

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD
ON-LINE AT 19.00 ON THURSDAY 18TH MARCH 2021**

PRESENT: R TAPLIN (Town Mayor)
Councillors: Mrs S WORTHINGTON (Deputy Mayor); G CAMPBELL, Mrs S CONBOY, J HLADKIWSKYJ; A HOOKER; C HYAMS; P IRVING; P MORGAN; Mrs M RADFORD; P ROUND; C THOMAS; C VANE PERCY; G WILSON; Mrs S WILSON; J YOUNG

Town Clerk: Ms V PRYCE
Minute Taker: Mrs C WHITLOCK

Four members of the public

MINUTES

Action

21/47 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE:

Cllr R Mahmood – Received (due to an overseas family commitment he would not be able attend meetings for the time being)

21/48 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

Cllrs G WILSON, S WILSON and RADFORD – Allotment Association (Holders)

21/49 MINUTES:

The MAYOR proposed the Council approve, as a correct record, the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 18th February 2021 and the extraordinary minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 3rd March 2021. All were in favour and it was so **resolved**.

21/50 TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The MAYOR welcomed the public attendees to the meeting.

The Club 800 Draw took place with the assistance of the Mayoress.

21/51 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION:

Mr J Morris thanked the Council for giving him the opportunity to discuss the proposed trial closure of bridge between Godmanchester and Huntingdon. He asked if the Council trusted their residents and businesses to have their say on the proposed trial and whether they should be consulted on. Mr Morris noted the issues regarding the potential effect on the bus service, however, Cambridgeshire County Council had said that the effect would only be marginal. Mr Morris advised that the Government had launched their National Bus Strategy; 'Bus Back Better' to improve and encourage bus usage by investing £3m in bus services. Mr Morris ended his report suggesting the Council should welcome, nor fear, consultation and that if the trial went ahead and was a disaster, the Council could just revert back to the current situation.

21/52 OUTSTANDING ACTIONS:

The MAYOR went through the outstanding actions and, in particular, noted that there had been no progress regarding the double yellow lines in Tudor Road. There was no further update from the Land Registry regarding the registration of Council land. Cllr CAMPBELL confirmed that he and Cllr HYAMS would be having a pre-contract meeting on 19 March with the contractor and administrator regarding the toilet at Judith's Field. All other actions would be addressed under

the appropriate Agenda item.

21/53 CORRESPONDENCE:

The MAYOR thought that Huntingdon Volunteer Centre's AGM had not been able to take place and, therefore, had been cancelled. Ely Cathedral had written to the new Mayor inviting him or her to their Thanksgiving Service to celebrate Prince Philip's 100th birthday in June. The MAYOR confirmed that the invitation had been accepted on the behalf of his successor. Szentendre's festival organiser had opened up the festival to other twinned towns but the MAYOR advised that this did not apply to Godmanchester, already being twinned with five towns. The MAYOR confirmed that the Ministry of Defence would retain RAF Alconbury and Molesworth indefinitely (it had originally only been until 2024). The MAYOR noted their retention would be good for both business and for the relationships with visiting forces.

(Post-Meeting note: The HVC AGM had been moved to 23 March and was held online; The Mayor attended.)

21/54 PROPERTY REPORT:

Cllr CAMPBELL advised on the ongoing problem of littering at Judith's Field. As the most troublesome area was around the skate park, the Group had thought that perhaps a more dynamic, preventative sign should be used. Cllr CAMPBELL thanked those Councillors who had voluntarily litter picked and Cllr HYAMS for preparing the proposed new sign. He wished to highlight that the wording suggested for use on the sign, *Don't be a Tosser*, could be seen as controversial. Following a discussion of the pros and cons, some Councillors felt that the sign may be seen as a gimmick and humorous on the first read but then people would ignore the sign. Some were concerned that the word had other connotations and therefore could be seen as offensive. The MAYOR proposed that the Council vote on whether the sign should be used. The majority voted against the proposal therefore the **motion was defeated**. The MAYOR thanked Cllr HYAMS for his hard work in preparing the sign and hoped the situation would be resolved at the next meeting.

21/55 PLANNING REPORT:

The TOWN CLERK was to advise HDC of planning application recommendations.

Town Clerk

Cllr G WILSON introduced his report on the trial closure of the Godmanchester to Huntingdon bridge. Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) had been liaising with Huntingdon Town Council, Godmanchester Town Council and local District and County Councillors on the CCC proposal for a trial closure of the road bridge between Godmanchester and Huntingdon to all but emergency traffic and cyclists. This would allow pedestrians more space on the footbridge and make the road bridge safer for cyclists. CCC said they would not allow buses on the bridge and instead they would have to use the A1307. Huntingdon Town Council voted not to support a trial closure at their meeting last December.

The Council had a full discussion and considered the pros and cons of a trial closure. Whilst many people had told the Town Council they were in favour of a closure, because of the benefits for cyclists and the opportunities to make parts of the town quieter, others expressed concern about the impact on bus services in both Huntingdon and Godmanchester and the impact on local businesses dependent on passing trade.

The Council agreed that traffic flows through Godmanchester were currently much reduced as a result of the current pandemic, and the Huntingdon link roads to the A1307 were not yet complete.

The Council therefore decided that a meaningful trial could not take place until we returned to some form of normality, and that it would be premature to consult with residents and make decisions on whether to trial a closure of the bridge until then. Once the Council had seen how traffic settled down, they would reconsider the situation. The MAYOR proposed to recommend that the Council did not go ahead with the trial closure or consultation at the current time. The majority were in favour and it was so **resolved**.

Cllr G WILSON reported that unfortunately CCC's *Micro-asphalt and Surface Dressing* programme had not included work to fix the pothole situation in the Town.

Cllr ROUND had presented the proposals to LHI panel of County Councillors and was awaiting news on whether it had been accepted or not.

Cllr G WILSON explained that there were three projects proposed for inclusion in the 2021/22 Business Plan including; Updating the Neighbourhood Plan, production of a Transports Plan (procurement of contract) and hoped next year to submit an additional Local Highways Improvement Bid.

21/56 ENVIRONMENT REPORT:

Cllr HOOKER reported that the consultation period for the Skyworld planning application had ended and Huntingdonshire District Council's (HDC) planners would subsequently make their decision on 19 April. Cllr HOOKER confirmed that the budgets for those projects which would not be completed by the end of April, would be carried forward and added to the 2021/22 Portfolio Financial Plan.

Cllr HOOKER advised that the internal auditor had highlighted the problems of having two different Cemetery charges for residents and non-residents. The Group had discussed renaming the charges to '*Cemetery Fees*' and had agreed to use the existing prices on the price list times five. However, residents would be offered a 75% discount.

Town Clerk

Cllr HOOKER advised that the TOWN CLERK had confirmed that the Council, as principle tenants of the allotments, were responsible for clearing and maintaining the ditches there. The Council sublet the allotments to the Allotment Association; however, there was not a formal contract with them. Cllrs HOOKER and G WILSON would locate where the ditches were. The Portfolio Group would then discuss with the TOWN CLERK.

Environment
Portfolio /
Town Clerk

21/57 FINANCIAL AND ACCOUNTS:

If required, the TOWN CLERK confirmed that it would be possible to show the breakdown of spending on the credit card statement and advised that payments were reconciled to the appropriate cost code. The amount of electric and gas bills for the QES were rather high considering the halls were not currently in use. However, although very low, the heating was on continuously because of the air flow system installed in the halls. It was noted that the electricity bill also covered the public toilet and outside lights.

Town Clerk

The list of payments were approved and would be authorised by Cllrs Conboy and G WILSON.

Cllrs Conboy
and G Wilson

21/58 BUSINESS AND FINANCE REPORT:

Cllr THOMAS did not require any decisions making by the Council, however, he wished the following actions to be noted:

The Five Year Rolling Plan had been sent to the Portfolio Group and Committee Chairs for review and amendment at the next group meetings. Formal adoption would be considered by the Council at the April Town Council meeting.

Annual Newsletter and Delivery was due to be published in May. The MAYOR would provide the foreword and all the groups and the Personnel Committee were advised to start drafting their contributions for submission to the TOWN CLERK. A final draft would be presented at the April Town Council meeting. The MAYOR asked for sight of the Portfolio reports in order to prepare the foreword.

All to Note

Cllr Thomas

Cllr THOMAS advised that the TOWN CLERK still required nominations for the **Mayoral Chair, Portfolio Groups and Personnel Committee** in time for the April Town Council meeting.

All to Note

Cllr THOMAS reported that at the current time it was not clear whether a Christmas Event may be possible. However, those Councillors interested in being involved with the project should contact the TOWN CLERK about forming a **Christmas Event Working Group**.

All to Note

21/59 MULTI WHEEL FUN TRACK (MWFT)

The TOWN CLERK, in her capacity as the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), confirmed that she had been required to take advice from the Monitoring Officer at HDC. This had been following concerns raised by another Councillor, reported to the TOWN CLERK, about the way the tender process for the MWFT project had been dealt with. In order to protect the Council and the Councillors, the TOWN CLERK instructed Cllrs G WILSON and ROUND to review the management of the MWFT tender process. The review was confidential and not for the public domain as it detailed financial and personal Information. Cllr G WILSON provided the Council with their findings and wished to agree the following recommendations on the management of this and similar projects:

- Councillors are reminded of the process of setting and varying budgets
- HDC should be consulted to confirm that the project does not require planning permission
- the freeholder should be notified of the Council's plans
- the impact on residents in Roman Way and the route to it is assessed and Council advised of the impacts
- the criteria to be used to assess tenders should be produced when the specification is being developed and agreed with Council
- the Town Clerk keeps a record of tenders received and formally passes this list to the group reviewing the responses.
- the Property Working party, working with the Town Clerk, provide further justification to Council as to why the three firms have been discounted

- all correspondence with tenderers should go through the Town Clerk, in accordance with the Council's current procedures
- the Property Working Party, working with the Town Clerk, should present a full options appraisal to Council on what can be delivered for £80k (or less) and what for £90k
- the Property Working Party should review what additional measures might be needed and their costs, for example new litter bins, benches and improvement of the unofficial footpath to Romans Way
- Council agree a clear five year Business Plan show priority projects, and identify how they will be managed and financed
- a "teach-in on public sector procurement and its application in the Town Council is arranged for all Councillors all advice / instructions from the Town Clerk, particularly on financial and procurement issues, are confirmed in writing.

Following which, a statement was read by a member of the Working Group.

The Council discussed how the project could be progressed. The Working Group agreed that with the support offered by the MAYOR, they would continue with the project to fruition. The Council agreed that the review had caused discomfort amongst the Council and felt now was the time to move on and 'walk together as a unified Council'.

The MAYOR proposed to recommend that the Council should accept the recommendations in the review paper and for the Working Group, with the support of the MAYOR, should continue with the project. The majority were in favour and it was so **resolved**.

21/60 PERSONNEL REPORT:

Cllr WORTHINGTON confirmed that the TOWN CLERK had completed all of the staff appraisals and, as a result, reported that a staff member had requested to reduce their hours to 10 hours per week with the view to leaving at the end of the year. The TOWN CLERK had looked at various options; either recruiting someone on a fixed term contract or instructing an external party to process tenders to alleviate pressure on staff.

Cllr WORTHINGTON and the TOWN CLERK were currently in the process of updating the Mayor's Handbook and also the Staff Handbook. They would also be looking at create a Whistleblowing Policy for Councillors, similar to that used by employees.

The MAYOR thanked the Councillors, Town Clerk and Minute Taker for their time and also for their good humour, at what might have been a difficult meeting.

The meeting closed at 21.23