

MEETING OF THE WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Monday 7th October 2013

At 7pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall

Present:

Councillor PJ Dorward (Chairman)

Councillors: A K Beames C Holliday
 M J C Curry T J Morris
 R F N Curry D A Snow
 D S Enright B J Woodruff

Officers: Town Clerk Democratic Services Officer
 Deputy Town Clerk

Also present: There was one member of the public.

444 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for their absence were received from Councillors Mrs J C Baker, N Buckle, Mrs B J Churchill, H B Eaglestone, A D Harvey, J S King and C K Woodward.

445 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting.

446 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting held on 5th August 2013 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

447 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MNUTES HELD ON 5TH AUGUST 2013**

Cllr R Curry noted that on page 2 of the minutes, there was a recommendation "that the reintroduction of regular vandalism updates be referred to the next meeting of Finance and General Purposes Committee for further investigation". The Town Clerk confirmed that an update had been considered at the Finance and General Purposes Committee of 23rd September and that this had subsequently been passed to the press.

Cllr R Curry stated that he thought that the report should be sent to the Thames Valley Police Commissioner as the cost to the tax payer could run into thousands of pounds. He thought that the Mayor should write to the Thames Valley Police Commissioner about this.

RESOLVED: that the Mayor writes to the Thames Valley Police Commissioner about the vandalism in Witney and the associated costs.

Cllr Morris queried the uploading of minutes on the Town Council's website as it appeared to him that nothing had been uploaded since January. The Town Clerk explained that to access minutes on the new website it was necessary to click on the agenda in the event calendar and look at the associated documents. Officers and members were still getting used to the new website, but all feedback was useful and this would be looked into to make it more user friendly.

448 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

A full list of events attended by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor would be considered at the next Council meeting.

Cllr M J C Curry said that she understood that Cllr Baker had broken her foot on holiday and the members joined with her in wishing Cllr Baker well.

449 **MINUTES OF COMMITTEES**

a) Planning and Development Committee of 13th September 2013

Cllr M J C Curry queried minute 382.11, as she did not think it was viable to ask for a Section 106 contribution towards the Corn Exchange. Cllr Beames explained that although it was not necessarily expected, the Committee had thought it was worth asking.

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

b) Planning and Development Committee of 3rd September 2013

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

c) Planning and Development Committee of 24th September 2013

Cllr R Curry stated that he did not like the recommendation in minute 435 to approve the name “Staple Court” for the development on Bridge Street/Newland, as it was the name of the adjacent nursing home. The Chairman said that in fact the nursing home was called “Staple Hall”.

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

d) Leisure and Recreation Committee of 9th September 2013

Cllr Enright asked when the SSGB report would be released to the public. The Town Clerk said that it would be published on the Council’s website after the current meeting once the Committee recommendation was ratified by the members. She asked for clarification on whether members wanted the report and feasibility study released or just the report.

RESOLVED: that the SSGB Sports Study report on the four Council owned Recreation Grounds be released into the public domain but not the DRAFT West Witney feasibility study.

Cllr R Curry referred to minute 398 and asked if Cllrs Beames and Woodruff had written a report. Cllr Woodruff explained that time had been short but they were currently working on a document. Cllr MJC Curry said that she understood that a further meeting would be organised and this would give time for the report to be finished.

Cllr R Curry also asked what the situation was regarding recommendations 2 and 3 – the Leys Masterplan - under minute 399. The Town Clerk explained that the Facilities Manager was on annual leave, and therefore the Leys Masterplan would be taken to the next Leisure and Recreation Committee meeting on 4th November.

Cllr Morris asked if there was any further progress on the issue of employment of a Park Ranger (minute 405). The Town Clerk confirmed that this would be on the agenda for the next meeting.

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

e) Leisure and Recreation Committee of 30th September 2013

Cllr Woodruff noted that Mr Chris Pyne of Witney tennis Club had addressed the Committee. He stated that he could not see any reason for further delaying the resurfacing of the tennis courts at West Witney Sports Ground, as it had already been approved by the Council. Anything that might happen to West Witney Sports Ground in future would be years away. He wanted to see the funds released to the tennis club to enable the work to go ahead.

Cllr R Curry said that it was inappropriate to sanction any work as it would be piecemeal. Although he appreciated what Cllr Woodruff had said he could not approve spending money on the courts as the Council should be concentrating on the bigger picture of all the sports facilities in the town.

Cllr Woodruff reiterated that spending the money had already been approved.

The Town Clerk said that this money was not in the current budget. She pointed out that the Tennis Club thought the money it had paid in rent from the beginning of the agreement (1st April 2003) should be set aside for refurbishment of the tennis courts. If the money had been in an earmarked reserve, there would be in the region of £6,000 left, due to the recoating in 2007 and the new fencing in 2010. Spending money on the courts had not been ratified by the Finance and General Purposes Committee as there had been a need to get a condition survey on the courts, and the Council had been looking at the sports facilities strategically.

Cllr Woodruff thought that money should be taken from the earmarked reserve for West Witney Sports Ground.

Cllr Morris said that the Council had agreed to do the work as it had an obligation under its agreement with the tennis club, and with this in mind, the work should be done. He understood that the opportunity to do the work before March had been lost and thought that members should agree that the work should be done as soon as possible. The money could be put into the budget in November.

Cllr Woodruff wanted the funds to be released to the tennis club immediately.

Cllr M J C Curry addressed Mr Pyne, who was in attendance as a member of the public, asking if the Tennis Club was prepared to play on The Leys courts if there were problems with those at West Witney during the winter. Mr Pyne said that the club would play at The Leys if required but they could not play in the evenings due to lack of lighting.

Cllr R Curry said that the courts at West Witney were not private courts and that as such they should be available to everyone in the town. The Council was looking at sports facilities in the town strategically and no money should be spent until the Leys Masterplan had been finalised.

Cllr Woodruff replied that the work required by the SSGB report would cost a lot of money and he could not see anything being done quickly. He was unhappy with the delays to the tennis court resurfacing and wanted the funds to be released immediately.

Cllr Beames concurred with Cllr Woodruff.

The Chairman referred to minute 440 and noted that if the Council was going to make a decision to do work on the tennis courts, it would negate the need for the proposed workshop.

Cllr Morris thought that a workshop would still be a useful exercise. He said that the tennis courts would remain at the West Witney site and that the Council had agreed to do the work required. Cllr M J C Curry replied that it was not certain that tennis courts would be retained there.

Cllr Snow understood Cllr R Curry's comment but thought that the issue had dragged on for a long time and that a decision on whether to do the work should be made. Cllr Holliday stated that if the Council had no obligation to carry out the work he was unhappy with handing over money to another organisation's bank account.

Cllr Enright said that the courts should be resurfaced no matter who was playing on them, and he couldn't foresee the courts being relocated. He thought that the Council should speak to the Tennis Club about the timescale for resurfacing in order to be prepared for next year. However, he was concerned that the money was unbudgeted and he did not think that funds should be released to the Tennis Club's bank account.

The Town Clerk reminded members that officers were working on a solution to move the courts to The Leys and providing the infrastructure for this, as discussed when considering the feasibility study. If resurfacing work was to go ahead at the West Witney Courts, they would not continue with this work.

Cllr R Curry was concerned that the situation was a tangle. He asked if the Council's legal obligations to the Tennis Club could be looked at to avoid any later problems and future obligations. The Town Clerk confirmed that the Council's solicitor was looking into provision of proper leases for all sports clubs at West Witney. This was a big piece of work, however, and rents might have to rise to reflect the current market rates.

The Chairman commented that the courts were Council property and as such needed to be maintained. By not doing the work, the Council was effectively denying the facility of the courts to people. He did not like spending money. He said that the Tennis Club understood that if work was done to the courts, it was "boxed in" and no further development could happen in respect of courts at the site. He agreed with Cllr R Curry that the Council should be under no obligation to resurface the courts again in future years.

The Chairman asked how much money should be spent, if members agreed the work should be done. There was only £6,000 available (based on the rent paid since 2003 – the "agreement"). The Town Clerk said that the Tennis Club had not paid last year's rent and this year's rent was due shortly (last years rent was included in the £6,000).

Cllr Woodruff recalled the cost of resurfacing to be £35,000, and he thought the shortfall should come out of the West Witney Sports Ground reserve. He therefore thought that the Council should spend up to £35,000.

The Town Clerk explained that the figure of £35,000 had come from the SSGB report, but the Facilities Manager had got quotations. Cllr Morris recommended shopping around to get the best price.

Cllr M J C Curry agreed with Cllr R Curry but she did sympathise with the Tennis Club. She thought that if work went ahead, it should be looked on as a capital project. Cllr R Curry said that members had until March 2014 to make a decision as work could not happen before then due to weather conditions. It seemed foolish to commit money at this point, before The Leys Masterplan and Sports Study had been properly considered.

Cllr Woodruff maintained that the courts would not be moved and the work should be done.

The Chairman asked Mr Pyne when the opportunity for the work to be done would be and Mr Pyne replied that it would be at the end of March /beginning of April 2014. The Chairman said that perhaps the Council should commit to doing the work now but should research best value in the interim period. It was a significant amount of community money to spend.

Cllr M J C Curry still had concerns if the tennis courts at West Witney might be moved and Cllr R Curry agreed. He said that in fact moving the Tennis Courts would improve the situation in terms of space.

Cllr Woodruff said that the SSGB report suggested the courts should stay in place and in the event that they were to be moved it would be a slow process as the money was not available.

Cllr Morris thought that the Council should make a recommendation that within the budgeting process, the tennis courts would be made fit for use by April next year, and work would be done in March if another solution was not found.

The Chairman noted that if money was spent and the reserves were reduced, this would mean less money for use as match funding for grant applications for the other sports projects .

Cllr Snow was concerned that the Council's reputation would be tarnished if the courts were not resurfaced.

Cllr Woodruff said that the reality was that the courts would not be moved any time soon and so the Council should resolve to carry out the work by March 2014, subject to the agreement of a lease with the Tennis Club.

Cllr Holliday commented that he found it hard to make a decision as he was relatively new to the Council and did not have enough background knowledge to vote.

The Town Clerk pointed out that as a point of order (Standing order 21 (g)) members could not introduce a recommendation on these minutes. There was no recommendation from the Committee to support a Council recommendation. She suggested that members might instead refer the matter back to the Leisure and Recreation Committee to look at the issue again.

Cllr Enright noted the Town Clerk's comment. He suggested that a recommendation could be made to the next Leisure and Recreation Committee meeting in November and any recommendation from that meeting could be brought back to Council in December. The Facilities Manager would also be present to provide further information and proper costings.

RESOLVED: To compliment the West Witney Sports Ground Working Party on its work and ask that a report be made to the Leisure and Recreation Committee. The Leisure and Recreation Committee was asked to discuss this report and to make a recommendation to Council.

Cllr R Curry queried why a workshop had been proposed to discuss the SSGB report, as this seemed an unnecessary delay.

Cllr Enright wanted to propose that the Leisure and Recreation Committee should make recommendations to Council and abandon the workshop.

Cllr M J C Curry explained that the rationale behind the workshop was that any decisions arising from the SSGB report were big decisions and the report was long. The Town Clerk's précis had been excellent and the concept of a workshop was so that members could disseminate the report and also so that sports club representatives could be invited.

Cllr Woodruff suggested that the workshop should be held after any recommendations from the Leisure and Recreation Committee.

Cllr R Curry urged the Leisure and Recreation Committee to progress and make recommendations from the SSGB report. The Council could then decide whether a workshop was required.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the Leisure and Recreation Committee consider the SSGB reports and take forward recommendations to Full Council.
- ii) That the proposed workshop should be cancelled for the time being.
- iii) That the SSGB Sports Study report on the four Council owned sites should be made public.

iv) That the minutes of the Leisure and Recreation Committee as detailed be received and any recommendations approved.

f) Public Halls Committee of 16th September 2013

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Public Halls Committee as detailed be received and any recommendations approved with the following amendment:

Page 2, minute 412 – change “me” to “be”.

g) Finance and General Purposes Committee of 23rd September 2013

Cllr R Curry referred to minute 424 and commented that he accepted that the meetings in November and December were for setting the budget, but it made more sense to him if an approximate budget was set in order for Committees to see how much to allocate to specific items.

The Town Clerk reminded members that there was a rolling capital fund and Committees were able to bid throughout the year for these funds – rather than set a Capital budget at this time. Cllr R Curry asked what Committees had to discuss if there was a rolling budget. The Town Clerk advised that they were responsible for proposing their own revenue budgets, and gave the scenario of the Langdale Hall closing as an example – the Public Halls Committee would scrutinise the budget and see if re budgeting money to the Corn Exchange was appropriate. She also explained that the Town Council ideally needed to inform the District Council of the precept in December, although this was unrealistic as the tax base would not be known by then and the Rt. Hon. Eric Pickles MP would not have made his Autumn statement.

Cllr R Curry asked if he could have a copy of the Vandalism report (minute 425). The Town Clerk confirmed that this could be sent to him.

The Town Clerk brought the Council’s attention to minute 426, concerning the grant application from the Lions Club. There had been a long debate about this and it had been referred to the Town Clerk and Chairman of the Leisure and Recreation Committee to discuss the event with the Lions in order to see how it should be funded. However, this would be too late as the event was to take place on 29th November. She advised that prior to taking this decision a figure had been quoted.

RESOLVED:

- i) To grant the Lions the sum of £100.00.
- ii) That the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee as detailed be received and any recommendations approved.

450 **CONCLUSION OF AUDIT FOR 31ST MARCH 2013**

The Council received and considered the conclusion of audit for 31st March 2013. The RFO asked if members had any questions. Cllr R Curry queried the items on the External auditor’s report. One issue had been the risk assessment which had gone to the Council for approval after March 2013. The RFO would ensure that the process was started earlier next year so it would be approved in time. The other issue was weekly banking. The RFO did not understand why the internal auditor thought that banking was not done weekly and she had gone back to them to try to get the report amended. If this was amended, the External Auditor’s report would also be amended.

Cllr R Curry recorded thanks to the RFO for a good audit report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

451 **REVIEW OF SUBSIDISED BUS SERVICES**

The Council received and considered documentation from Oxfordshire County Council on a review of subsidised bus services.

The Town Clerk explained that the Council had an independent transport representative who had responded to the County Council with an 80 page report. She also brought to members attention the meeting to discuss the review in the Langdale Hall on 16th October from 1.30pm – 3.30pm.

Cllr Enright considered bus services to be very important. He understood that one area of the services that were under consideration for reduction was Saturday afternoon services. He was concerned that if services were reduced they would feel unreliable to people who wished to use the buses.

Cllr Enright also proposed that the County Council should consider the introduction of a bus to the John Radcliffe Hospital, similar to the one that was running in Bicester with great success. This would help the hospital staff to get to work and take some traffic off of the roads.

Cllr Enright was worried about some services from other towns into Witney being reduced as this could impact economically on the shops and businesses in Witney.

Cllr Morris said that Witney had grown significantly over the last few years and had a relatively vibrant night life, and yet the buses stopped at 6pm to neighbouring villages. This needed to be improved, especially for younger people.

Cllr M J C Curry agreed with all the previous comments and added that she thought there should be a park and ride in Witney. Cllr R Curry said that this was planned as part of new development.

The Chairman asked how the Council should respond to the review. The Town Clerk commented that the Transport Representative had already responded and she would try to get his précis circulated to members.

Cllr Enright asked who the Transport representative was and queried if he had acted in the Town Council's best interest. The Town Clerk explained that he was a recognised person (by external bodies such as ORCC) and was very dedicated to the task. Cllr Enright was not happy with his comments being submitted in the Town Council's name.

RESOLVED: To write to the County Council with the following comments:-

- i) That the Town Council was keen to ensure that the frequency of services was maintained otherwise they would become unreliable
- ii) That it would strongly be worth considering the introduction of a bus service from Witney to the John Radcliffe Hospital
- iii) That bus services should make the Town centre accessible to the outlying villages, including during the evening.
- iv) That the bus to the Long Hanborough Station should be maintained to enable people to travel by train without driving.

Cllr R Curry suggested that this letter was also sent to the District and County Councillors.

Cllr Enright left the meeting at 8.35pm.

452 **HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE**

The Council received and considered a report from the Facilities Manager.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

453 **WINDRUSH CEMETERY ACCESS**

The Council received and considered a proposal for a revised road layout and new signage for the access to the Windrush Cemetery from the County Council Highways Department.

Cllr Beames thought that it was an excellent proposal, but suggested that the speed limit on that section of the road should be reduced to 30mph .

RESOLVED: To support the suggested layout and signage and to suggest to the County Council Highways that the speed limit be lowered to 30mph on that section of the carriageway.

454 **SEALING OF DOCUMENTS**

There were no documents to be sealed.

The meeting closed at 8.40pm

Chairman.

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