

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee Meeting held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 4 August 2020, on-line via Zoom.

PRESENT:

COUNCILLORS: Lynne Grimshaw (Chair) Victor Bridges
Marjorie Chambers Nicola Chambers
Matthew Cuthbert Stephen Fenwick
Jim Lang Lawrence Henderson
Kris Lavery Liam Lavery
Mark Purvis Tom Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE: Mike Slaughter – Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer
Stephen Humphrey – Funding & Projects Officer
Sharon Parmley – Senior Administration Officer (minutes)
Members of the Public - 0

FGS 20/023 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors, Eleanor Armstrong, Avril Chisholm, Brian Gallacher, Ken Parry, Pauline Thompson and Bob Walkinshaw.

FGS 20/024 2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS.

Cllrs. V.Bridges and M.Chambers declared an interest in Agenda item No.8 Allotments – Capital Works Programme 2020/21.

FGS 20/025 3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING.

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 25 February 2020, were agreed and signed as a true record.

FGS 20/026 4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST MINUTES.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

FGS 20/027 5. SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS.

The Town Clerk submitted a full schedule of payments and income for the financial period 19 February to 27 July 2020.

Resolved:

That, the Schedule of Payments for the financial period 19 February 2020 to 27 July 2020 be formally agreed and approved.

FGS 20/028 6. APPLICATIONS FOR FUNDING SUPPORT.

The Funding & Projects Officer presented an application for funding support from a newly constituted organisation “Creativity in the Community”.

Members were informed that an amount of £750 had been requested from the group to purchase a laptop computer & printer and a teaching whiteboard. The equipment was required to support new training and development activities in Ashington specifically targeted at disadvantaged and marginalised people using arts and creativity-based programmes. The aim of the organisation was to help to build the abilities and self-confidence of all participants leading to improved life chances and opportunities.

Members were further informed that “Creativity in the Community” was recently awarded £10,000 from the National Lottery funder “Awards for All” to provide the courses over the next twelve months.

Resolved:

That Creativity in the Community be awarded a grant of £750.

FGS 20/029 7. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2020/21.

The Town Clerk presented the budget report in detail and highlighted for members the impact of COVID-19 on the planned agreed practical work programmes and expenditure. Key points included the following:

- Event Cancellations - the Northumberland Miners Picnic and Fayre Day had been cancelled a combined saving of £18,000. Members were reminded however that an emergency Covid-19 fund had been established with a virement of £10,000 from events.
- An expected saving was likely in the budget provision for the Service Level Agreement (SLA) at Hirst Park. There had been delays in the finalisation of the major Northumberland County Council (NCC) capital improvement project to re-vitalise the park; as a result, additional maintenance costs had not accrued and no formal SLA had yet been agreed.

Members were reminded that as part of the major Hirst Park capital project the Town Council as a key partner had agreed in 2017, to meet 50% of identified enhanced maintenance costs on an annual basis. Full budget provision of £23,680 had been included in the 2020/21 core budget.

- Despite the unexpected and major impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, members were advised that the Town Council had

safely continued with the major horticultural improvement work on Station Road. Members were informed that there had been significant logistical and procurement problem faced during the pandemic with new wholesalers and retailers but the new Horticultural Officer had done an excellent job under very trying circumstances; it was hoped that members had noted the improvements made.

Members were further informed that, in delivering the horticultural service, use had been of accommodation within the new Growing Zone at Hirst park for the deliveries and storage of plants and flora and it was hoped that a long-term agreement could be reached for the Town Council to operate the Horticultural Service from within Hirst Park on a continued basis via a formal tenancy agreement. Members were reminded that the Horticultural Officer was on an initial 2-year fixed term contract and informed that a report on the development of the service would be part of the budget planning for 2021/22 as it was now clear that the Town Council were the responsible body.

The Town Clerk reported that a formal seasonal SLA with NCC was still part of the current service for maintenance work although it would be re-visited and reviewed ahead of 2021/22. The Town Clerk informed members that there was real scope to look at scrutiny of the SLA with a view to the consideration of a full in-house service including the potential for a trainee or apprenticeship.

Resolved:

That the Budget Monitoring Report for the financial period 1 April to 31 July 2020 be formally agreed and approved.

FGS 20/030 8. ALLOTMENTS – CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAMME 2020/21.

The Town Clerk informed members of the proposed improvement works to the North Seaton Colliery Allotment Site, as part of the Capital Works Programme for 2020/21, and to formally request financial support to enable completion of the work.

Members were informed that significant improvement works had taken place at the allotment site in recent years with external funding of £19,000 secured to carry out some of this work. Works had included new external fencing, roadway improvements and removal of redundant plots. Volunteers from the North Seaton Colliery Allotment Association had also carried out significant improvements and brought redundant plots back into use. The allotment site has 76 allotment plots with an estimated 400 residents regularly benefiting from activities.

The proposed work would improve 300m of roadway and provide additional parking spaces for plot-holders. The current surface of the roadway was of poor quality with limited parking which caused access issues for an increasing number of elderly and disabled plot holders.

To develop the project Ashington Town Council had worked closely with the Allotment Association. The total cost of the project was £4,300. In terms of funding, Cllr. J.Lang had made a commitment of £2,000 to the project and the Allotment Association had made a commitment of £500 from their own funds. A sum of £1,800 would be required from the Town Council's Allotment Fund to allow the full project to proceed.

Resolved:

That:

(i) Finance & General Services Committee formally notes the report and acknowledges the success of North Seaton Colliery Allotment Association in securing £2,500 funding toward the scheme: and that

(ii)The Town Council agree a contribution of £1,800 from the Council's Allotments Fund to in order complete the required capital work.

FGS 20/031 9. MEMORIAL TO JACK CHARLTON.

Cllr. Liam Lavery presented a motion to the meeting that *“noted and recognised the wonderful contribution made by the late Jack Charlton during his life; noted the fondness by which he is remembered on both sides of the Irish Sea and the high esteem in which he will always be held in his hometown”*.

Members were informed that a public *“Go Fund Me”* campaign had already been set up to raise funds for a Jack Charlton statue and that the current fund stood in excess of £3,000.

The Town Clerk reminded members that at the meeting, a letter to the Council, from a member of the public, had also been circulated requesting that formal recognition be properly given to commemoration of the 1966 World Cup and footballing achievements of the Charlton Brothers. The Town Clerk advised members that Northumberland County Council (NCC) had also indicated that they wished to see recognition in Ashington of the Charlton Brothers sporting achievements and that support, including funding, would be considered for such a project.

Members were concerned that there would be possible confusion with the *“Go Fund Me”* public campaign and how any similar Council project

would be best taken forward. The Town Clerk advised that, after discussion with Cllr.L.Lavery, and prior to any consideration by the Committee, it would likely be the case that the Town Council would be asked and expected to take on and oversee both the delivery of any agreed project/s and the safe management of public monies, including those given via the public campaign.

Resolved:

That the Committee agree to:

- (i) Pursue a lasting memorial for “Big Jack” in his hometown, a community that meant so much to him over his life,**
- (ii) Discuss the proposals with the community and Jack’s family to ensure a fitting memorial to a man who would always be a hero to our town,**
- (iii) Explore the idea of erecting a statue of Jack Charlton in the town,**
- (iv) Work with Northumberland County Council to discuss and develop a separate commemoration project of the of the 1966 World Cup and footballing achievements of the Charlton Brothers,**
- (v) Set up a Working Group to take the projects forward and to report progress to future meetings of the Committee, the Working Group members to be Cllr.L.Lavery (Chair), Cllr.J.Lang, Cllr.M.Purvis together with the Town Clerk,**
- (vi) Seek to identify and source external funding from both the public and any other identified private funding sources as much as possible; and**
- (vii) Subject to the confirmation of funding commitments and level, to then identify and consider the project financial contribution to be made by the Town Council.**

FGS 20/032 10. IMPROVEMENT WORKS/FOOTPATH REPAIRS – ST JOHNS CEMETERY.

Improvement works and footpath repairs to St Johns Cemetery were deferred until the next meeting of Finance and General Services Committee, to enable Cllr. M.Purvis to obtain all costings for the project.

FGS 20/033 11. ENTRANCE FEATURE DESIGNS.

Cllr. Matthew Cuthbert presented a motion to the meeting to consider, discuss and agree the final designs and locations for two new proposed entrance features on the B1334 (North Seaton Entrance) and A196 (Stakeford Entrance).

Cllr. Cuthbert advised that the work had been stalled by the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown of external contractors and businesses. Members were informed that design work for the plinths had only recently been concluded with the receipt of designs in keeping with the current entrance features and that the Council was now in a position to move forward with this much-awaited work.

Resolved:

That Finance and General Services Committee:

- (i) Agree the plinth designs and locations for the permanent entrance features at both identified locations, B1334 (North Seaton Entrance) and A196 (Stakeford Entrance) to the town,**

- (ii) Agree the award of the contract work to Branbledown Landscape Services Ltd in the sum of £16,454.00 plus VAT, to include:**
 - **Construction of 2 no. plinth walls and installation of approved signage**
 - **Supply and planting of extra heavy standard trees to the rear of the walls**
 - **Creation of feature planting beds 5m2 to front of the walls to town council specification**

- (iii) Agree an additional contingency sum of £3,500 to cover required externalities, including any identified hard dig, contaminated material and works with services.**

FGS 20/034 12. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS.

There was no other urgent business.

FGS 20/035 13. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING.

The next meeting of the Finance and General Services Committee was provisionally scheduled 27 October. (Venue/Format to be agreed).

The Meeting ended at 9:00pm.