

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE WANTAGE TOWN COUNCIL HELD AT THE BEACON, PORTWAY, WANTAGE ON MONDAY 26 JUNE 2023, AT 7.30 P.M.

Councillors present: Councillor A Dunford (Town Mayor)
Councillors I R Cameron A Crawford, T Gilhorne,
J T Hannaby, E L Johnson, P Kirby-Harris,
A C Menzies, K Morris and C Walters.

Others present:

Clerk: W P Falkenau.
Deputy Clerk: S Sanders

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Third and V Wright.

Declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests, other registrable interests and non-registrable interests

None. Declarations were to be made if items on a members' register of interests arose.

13. To approve the minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on 15 May 2023

The minutes were approved and signed.

14. Statements and Questions from the public

None.

15. Matters arising from the Annual Council meeting held on 15 May 2023

8. Payment of grants 2023/24. It was noted that the Dickensian Evening Working Group needed to apply for its grant, if it was required.

16. Minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held on 27 March, 15 May and 5 June 2023.

5 June 2023

3. b) b) Update on purchase of SIDs (Speed Indicator Devices) for Charlton Road, Denchworth Road, Grove Road and Ormond Road

The poles had been installed. A quote of £9,588 had been received for the purchase of four devise that would be moved about between six poles. Fixings will be an additional cost. It was agreed to proceed with the purchase within a budget of £10,000.

Action: Deputy Clerk

5. Neighbourhood Plan – Regulation 15 submission

It had been agreed the District Council that the Wantage Memorial Park be removed from the list of green spaces. Its inclusion could restrict changes or improvements to the existing facilities. The District Council had agreed to provide support in updating the plan and the maps within it.

7. Other business – surface water discharge to the Letcombe Brook across the land adjacent to Grove Road from the highway and from the Kingsgrove development

Following the alterations to the Mably Way/ Grove Road roundabout, surface water from the highway was being discharged into a delay pond within land owned by the County Council, adjoining the Town Council owned land. As a result of a lower tank capacity being installed in the roundabout than planned, the pond was too small to cope with potentially

contaminated water being discharged from the highway. This could lead to contaminated water being discharged into the Letcombe Brook A solution would be to increase the size of the pond by extending it into the Town Council owned land. It would be up to the County Council to apply to the Town Council to do this.

Plans for the discharge of surface water from the Kingsgrove development into the brook over Town Council land had yet to be finalised. The works already undertaken on the Grove Road land had caused damage to the wildlife habitat and proposed works would cause further damage. It was agreed that the developer and the County Council would need to provide funding to restore the damaged areas.

ON THE PROPOSITION of Councillor Johnson
SECONDED BY Councillor Cameron
IT WAS RESOLVED to be disposed in principle to approve the expansion of the delay pond into the Town Council land subject to a detailed plan and the provision of funding for the restoration of the damaged areas to their previous state.

ON THE PROPOSITION of Councillor Johnson
SECONDED BY Councillor Cameron
IT WAS RESOLVED that the minutes, as amended, be adopted.

17. Minutes of the Leisure and Amenities Committee meeting held on 22 May 2023

4 b) Manor Road Memorial Park - Update on third party tree planting

It was agreed that the Climate Emergency Sub-committee should take over responsibility for the tree planting.

ON THE PROPOSITION of Councillor Hannaby
SECONDED BY Councillor Kirby-Harris
IT WAS RESOLVED that the minutes, as amended, be adopted.

18. Minutes of the Promotion, Communication and Events Committee meeting held on 19 June 2023

ON THE PROPOSITION of Councillor Gilhome
SECONDED BY Councillor Crawford
IT WAS RESOLVED that the minutes be adopted.

19. Minutes of the Policy, Management and Finance Committee meeting held on the 12 June 2023

ON THE PROPOSITION of Councillor Crawford
SECONDED BY Councillor Johnson
IT WAS RESOLVED that the minutes be adopted.

20. To consider reports from the 2022/23 Internal Audit Review dated 4 June 2023

Mr Rose, the internal auditor, had completed and signed the Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/23 and provided a letter dated 4 June 2023 giving explanation for items not covered. These were noted.

The internal auditor had made two observations/ recommendations:

1. As at the date of the year end audit the Council had not published the details of Members Allowances paid in accordance with Regulation 15 of Members Allowances Regulations 2003. The Council to note the publication requirements in respect of Members

Allowances and to ensure that details of allowances paid are published in accordance with the Regulations.

2. As at the date of the audit the year-end bank reconciliation had not been signed and dated as evidence of independent review. Prior to the approval of the Accounting Statement the year end bank reconciliation and supporting bank statements should be subject to independent review and signed and dated as evidence of this review.

ON THE PROPOSITION of Councillor Crawford
SECONDED BY Councillor Gilhome

IT WAS RESOLVED that the following responses be approved:

1. No allowances are paid to councillors under Members Allowances Regulations 200 The Town Mayor receives an allowance under the Local Government Act 1972. To remove doubt, a notice advising of the above was posted on the Council's notice board and website on 13 June 2023. The requirement is that it be posted for fourteen days.
2. The year-end bank reconciliation was reviewed by councillors at the Annual Council meeting on 15 May 2023. The Town Mayor signed and dated the reconciliation at the meeting and initialled the bank statements as evidence of the review.

21. To consider and approve for signing the Balance Sheet and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2023

The Balance Sheet and Accounts were considered and approved. The Town Mayor and Clerk signed them to indicate the Council's approval.

22. To approve the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23

ON THE PROPOSITION of Councillor Crawford
SECONDED BY Councillor Cameron

IT WAS RESOLVED to approve the statement. The Statement was signed by the Town Mayor and Clerk, to indicate this.

23. To approve the Accounting Statements 2022/23

ON THE PROPOSITION of Councillor Crawford
SECONDED BY Councillor Cameron

IT WAS RESOLVED to approve the Statements. These were signed by the Town Mayor and Clerk, to indicate this.

24. To note period for the exercise of public rights for the accounts for the year ended 31 March 2023 from 28 June to 8 August 2023

The period for the exercise of public rights was noted.

25. Formal complaint by Mr Corlett – to receive advice of the outcome of the complaint hearing held on 12 June 2023

Statement of complaint received in email dated 24 April 2023

“The complaint being that WTC did withhold relevant information from Oxfordshire Council relating to this case, which was not supportive of WTC's attempts to permanently close road access in the Market Place area. This information is clearly detailed in the email trail below.”

Also, in his email of the 18 April 2023 requesting details of the submission by the Town Council to the County Council, Mr Corlett advised “ My request is for a copy of your submission to Oxfordshire Council. If this submission does not refer to my letter stating damage to my business, and my statement in the council chamber stating £100,000 of cost to the valuations of my business and properties, then there has clearly been a case of failure to submit relevant evidence.”

Outcome of the complaint hearing held on 12 June 2023 - Response advised to Mr Corlett by letter attached to email on 15 June 2023:

In response to your formal complaint, dated 24th April 2023, we take complaints from our constituents seriously and appreciate the opportunity to address your concerns.

We understood from you that your complaint was that Wantage Town Council withheld information when representing the Wantage Western End pedestrianisation scheme to Oxfordshire County Council.

First and foremost, we would like to confirm that the Town Council did not withhold any evidence from Oxfordshire County Council regarding the pedestrianisation scheme. In fact, the main consultation/survey on pedestrianisation which provided evidence on the issue was conducted by Oxfordshire County Council who ultimately made the decision regarding the scheme on 23 March 2023. We note that you had responded to that survey.

Regarding your email expressing concerns about the scheme, the Council did receive it and noted that you had also copied it to Lee Turner at Oxfordshire County Council. Wantage Council did not forward the email separately as this had already been received by the correct officer at Oxfordshire County Council.

Our communication with Oxfordshire County Council explicitly stated that there was no significant evidence of adverse effects resulting from the scheme. We understand that you provided various numbers in your statement to the Leisure and Amenities Committee regarding losses to your business. In order to ensure fairness and transparency, it is essential to consider verifiable data and substantiated claims when assessing the impact of the pedestrianisation scheme on local businesses. Without any supporting evidence, we were unable to present those figures to Oxfordshire County Council. We note that as Oxfordshire County Council had received 193 responses to its consultation, including your own, it is not practical to verify each input so the onus is on respondents to provide evidence for their concerns.

Wantage Town Council is committed to ensuring the well-being and prosperity of our community as a whole. The decision to seek implementation of the pedestrianisation scheme was made after careful consideration, taking into account the feedback received from the consultation process and the overall benefits anticipated for the town.

We would also like to highlight that some details of the scheme have not yet been finalised. The details regarding deliveries - which would include how your customers can drop off and collect from businesses still needs to be discussed and agreed by Oxfordshire County Council. We would recommend that you write to them with your specific desires and to copy us in so that we may consider if we can support your views.

Once again, we appreciate your engagement and willingness to voice your concerns. Wantage Town Council remains committed to fostering a thriving and inclusive community, and we value your input in shaping the future of our town.”

26. District and County Councillors' reports

District Council

Plans for the decarbonisation of the Wantage Leisure Centre and provision of a learner pool were proceeding. It was suggested that a meeting be requested with the District Council to enable discussion before the plans proceed too far.

It was noted that the report from the consultants regarding Leisure Strategy was imminently due. The Clerk was to seek an update from Mr Stone the District Council's Chief Executive. **Action: Clerk**

The membership of the District Council's cabinet had been changed.

County Council

There were no plans to progress the reopening of Grove railway station. Work to construct the middle section of the eastern link road was due start.

27. Town Mayor's communications

The Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor reported on events and activities they had attended.

CONFIDENTIAL ITEM

ON THE PROPOSITION of the Town Mayor
IT WAS RESOLVED that in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it was advisable in the public interest that the public and press be temporarily excluded.

28. Staffing matters

Town Clerk Recruitment

Councillor Crawford left the meeting for this item due to him being acquainted with one of the shortlisted candidates. The candidates had been interviewed by a panel of councillors and the Clerk. There had been three credible candidates. A shortlist of two had been agreed after the first interview. One of the candidates had specific experience as a parish clerk within the Vale of White Horse district. The other candidate had experience as a councillor, but not as a parish clerk.

ON THE PROPOSITION of Councillor Cameron
SECONDED BY Councillor Gilhome
IT WAS RESOLVED to offer the position of Town Clerk to Mrs Julia Evans, the candidate with parish clerk experience, at a date to be determined with some overlap of the current Town Clerk. **Action: Clerk**

The Clerk was to provide feedback to the unsuccessful candidate. **Action: Clerk**

The meeting closed at 9.05 p.m.

WPF