



Town Hall | 61 Newland Street | Witham | CM8 2FE
01376 520627
witham.gov.uk

MINUTES

WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Date: **Monday, 5th February 2024**

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

Present: Councillors:

S.	Ager	(Town Mayor)
L.	Barlow	(Deputy Town Mayor)
E.	Adelaja	
P.	Barlow	
J.C.	Coleman	
J.M.	Coleman	
L.	Headley	
P.	Heath	
T.	Hewitt	
J.	Martin	
R.	Playle	
R.	Ramage	
A.	Sloma	
B.	Taylor	(arrived at 7.56 p.m.)
E.	Williams	
N.	Smith	(Town Clerk)
H.	Andrews	(Deputy Town Clerk)
G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)

And one member of the public.

162. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fleet and Councillor Taylor who would be late.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and approved.

163. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of Town Council held 8th January 2024 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Town Mayor.

164. INTERESTS

No interests were declared at the time but later in the Meeting at Minute 177 – Section 106 - Allotments, Councillor Playle declared a non-pecuniary interest as his father is the Chairman of the Allotment Society.

165. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No comment was made by the member of the public present.

166. ESSEX COUNTY AND BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL UPDATE

Councillor Playle, as a County Councillor gave a report. He referred to the proposal by the North Essex Parking Partnership for charging to park in the town centre bays. Members agreed that there appeared to be a lack of public accountability and it was agreed that there should be a cross-party statement to oppose this scheme.

He explained that Essex County Council had published an update on bus services following the consultation last year and that a mineral review was being undertaken.

Councillor Heath, as a Braintree District Councillor, explained that the District Council precept had been agreed with the maximum 2.99% increase equating to an 11p a week increase for a Band D property. He said that with inflation running at 7% cuts to services would be needed. It would seem that neither Braintree District nor Essex County Councils knew about the North Essex Parking Partnership proposals. He had also raised the point regarding double taxation so an all-party Developing Democracy Group had been formed to discuss these issues. The proposal for a taxi rank in Newland Street was being taken forward and the District Council was reviewing the usage of Causeway House as it now only had upwards of 450 officers. He concluded his report with the comment that the District Council's buzz words are 'Fit for the Future'.

The Town Clerk reminded Members that although the Town Council could choose to issue a statement now the proposals would be on the agenda of the next Planning and Transport Committee Meeting where Members could decide how best to oppose the proposal.

RESOLVED That the Town Council would issue a statement opposing the parking proposals and the matter discussed at a future meeting.

167. TOWN MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS

Details of the Town Mayor's engagements attended for the period 3rd to 29th January 2024 were received.

Members commented that there had been good feedback concerning the Mayor's Lunch being held in January when it can be the loneliest and most miserable month for some.

RESOLVED That the details be received and noted.

168. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Deputy Town Clerk explained that the Town Centre improvements were now waiting for a licence to begin the work from Essex County Council. She had heard that a pre-start meeting for Phase 2 of the town park improvements would take place on 12th February 2024 and

likewise the boardwalk installation in James Cooke Wood. The Bee Friendly planting project would start on 6th February 2024.

In answer to a question, the Deputy Town Clerk explained that the Section 106 Group was keeping an eye on this funding to ensure it was used before the time limit. There was approximately £30,000 to be spent before the end of the year on open spaces and it was hoped to utilise this funding for improving paths and bridges on the River Walk.

RESOLVED That the information be received and noted.

169. COMMITTEE REPORTS

(a) **Planning and Transport Committee held 8th January & 22nd January 2024**

Minutes 174 to 196.

Councillor P. Barlow, Chairman of the Planning and Transport Committee, gave his report en bloc.

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

(b) **Environment Committee held 22nd January 2024**

Minutes 18 to 36.

Councillor Ager, Chairman of the Environment Committee, gave her report en bloc.

RESOLVED That the report of the Environment Committee be received.

170. BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL POLLING STATION REVIEW

Details of the Braintree District Council review of polling stations were received.

Members were concerned about the inadequacies of two polling stations and the apparent reluctance for schools, which are at the centre of communities, to be used. The Templars Community Office held two polling registers which not only required voters to queue outside but there was no private area to check photo ID for those wearing face coverings and disability access was poor. In addition, Witham Football Club which was on the edge of West Ward which had a long, unlit walk to access with cars posing a danger for any children/youth groups being held.

Members considered that Braintree District Council should be pressed to provide better facilities and that as Chipping Hill School was used in South Ward there was a precedent to use academy premises.

RESOLVED That the details be received and that the District Council should ensure that it was as easy as possible for people to vote, that the polling stations at Templars Community Office and the Witham Football Club were totally inadequate, that a proper review of the polling stations should be undertaken and that schools, which were in the centre of communities, should be used.

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

171. BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL DRAFT CORPORATE STRATEGY

Details of the Braintree District Council Draft Corporate Strategy were received.

Members agreed that action would be required to bring about the proposed changes.

RESOLVED That the details of the District Council's Corporate Strategy be received.

172. A12 WIDENING SCHEME

Details of the A12 widening scheme from National Highways were received.

Comment was made that there had been lots of discussion with the National Highways and that the Town Clerk should be given approval to seek legal advice if necessary with regards to the compulsory purchase of Town Council land.

RESOLVED That the details be received, the form detailing land to be compulsory purchased be completed and the Town Clerk given authority to engage a solicitor if necessary.

173. DRAFT MEETING SCHEDULE 2024/2025

The draft meeting schedule for 2024/2025 was received.

RESOLVED That the draft schedule be received and noted.

174. 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 (S3) of the Local Government Act 1972.

175. LAND TRANSFER

The Land Transfer report was received.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

176. FUNDING REPORT

The Funding Report was received.

RESOLVED That the Funding Report be received and noted.

177. SECTION 106 – ALLOTMENTS

Councillor Playle declared a non-pecuniary interest as his father is the Chairman of the Allotment Society.

A report was received regarding the purchase of eight tap and stand pipe covers for the allotment using Section 106 funding.

Members had a long discussion about the merits of using glass-reinforced plastic covers as opposed to wood. The Deputy Town Clerk explained that during the winter months, the water was turned off at the allotments but the covers would protect the taps and the standpipes which prove a constant issue. This funding pot had an expiry date of September 2024 and funds not spent by this date would be returned to the developer. She explained that other Section 106 funding was available to investigate the possibility of introducing raised beds at the allotments which had a longer expiry date.

Members recognised that the plastic covers would be more robust than wood which could prove more expensive in the long term.

RESOLVED That the report be received and the recommendation to approve the allocation of Section 106 funds to purchase eight Fox 5 Pillars from Kaver Laminates Ltd at a cost of £2,160 plus £100 delivery be agreed.

There being no further business the Town Mayor closed the Meeting at 8.35 p.m.

Councillor S. Ager
Town Mayor

NS/GK/ 7.2.2024