

BANBURY TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of Banbury Town Council held as a virtual meeting on Tuesday, 15 September 2020 at 6.30pm.

Present: Councillor Colegrave (Town Mayor)
Councillors: Bell, Beverly, Bignell, Cherry, Clarke, Dhesi, Donaldson, Fatemian, Harrison, Hussain, Kilsby, Mallon, Mepham, Milne Home, Richards and Wren.

Officers: Mark Recchia (Town Clerk)
Mark Hassall (Deputy Town Clerk/RFO)

C.9/20 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Banfield, Beere, Ross and Woodcock.

C.10/20 Declarations of Interest

None.

C.11/20 Minutes of the Last Meeting

IT WAS RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 June 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

C.12/20 Communications

None.

C.13/20 Questions - Elected Members and Members of the Public

None.

C.14/20 Income and Expenditure

The Council considered a report prepared by the Deputy Town Clerk/RFO comparing year-to-date income and expenditure with the projected annual budget to 3 September 2020.

The Deputy Town Clerk/RFO drew attention to the fact that overall, the Committees were within forecast. Underspends versus the projected budget were £294k across all services, made up of General Services underspends of £133k and Resources underspends of £161k. This was mainly caused by expected YTD underspends of timing of grounds maintenance charges and capital works, particularly providing public toilets in Peoples Park, offset by timing of upcoming refurbishment of MUGAs at Stanbridge & Hill view and Ferriston play area.

The remaining variances were addressed as follows:

- Corporate management costs (legal costs) (£10k)
- Timing of salary costs in Central Administration (£34k)
- Cancelled events (net impact saving of (£51k) to date)
- Elections delayed to 2021 (£23k)

RESOLVED to receive and note the Income and Expenditure report.

C.15/20 Review of Internal Control Systems for the Financial Year 2020/21

Members considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk/RFO indicating that the Council was required, under the Accounts & Audit Regulations, to carry out an annual review of the effectiveness of its internal audit procedures.

The Council was asked to review the Council's records and control systems for 2020/21. Members' attention was drawn in particular to the need to consider whether the various internal audit measures in place were commensurate with the risks involved.

RESOLVED that no changes be made to the Internal Controls programme as set out in the report.

C.16/20 Risk Management Policy

The Council conducted an annual review of its Risk Management Strategy/Policy on the recommendation of the Council's External Auditor.

RESOLVED that the Risk Management Policy (as set out in the report submitted) be approved.

C.17/20 Financial Risk Assessment 2020/2021

The Council considered a report from the Deputy Town Clerk and RFO submitting the 2020/21 Financial Risk Assessment.

RESOLVED that the Financial Risk Assessment for 2020/21 be approved.

C.18/20 Local Authority (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (As Amended) – Parish Allowances Schemes

The Committee considered a report of the Town Clerk, following the annual consideration given to the level of Members' Allowances by the Parish Remuneration Panel appointed by the District Council. Council had previously resolved not to adopt a Members Allowance Scheme under the Local Authorities (Members Allowance) (England) Regulations 2003 (Minute R.7/03 refers) but it had accepted that travelling and subsistence allowances as set out in the Parish Remuneration Panel's reports should be paid for approved duties outside the town of Banbury (Minute R.53/03).

Members were advised that the Panel had recommended no change to the level of travel and subsistence allowances for 2020/21.

RESOLVED that the no change be made to the travelling and subsistence allowances as recommended by the Parish Remuneration Panel.

C.19/20 Treasury Management Review

Members were advised that under the Local Government Act 2003 the Council was required to determine an Annual Investment Strategy. It was suggested that the Council be invited to adopt the existing policy without amendment.

RESOLVED that the Council formally adopt the Treasury Management policy as set out in the report submitted.

C.20/20 Annual Return 2019/20

The Annual Return 2019/20 was yet to be received from the External Auditors at the time the meeting took place, as such the item was deferred.

C.21/20 Confidential Business Exclusion

RESOLVED that, in accordance with Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the items set out below on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the general interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

SUMMARY of items discussed during confidential session

C.22/20 Acceptance of Tenders

Following approval of the 2020/21 budget estimates by the Council several tender exercises had been undertaken for a number of schemes over the summer months. These were:

- a) MUGA refurbishment at Stanbridge & Hill View Parks
- b) Replacement of Ferriston play area
- c) Replacement of Safety Surfacing at various Play Areas
- d) People's Park Café Project

The tenders were opened by the Chairman of General Services Committee on 17 July for contracts a) to c). Five companies tendered for Contract a) with one tender subsequently being withdrawn. The lowest valid tender was submitted by Play & Leisure Ltd in the sum of £63,088.40. Eight companies tendered for Contract b) again with one tender being withdrawn. The lowest valid tender was again submitted by Play & Leisure Ltd in the sum of £35,513.65. Two companies submitted tenders for Contract c) with the lowest tender being received from Caloo Ltd, in the sum of £49,280.00.

Tenders for the Café project were also opened in July by the Chairman of General Services Committee. The lowest tender (£676,405 subject to arithmetical checking) was submitted by C J Charles and Sons Ltd. This was considerably in excess of the budget provision available and had required a re-appraisal of the project, as had the impact of Covid 19 upon the catering industry.

RESOLVED that the Council:

- 1) Notes the report on tenders received for the projects outlined;
- 2) Authorises the Town Clerk to enter into contracts with the successful tenderers for Contracts a) and b) (Play & Leisure) and Contract (c) Caloo) in the sums set out; and
- 3) Declines to accept any of the submitted tenders for Contract d) People's Park Café Project.

(Note: following the meeting it was discovered that the report had contained mis-information in that, whilst the lowest priced tender for Contract (b) "Ferriston Play Area" had indeed been submitted by Play and Leisure, this was not a price based tender exercise and the successful tenderer, following public consultation and assessment of the Designs submitted, had been Hags, at a cost of £46,000. The matter was therefore to be re-submitted to the next meeting of Council to amend).

C.23/20 People's Park Capital Works Update

Council considered a report submitted by the Town Clerk updating Members on various capital works taking place in or planned for People's Park, which had been launched to mark the Centenary of the Park.

(a) New Toilet Facilities/Mess Room and Covered Demonstration Area

The Town Clerk reported that work was nearing completion on the new toilet, mess room and covered demonstration area within the Community Garden that had replaced the former dilapidated prefab building and polytunnels. As well as providing much needed public toilet facilities in the park for the first time in over 25 years, the building would provide a new mess room facility for the in-house parks team whilst working in the park and a covered demonstration area for various outdoor workshops.

The Contractors (Hackwood Homes) were currently working through a snagging list. However, extensive groundworks had been required as part of the build and this had left the tarmac area around the building in an unsafe condition, with trip hazards. Whilst the area could have been resurfaced as a contract extension, it was felt that this was not within the scope of the original tender and that it was preferable for these works to be re-tendered separately as part of a re-landscaping project for the rest of the Community Garden. As such, a temporary paved footway was to be installed to allow access to the toilet block.

(b) Landscaped Garden

During the 2020/21 budget setting process a budget provision had been made for a re-landscaping of the remainder of the Community Garden area. This area was used as a garden store/depot facility by CDC parks contractors before its transfer to BTC and was not seen as an integral part of the public park. When it was taken over by BTC it was given a facelift by the Park Rangers and was maintained through voluntary effort rather than as part of the GM contract.

The Community Garden would originally have been a Victorian Walled Garden forming part of the Neithrop House estate. With the refurbishment of Neithrop House itself now complete and the new toilet block and covered demonstration area also nearing completion, there was now an opportunity to focus upon re-instating this area and making it into a place that could complement and add to the park's offer. Design proposals would be brought before Members in due course, ahead of tendering for landscaping works. It was also suggested that some thought be given to a re-branding and re-naming of the area, to differentiate it from the Banbury Community Action Group "Community Garden" at Bridge Street.

(c) Café Project

As was reported under the previous item (Minute C22/20), tenders for the Café project came in substantially above the project budget. Discussions were ongoing with the QS and Design Team around the reasons for the large disparity, but Members were reminded that the original scheme had been heavily amended to meet planning requirements. This, together with the impact of Covid 19 on the catering industry, had undermined the viability of this project in its current form and necessitated a re-appraisal of the available options. These were however limited by very tight planning controls governing the setting of the Neithrop House listed building, the former Victorian Toilet Block building and the parkland setting.

In addition to seeking Members agreement to not proceed with the Café plans as currently designed, a steer was sought on the preferred way forward so that officers could begin examining these and working up alternative proposals for the site. Members supported further discussions with planners being undertaken on the under-mentioned options:

- Extending the Victorian Toilet Block with a modular building similar to the new Toilet Block/Mess Room erected within the People's Park walled garden. This structure had been provided at much lower costs, whilst still meeting all planning requirements and appeared to represent good value for money;
- Constructing a separate modular style structure beside but independent of the Victorian Toilet Block; or
- Refurbishing the existing Victorian Toilet Block within the current building envelope to create a smaller, Kiosk style catering offer – this option was worth exploring as it would bring a redundant building back into use and be less problematic in planning terms, whilst carrying less risk of a lack of business viability in a Covid 19 secure environment.

RESOLVED that the Council:

- (a) Notes the update on Capital Works within People's Park;

- (b) Asks Officers to work up proposals for re-landscaping of the Community Garden area; and
- (c) Does not proceed with the Café proposals as currently designed but instead ask Officers to explore the Options outlined above with planners and, if favourable responses are received, to work up costings for these and report back.

The Meeting ended at 7.20pm.