

MEETING OF THE WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Monday 10 February 2014

At 7pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall

Present:

Councillor PJ Dorward (Chairman)

Councillors:	A K Beames	A D Harvey
	J C Baker	C Holliday
	B J Churchill	J S King
	RFN Curry	T J Morris
	R F N Curry	D A Snow
		B J Woodruff

Officers:	Town Clerk	Democratic Services Officer
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Also present: There were four members of the public present.

070 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for their absence was received from Cllrs M J C Curry, H B Eaglestone, D S Enright and C K Woodward.

071 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllrs Baker, Dorward, Harvey, Morris and Snow declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 12 – Consultation on Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Affordable Housing -as they were District Councillors.

072 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2013 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

073 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 DECEMBER 2013**

Cllr King asked if there was any update on the Cemetery Access for the Windrush Cemetery – specifically if the Town Council had seen plans. The Town Clerk confirmed that the Council had seen the plans at the October 2013 Council meeting.

074 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mr James Mills

Mr Mills thanked the Council for allowing him to speak. He said that it was no surprise that he was present to speak about St. Mary’s Church. He stated that it was good to see from the Leisure and Recreation Minutes of 3 February 2014 that the Town Council seemed to have accepted responsibility for the churchyard. However he had some concerns. One of these

was that the report from Peter Mitchell was confidential. Mr Mills said that Peter Mitchell was not a solicitor and styled himself as an independent death consultant.

Mr Mills also pointed out that the minutes stated that a faculty was required from the PCC when in fact it was the DAC. He also noted that Cllr M J C Curry had recalled a previous report from Henry Westbury and asked if the Town Clerk was aware of this.

Mr Mills disputed that the Town Council was responsible for keeping the churchyard in “decent” order, and said that in fact it should be kept to a standard that the PCC was happy with. He also wanted to make it clear that St. Mary’s preservation Trust was a separate organisation from the Church itself.

Mr Mills noted that the minutes of 3 February recorded that there should be an inspection of the churchyard, but there was no mention of inspection of monuments or of tree surgeons.

Mr Mills was concerned that councillors were not receiving all the information available, including his report of which he had copies available if members wanted them.

Overall, Mr Mills was glad that the Council was beginning to accept its responsibilities. He invited the Council to send a representative to the church’s Buildings Committee to facilitate working together. He was very concerned that there were factual inaccuracies in Peter Mitchell’s report and thought there could be grounds for a Freedom of Information request.

Mr Mills said that although he had been invited to address the January meeting, he had been told by the Facilities Manager that the issue would be taken to the March meeting. No one had advised him of this change in advance.

The Chair replied that he felt it was sad that the situation had come to Mr Mills having to come and almost complain to the Council and he invited him to attend the Leisure and Recreation Committee meeting where the churchyard would be an agenda item.

Mr Mills said that he was prepared to do so if Officers had the courtesy to invite him.

075 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Members received and considered the details of the events attended by the Town Mayor, as circulated with the agenda.

The Chair said that he had attended a meeting of the Brize Norton Local Consultation Working Group on 20 January and wished to update Members on what was discussed. Airspace was changing due to the closure of RAF Lyneham. There would be an increase in certain types of noisy aircraft, although the Tri Star was expected to go out of service later in February. The perception of how aircraft flew was generally inaccurate. Brize Norton was working on a plan of routes. New aircraft were being introduced although the engine noise was unknown, but they should be less than the Hercules. Airbus was coming to Carterton which would bring some jobs to the area.

Aircraft had been repositioned on the airfield to try to work out the best position for ground running. The alternative would be to build a box for ground running, although this was unknown technology.

Cllr Churchill reported that she could sometimes smell fuel. The Chair asked that if members themselves were affected or received reports from constituents that they forward them to him. Cllr Churchill thought that people had got used to the noise.

076 **MINUTES OF COMMITTEES**

a) Planning and Development Committee of 17 December 2013 and 28 January 2014

On the minutes of 28 January Cllr R Curry queried why the Committee had wanted to see street trading licences brought more in line with business rates – he felt that if anything this should be the other way around.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the Planning Committee as detailed be received and any recommendations approved.

b) Leisure and Recreation Committee of 13 January and 3 February 2014

Cllr R Curry noted that in the minutes of 13 January, he had asked if vandalism had been reported to the police. He asked if this had been done. The Town Clerk advised that she would need to check as the Facilities Manager was on annual leave. Cllr Churchill said that it had been raised at the NAG.

Cllr Beames referred to page 3 of the minutes of 3 February where he had proposed that the tennis courts resurfacing be funded from next year's rolling capital fund. Having seen the quotations from the work he proposed going with option 3 and releasing the money from next year's rolling capital fund.

Cllr King added a further proposal that when the new lease arrangement was made with the tennis club, the courts should be open to the whole town. Cllr Churchill seconded this.

Cllr R Curry asked when the new lease was due to be negotiated. The Town Clerk replied that currently there was an agreement in place with the tennis club, but the Council could ask the solicitors to start work on the lease. It had previously been agreed to review all the leases at West Witney Sports Ground at the same time, but this was unlikely to happen now that progress in that area had stalled. Cllr Woodruff commented that now the West Witney Users had a formal organisation, the Council should wait for them to approach it before negotiating leases.

Cllr Curry was uncomfortable at leaving the issue unresolved. He proposed an amendment to Cllr King's proposal that a new lease should be negotiated within three months. Cllr Beames amended his proposal to include these elements. He proposed that the tennis courts resurfacing should go ahead with the funds being released from next year's rolling capital, and that the work should be tied into an appropriate timescale. The lease should then be negotiated within 3 months. Cllr Beames commented that he thought it would be beneficial to negotiate all the club leases at West Witney simultaneously.

Cllr Baker said that she understood Cllr Beames views but agreed with Cllr King that the courts should be open to all. She thought it was a reasonable request to negotiate a lease.

Cllr Morris noted that Cllr Beames proposal did not state that a lease was required to get any work done, it just stated that the courts should be open to all. He felt that when the time came to negotiate the lease, the Council could speak to the Tennis Club and ask them to make the courts more available as the renewed lease would require this.

Members voted on Cllr Beames proposal. Ten members voted for and one against.

RESOLVED:

- 1) that the tennis courts resurfacing should go ahead with the funds being released from next year's rolling capital, and that the work should be tied into an appropriate timescale. The lease should then be negotiated within 3 months and the courts should thus be made available to all.
- 2) that the minutes of the Leisure and Recreation Committee held on 13 January and 3 February 2014 as detailed be received and any recommendations approved.

c) Public Halls Committee of 20 January 2014

Cllr Churchill reiterated the request she had made on page 4 for a new lift to be installed in the Corn Exchange.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the Public Halls Committee as detailed be received and any recommendations approved.

d) Special Finance & General Purpose Committee of 21 January 2014 and the Ordinary Meeting of 27 January 2014

The Town Clerk noted that the minutes of 21 January should read "Tuesday" at the top of page 1 and not "Monday".

Cllr Churchill wished to reiterate her request to see "Savings" as an agenda item at all committees. She formally proposed this and it was unanimously agreed. Cllr Harvey added that he was pleased to see the Council making progress in financial matters – it would be for committee chairmen to ensure that the financial plans were adhered to.

Cllr Harvey also commented on the snow plan proposed by Cllr Enright at the meeting of 27 January. Since that meeting he had had correspondence from Cottsway Housing, as he had asked what the company's plans were. The response had been that their contractor would grit all roads in sheltered housing areas but there was no provision for the rest of its housing. He intended to go back to them to point out that there were some disabled/elderly people in Cottsway housing who needed their access gritted, especially those with ramps to access their front doors.

Cllr R Curry noted that Mr Kemp had attended the meeting of 27 January. He had not been present at the meeting and asked if he was correct in thinking that it had been agreed that committees would have three year budgets. The Town Clerk advised that this was not the case. Cllr R Curry said that he thought it important to

have three year budgets and these should include the capital that was available for each committee. He noted that Mr Kemp said that he was happy to receive questions and suggestions for financial reporting. Cllr R Curry stressed that reports must show figures in a format that members could understand and he thought that DCK Beavers should recommend how often these reports should be done. He proposed that the Finance and General Purposes Committee should set up a working party to work with Mr Kemp on this. This was seconded by Cllr Beames. All members were in favour.

The Chair confirmed that the Finance and General Purposes Committee would be tasked with looking at how figures were formatted so they could be easily read and interpreted.

Cllr Morris referred to the snow plan on pages 5 and 6 and said that given the current weather he was not sure that the town needed a snow plan. He suggested that the bins should be filled with rubber balls and dinghies rather than grit! Cllr Baker said that if the minutes were agreed, would the Town Clerk write to the District Councillors about grit bins. The Town Clerk advised she would do so after the meeting.

Cllr Harvey understood that the County Council had responsibility for grit bins and that County Councillors could provide funding out of their allowances, and therefore writing to them seemed more cogent. Cllr Churchill added that housing associations would also provide grit bins if they were asked to.

RESOLVED:

- 1) that the Finance & General Purposes Committee form a Working Party to work with DCK Beavers on financial report format and contents.
- 2) that the minutes of the Special Finance and General Purposes Committee and the Finance and General Purposes Committee as detailed be received and any recommendations approved.

077 **CENTENARY OF FIRST WORLD WAR**

The Council received and considered the report of the Communications and Events Officer concerning a commemoration day to mark the start of the First World War. Cllr Beames had concerns about the timing- the play day had been held at the end of the school summer holidays last year – and also the fact that there was no budget. The Town Clerk pointed out that £1,000 was set aside during the 2014/15 budget cycle to mark the occasion, and that the play day (held in association with OPA and therefore dependent on their diary) would be held in the October half term this year. She added that the date of 10th August was the closest date to when Britain declared war on Germany. Cllr Harvey proposed that all the recommendations in the report were approved.

Cllr Morris was also concerned about funding. The Town Clerk reiterated that there was a budget set aside and there may be more funding available from the County Councillors. Cllr Morris thought the money would be better spent on the war memorial. The Town Clerk pointed out that the Council had already spent money on restoring the war memorial and currently it did not need any further work.

The Chair wondered if the matter should be referred to the next Leisure and Recreation Committee meeting. Cllr Harvey proposed setting up a working party, which could report back to the Leisure and Recreation Committee.

Cllr R Curry agreed with the Chair that the matter should be referred to the Leisure and Recreation Committee, and was also concerned about what might happen if the additional money did not materialise. Cllr Woodruff was concerned at stretching the staff resources by organising an event.

The Town Clerk advised that if the matter was deferred there would not be enough time to organise an event. The Chair therefore proposed that a working party should be set up and Cllrs Churchill, Holiday and Snow volunteered to be members. Cllr Baker commented that this was a worthwhile project but cautioned care on the money spent.

RESOLVED:

- 1) that the report be noted
- 2) that a Working Party be set up to organise a commemoration of the First World War in 2014, and that the Working Party consist of Cllrs B Churchill, C Holiday and S Snow

Subsequent to the meeting Cllr C Curry expressed an interest in being on the Working Party as she was not present at this meeting and unable to put herself forward.

078 **POST OFFICE RELOCATION**

The Council received and considered correspondence from the Post Office concerning the decision to relocate the branch to W.H Smith's.

Cllr Churchill said that she found the letter very insulting as a disabled person. The automatic doors opened onto the tills and it was hard to get a mobility scooter around. She was surprised that they had measured 100 yards from the car park to the store. She pointed out that if you walked with sticks, it was not possible to carry a parcel. She felt that the consultation had been a farce. Cllr Baker agreed with Cllr Churchill and said that even if some of the aisle displays were removed there would not be enough room.

Cllr Beames reported that the relocation of the post boxes had been to the Planning Committee and had been deferred due the correspondence being dated before the end of the consultation period. He requested that this issue be referred back to the Planning Committee of the 18 February for further consideration.

Cllr Harvey agreed that the W.H Smith store was totally unsuitable and would not be able to handle the extra footfall unless it became a post office selling newspapers. He noted the proposals for the siting of post boxes but felt that any new box should be sited adjacent to the current post office building. He agreed with other members that there had not been a true consultation as the deal to move had already been done.

Cllr Morris also agreed that everyone thought it was a bad idea and he felt that no one had listened to local views. He felt that the Town Council should write to its MP expressing its

displeasure. Cllr Churchill asked that any letter include the fact that the move was an insult to the disabled people of the town.

The Chair remarked that although the business model was unknown, there were so many reasons against the move. He agreed that the Council should write to the local MP, stating the Council's objections to the way the consultation had been handled and the fact that local opinions had not been taken into account. The Chair recalled Cllr Holliday stating "First class town, second class plan, third class service" and he felt this summed up the situation.

The Chair thought that the response to the new location of the post box would be better coming from the whole Council rather than the Planning Committee. Cllr Beames explained that he thought if the issue was referred back to the Planning Committee, members would be able to investigate other sites as well as those proposed.

The Town Clerk reported that she had spoken to the Collections Manager who had indicated that the preferred location was the Woolgate car park as the other locations would not be feasible. Cllr Harvey thought that the location outside the post office would be suitable as it had disabled parking adjacent to it. Cllr Churchill pointed out that any post van collecting post in the Woolgate car park would have to park in one of the disabled bays, which was not permitted.

Cllr Beames thought that the car park location was hard to access and a relatively hidden location. The proposal to site it alongside the taxi rank would be obstructive as would the site outside the current post office. Cllr R Curry seconded Cllr Beames' proposal to refer the issue to the Planning Committee and pointed out that any member could attend if they wished. A letter could then be sent back with considered views.

RESOLVED: that the post office box relocation issue be referred back to the forthcoming Planning meeting of 18 February and that the Town Clerk writes to the Town's MP expressing the Council's displeasure with the consultation process.

079 **CONSULTATION ON COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL) AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

The Council received and considered correspondence from West Oxfordshire District Council. The Chair asked if members had any points to raise.

Cllr Beames reported that he had e-mailed the Town Clerk asking her which meeting this consultation would go to. He was concerned that it had come straight to the Full Council meeting. He noted the implication that if a town plan was in place, the CIL rate would be 25% as opposed to 15% if one was not in place. Cllr R Curry asked if this should go to a consultation working party. The Town Clerk explained that historically all large consultation documents that had varying implications for the town came to Council as they were important and all members should have the opportunity to put their views forward.

Cllr Churchill, in response to Cllr Beames pointed out that the cost of a Town Plan (around £100,000) would negate any benefit in the level of CIL received. Cllr Morris added that the introduction of the CIL was unlikely to make a huge difference to the Town Council.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

080 **WEST OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN UPDATE – DECEMBER 2013**

The Council received and considered correspondence from West Oxfordshire District Council. Cllr Harvey understood that there were further delays in finalising the SHLA. He believed that it would need to go out for further consultation once the figures were finalised.

Cllr Morris said that if there was further consultation there was a danger that developers would put in applications for North Witney. Cllr Harvey proposed that planning officers from the District Council should talk Council members through the plan. This should not be an additional evening meeting. Cllr R Curry agreed with Cllr Harvey. Cllr Harvey said it might be helpful to have it in a District Council Committee room.

Cllr Beames asked why on page 86 of the Local Plan there was a redaction in support for nursery school education – this was contrary to the Government policy. Cllr Harvey said that this could be raised with the Planning Officer at the meeting.

RESOLVED: that the Town Clerk arranges for a Senior Planning Officer from West Oxfordshire District Council to address the Town Council on the Local Plan and CIL.

081 **PRECEPT 2014/15**

The Council received and considered the report of the Town Clerk.

RESOLVED: that the Town Clerk be authorised to sign and serve a precept on the West Oxfordshire District Council, in accordance with the appropriate provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), requiring the District Council to pay the Town Council the sum of £1,172,218 in respect of Council Tax for the town during the financial year 2014/15.

082 **SEALING OF DOCUMENTS**

There were no documents to be sealed.

The meeting closed at 8.20pm.

Chair.