

Council Meeting

Monday 11th January 2021 at 7.30pm

Online at zoom.us (or via your device app)



Minutes

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

PRESENT

Councillors:

P Davies	M Mallows
A Dearlove	M McNeill
P Giesberg	J Moody
E Hards (Mayor)	D Rouane
V Haval	A Sandiford
A Hudson	P Siggers
M Khan (Deputy Mayor)	A Thompson
A Macdonald	M Walsh
D Macdonald	C Wilson

Officers:

Janet Wheeler - Town Clerk

The Mayor opened the meeting by noting that Mr Andy Baker had been recognised for his exceptional charitable work in the New Year honours list by being made an MBE. The Mayor proposed suspending Standing Order 71 – standing to address the Chair.

65. To receive apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr J Durman.

66. To receive declarations of interests

The Mayor declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in minute 106 of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and would leave the meeting for this item. There were no further declarations.

67. To receive petitions

The Mayor spoke of a petition which was received with 386 signatures collected in 2018 relating to Parking on Broadway and Didcot generally. Standing Order 34 states that a member of the public may present the petition. The material was old and possibly beyond the time limit for legally holding residents' signatures and personal information. The Mayor proposed noting the content which has largely been over-taken by events. It was also AGREED that the Town Clerk would destroy the signatures.

Standing Orders were suspended to allow members of the public to speak.

Mr Dave Reeves spoke to the Council about the pressures of the pandemic to residents. He referred to financial worries and also the damage from the closure of sporting and social centres in the town. There was a shortage of leisure facilities in the town and he wanted to get Willowbrook open to residents as quickly as possible. He suggested several options to the Council including the setting up of a working group in which he offered to participate and help the Council. He has industry knowledge and would offer his time without the expectation of reimbursement.

Cllr C Wilson asked if there were any other facilities other than Willowbrook. Mr Reeves said that there were lots of rooms available in Didcot but the size of the space was often an issue for many leisure activities. The size of the Willowbrook rooms was ideal.

The Mayor thanked Mr Reeves for his contribution and reinstated Standing Orders.

68. To approve and adopt the minutes of the Council meeting held on 2nd November 2020 and the Extra-Ordinary Council meeting held on 8th December 2020.

The Mayor paged through the minutes of the Council meeting held on **2nd November 2020** for accuracy and to allow for questions.

It was proposed by Cllr E Hards and seconded by Cllr M. Khan and RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the full Council meeting held on 2nd November 2020. It was noted under minute 50 that Mr S Hewerdine has resigned as a Town Councillor.

The Mayor then paged through the minutes of the Extra-Ordinary Council meeting held on **8th December 2020** for accuracy and to allow for questions.

It was proposed by Cllr E Hards and seconded by Cllr M Khan and RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the Extra Ordinary Council meeting held on 8th December 2020.

69. To consider recommendations of Committees to Council in accordance with Standing Orders 95 - 112

a) Planning and Development Committee

It was proposed by Cllr A Dearlove and seconded by Cllr D Macdonald and RESOLVED to receive the Minutes for the meeting held on **28th October 2020**.

It was proposed by Cllr A Dearlove and seconded by Cllr M Walsh and RESOLVED to receive the Minutes for the meeting held on **18th November 2020**.

It was proposed by Cllr A Dearlove and seconded by Cllr D Macdonald and RESOLVED to receive the Minutes for the meeting held on **9th December 2020**.

It was proposed by Cllr A Dearlove and seconded by Cllr D Macdonald and RESOLVED to receive the Minutes for the meeting held on **23rd December 2020**.

b) Finance and General Purposes Committee

Cllr E Hards left the meeting for this item due to being a trustee of the Citizens Advice who were to receive a grant over the value of £5,500 (Financial Reg 4.1). Cllr M Khan took the Chair and proposed that the recommended grant of £10,000 awarded to Citizens Advice was approved by the full Council. This was seconded by Cllr A Dearlove and RESOLVED in favour.

Cllr M Khan stated that the Council would look again at the Financial Regulations to see if this limit needed amending. The Mayor resumed the Chair.

It was proposed by Cllr J Moody and seconded by Cllr P Siggers and RESOLVED to receive the Minutes for the meeting held on **23rd November 2020**.

It was proposed by Cllr J Moody and seconded by Cllr P Siggers and RESOLVED to receive the Minutes for the meeting held on **21st December 2020**.

- (i) Recommendation – Minute 133** – It was RESOLVED to send the letter approved by F&GP Committee to SODC regarding an expression of interest in further assets within the Didcot boundary.

Cllr J Moody spoke to state that the Committee discussed the financial implications of taking on ownership of assets and facilities in areas where we cannot precept. He said that it may be possible to help surrounding parishes on a more commercial basis. Cllr D Rouane gave some background stating that SODC wanted to give the land to a charity to look after but this was an opportunity for the parishes to also be considered. There would be some S106 money to help with costs for a short time but this was an agreement in principle to continue discussions. Cllr M Khan said that we need to look at all the options. The Town Clerk will engage with SODC to gain more information. The vote was unanimous.

c) Personnel and Administration Committee

It was proposed by Cllr M Khan and seconded by Cllr A Macdonald and RESOLVED to receive the minutes for the meeting held on **7th December 2020**.

- (i) Recommendation – Minute 53** - It was proposed by Cllr A Macdonald and seconded by Cllr M Khan and RESOLVED to approve the recommendations and amendments to the Leave and Toil Policy. Cllr M Khan spoke to state that these amendments will help members of staff to take their toil quicker and avoid excessive carry over of leave into the new financial year.

d) Environment and Climate Committee

It was proposed by Cllr D Macdonald and seconded by Cllr A Hudson and RESOLVED to receive the minutes from the Extra-Ordinary meeting held on **19th October 2020**.

Cllr A Hudson asked about the progress of the demolition of the old pavilion at Edmonds Park. The Chair said that this would be discussed at the next meeting and we will need planning permission to demolish.

Cllr C Wilson wanted an up-date on the Stubbings Land pathway and the provision of outdoor table tennis. The Chair said that the cost of a tarmac pathway at Stubbings Land would need to go out to tender. The project was on the contracts portal. The outdoor table tennis was in next financial year's budget.

It was proposed by Cllr D Macdonald and seconded by Cllr A Hudson and RESOLVED to receive the minutes from the meeting held on **16th November 2020**.

e) Civic Hall Management Committee

It was proposed by Cllr P Siggers and seconded by Cllr J Moody and RESOLVED to receive the minutes of the meeting held on **25th November 2020**.

70. To receive the Mayor's Report

The Mayor's report was noted by the Council.

71. To consider and agree the following for the financial year 2021-2022:

Budget recommendation and precept request for 2021 – 2022

The Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee presented the budget. He reiterated the reduced income due to the pandemic and the need to maintain projects and upkeep of outside areas, the allotments and the cemetery. The Civic Hall was being made available to the NHS for the covid vaccination programme; the blood transfusion services were continuing to operate and the covid testing had been carried out in the Civic Hall car park through the lockdowns.

The budget represents a significant reduction in expenditure in tandem with the reduction in income. Given all the pressures facing the Council the modest increase of 4.5% on the precept was reasonable to allow the facilities to continue to operate.

There was a brief explanation of how the tax base feeds into the precept. Band D is the reference point and is nine-nineths of the precept. Smaller properties pay a lower rate and the tiers above Band D pay more going up to Band E which pay 10 nineths.

The Mayor opened the meeting to questions. Cllr C Wilson had a general question about grant funds being added to our revenue. The Chair confirmed that the budget allows for a mix of revenue and additional grant funding. The Mayor said that the larger items could not be afforded through revenue alone and the Town Council

would need to look at grants or loans for the larger projects. She also stated that the ear-marked reserves would be considered at the Finance & General Purposes Committee and then come to the next Full Council. This work will also relate to the larger projects.

Cllr P Davies had a question on the 18/19 budget where the sum of £750,000 was a grant assumed to have been received and spent. This grant was never realised and had to be removed until funds have been secured.

Cllr D Rouane questioned whether we have the skills in house – or a budget to employ a consultant to seek grants and funding. Cllr J Moody said that each individual project carried funds to engage consultants. The professional fees cost centre would also cover consultants who could be engaged to complete this task.

Cllr M Khan thanked the members of the Finance and General Purposes Committee for their hard work and especially Cllr J Moody and Cllr P Siggers. He also thanked the Town Clerk. He was fully supportive of the budget which addresses the loss of income. The figures were realistic and a modest increase which is equivalent of a pint or coffee and cake would ensure that the Council would not need to cut services. The work on the main projects will continue along with the green projects. He has also asked the Town Clerk to organise financial training for all Councillors in the coming months.

Cllr C Wilson asked whether the Finance and General Purposes Committee had carried out any visioning on how to restore the finances as we emerge from lockdown. Cllr J Moody said that the tenants in Willowbrook and hirers of the Civic Hall are the two main sources of income. The Town Council has committed to having a consultation for Willowbrook as soon as we can. We have taken a pragmatic view of the future use of the Civic Hall in the budget as we cannot predict how long it will take for the economy to emerge from the pandemic. It is reasonable to assume that it will be the autumn before hall bookings pick up with many wellbeing groups keen to start up their activities with some surety.

Cllr J Moody summed up by commenting on the precept requests of the other bodies including the police; SODC and other parishes.

It was proposed by Cllr J Moody and seconded by Cllr P Siggers and RESOLVED to approve the budget recommendation for 2021 – 2022 and the precept request for **£1,144,053**. The vote was carried with two abstentions.

72. To receive an up-date on the consultation on the future of Willowbrook

It was AGREED to refer the consultation papers to the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee to give the Officers more time to prepare.

73. To receive such communications as the Leader of the Council may wish to bring before Council and to consider the recommendation of the Leader on how such communications should be dealt with.

Cllr M Khan received a lot of letters relating to the covid vaccination programme and also regarding the future use of Willowbrook. These communications were being reviewed by the Town Clerk and the next steps regarding Willowbrook will be agreed at the appropriate Committee.

74. To consider motions in the order in which they have been notified:

No motions were received.

75. Didcot Garden Town Project and the report of the Council's representative on the Didcot Garden Town Management Board

There was a residents' sounding board on 30th November which some Councillors had attended. Topics covered included environmental concerns, parking and cycling. The management team are collating answers to the questions and this will be shared. The next meeting of the Advisory Board is 25th January and this is a public meeting. The Leader will also be having a monthly meeting with Didcot Garden Town Manager and the next one is 18th January. Councillors were invited to send any questions to the Leader.

76. Questions to the Leader concerning the business of the Council in accordance with Standing Order 58

Q: Last month Didcot Town Council held its awards evening as a remote event. In my time as Mayor I found this event to be one of the most rewarding. The involvement of the Councillors in this year's event is a good idea but this is a Didcot Town Council awards evening and I don't recall seeing any communication inviting Councillors to take part. Can the Leader explain the process of how the selection was made? (Cllr A Dearlove)

A: The Mayor answered to say that the event was split up among different Councillors so that she was not being recorded on a mobile phone in the foyer of the Civic Hall for the whole evening. This was a one-off event and it was hoped that next year we will be able to revert back to meeting in a room as usual. The Leader also said that this was preferred to not holding the event. He said that the feedback had been good and he thanked the Council staff for putting together the awards online which was a first for them.

Q: Why were the playgrounds closed last week contrary to Government advice? (Cllr D Rouane)

A: The Town Clerk answered to say that conflicting advice was received and a decision was taken regarding safety. It is possible we interpreted the Government advice incorrectly and the Town Clerk apologised if this was the case. Government advice changes almost day to day but as soon as it became clear that other playgrounds were staying open the situation was swiftly rectified.

The Council were sympathetic to the situation that the Officers were facing.

Q: At the last full Council in November, the Council gave a 100% assurance that the Civic Hall is not for sale. Can you give the same reassurance for Willowbrook? (Cllr P Davies)

A: The Leader confirmed categorically that Willowbrook is not for sale. The plan is to work towards re-opening as a facility for the community and an appropriate tender process will be followed to achieve this.

The meeting closed at 8.40pm.

Signed:

(Mayor)

Date: