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MINUTES

WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Date: **Monday, 17th January 2022**

Place: **Council Chamber, Town Hall, Newland Street, Witham, CM8 2FE**

Present:	Councillors	A.	Kilmartin	(Town Mayor)
		J.	Bayford	(Deputy Town Mayor)
		S.	Ager	
		K.	Atwill	
		P.	Barlow	
		J.	Goodman	
		S.	Hicks	
		C.	Lager	
		M.	Lager	
		C.	Livermore	
		T.	Pleasance	
		S.	Rajeev	
		M.	Weeks	
		J.	Williams	
R.	Williams			
Essex County Councillor	R.	Playle	(Witham Northern)	
St John Ambulance Brigade	P.	Franklin	(Retired President)	
	C.	Batson	(Acting Leader of Adult Section)	
	M.	Bass	(Events Co-ordinator)	
	N.	Smith	(Acting Town Clerk)	
	H.	Andrews	(Assistant Town Clerk)	
	G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)	

171. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jay who was unwell and from District Councillor Rose.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and accepted.

172. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of Town Council held 14th December 2021 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Town Mayor.

173. INTERESTS

No interests were declared but later in the Meeting at Minute 177 – St John Ambulance Brigade, Councillor Hicks declared a non-pecuniary interest.

174. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There was no member of the press or public present.

175. APPOINTMENT OF ACTING TOWN CLERK

Members noted that following the resignation of James Sheehy as Town Clerk, Nikki Smith had been appointed as Acting Town Clerk whilst a replacement was sought.

RESOLVED That the information be received and noted.

176. ESSEX COUNTY AND BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL UPDATE

Councillor Ross Playle explained that the proposed cycleway in Collingwood Road, as part of the Bellway Development off Forest Road, had not been resolved and would go back to the District Council's Planning Committee. Councillor Playle said that the site manager of Gimsons had suggested that the footpath by River View was likely to be opened by the end of January/beginning of February. He referred to Coleman's Quarry and the changes which would result in additional HGVs through the town centre. Councillor Playle stated that Little Braxted Parish Council had suggested that as part of the planning process the Appleford Bridge should be widened to take two lanes of traffic. He reminded Members that the Library Consultation would close on Friday.

Members explained that a decision had been taken to refuse any planning application in regards to the Quarry until such time as all HGVs accessing or egressing the site use the adjacent A12 rather than the town centre. They considered that not only would the widening of the Appleford Bridge encourage motorists to speed but spoil a characterful bridge.

The Town Mayor thanked Councillor Playle for his report.

177. ST JOHN AMBULANCE BRIGADE

The Town Mayor welcomed Paula Franklin of the Witham Branch of St John Ambulance Brigade to the Meeting.

Mrs Franklin, retired President of the Witham and Tiptree Branch of the St John Ambulance Brigade explained St John had had a presence in the town for many years and used to meet in a hired hall before progressing to an army hut to the rear of Spring Lodge. When the District Council wanted to develop the land they were given a 50 year lease on a purpose built building. St John headquarters looked at all their premises following the pandemic and considered that Witham's building could be a liability if

repairs were required and promptly shut the premises. As a consequence, £50 was paid per week for adults to meet at the Football Club and £40 for the cadets to meet elsewhere. There were also problems with storage and volunteers had to drive to three different venues to collect equipment.

Mrs Franklin introduced Chris Batson, acting Leader of the Adult Section, and Mark Bass, Events Co-ordinator. She said that she had written to Priti Patel, MP, who was very supportive. She hoped that the Town Council would be able to offer advice and support.

Councillor Hicks declared a non-pecuniary interest as he had been instrumental in making the Planning Department aware of the height specifications required for the garage doors in light of the ambulances used.

In answer to a question Mr Batson explained that the HQ was trying to ward off any unexpected costs. He said that with insurance, utilities and maintenance he expected an average of £2,000 - £3,000 to be spent per annum.

Members wished to support St John and explained that grants could be available to help with these costs if necessary although the rent for rooms would be sufficient to cover these costs.

The suggestion was made that St John be invited in conjunction with officers to work out a zero based budgeting sheet. Concern was expressed that any grant funding would need to be spent in Witham only. Mr Batson suggested that the building would need to be removed from the St John portfolio and then rented back to them.

Members agreed that there would be a solution to this problem if the District Council transferred ownership of the building to the Town Council.

RESOLVED That St John be asked to meet with Town Council Officers to look at the lease of their building and work out funding requirements both in the short and long term before consulting with Braintree District Council about possible ownership of the building.

The Town Mayor thanked Paula, Chris and Mark for attending the Meeting.

Councillor Livermore left the Council Chamber.

178. TOWN MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS

Details of the Town Mayor's engagements attended for the period 15th December 2021 to 17th January 2022 was received.

The Town Mayor added that she had been collecting musical keyboards and other instruments for the New Rickstones Academy. She also asked Members to note that her Civic Service would be on Sunday, 3rd April 2022 at 3 p.m. at St Nicolas Church.

RESOLVED That the details be received and noted.

179. ACTING TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Acting Town Clerk's report on matters arising was received.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

Councillor Livermore returned to Council Chamber.

180. PRECEPT 2022 – 2023

The Precept Form, Minutes of the Meeting of the Estimates Sub-Committee held 13th December 2021 and recommendations were received and Members asked to agree the precept for 2022 – 2023.

The Leader of the Council spoke about achievements despite the difficulties of the pandemic. Councillor Lager said that the tree maintenance programme was now complete, a survey had been undertaken of the River Walk cycle ways, footpaths and bridges and it was hoped to make a start on repairs reflecting on the different characteristics/uses of the land. He hoped that improvements would continue on the CCTV system, Special Constables, who are greatly appreciated by residents, would be recruited, the link between the River Walk and Whetmead would hopefully be realised and the Neighbourhood Plan, which could take several years, would consider inter alia Listed Buildings and shops fronts in Conservation Area. He spoke about the need for better accommodation for the Operations Team and for devolved services from Braintree District Council to include the park and land by ASDA; and the Blackwater Rail Trail from Essex County Council. He said that there were some ambitious schemes and there would be discussions with the District Council regarding investment in the town but he stressed the importance of not over-stretching staff or resources. He said that there would be a modest increase in the precept to deliver ambitious plans.

A question was asked about the Winter Wonderland light show on the River Walk which had been promised in place of the Christmas Fayre in 2020 and the resolution to look at its feasibility. It was considered that by not including a specific budget line the decision had been made not to proceed. The Leader of the Council considered that there was sufficient funds in the Festival budget to proceed with this event should the Town Council agree.

RESOLVED That the Minutes from the Meeting of the Estimates Sub-Committee held 13th December 2021 be received.

RESOLVED That the Admin and Central Services budget for 2022/2023 be accepted.

RESOLVED That the budget for the Community Committee 2022/2023 be accepted.

RESOLVED That the budget for the Environment Committee 2022/2023 be accepted.

RESOLVED That the budget for the Policy and Resources Committee 2022/2023 be accepted.

RESOLVED That the budget for the Planning and Transport Committee 2022/2023 be accepted.

RESOLVED That the reserve allocations and balances for 2022/2023 be accepted.

RESOLVED That the Precept for 2022/2023 be increased by the equivalent of £1.57 (2.00%), an increase of £1.57 per annum to £80.28 at Band D. A total precept amount of £704,406.00 be approved.

181. FOOTPATH CLOSURE AT RIVER VIEW

A report was received regarding the public using an unofficial pathway.

The Assistant Town Clerk explained that with the formal closure of the public footpath to facilitate work at the Gimsons site, pedestrians had made an unofficial pathway across the grass. In the wet, muddy conditions it had been agreed to lay bark on the pathway but this had deteriorated to such an extent that it had been closed to avoid injury to pedestrians. Signs and fencing in the gaps in the hedge had been installed to prevent the path being used but these had been repeatedly vandalised. At present one gap in the hedge was closed whilst the other was open. She added that in light of further information the public footpath would reopen possibly as early as the end of January and certainly by the end of February.

RESOLVED That the report be received and the temporary fencing remain in its current state to allow pedestrians to use the unofficial footpath should they so wish.

Members raised the issue of the new footpath laid by contractors being at a different height so that a dangerous step had been created.

RESOLVED That Bellway be contacted and asked to remedy the height difference before the public footpath was reopened.

182. QUEEN'S JUBILEE WORKING GROUP

The resignation of Councillor Livermore from the Queen's Jubilee Working Group was received and a replacement was sought.

RESOLVED That Councillor Livermore's resignation be accepted.

RESOLVED That Councillor Ager be appointed to serve on the Queen's Jubilee Working Group for the ensuing civic year.

183. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Planning and Transport Committee held 14th December 2021 and 4th January 2022

Minutes 175 to 198 (inclusive)

Councillor Goodman, Chairman of the Planning and Transport Committee, gave a report of the Meetings en bloc.

RESOLVED That the Report of the Planning and Transport Committee be received.

184. 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 (S5) of the Local Government Act 1972.

185. LEGAL MATTERS

A verbal report was received.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

186. STAFFING MATTERS

A verbal report from the Leader of the Council was received.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

There being no further business the Town Mayor closed the Meeting at 8.55 p.m.

Councillor Mrs A. Kilmartin
Town Mayor

NS/GK/20.1.2022