

**MELTHAM TOWN COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 04 JANUARY 2021**

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| Present via video conference or phone: | Councillor Buchanan (Chair), Councillor Bampton, Councillor Sonia King, Councillor Haigh, Councillor Keighley, Councillor Lyons, Councillor Storey and Councillor White |
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**PUBLIC SESSION:** Three members of the public were in attendance. Two had attended in connection with agenda Item 14 Grant Application (2) and one in connection with agenda Item 10 Purchase of Land. The Chair suggested that the members of the public may wish to make any comments when the agenda item was discussed rather than in the Public Session and they agreed.

**21/01 NOTICE OF THE MEETING**

Taken as read.

**21/02 ADMISSION TO THE PUBLIC**

Pursuant to section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 as amended by the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 (as amended)

**RESOLVED:** That because of the confidential/ personal/ commercially sensitive or legally prejudicial nature of the business to be transacted, the public and the press leave the meeting during consideration of the following: -

- Item 3 Councillors' reasons for absence – to consider this item in private as it would divulge personal confidential information
- Item 8 Contractors fees and charges – to consider this part of the item in private as it would divulge commercially sensitive / personal information
- Item 10 purchase of land – to consider this item in private as it would divulge commercially sensitive / personal information

**21/03 APOLOGIES / REASONS FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies for absence were received.

**21/04 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Buchanan, Bampton and Keighley declared an interest under Appendix B of the code of conduct in respect of Item 9 Grant Application (1)

Councillor Keighley declared an interest in respect of Item 10 Purchase of Land due to a family member being employed by the valuation firm.

**RESOLVED:** To deal with agenda Item 14 Grant Application (2) followed by agenda Item 10 Purchase of Land next, hereafter the original agenda to resume

**21/05 GRANT APPLICATION (2)**

Councillors considered a community projects fund larger grants application from the Trustees of the Wilshaw Village Hall in the sum of £10,000.00 for works to Wilshaw Village Hall circulated with the agenda.

The two members of the public who attended in connection with this matter gave a short overview of the proposals for the development of Wilshaw Village Hall. They confirmed that planning approval would hopefully be received shortly. The Chair reiterated that the facility in Wilshaw was both wanted and needed and that the Town Council were supportive of the proposals. There were some questions from Councillors about additional funding sources. It was suggested that the Town Council work in partnership with the trustees where possible and would try and support this project both financially and with other non-financial support where it could. It was suggested that to ensure a regular dialogue between the Town Council and the trustees the matter should be placed as a standing agenda item on future Council meetings with the trustees being invited to attend to update and brief the Council on progress and any problems that had arisen.

**RESOLVED:** That the community projects fund larger grants application from the Trustees of the Wilshaw Village Hall in the sum of £10,000.00 for works to Wilshaw Village Hall be approved together with the necessary expenditure.

**21/06 PURCHASE OF LAND**

Councillors considered further correspondence in connection with a previous request to purchase land in the ownership of the Council circulated with the agenda. The member of the public attending the meeting in connection with this matter explained that a valuation had been obtained which valued the land both with and without planning permission for a garage. The member of the public explained that they would be prepared to purchase the land at the upper valuation and would take the risk that planning consent could be obtained for a garage. The member of the public also explained that in either case they would be willing to install lighting at no installation or running costs to the Council to provide light to the public thoroughfare adjacent to the area of land. This was welcomed by Councillors, but the Chair suggested any lighting scheme would need to be approved by the Council. A discussion took place on the need for the Council to retain some control over possible future development on the site if the land were sold. The prospective purchaser reiterated that the proposal was to construct a garage and Councillors were supportive of this but felt they would need some control over future proposed development by way of a covenant. The Council would also require any reasonable legal costs of the sale and any necessary valuations to be reimbursed by the purchaser. There was a discussion about whether a sale set a precedent for future approaches to purchase Council land. It was suggested that this prospective sale was being considered as the land in question did not in the Town Council's opinion have any significant amenity value and that any future approaches would need to be considered on a case-by-case basis with an assessment of the amenity value of the land in question. It was suggested that any monies realised from the sale should be ring fenced for improvements to the adjacent Council land. The Clerk suggested there may be several legal considerations which would need to be addressed.

It was therefore agreed that in principle the Town Council supported the sale of the land subject to obtaining legal advice on the prospective sale and any necessary

valuations. Any sale to be subject to a covenant restricting future development, an agreement on lighting provision and the purchaser paying the reasonable legal fees of the Town Council together with any necessary valuations.

The Town Clerk to liaise with the prospective purchaser to bring back more detailed proposals to Council.

#### **21/07 MINUTES**

It was proposed by Councillor Bampton and seconded by Councillor Haigh and

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on the 12 October 2020 be approved.

#### **21/08 MINUTES OF COMMITTEES**

It was proposed by Councillor Bampton and seconded by Councillor White and

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Planning Environmental and General Purposes Committee held on the 12 October 2020 be approved.

It was proposed by Councillor Bampton and seconded by Councillor White and

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Planning Environmental and General Purposes Committee held on the 26 October 2020 be approved.

It was proposed by Councillor Bampton and seconded by Councillor White and

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Planning Environmental and General Purposes Committee held on the 16 November 2020 be approved.

It was proposed by Councillor Bampton and seconded by Councillor White and

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Planning Environmental and General Purposes Committee held on the 7 December 2020 be approved.

It was proposed by Councillor Bampton and seconded by Councillor Buchanan and

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Properties Administration and Finance Committee held on the 12 October 2020 be approved

It was proposed by Councillor Bampton and seconded by Councillor Buchanan and

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Properties Administration and Finance Committee held on the 7 December 2020 be approved

#### **21/13 BUDGET MONITORING**

Councillors considered the budget monitoring report for the third quarter of the financial year circulated with the agenda.

Councillors agreed with the recommendations of the Properties Administration and Finance Committee from its meeting on the 7 December 2020 to a virement of £200.00 from the 'Postage and Petty Cash' budget head into 'IT costs' to cover the costs of Zoom and a virement of £5000.00 from the 'Ask Meltham' budget head into

'Park Reserves' which balanced the expected spend on projects in the last quarter against the fact that COVID-19 had limited the progress of some projects this financial year. The virement into Park Reserves was considered consistent with the outcomes of Ask Meltham.

**RESOLVED:** That a virement of £200.00 from the 'Postage and Petty Cash' budget head into 'IT costs' to cover the costs of Zoom be approved.

**RESOLVED:** That a virement of £5,000 from the 'Ask Meltham' budget head into 'Park Reserves' be approved

#### **21/14 BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2021/22**

Councillors considered the Grounds Maintenance Contractors annual costs for 21/22 which remain the same as in previous years and considered notification of a fee increase for 21/22 from another of the Council's main contractors which was accepted. Councillors noted that the proposed budget is likely to accommodate the increase in fees but is dependent on the quantity of work commissioned.

Councillors considered a recommendation from the Properties Administration and Finance Committee from its meeting on the 7 December 2020 that the Council approve the budget and precept for 21/22 as set out in the report prepared by the Clerk (which includes the suggested revisions to the 21/22 budget suggested by the Committee at its October and December meetings) circulated with the agenda.

In particular Council accepted the following recommendations:

- The establishment of a new budget head for events /activities in the park
- Where applicable a 2% inflation increase should be applied
- The budget for audit and accounting fees should be increased to cover the cost of the scribe accounting package
- The budget for IT costs should be increased to cover Zoom and Councillor emails
- The budget for postage and petty cash should be reduced to reflect reduced postal costs
- The budget for professional fees should be increased to reflect the increased number of tree surveys required
- The budget for salaries should be increased to cover any increases in employer pension contributions and increments
- The budget for devolved services should be reduced by £500 based on spend in previous years

Council also accepted the recommendation from the Properties Administration and Finance Committee that the capital grants scheme for 2021/22 should be reduced from £25k to £15K (£10k for general applications and £5k for shop front grant applications).

Council agreed that the draft budget for 21/22 and the resultant precept demand for 21/22 as set out in the report circulated with the agenda appeared acceptable but it was noted that the Council Tax base figures were not yet available from Kirklees Council so the effect on a Band D property could not yet be established.

#### **21/15 GRANT APPLICATION (1)**

Councillors considered a smaller grants application circulated with the agenda from the Friends of Robert Ashton Memorial Park in the sum of £500.00 to establish a bank account and purchase equipment and put on events in the park in the future. Councillors Buchanan, Bampton and Keighley answered some questions about the grant application intending to leave the meeting before councillors considered whether to approve the grant or not. However, it became apparent that the meeting would cease to be quorate, so this item was deferred until the next Council meeting.

#### **21/16 ACCOUNTS 2019/20 AND ANNUAL EXTERNAL AUDIT**

Councillors considered the annual return detailing the external auditor's comments circulated with the agenda and noted that the Notice of Conclusion of Audit had been prepared and posted on the Notice Boards and on the Council's website in accordance with the legal requirements along with the certified AGAR (Sections 1, 2 & 3). Councillors further noted that the audit process has now been completed for the year 2019/2020.

The Clerk explained that the Council had been subjected to a more detailed audit process this year as a result of expenditure increases as a result of the purchase of the Town Hall.

Councillors considered the matters arising from the review which were detailed in the external auditor report and certificate. The Clerk explained that two issues had been raised:

- That the authority had not restated the 2018/19 figure when revaluing assets in Section 2, Box 9 of the AGAR. This related to the revaluation of the toilet block in the park. The Practitioners' Guide allows smaller authorities to use any reasonable valuation method, provided that the prior year figure is restated for consistency and comparability which had not been done.
- The annual precept stated did not agree to the figure published by the precepting authority. All grants, including Council Tax Support Grant, should be shown in Box 3 but the very small of CTR grant for 19/20 had been included with the precept figure. The figures in Boxes 2 and 3 should read £125,707 and £24,309 respectively and would need to be restated next year.

It was decided that no further action was required.

**RESOLVED:** That the matters arising from the review detailed in the external auditor report and certificate required no further action save for restating the Box 2 and 3 figures for next year's AGAR.

#### **21/17 INFLUENCING TOWN DEVELOPMENT**

Councillors discussed what influence the Town Council has or could have in relation to development in the town, particularly the Town Centre. It was agreed to make this a standing agenda item.

#### **21/18 TREE SURVEYS**

The Clerk reported that surveys had now been completed at The Scout Hut Site/land adjacent to 175 Huddersfield Road and the three allotment sites owned by the Council. There were considerable recommended works required at all the sites of varying degrees of urgency. The Clerk briefly outlined some of the issues that were

arising and that there were a very large number of trees and keeping track of all the works was challenging. The Clerk stated she was creating an electronic system to monitor the position with each tree, but this was time consuming. The Council agreed to delegate to the Clerk the authorisation to proceed with all the recommended works provided the quotation received from the preferred contractor is commensurate with previous recent quotations and approved the necessary expenditure for the recommended works.

**RESOLVED:** That the delegated to the Clerk the authorisation to proceed with all the recommended works provided the quotation received from the preferred contractor is commensurate with previous recent quotations and approved the necessary expenditure for the recommended works.