



Town Hall | 61 Newland Street | Witham | CM8 2FE
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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Town Council**

Date: **Monday, 3rd August 2020**

Present:	Councillors	Mrs	S.C.	Lager	(Town Mayor)
			R.P.	Ramage	(Deputy Town Mayor)
		Mrs	S.	Ager	
			K.L.	Atwill	(arrived 7.04 p.m.)
			P.R.	Barlow	
			J.C.	Bayford	(arrived at 7.29 p.m.)
			J.C.	Goodman	
			S.E.	Hicks	(arrived 7.15 p.m.)
		Miss	C.	Jay	
		Mrs	A.	Kilmartin	
			M.C.M.	Lager	
			C.S.	Livermore	(arrived 7.12 p.m.)
			T.A.	Pleasance	(arrived 7.22 p.m.)
			P.M.	Ryland	
		Miss	M.L.	Weeks	
			R.	Williams	(arrived 7.57 p.m.)
Essex County Councillor			J.	Abbott	(Witham Southern)
			J.	Sheehy	(Town Clerk)
		Miss	N.	Smith	(Deputy Town Clerk)
		Mrs	H.	Andrews	(Ass. Proper Officer)
		Mrs	G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)

149. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor R. Williams, who would be late as he was working.

Technical issues were noted in these minutes causing late arrivals to the remote meeting.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and accepted.

150. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Town Council held 6th July 2020 were received and agreed.

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held 6th July 2020 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

151. INTERESTS

Councillors J.C. Goodman, Mrs A. Kilmartin, M.C.M. Lager and Mrs S.C. Lager declared non-pecuniary interests in Minute 157 – Delegated Decisions, as they knew applicants of planning permission from Chipping Hill.

Councillor K.L. Atwill arrived at the Meeting.

152. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no Members of the public present.

153. ESSEX COUNTY AND BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL UPDATE

A report from Councillor D. Louis was received.

Councillor J. Abbott, Witham Southern, said that he would be attending the A12 Forum on 19th August 2020. He was the Chair of the Colemans Quarry Liaison Group where there were concerns how it could co-exist with six lanes of traffic running through it. The major interchange junction on the A12 at Colemans Bridge would be to the south of the Quarry. He wished to raise concerns about access for lorries but his request for a meeting had been refused. He referred to the District Council's Local Plan and the declined Garden Community. He said that the proposed route of the A12 north of Feering would not happen and further consultation on the proposed route would be needed. The A12 improvements to Kelvedon were funded and would be proceeding.

He said that the Town Council would be interested in the potential Government reforms regarding planning and the relaxation of consents.

He then referred to the Local Highways Panel and explained that schemes had been put on hold until the Autumn because of Covid restrictions.

He explained that the Highway Rangers are unable to cut back greenery from the footpath by the Catholic bridge as traffic management would be required. He had referred the matter to Essex County Highways as pedestrians have to step into the road as the footpath was blocked.

He had been made aware of the problems in Guithavon Valley with parked cars and would be happy to discuss this issue with Members.

He said that he was still pressing for urgent road repairs at The Grove junction with Newland Street but an overnight closure would be required.

He would be pleased to see local management of the Blackwater Rail Trail.

He referred to the correspondence with the MP regarding nitrous oxide and the offence in supplying and distributing.

Councillor J. Abbott then spoke about ongoing discussions regarding the proposed reorganisation of local government with the disbanding of Essex County and Braintree District Councils to form a unitary authority. He said that as a result County Council elections are unlikely to take place next year and unitary elections would be held in 2022.

In answer to a question, Councillor J. Abbott said that the one way working over the A12 south of Witham would continue until the improvements of the A12 in 2023. Members considered that there should be a better solution.

The Town Mayor thanked both Councillors D. Louis and J. Abbott for their informative reports.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

Whilst Councillor J. Abbott was giving his report Councillors S.E. Hicks, C.S. Livermore and T.A. Pleasance arrived at the Meeting.

154. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Town Clerk reported that there was as yet no response from the MP regarding any amendments of the Gender Recognition Act and no contact had been made by Fern House Surgery although it was understood they did not wish to proceed with the grant.

RESOLVED That the information be received and noted.

155. COVID – 19 GOVERNANCE OVERVIEW

The revised Covid – 19 Governance Overview was received.

RESOLVED That the revised Covid – 19 Governance Overview be received and agreed.

156. DELEGATED DECISIONS

Councillors J.C. Goodman, Mrs A. Kilmartin, M.C.M. Lager and Mrs S.C. Lager had all declared interests.

The delegated decisions from 6th to 24th July 2020 were received.

Councillor J.C. Goodman detailed the Planning Application decisions.

RESOLVED That the delegated decisions from 6th to 24th July 2020 be received and noted.

157. REVIEW OF COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL POSITION

A report and figures showing the Town Council's financial position were received.

The Town Clerk explained that it was important for Members to be aware that there could be a reduction in the tax base this year because of the financial climate following Covid and potential for a significant shortfall in precept. He made the forecast that there would need to consider significant uplift in precept or a reduction in the Town Council's capital expenditure programme depending on the tax base figure once published.

Members thought that the District Council would be able to assist with figures regarding council tax relief but there were new homes ready to be occupied which would off-set the potential shortfall.

Members consider that it would be difficult to justify any increase during the economic crisis.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

Whilst the above matter was being discussed, Councillor J. Bayford arrived at the Meeting.

158. ACCOUNTABILITY AND SCRUTINY OF OFFICERS

A report on the accountability and scrutiny of Officers was received.

The Leader of the Council considered that elected Members should be aware of the current situation concerning what they wished to deliver and there should therefore be consistent reporting back by officers possibly as part of the Clerk's Report.

Members considered that it would be worthwhile to look in more detail at major projects, what had proved to be successful and what difficulties had occurred.

Members agreed that there was no need for a formal overview and scrutiny panel.

The suggestion was made that it would be helpful for Members themselves to report on their actions so others would be aware.

The Town Clerk said that he would report with a suggested system but if he received a written question seeking an update he would be able to contain it in the Clerk's Report.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

159. FINANCIAL REPORTING

Members were asked to consider a recommendation by the Leader of the Council for further information to be contained in the Budget Sheets for each Committee.

The Leader of the Council explained he was seeking a mechanism for early information about under or over spends in the budget to ensure that funds are spent rather than go into reserves. He cited as an example the LED light project which came back substantially under budget. He wished to receive regular forecasts. He suggested exploring with the software suppliers a way to produce the figures he required but if this was not possible he wanted to know how the information could be obtained.

The Town Clerk explained that the software could provide a limited number of report formats. He said that currently the Town Council is given twenty budget reports a year and the proposals to produce this extra information were in his opinion unjustified pointing to the Council's existing ability to make sound financial decisions based on the information currently presented to it. He offered Members the opportunity to attend a meeting and examine the Council's financial reporting system with Members.

Members did not want to over-burden the Officers with paperwork and that a meeting with the Town and Deputy Clerks might resolve this issue. The suggestion was made that these figures could be produced twice a year for the Estimates Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED That initially Councillors K.L. Atwill, P.R. Barlow, J.C. Goodman, M.C.M. Lager and R. Williams get a better understanding of the software and what is possible to produce with a report being made to a pre-budget Estimates Sub-Committee Meeting.

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

160. NITROUS OXIDE USE

A reply was received from Priti Patel, MP, regarding the misuse of nitrous oxide.

Members debated what could be done to dissuade young people from the misuse of nitrous oxide which could seriously damage their lungs. The issue had been raised through the Braintree Community Safety Partnership with police and Members considered that the Town Council should be kept informed. The suggestion was made that Councillor Peter Tattersley, the District Council Cabinet Member for Health, should be involved.

Members agreed that publicity was required and a strategy developed across agencies.

RESOLVED That the letter be received and the Community Safety Task and Finish Group be asked to hold an early meeting to take this matter forward, to develop a multi-agency strategy to include publicity.

161. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

(a) The Neighbourhood Plan Notes from the Meeting held 7th July 2020 were received.

RESOLVED That the Notes be received and noted.

(b) The Leader of the Council proposed to establish a Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group with the following Terms of Reference:

Purpose:

*to support the community of Witham in the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan ("NP") as a Supplementary Planning Document within the Braintree District Local Plan;
Outcome: a Neighbourhood Plan confirmed by referendum and adopted by the Local Planning Authority;*

Process:

- 1. establish a Steering Group membership representative of the community of Witham;*
- 2. develop a project plan to deliver the outcome on time and within budget;*
- 3. oversee the preparation of the NP, providing advice and support as required;*
- 4. provide regular progress reports to the Council.*

Note that the Steering Group does not have the power to approve or commit Council expenditure, this being within the delegation to the Town Clerk.

The Council may wish to determine that no more than 5 councillors should serve, one of whom should chair the Steering Group.

Members understood that the Town Council would receive grants but the Steering Group would manage the project. A very optimistic 18 months to see the Plan delivered was suggested but it was recognised that this timescale would be extended particularly if the County and District Councils were disbanded and a Unitary Authority formed.

Members considered that an Officer should be part of the Group and the Town Clerk was confident that this would be possible.

RESOLVED That the Terms of Reference for the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group be agreed.

- (c) The Leader of the Council recommended Members to serve on the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group but others were anxious to be part of the Group.

After further discussion it was agreed that the Terms of Reference be amended so that seven Members may serve on the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group which would allow for a breadth of knowledge and expertise.

RESOLVED That the Terms of Reference be amended so that seven Members may serve on the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

RESOLVED That Councillors Mrs S. Ager, K.L. Atwill, P.R. Barlow, J.C. Goodman, S.E. Hicks, Miss C. Jay and M.C.M. Lager be appointed to serve on the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 8.53 p.m.

Councillor Mrs S.C. Lager
Town Mayor

JS/GK/5.8.2020