

Finance and General Purposes Committee
25th January 2021 at 7.30pm
Meeting held online at zoom



Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a true and correct record by the next meeting of this Committee.

Present:

Councillor J Moody (Chair)
Councillor P Siggers (Vice Chair)
Councillor P Davies
Councillor V Haval
Councillor M McNeill
Councillor A Sandiford
Councillor A Thompson

Officer: Mrs J Wheeler, Town Clerk
Mrs Teresa Tye, Committee Clerk

Also present:

Cllr M Khan (Leader and Deputy Mayor) and Reverend Andy Lord, Vicar of All Saints Church

134. Apologies

There were no apologies as everyone was present.

135. Declarations of interests

Cllr P Davies declared an interest in item twelve on the agenda relating to the proposed installation of Electrical Charging points.

136. To approve the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held 21st December 2020

It was proposed by Cllr J. Moody and seconded by Cllr P Siggers and **RESOLVED** to agree the minutes held on 23rd November 2020 as a correct record.

Cllr V Haval spoke regarding the grant to Sue Ryder. The grant of £1000 must not be used for wages and must be restricted to the palliative care hub in the Didcot area.

Cllr J Moody asked for an amendment to the last sentence of the minutes to state that Cllr D Rouane and Cllr V Haval would act as a conduit for information regarding

any future discussions with SODC on the development at Ladygrove East rather than acting as a Town Council representative.

137. Questions on the minutes as to the progress of any item

There were no further questions or comments.

Cllr A Thompson entered the meeting.

It was proposed by Cllr J Moody and seconded by Cllr A Thompson to suspend Standing Orders to allow for public participation.

Reverend Andy Lord spoke to give more background regarding item 8 on the agenda relating to the application for a partial closure of the All Saints Churchyard and the request for the Town Council to take over the maintenance. Reverend Lord said that burials would still take place in the old section even though it would be closed. The path would separate the old and new section. South and Vale/SODC have indicated that they have no objections.

Cllr P Davies asked when the title deed came over to the ownership of the church. It was confirmed that the church had historic ownership for some time – no specific date was known. Cllr A Sandiford wanted clarification on what would be required in terms of maintenance. Rev Lord confirmed that everything within the boundary including the paths; walls; wooden wych gate; lighting and trees along with the grass would all require maintenance and the Town Council would be responsible for the old section. It was noted that the land ownership would remain with the Church.

Standing Orders were reinstated.

138. To note a grant report from the Christmas Day lunches activity

This report was circulated with the agenda and noted by the Councillors. It was good to see that dinners were provided on this unusual Christmas Day when so many were alone.

139. To note the status of the grant applications and those who have given the Council a report

There were no new grant applications for this month's meeting but the Clerk had produced a report to note grants awarded for this year and those who had supplied a report. There is approx. £18,476 left in the cost centre for the rest of this financial year.

140. To receive the bi-yearly CCTV report

The report was noted. Cllr P Davies requested clarity on the billing as some towns in the scheme had more cameras than others but seemed to pay the same. The Town Clerk would clarify this matter and whether we have some cameras in hand.

141. To discuss the proposed partial closure of All Saints Churchyard

Cllr P Davies felt that we would be foolish not to object on the basis on whether a partial closure is a usual practice. The Town Clerk had spoken to the Outside Services Manager for usual costs and it was estimated that routine maintenance would cost the Town Council around £5,000 per annum based on two men for two mornings a month - £3,800 per year. More specialist work on trees and other assets within the churchyard would cost extra.

Cllr P Davies proposed objection on the grounds of partial closure; this was seconded by Cllr A Sandiford. The vote was six in favour with one abstention.

142. To consider the request for a Muslim section of the cemetery for Muslims in south Oxfordshire

It was AGREED that our cemetery is non-denomination and the Town Council welcomes all faiths. It was clarified that we only have around seven years left in terms of space for future burials in the cemetery and Didcot was a growing town. SODC have been made aware of the problem but have given us no suggestions for a new burial ground. To grant a section exclusively for those of the muslim faith would require a change of policy as we do not allow reservation but use the next in line.

It was AGREED that the Town Clerk would draft a letter for the Committee to consider at the next meeting – and perhaps ask for clarification of why they need a special area.

143. To note the email from Clear Channel relating to their barter scheme

The Chair summarised the situation. It is a notional contract to allow them to pay VAT to the HMRC. It is an administrative process and there is no money involved. The self-billing invoices was the method suggested by ClearChannel and has been approved by HMRC.

Cllr P Davies was concerned that this would make our VAT returns incorrect and we would need to historically adjust them. The Town Clerk said that we would need to make adjustments dating back for six years. Our agent is aware and will be happy to do this.

It was AGREED that we would accept the self-billing arrangement but only once the issue with the side panel on the bus shelter was resolved. The Town Clerk would contact ClearChannel and our VAT agent.

144. To review the progress on the solar power project for the roof of the Civic Hall

The report covered quotes from two companies to install solar panels (photovoltaic) on the Didcot Civic Hall. The best siting for the panels would be on the extension which offers a large, almost flat roof. Up to 68 solar PV panels could be fitted to the roof of the Civic Hall. The more that are installed, the more the Council will save on electricity costs. The panels do generate less electricity over their working lifespan. The industry standard is around twenty years.

On a forecasted spend on electricity over the next twenty years of £784,818 –

Company A was offering:

60 panels (LG350) for £37,622 (Saving £169,475 over 20 years) OR

60 panels (JA310) for £28,302 (Saving £120,085 over 20 years)

Company A estimate that carbon emissions in excess of 8900kg could be saved per year.

Company B was offering:

39 x 350w PV panels for £34,473 inc VAT (£27,578.88 without the VAT)

However further down in the report the number of PV modules was 68 - This was a mistake and was later clarified to be:
68 x 350w PV panels for £35,700 inc VAT (£29,750 without the VAT)

Both companies used the prescribed Government model for estimating PV generation. The EiE report indicates that in the current financial year, the Civic Hall is estimated to be using 105,260 kWh of electricity. The installation of an LED readout could be mounted on the Civic Hall to show passers-by the total energy generated and the carbon emissions avoided.

There is some availability to S106 funding for this project. Planning permission and Building regulations would also be needed before installation. Cllr J Moody wanted to know about the benefits of battery storage for an export tariff and whether there was an advantage in installing this at the same time assuming that there would be enough electricity to supply the Civic Hall plus sell some back to the network.

This item was due to go to the Civic Hall Management Committee for comment and then more information would be sought.

145. To consider the report on the provision of electrical charging points

There was much discussion on this topic which was also due to go to the Civic Hall Management Committee for further comment. There was concern over losing parking spaces at the Civic Hall and this project had not been budgeted for. However there were several options including leasing which would not cost the Council anything and may generate some income.

Fast charging means that cars are less likely to block a space for an excessive amount of time. The Councillors were interested in the time it would take to receive some income. The Committee also acknowledged that there is a lot of work happening on this at District and County level and in other towns.

It was AGREED to re-visit in three to six months' time and try to learn from the experiences of other Towns and the principle Councils. The Council would also have a better idea of when the country would be getting back to some form of normality as the pandemic recedes.

146. To review the draft consultation papers for the Willowbrook building

It was AGREED that the Committee review the papers drafted by the Town Clerk and look at the detail for the next meeting of F&GP. It would need then to go to the Town Council in March. At the last consultation exercise the sports and leisure clubs were approached first and then it went out to members of the public.

147. To note the progress report on items not on the agenda

The progress report was noted by the Committee.

148. Exclusion of the press and public

RESOLVED: pursuant to Section 1 of the Public Bodies [Admission to Meetings] Act 1960 to exclude the press and public from the meeting on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

149. To consider the information regarding an additional camera and to note the confidential minutes of the CCTV group

The Committee were supplied with some email correspondence and a confidential map of camera locations. The Councillors felt that other towns were getting better value with more cameras than Didcot. The age of the cameras was also discussed as it seemed that other towns were getting new cameras. The Town Clerk was asked to progress at least one extra camera under Cow Lane Bridge (possibly one each end) and another possible location near the bridge at Aldi. Cllr A Thompson thought the priority must be Cow Lane with the bridge at Aldi as a good second option. Cllr V Haval felt that it was important the if people were not taking their cars – they must feel safe.

150. To review the recommendations from the Personnel and Administration Committee

It was proposed by Cllr J Moody and seconded by Cllr P Siggers and RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND to accept the recommendations.

Meeting closed at 8.45pm.

Signed _____ Chairman Date _____