



Town Hall | 61 Newland Street | Witham | CM8 2FE
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 witham.gov.uk

MINUTES

Meeting of: **Town Council**

Date: **Monday, 6th July 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 | (arrived 8.20 p.m.) |
| | | | J. | Sheehy | (Town Clerk) |
| | | Mrs | H. | Andrews | (Assistant Proper Officer) |
| | | Mrs | G. | Kennedy | (Committee Clerk) |
| | | Miss | N. | Smith | (Deputy Town Clerk) |
| Braintree District Councillors | | | W.J. | Rose | |
| | | Mrs | S. | Wilson | |
| Essex Police | | PS | S. | Jesse | (Community Special) |

And seven members of the public.

130. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P.M. Ryland who had a previous engagement and Councillor R. Williams who was working and would join the Meeting when able.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and accepted.

131. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Town Council held 2nd June 2020 were received.

Councillor J. C. Goodman explained that his interests at Minute 112 had been corrected but under Minute 122(a) – Grant Aid – The Hub and Minute 122(b) – Grant Aid – Boys’ Brigade, his interests were still included. He added that instead of Power of General Competence, quoted at Minute 122(a), it should read The General Power of Competence.

It was agreed that the Minutes should be amended accordingly and signed by the Town Mayor.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be amended accordingly and signed by the Town Mayor.

132. INTERESTS

Councillors P.R. Barlow, J.C. Goodman and Mrs A. Kilmartin declared non-pecuniary interests in Minute 146 – Rainbows, as they know Mr Andrew Rudd who put forward the suggestion.

Councillor Mrs A. Kilmartin declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute 140 – Fern House Surgery, as she had presented an award to staff in her capacity as Chairman of Braintree District Council.

Later in the Meeting at Minute 140 – Fern House Surgery, Councillor R.P. Ramage declared a non-pecuniary interest as he knew the applicant.

133. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Lianne Sutton spoke on the Agenda Item 10 (Minute 139) – LGBTQ+ Ambassador. She explained that she worked with the Witham Youth Group and alongside the Youth Services at the Maltings Academy. She spoke about the Government’s plan to scrap reforms in the Gender Recognition Act and the damage it had caused to transgender people who should have a fundamental right to recognition and equality. She said that she worked with several transgender and gender non-conforming people who are ridiculed and become invisible in education. A consultation of over 100,000 people was referenced, with findings resulting in 70% of respondents in favour of the reforms yet officials considered the results had been skewed by an avalanche of responses from trans groups. This has meant that transgender youth feel unimportant. She referred to Section 28 legislation which banned the “promotion of homosexuality” until its repeal, leaving a generation of young people isolated, and it was considered that this opportunity for reform which could be lost, had set back trans’ rights by a decade. Safe places are needed for women, who are humiliated by being unable to use certain facilities. She urged the Town Council to write a letter to Priti Patel, MP, supporting the rights of trans people.

The Town Mayor thanked Lianne Sutton for her comments.

Councillor W.J. Rose referred to Agenda Item 18(a) (Minute 147) – Amenity Land Owned by Greenfields. He said that whilst he was not against the idea in principle, consultation would be required with the residents of Bures Drive as the land is close to the rear of properties 15 to 22. He thought that the land in question is in fact not owned by Greenfields but the Academy Trust.

The Town Mayor thanked Bill Rose for his comments.

134. TOWN CLERK’S REPORT

The Town Clerk explained that the Information Centre had opened that morning and there had been a reasonable footfall. Customers had been favourable with their comments about the refurbishment. He proposed to present a full report to Community Committee to complete and review the project outcomes.

Members were disappointed that it had not been possible to have a formal opening and reception which would have coincided with the 25th anniversary of the opening of the Town Hall but it was agreed that the Information Centre had been completed successfully, pending final report details.

RESOLVED That the information be received and noted.

135. ESSEX COUNTY AND BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL UPDATE

A written report had been received from Essex County Councillor J. Abbott on matters relating to Witham.

Members were grateful to receive the report and to be kept in touch with developments. It was commented that the Essex County Councillor representing Witham Southern regularly fails to give a report or to attend a Meeting. It was agreed that a letter be sent to Councillor D. Louis asking him for a report.

Members were pleased that the library had reopened but it had been noted that there was a severe shortage of books for young children. It was agreed that a letter of thanks should be sent to the library for all the work that the staff have done.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

136. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Leader of the Council proposed the following –

- (i) That Councillor Mrs S. Ager resigns as a Member of the Planning Applications and Transport Committee and be appointed as a Member of the Community Committee; and Councillor K.L. Atwill resigns as a Member of the Community Committee and be appointed as a Member of the Planning Applications and Transport Committee, which was an agreed exchange.

RESOLVED That Councillor Mrs S. Ager resigns as a Member of the Planning Applications and Transport Committee and be appointed as a Member of the Community Committee; and Councillor K.L. Atwill resigns as a Member of the Community Committee and be appointed as a Member of the Planning Applications and Transport Committee.

- (ii) That following the resignation of Councillor T.A. Pleasance as Chairman of the Environment Committee, that Councillor J.C. Goodman be appointed as Chairman of the Environment Committee and Councillor K.L. Atwill as Vice-Chairman. Members were very grateful for Councillor T.A. Pleasance's contribution as Chairman.

RESOLVED That that Councillor J.C. Goodman be appointed as Chairman of the Environment Committee and Councillor K.L. Atwill as Vice-Chairman.

- (iii) That Councillor T.A. Pleasance be replaced by Councillor J.C. Goodman on the Estimates Sub-Committee. It was explained that it is usual practice for the Chairmen of Committees to be Members of the Estimates Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED That Councillor T.A. Pleasance be replaced with Councillor J.C. Goodman on the Estimates Sub-Committee.

137. DELEGATED DECISIONS

The delegated decisions from 26th May to 22nd June 2020 were received.

Councillor J.C. Goodman as Chairman of the Planning Applications and Transport Committee, detailed the procedure and delegated decisions taken.

The Leader of the Council asked for clarification as to whether the new Christmas Lights would be within budget. The Town Clerk explained that he did not have the figures to hand but would respond outside of the Meeting.

In answer to a question it was explained that the data sim would cost £20 per month and the Smart phone had been given to police on Friday and used over the weekend. PS Simon Jesse explained that this was a fantastic tool which had been used at the weekend. There was a full facility to move the CCTV cameras and zoom so that vehicle registration plates can be easily seen along with people's clothing. He said that this facility would be of great benefit in crime reduction and increased security.

Members thanked PS Jesse and his colleagues for their brilliant work during lock-down.

RESOLVED That the delegated decisions from 26th May to 22nd June 2020 be received and noted.

138. WHETMEAD IMPROVEMENTS

A report was received from Councillor M.C.M. Lager requesting that improvements be made to the entrance to Whetmead Nature Reserve.

Councillor M.C.M. Lager considered that in the past Whetmead had been both an under-appreciated and unknown facility. The entrance to Blackwater Lane could be intimidating and he proposed that both pedestrian and vehicular access needs to be cleared. He suggested that ownership of the Lane would need to be established. He explained that over forty years ago Whetmead had been a refuse tip and the entrance under the A12 used by the refuse lorries needed to be improved.

He suggested that ownership of Blackwater Lane should be established, appropriate budget determined for funding improvements and a business plan created.

Members agreed that improvements were required but considered that both Whetmead and James Cooke Wood had been well used during the Coronavirus lock-down.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted and contents placed into action.

139. LGBTQ+ AMBASSADOR

A copy letter from Stephen Morgan, MP, regarding the Reformation of the Gender Recognition Act was received.

Councillor Miss C. Jay, as the LGBTQ+ Ambassador, both thanked and respected Lianne Sutton for talking to Members. She said that overnight from being appointed the LGBTQ+ Ambassador she had 60 members in the Group. She wanted to ensure that the rights of trans people are protected and that a letter should be sent to Priti Patel, MP.

Members agreed that there should be no discrimination and this motion should be supported.

RESOLVED That a letter on behalf of the LGBTQ+ group be sent to Priti Patel, MP asking that she support and honour the original Identification Act.

140. FERN HOUSE SURGERY

Councillor Mrs A. Kilmartin had declared a non-pecuniary interest. Whilst the matter was being discussed, Councillor R.P. Ramage declared an interest as he knew the applicant.

A grant aid request from Community 360 on behalf of Fern House Surgery was received for a grant of £300 towards the development of a garden for staff.

Councillor Mrs S. Ager explained that the garden would eventually be open to the public, she hoped that the Open Spaces Team would be able to assist and plants from the Period Garden used.

Members questioned whether a grant should be given to allow a private business to benefit and wanted an assurance that the garden would in fact be open to the public. There was much discussion and also concern raised that a garden open to the public would be abused by drinkers and drug dealing in the same way that the Period Garden at the Town Hall was misused.

It was proposed and seconded that a grant of £300 be given for the development of a garden at Fern House Surgery.

An amendment was made that a condition of the grant would be for the money to be returned if the garden is not opened to the public within six months to a year.

RESOLVED That the amendment to include a caveat that the grant be returned if the garden is not opened to the public within six months to a year be agreed.

RESOLVED That a grant of £300 be made towards funding the development of a garden at Fern House Surgery and that a condition be that the grant would be returned if the garden is not open to the public within six months to a year.

Whilst this matter was being discussed Councillor R. Williams arrived at the Meeting.

141. NITROUS OXIDE USE

Following a complaint from a resident, Councillor Miss C. Jay asked the Town Council to consider writing to Priti Patel, MP regarding the misuse of nitrous oxide.

Members fully agreed with the suggestion.

RESOLVED That a letter be written to Priti Patel, MP, expressing the Town Council's concerns regarding the misuse of nitrous oxide and seeking her assistance in resolving this problem.

142. HIGHFIELDS ROAD

A report was received regarding better signage at the one-way section of Highfields Road along with parking restrictions.

Members reported that there had been several near misses with motorists driving the wrong way down the one-way section of Highfields Road and thought that confusion could have occurred because of overgrown hedging and commuter parking. The residents had been consulted in the past following complaints about parking but there was no consensus of opinion so the matter was left in abeyance.

Members considered that the signage was clear but that motorists ignore the signs. Discussion took place as to whether the parking was an obstruction which could now be dealt with by the Parking Partnership Team. The Outdoor Spaces Team would be asked to check this location and clear any overgrown vegetation.

RESOLVED That photographic evidence be sought regarding the parking issues and the matter referred to the Local Highways Panel.

RESOLVED That a letter be written to Braintree District Council seeking clarity as to whether tickets can now be issued by the Parking Partnership Team for obstruction.

RESOLVED That the Parking Partnership Team be asked to regularly check this location for offending vehicles.

143. SOCIAL MEDIA

The Draft Social Media policy was received.

Members debated the point regarding whether the public would assume a Councillor's comment was a personal view or the view of the Town Council. The view was put that careful thought needed to be taken when posting comments so as to adhere to the Code of Conduct. The suggestion was made that a solution would be to replace 'can' with 'may' in the second paragraph.

RESOLVED That the second paragraph in Code of Conduct – Members read – 'If a Member has an account where they comment as both a Councillor and an individual it **may** be presumed that the views expressed are those of the Council rather than the Member personally when this may not be the case.'

RESOLVED That the amended draft Social Media policy be received and adopted.

144. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

A recommendation was received from the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee to adopt the new 'Uniform Project Management Process'.

RESOLVED That the Uniform Project Management Process be received and adopted.

145. QUALITY COUNCIL STATUS

The following draft statements for endorsement by Town Council were received -

- Governance Statement
- Community Statement
- Development Statement

It was explained that once these statements are agreed then an application could be made to apply for Quality Gold Status for the Council.

RESOLVED That the Governance Statement, Community Statement and Development Statement be received and adopted.

RESOLVED That the Town Council applies for Quality Gold Status.

146. RAINBOWS

Councillors P.R. Barlow, J.C. Goodman and Mrs A. Kilmartin had declared non-pecuniary interests.

A suggestion was received that the rainbows painted by the children be collated into a public record as part of Witham's history during the pandemic.

Members agreed that this would be a good idea and the suggestion was made that an electronic record could be made.

RESOLVED That the rainbows painted by the children of Witham be collected to form a public record of Witham's history during the pandemic.

147. AMENITY LAND OWNED BY GREENFIELDS

Members were asked to consider proposals to amenity land owned by Greenfields.

(a) Proposed Community Orchard off Spa Road

Members agreed that careful consideration would need to be taken but it would be necessary first to investigate who owns the land. The office would undertake the necessary enquiries.

(b) Area by the Ephemeral Pond in Forest Road

Members explained that Section 106 monies were available for improvements but ownership of the land was being sought.

RESOLVED That the information be received and necessary enquiries be undertaken.

148. BLACKWATER RAIL TRAIL

A report was received from Councillor M.C.M. Lager.

Councillor M.C.M. Lager explained that the Town Council is in negotiations with Essex County Council to gain ownership of the Blackwater Rail Trail and the report was an outline business case.

RESOLVED That the proposed business case be forwarded to Essex County Council as part of the process of seeking ownership of the Blackwater Rail Trail.

There being no further business the Town Mayor closed the Meeting at 9.18 p.m.

Councillor Mrs S.C. Lager
Town Mayor

JS/GK/9.7.2020