

EXTRA ORDINARY COMMITTEE OF WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Wednesday 14 January 2015

At 6pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Witney

Present:

Councillor Mrs J C Baker (Chairman)

Councillors:	A K Beames	A D Harvey
	R F N Curry	C Holliday
	P J Dorward	J S King
	H B Eaglestone	T J Morris
		B J Woodruff

Officers:	Town Clerk	Democratic Services Officer
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030 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for their absence was received from Cllrs Mrs B J Churchill, Ms C Curry, D S Enright, and C K Woodward

031 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllrs Mrs J C Baker, T J Morris, A D Harvey declared a disclosable pecuniary interest as members of West Oxfordshire District Council

032 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No members of the public were present.

033 **CORN EXCHANGE PROJECT SHORT TERM FUNDING STRATEGY**

Members received and considered the report of the Town Clerk as circulated with the agenda.

The Town Clerk advised that she had received an email on 17 December 2014 from West Oxfordshire District Council informing the Council of the decision to add the Langdale Hall to the District Council's list of Assets of Community Value following the nomination by the Witney & District Museum in November. The Town Clerk raised her disappointment of the fact that she had received no prior warning to the e-mail. Furthermore the District Council proceeded to issue its PR without consultation with the Town Council.

As a result of the listing she advised Councillors that this now meant there was a partial moratorium on the sale of the Langdale Hall meaning the Council could not exchange contracts as anticipated. Community groups now had until 27 January 2015 to express an interest in the hall, which would then trigger a full moratorium. As the sale of Langdale Hall was integral to funding part of the Corn Exchange refurbishment she requested an urgent meeting with the CEO and Senior Management team at the District Council. Consequently she met with Frank Wilson the Strategic Director with responsibility for Finance on the 22 December 2014 with a view to trying to secure an interest free loan. She was informed at

the meeting that this went against the District’s loan policy but rates were considered to be low.

The Mayor had also raised the situation with Cllr Barry Norton the leader of WODC and was scheduled to meet with him and the District Council Officers the following week. Cllr Harvey referred to the situation being a shambles and it was right to be furious with the District Council as he understood that Cllr Richard Langridge had advised that the nomination would be considered and dealt with by the 9 January 2015. He was disgusted that they had not given the Town Council time to deal with the exchange and not even told the Town Clerk that they were bringing the decision forward. He considered that the District Council had behaved badly and the Town Council needed to make it clear to them how strong its reactions were.

All Members considered the behaviour of the District Council appalling and in disregard to the Town Council. The Chairman suggested that a letter be sent to the MP highlighting the shortcomings of the legislation. A Member also suggested that a strongly worded letter be sent to the District Council.

In considering the financial position of the Corn Exchange Refurbishment Project the Town Clerk suggested a temporary funding solution using other earmarked reserves and funds from the rolling capital fund.

Earmarked Reserve	Current balance	Suggested use	Comments
Rolling Capital Fund 14/15	£357,107	£150,000	£80k committed to splashpark + few other minor projects
Rolling Capital Fund 15/16	£150,000	£150,000	Budgeted in 15/16 in line with medium term financial strategy
Recreation EMR	£196,357	£150,000	Formerly WWSG Contingency
Building Repair Fund	£62,996	£50,000	
Original budget	£250,000	£250,000	
S106	£145,000	£145,000	Town Clerk to seek early release of these funds
		£895,000	

RESOLVED:

1. that the Town Clerks report be noted;
2. that the registration by West Oxfordshire District Council of the Langdale Hall as an Asset of Community Value be noted;
3. that given the Council’s experience now of the Community Right to Bid under the Localism Act 2012 the Council writes to its MP to highlight the areas for improvement;
4. that a strongly worded letter is sent to the Chief Executive of the District Council on the treatment of the Council during this process;

5. that the revised temporary funding for the Corn Exchange project be agreed and should the S106 not be released the Mayor, Chair of Public Halls and Town Clerk be delegated to secure a bridging loan on the most preferential terms possible as a last resort.

A Member proposed a vote of thanks to the Town Clerk for all her dealings with this situation.

034 **THE LEYS RECREATION GROUND – EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST TO MANAGE THE TENNIS & CAFÉ FACILITY**

The full Council was being asked to consider and ratify the RECOMMENDATION arising from the Recreation Committee meeting held on 12 January 2015 to advertise for ‘expressions of interest to manage the tennis and café facility at the Leys Recreation Ground on a 10 year lease’.

The Town Clerk gave a verbal report on the background leading to the Recreation Committee’s recommendation. A Member asked if this would affect the Liven Up the Leys who had taken advantage of the facility in the Pavilion. The Town Clerk advised that the only problem might be the cricket teas as they Cricket Clubs self-catered.

RESOLVED: that the recommendation from the Recreation Committee be approved.

The meeting closed at 6.45pm.
