, J.C. Bayford, M.C.M. Lager and Mrs S.C. Lager had declared interests.

Members were reminded that the grant for the Park Run had been returned as it had not taken place and the Boys’ Brigade was asked to submit a further grant application for its technology project.

RESOLVED That a grant of £2,000 be given to the Boys’ Brigade towards its technology project.

123. **VOTE OF RECOGNITION**

Councillor Mrs A. Kilmartin had declared an interest.

Members were asked to consider a motion laid before the Council by Councillor Mrs S. Ager for a ‘formal vote of thanks to Tina Townsend and volunteers of The Hub’.

Members agreed that the extraordinary work of the volunteers should be recognised but it would be inappropriate to single out an individual.

RESOLVED That the volunteers of The Hub be formally recognised and thanked for the work they are undertaking during the Covid 19 emergency to assist the vulnerable and self-isolating.

124. TRANSFORMATION OF INFORMATION CENTRE PROJECT

A report was received regarding the transformation of the Information Centre.

The Town Mayor explained that she had seen the Information Centre during the works being undertaken and been impressed with its transformation to date.

The Town Clerk explained that he was pleased the project had come in under budget to date. He said that advice from the District Council regarding improved accessibility to the front of the centre was still awaited via a pre-application advice submission. He said that when restrictions allow there would be a formal opening of the centre but Members would have an opportunity to view once the work has been completed prior to public opening if possible under social distancing measures.

RESOLVED That the report be received and information noted.

125. HIGHWAYS DEVOLUTION PILOT

A report and draft legal agreement for the Highways Devolution scheme were received and Members asked to consider the merits of taking part in the scheme this coming year.

Members considered that the new agreement was improved on the previous year. The importance of being aware of the work Essex County Council was going to undertake was stressed and enquiries to ascertain these details were suggested.

RESOLVED That the Town Council partake in the Highways Devolution scheme this year and the agreement signed.

126. CLOTHES DISTRIBUTION

A proposal was received from Councillor Mrs S. Ager regarding a proposed clothes distribution scheme.

The Social Isolation Task and Finish Group had been considering ways it could assist those who needed clothes particularly for children. It was proposed to run a trial and that those in need would contact the group via email who would then put out a request for appropriate clothing through social media. The clothing which should be clean when packaged would be left outside the house so that a Member of the Task and Finish Group could collect. There would be a need to check the clothing and hold for 72 hours before delivering to the person in need.

Members recognised the need to be sensitive about those who required help and that no extra work would fall on staff. After further discussion, it was considered that a remote meeting with the Town Clerk would be appropriate to resolve outstanding issues including insurance and data protection.

RESOLVED That the information be received and the project postponed until further details are available.

127. FERN HOUSE SURGERY

A proposal was received from Councillor Mrs S. Ager to assist in creating a garden at the rear of Fern House Surgery for staff to relax and self-isolate.

The Grant Aid application had not been received in time for the Meeting and it was pointed out that applications would need to be considered by Town Council rather than under delegated decisions.

It was therefore agreed that the matter would be deferred until the next Council Meeting on 6th July 2020 when the application could be discussed.

RESOLVED That the information be received and the matter discussed at the next Town Council Meeting on 6th July 2020.

128. LGBTQ+ AMBASSADOR

A motion was laid before the Council by Councillor Miss C. Jay for the establishment of a LGBTQ+ Ambassador to be included on the Council's list of 'Representatives on Outside Bodies', and to appoint Councillor Miss C. Jay to this position.

Members discussed whether it would be appropriate to appoint a representative to an outside body that has not yet been formed. The importance of having a Town Council ambassador for LGBTQ+ was recognised and it was considered that this would be the first step in creating a group for those who feel disconnected.

RESOLVED That a LGBTQ+ Ambassador be included on the Council's list of Representatives on Outside Bodies and Councillor Miss C. Jay to this position.

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the Meeting for the consideration of the remaining items of business on the grounds they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within Schedule 12A (S4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

129. LEGAL MATTERS

A report on outstanding legal matters was received.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted and to keep Minute 129 – Legal Matters, in Private Session.

There being no further business the Town Mayor closed the Meeting at 9.19 p.m.

Councillor Mrs S.C. Lager
Town Mayor

JS/GK/5.6.2020

- 1) *Note: The commissioning of a Neighbourhood Plan has been referred to the Planning Applications & Transport Committee under the Council's adopted Scheme of Delegation.*
- 2) *All grants awarded under the Council's Grant Aid Scheme are issued under the General Power of Competence, as such the GPC was not especially invoked in order to underpin the administration of this particular grant, which is a matter of administrative process as opposed to legal power.*