



FAIR OAK & HORTON HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on Monday 18 September 2023 at the Parish Office, 2 Knowle Park Lane, Fair Oak

P – present, Pt – part of the meeting, Ab – absent, Ap – apologies

Ab	Cllr Anderson	P	Cllr Couldrey	Ap	Cllr Meech
Ap	Cllr Barrett	P	Cllr Douglas	P	Cllr Scott
Ap	Cllr Bird	Ap	Cllr Forfar	P	Cllr Smith
Ap	Cllr Broomfield	Ap	Cllr Higby	P	Cllr Stupple
Ab	Cllr Chivuchi	P	Cllr Marsh	P	Cllr Tennent

Officers in attendance: Mel Stephens, Clerk, Michelle Leadbitter-Allen, Deputy Clerk and Joanna Cahill, Responsible Finance Officer

Apologies: Cllrs Barret, Bird, Broomfield, Higby, Forfar and Meech

44 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Deputy Clerk Minute No 51.

45 MINUTES (PAPER A)

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 17 July 2023, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record;
- (b) That the minutes of the Asset Committee of 10 June & Finance Committee dated 4 September be noted;
- (c) That the minutes of the Finance Committee 10 July be noted and agreed; and
- (d) That the delegated planning decisions of the week ending 20 June, 21 July, 4 & 25 August 2023 be noted.

46 COMMUNITY CAFÉ PROJECT (REPORT B)

The Council considered a project update on the Community Café construction including the latest budgetary position which was currently showing an overspend of approximately £71k.

The Clerk explained that there were various factors contributing to the overspend, including the following: -

- The complex site conditions and requirements that led to the need for driven pile foundations and the subsequent additional technical drawings & advice on the alternate specifications.
- The additional tests, professional reports and specifications required from soil and gas experts to satisfy planning requirements associated with contaminated land; and
- Ensuing additional construction costs.

Members discussed the latest budget attached at Appendix 1 to Report B and the funds held across all three of the Council's accounts, including earmarked reserve pots.

Members were advised that the Internal Auditor had given instructions to the Responsible Finance Officer to clear all historical ear marked reserves not allocated to current projects to the café project. She had also advised that the Café ear marked reserve show a negative amount at the end of the project, clearly highlighting the project overspend. The additional funds required to complete the project would be sourced from the Council's very healthy, premier account.

Whilst the overspend was not insignificant, the Clerk pointed out that the Council had not had to pay for any project management or architectural fees which had saved at least £50k.

The utilization of the skills and labor of volunteer support through the local community, council employees and their families had also saved on costs.

Planned crowdfunding efforts would also alleviate some of the budget stress, with The Fountain Café contributing to the cost of internal fit out, such as server counter.

Members supported the additional funding support, expressing the view that despite the very difficult and challenging existing contaminated site, the Council would have a sizable, brand new community facility in the heart of the Parish, that would bring long-term value to local residents.

As such, it was: -

RESOLVED:

- a) That the content of the report and latest budgetary position be noted;

- b) That the alternations made to Ear Marked Reserve Funds to support the project be approved;
- c) That the amended budget as set out in Appendix 1 to Report B be approved;
- d) That the request for the budget shortfall of £71,643 to be met by the Council using funds in the premier account be approved; and
- e) That delegated authority be given to the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) to administrate budget requests from the Council's premier account.

Action: M Stephens/J Cahill

47 NEW CENTURY PARK PUBLIC ART PHASE 1 (REPORT C)

The Council considered the public art installation proposals at the café site which included decorative gates and fencing, as well as funding support for the project.

The project would be undertaken in a phased approach, with phase one fencing and gates, phase two bike racks and phase three the installation of an information board serving the whole site.

The Clerk circulated designs submitted by a local artist who had previously installed artwork at the park site for phase one of the project.

The Clerk had approached the Local Area Committee (LAC) for funding support for the entirety of the project, the LAC had indicated their support and had approved the entire funding for phase one of the project and requested that the Clerk make further approaches for funding support for phase two and three as the project progressed. However, the LAC wished to see a financial contribution from the Parish.

The project budget had been set at £22,090 with the Parish contributing 15% towards this cost i.e £4,418.

Members were happy to support the project including the designs for phase one and subsequently agreed the allocation of £4,418 from the café ear marked reserve as the Parish contribution.

RESOLVED:

- a) That a phased approach to the public art installation at the café/wider park site be approved;
- b) That the proposed art installations be approved;
- c) That £4,418 be allocated from the café earmarked reserve to support the entire project;
- d) That the budget for the project as set out in paragraph 7.1 below be approved; and

- e) That the Clerk be given delegated authority to commission artwork and oversee its installation with a progress report following completion of the project.

Action: M Stephens

48 FINANCE REPORT (REPORT D)

The Council considered the finance report which highlighted the Council's latest budgetary position.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the contents of the report be noted: and
- b) That the BACs payments be approved.

Action: J Cahill

49 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair informed members that Cllr Scott had resigned as the parish representative at Tywnams Charity with immediate effect, although he would continue to advise them on building matters when needed. The Chair thanked Cllr Scott for his service.

The Chair advised that her spouse had been appointed as the clerk to the trustees of Tywnams Charity, but was not involved in the appointment.

The Chair asked for councillors to participate in Jeans for Genes Awareness Day if they were able.

The Chair also reminded councillors of the importance of attendance at meetings to ensure meetings of the Council were quorate. It was suggested and agreed by members that the Finance Committee be moved to Friday mornings from December as a preferred meeting day.

The Clerk was asked to survey members on their preferred meeting days and times.

Action: M Stephens

50 CLERK'S UPDATE

The Clerk gave a presentation to members, attached at appendix one to the minutes. Various updates were given, including: -

Grass cutting

The inclement weather had delayed some grass and hedge-cutting across the

parish, however, the Operations team had worked hard to catch up on the grass-cutting. Priority hedge-cutting works such as pathways used on school routes had been cleared.

The Operations Team would focus on the café landscaping work before continuing with the outstanding hedge works.

Twynams

The first phase of planting had been completed allowing the Community Development Officer to begin community activities on the site. The second stage of planting would commence shortly with assistance from residents. It was hoped that this would encourage the establishment of a Friends of Twynams group.

Café:

The Operations Team would soon commence fencing work at the site with the removal of the existing fence.

Woodlands Community Centre

The Clerk advised that the Operations Manager would be working at the Woodland Community Centre from the following Thursday to establish a council presence at the centre and to monitor on-site maintenance.

Splashpad

The Splashpad had completed its first season which was deemed successful and well-received by residents and visitors. Some operational tweaks had been identified which would be considered for next season. A full monitoring report would be submitted to the Council in due course.

IT / BT Leased Line

The BT leased line had been installed at the Parish Office with fully functioning internet available throughout the building.

Library

The library launch had been successful with the library reporting more footfall and new member sign-ups.

Crowdhill Green Phase Two Infrastructure Works

A project initiation document had been produced and would be shared with members in the winter.

Lapstone Playing Fields

Phase One construction works were near completion with Phase Two culvert works to be completed during the spring.

Climate

The Deputy Clerk was proceeding with a grant fund application for a solar PV and battery storage installation at Woodland Community Centre.

Y-Zone Youth Centre

Y-Zone would initiate its winter programme on 23rd October, opening every Monday and Thursday from 6 p.m. to 8.30 p.m. The Clerk was asked to keep a watching brief on the delivery of youth provision, given the significant funding support from the Parish.

The Community Development Officer had also initiated various other projects across the parish with key stakeholders this included a knitting project with Sunnybank Care Home, clearance work at Wyvern Meadow, getting staff involved in the Wildlife Trusts Big Wild Walk Challenge and use of the Library as a warm welcome space.

51 ELECTRICITY CHARGES (REPORT E)

The Deputy Clerk declared an interest as one of the solar supplier quotes was a company belonging to her spouse. All supplier quotes were anonymised during debate and determination.

The Council considered actions undertaken as part of the electricity action plan to address electricity usage at the Parish Office. The Council also agreed to appoint a new utility provider at the Parish Office; furthermore, the Council considered a phased proposal for the installation of solar panels at the Parish Office.

Members were updated on the progress of the Electricity Action Plan and the actions undertaken by officers to mitigate the risks of high energy costs which had been recommended by the Finance Committee.

Members were given further details on the proposed solar panel installation at the Parish Office including the size of the proposed installation, the inverter and battery capacity and potential payback and return on investment. Three quotes had been sought for this proposal and the quotes were circulated for members consideration.

Members also discussed the proposal to phase the retrofit fit works to include a second phase installation for a larger solar capacity and this would be taken forward as part of next year's budget considerations.

Given the Council's pledge to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels and move to a more sustainable working practice, members fully supported the proposal for solar installation.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the contents of the report be noted;
- (b) That 'Provider 1', Octopus Energy be agreed as the Parish Office energy supplier for the parish office to start with immediate effect.
- (c) That Phase 1 of the proposed parish office solar installation be agreed, with the cost funded from Parish Office Earmarked Reserves;
- (d) That 'Provider 2', Goldwater Electrical be appointed to install the solar PV and battery storage at the parish office; and
- (e) That the submission of Phase 2 of parish office solar installation be brought to the Budget Task and Finish Group for consideration for inclusion in the 2023-2024 budget.

Action: M Leadbitter-Allen

52 COUNCIL'S INSURANCE PREMIUM

The Council considered the Insurance Premium cost of £15,144.90 for the period 1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024.

RESOLVED:

The insurance premium for the period 1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024 at a cost of £15,144.90 be agreed.

Action: M Stephens

53 CHRISTMAS OPENING HOURS

RESOLVED:

That the Council offices be closed to the public from 27-29 December 2023.

Action: M Stephens

54 WORK PROGRAMME (REPORT I)

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

55 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

RESOLVED:

“That, under Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies Admissions to Meetings Act 1960, the public and the Press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information which would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of its confidential nature (staffing matters)”

PART II – PRIVATE SESSION

56 STAFFING UPDATE (VERBAL REPORT)

The Clerk praised the work that the Operations Team to ‘fill in the gaps’ left by staff illness and resignations. Staff members often went above and beyond offering their time on their days off or over weekends to cover a range of duties.

The Clerk raised a concern regarding the detrimental impact on the staffing budget of staff overtime payments. Additionally, some staff were historically remunerated for overtime worked while others were required to take overtime worked as time in lieu, this meant that there was not a level playing field for all staff members with a dual process in place.

It was recognised that all staff were valued members of the team and that they should continue to feel valued, but that to be fair and consistent, and to not exceed the allowed budget, a system of taking time in lieu be proposed for use by all staff members.

The Council felt strongly that any new change in process should not be undertaken without consultation with staff members.

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk canvass staff on the proposed process for managing staff overtime moving forward with the results being submitted to the December Finance Committee for further consideration.

Action: M Stephens

Signed Chairman.

This was all the business and the meeting closed at 7.40 pm.