

LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
MONDAY, 27 JULY 2020 AT 7.30 PM

Present: Councillors

- D Bowater (Chair)
- F Kharawala (Vice-Chair)
- C Palmer
- R Berry
- C Chambers
- K Cursons
- A Dodwell
- M Freeman
- S Jones
- T Morris (left 20:09 hours, re-joined 21:25 hours)
- G Perham
- V Harvey
- S Hemmings
- D Scott (left 22:10 hours)
- J Silverstone
- P Snelling
- R Goodchild
- A Gray
- S Owen

Also in attendance:

- M Saccoccio, Town Clerk
- S Sandiford, Head of Democratic and Central Services/Deputy Town Clerk
- V Cannon, Head of Cultural and Economic Services
- I Haynes, Head of Grounds and Environmental Services
- C Cummins, Finance Officer
- M Jahn, Committee Officer
- S Wilbur, Microshade Business Consultants Ltd
- Graham Mountford, BLEVEC
- June Tobin, Leighton-Linlade Helpers
- Cllr K Ferguson, Central Bedfordshire Council

Members of the Public: 7

Town Mayor Councillor D Bowater welcomed everyone to the first remote meeting of the Council and asked for a minute's silence in recognition of those who had lost their lives in the COVID-19 pandemic.

92 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received and were accepted from Councillor

B Spurr.

93 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests, and the nature of those interests, that they might have in any of the items under consideration at the meeting.

Councillors Bowater, Harvey, Cursons and Jones declared a personal interest as members of the COVID-19 Task Force. Councillor C Palmer declared a personal interest as a volunteer with the Friends of Leighton-Linslade in Bloom.

No disclosable pecuniary interests were declared.

94 TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor Bowater advised that sadly, during the COVID-19 lockdown most fundraising events had had to be cancelled. A virtual Murder Mystery evening was held and enjoyed by all raising £200 for the Mayoral charities. The Town Council had also funded materials for safety visors and the donations received from residents and businesses had been added to the Mayor's Charity Fund.

Thanks were given to everyone for their hard work during these difficult times.

95 LEADERS' ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor S Jones, Leader of the Conservative group, spoke briefly to give thanks to all Town Council staff, councillors and volunteers from all organisations for their hard work during these times.

Although the unexpected events of 2020 had inevitably had an impact on planned work and projects, the refurbishment of the Pages Park play area was near completion and with the re-opening of the Splash and Play and other play areas, congratulations should be given to all concerned on achieving this under difficult circumstances. The opening of the multi-storey car park the following day was a welcome step to help in the recovery of the town centre, along with the temporary pedestrianisation. It was hoped that 2021 would be a better year although noted that the pandemic situation was far from over.

Councillor R Goodchild, Leader of the Liberal Democrat group, confirmed that he would continue as group leader with Councillor S Owen as group deputy. He informed Members that since returning to the Council he had been disappointed with the behaviour demonstrated at various meetings and that working together, it must be ensured that this did not continue.

Councillor Goodchild confirmed his group was in favour of a thanksgiving

service to honour NHS staff, key workers, volunteers and those affected by COVID-19.

96 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Council received the draft minutes of the Council meeting held on 27 January 2020.

Minute reference 64 (Bedfordshire Police): a comment was raised regarding the discussion during this item, which had not reflected the original request for Bedfordshire Police to present its policing plan for Leighton-Linslade. The question was asked whether this would be revisited at a future meeting.

Minute reference 66 (Leaders' Announcements): three councillors and the Town Clerk had attended the CPRE Neighbourhood Plan Workshop on 4 March 2020, which was felt to have been a good event. Several parishes represented at the event had already embarked on a Neighbourhood Plan and it was thought that others had been persuaded by the event to follow that same route. It was asked whether a report would be presented at a future meeting in order to allow the Council to reconsider this matter (following the agreement made in September 2019 to review in a year's time).

Minute reference 69 (Minutes of the Previous Meeting): it was clarified that the faulty lamp column was located by the flats at the Wing Road roundabout and that the safety bollards at the corner of Vimy Road were still in a state of disrepair.

Minute reference 76 (Budget and Precept for 2020-2021): A question was raised regarding the debate on this item and the fact that two councillors wishing to speak had not been able to do so. The Chair would respond to the question in writing outside of the meeting.

A question was raised regarding whether the implicit motion to receive and approve the previous meeting minutes was capable of amendment. It was confirmed that the minutes could only be amended if agreed to be inaccurate but that the implicit motion to receive and approve the minutes could be amended if agreed by majority vote to do so.

A motion was proposed by Councillor S Owen and seconded by Councillor R Goodchild for the Town Clerk to bring update reports to the next meeting of Council on 24 August in respect of the policing plan for Leighton-Linslade, land south of the High Street and an update regarding the Task and Finish group reviewing activities for older people.

Clarification was given that Chief Inspector Lee Haines had been invited to the October meeting of the Community Safety Sub-Committee, that Stephen Mooring of Central Bedfordshire Council would attend the next Partnership Committee to update regarding land south of the High Street and that an informal feedback session for the Older Persons Task and Finish group had been arranged for 13 August, with a written report to follow to the Cultural

and Economic Services Committee on 7 September.

On receiving this information, Councillor Owen confirmed he was happy for his amendment to the motion to receive and approved the minutes to be withdrawn.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 27 January 2020 be approved as a correct record and would be signed at a later date when safe to do so.

Council received the draft minutes of the extraordinary Council meeting held on 20 March 2020 and the Chair invited comment on each page.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 March 2020 be approved as a correct record and would be signed at a later date when safe to do so.

A Councillor asked to raise a point but the item had been concluded and the Councillor's hand had not been raised.

The Chair spoke to introduce an additional Mayor's announcement. Councillor S Owen raised a point of order that this was not on the agenda and moved that the next business be taken. This was seconded.

97 COMMUNITY RIGHT TO BID

Council received and considered a report to support residents in their request that the Town Council submit an application to Central Bedfordshire Council for the land adjacent to no.41 The Paddocks to be listed as an asset of community value. An amendment to the recommendation was made by Councillor Freeman and seconded by Councillor Jones. The recommendations were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED:

- (a) in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, that on behalf of the residents of the Paddocks, an application be submitted to Central Bedfordshire Council to have the land adjacent to no.41 The Paddocks listed as an asset of community value.**
- (b) to write to the owner of the land adjacent to no 41 The Paddocks suggesting that in lieu of many years of fees for maintaining the land, that the ownership of the land be transferred to the local authority.**

98 MARKET UPDATE AND PITCH FEES

Council received a report which gave a general update on market operations and the impact of COVID-19 and how restrictions were implemented.

A question was raised why this report had been presented to Council and not

to the Market Sub Committee. Council was informed this report was to keep members up to date with events concerning the relaunch of the Market following its weeks of closure during the COVID-19 lockdown.

The difficulty of the COVID regulations was acknowledged but it was requested that further consideration be given to the market layout and to the Saturday trading of the farmers' market. Thanks were expressed to all staff involved in the market and especially the Head of Cultural and Economic Services for providing information and keeping councillors up to date during COVID-19.

RESOLVED to note the report.

A further report was received regarding market pitch fees, including the financial impact of the pandemic on market income and a number of potential options for consideration. It was proposed that option 3 be taken forward and that this be reviewed in four weeks' time. The proposal was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED to endorse option 3 in the report: to continue free pitches for a further 4 weeks for permanent traders from 1st August 2020. Casual and speciality traders to be charged full fees upon their return. Market rents to be reviewed again at the next Council meeting on 24 August 2020.

99 COMMUNITY EVENTS UPDATE

Council received and considered a report regarding event cancellation due to COVID-19 restrictions and the re-allocation of budget to facilitate online and additional activity instead. Council was advised of the delivery plans for VJ Day celebrations on 15th August 2020 which would utilise the underspend of earmarked reserves allocated to VE Day celebrations (38/CE).

Regarding Music in the Park, it was recognised that a band could not fit into the Bandstand whilst adhering to social distancing measures but suggested that perhaps a smaller group such as a jazz combo or similar, could play in the Bandstand at a future date. Another suggestion was to broadcast recorded music from the bandstand, for people to listen to whilst socially distanced.

There was support for a "thanksgiving" event in respect of the COVID-19 pandemic but agreed that there must also be recognition and remembrance of those lost or affected by COVID-19, either at that same event or at another civic event.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendations be approved and this was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED:

- (a) to cancel the live Music in the Park programme of events in August and September, including Last Night of the Proms and host online versions.
- (b) To create a trail and online content for Living History day focussed on the shops within the Town Centre.
- (c) To re-allocate a proportion of the Music in the Park budget to facilitate a Thanksgiving event for Key Workers, NHS Staff, volunteers, and those affected by COVID-19.
- (d) To re-allocate a proportion of the Big Lunch budget to facilitate additional music and leisure offerings within the Town Centre.
- (e) To use the Christmas Festival budget to hire 3D Christmas motifs and/or Christmas props to install within the Town Centre for the Christmas season and to cancel the Friday night Christmas lights switch-on event.

100 QUESTIONS

- (a) Graham Mountford (BLEVEC) spoke to give thanks to volunteers, the town council and officers for their work providing help to members of the community. The group set up had worked extremely well and provided an excellent service. He stated that although government food parcels would stop on the 31 July 2020 there would still be a need for them in the foreseeable future. It was essential the excellent work continued and that support was given to the group. Council thanked all involved in the emergency response for their hard work and agreed that help for the community should continue whilst needed.
- (b) A question was raised regarding the temporary traffic regulation order for the High Street and whether Central Bedfordshire Council were adding their own exclusions. It was confirmed that Central Bedfordshire Council could be contacted to clarify this.
- (c) No questions had been received from Councillors.

101 HIGH STREET PEDESTRIANISATION

- (a) Highways officers from Central Bedfordshire Council had been invited to attend the meeting but were unable to be present. It was suggested that this agenda item should be moved to the next meeting of the Council for urgent discussion.

A suggestion was made to urge Central Bedfordshire Council to provide a couple of hours of free car parking in the afternoons and to provide a time-slot once a week where the barrier could be manned, to provide blue-badge holders with vehicular access into the High Street. The lack of free parking was deemed to be a problem in the town with the Grovebury Road retail park offering free parking and Councillor Dodwell advised she had approached the portfolio holder at Central Bedfordshire Council about the potential use of land south of the High Street for temporary free parking. The impact on local businesses of reduced footfall was a concern.

It was confirmed that the previous arrangement for Wednesday afternoon free car parking in the Duncombe Drive car park would continue from this week.

RESOLVED to ask officers to request that Central Bedfordshire Council investigate potential options to increase free car parking opportunities in the town centre, for example periods of free parking in the car parks or use of other land such as land south of the High Street.

(b) Council considered a motion proposed by Cllr R Goodchild and seconded by Cllr S Owen: "that this Council urges Central Bedfordshire Council to re-open the multi-storey car park without delay as an important element of convenience for Waterborne Walk and the High Street shoppers".

It had been confirmed earlier in the day by a press release and by email that Central Bedfordshire Council would be opening the multi-storey car park from 8am on Tuesday 28 July. A suggestion that the motion be withdrawn was refused.

Discussion took place with a number of views expressed regarding the delay in opening the multi-storey car park and a perceived lack of communication.

On being put to the vote, the motion was not carried (5 for, 6 against, 7 abstentions).

RESOLVED not to support the motion as set out.

102 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2019-2020 AND ACCOUNTING STATEMENTS 2019-2020

(a) Council received and considered Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return. Further to a report made to the Policy and Finance Committee on 20 July 2020, the Committee had recommended approval of Section 1 to the Council.

RESOLVED to approve Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, the Annual Governance Statement, to be signed by the Town Mayor on behalf of the Council.

(b) Council received and considered Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, the Accounting Statements for 2019 - 2020. These were recommended for approval by the Policy and Finance Committee of 20 July 2020.

RESOLVED to approve Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, the Accounting Statements for the year ended 31 March 2020, to be signed by the Town Mayor on behalf of the Council.

103 ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

Council received a revised version of the draft Annual Report for 2019-2020 for consideration. This incorporated a number of points raised at the Policy and Finance Committee meeting held on 20 July 2020. It was proposed and seconded to approve the report. On being put to the vote, the motion was carried (15 in favour, 2 abstentions).

RESOLVED to approve the Town Council Annual report for 2019-2020.

104 MEETINGS AND APPOINTMENTS

Council received and considered a report regarding meetings and appointments, referring to the recent temporary legislation passed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to allow remote meetings and to allow appointments which would usually be made at an Annual Meeting to be made at another time. The hope was that despite the pandemic, a way would be found to resume face to face meetings as a better forum for debate. A number of recommendations were given consideration. On being proposed and seconded, the recommendations were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED to:

- (a) note the report.**
- (b) endorse the holding of an additional Council meeting on Monday 24 August (to be held remotely via Microsoft Teams).**
- (c) endorse the move of the September Partnership Committee Meeting from 10 September 2020 to 3 September 2020.**
- (d) to appoint a new Chair and Vice Chair at the Council meeting scheduled for 28 September 2020. The appointment to continue until the following Annual Council Meeting in May 2022.**
- (e) to endorse a further temporary amendment to Standing Orders such that Council meetings may take place in premises other than the White House, for the reasons set out in paragraph 5. This temporary amendment to remain in place until such time as Council resolves otherwise.**

Councillor T Morris re-joined the meeting.

105 COVID RISK ASSESSMENTS

Council received a report outlining COVID-19 secure risk assessments for the TACTIC building, Pages Park Pavilion, Linslade Memorial Pavilion and the Astral Park Sports and Community Centre.

After discussion it was confirmed that as our facilities are unsupervised hire only, the 2-metre social distancing rule should be adhered to and would continue until Government guidelines changed.

The Council was asked to consider approval of two recommendations in the

report. On being put to the vote, the recommendations were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED:

(a) to note the report.

(b) that Leighton-Linslade Town Council as employer endorses the Secure Risk assessments for The Teenage Advice and Information Centre, Linslade Memorial Pavilion, Pages Park Pavilion and the Astral Park Sports and Community Centre.

(c) that in order to ensure any future changes in either Government guidance or changes which need to be made locally, can be actioned swiftly, any proposed future amendments to COVID-19 secure risk assessments be authorised by Council by email, in accordance with the emergency decision making procedures resolved by Council on 20 March 2020.

106 COVID-19 PANDEMIC

(a) Members received and noted all decisions made by Council between 20 March 2020 and 30 June 2020, i.e. the period of the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions during which no physical meetings could take place. Decisions had been made in accordance with the emergency decision making process agreed by Council on 20 March 2020.

RESOLVED to note all decisions made by Council between 20 March and 20 June 2020, in accordance with the emergency decision making procedure agreed by Council on 20 March 2020.

(b) Members received a report regarding the financial impact of the pandemic on the Council's income. Even in a worst-case scenario, the Town Council was well positioned to meet the income shortfall caused by the Pandemic in 2020-2021. A COVID Support Fund earmarked reserve had been created and a full financial breakdown was provided to show where the fund total of £128,010 had come from (revenue budget underspend and additional income).

It was noted that income forecasting for 2021-2022 might prove difficult due to the changing situation with the pandemic.

On being proposed and seconded, the recommendations in the report were approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

1) to note the report.

2) to endorse the creation of an Earmarked Reserve (from the 2019/20 revenue underspend) to the sum of £128,010 for the purposes of meeting the anticipated shortfall in income caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

- 3) that any remaining income shortfall be drawn down from:
 - i) general reserves and/or
 - ii) revenue budget savings
- 4) to agree that the projects identified in the Town Council's 5 Year Financial Plan continue as soon as is practicable to do so.

(c) Council received and considered a report regarding the COVID-19 Task Force, along with an appendix providing a range of figures on the help given since March as well as testimonials from recipients of help.

Graham Mountford, BLEVEC Silver Commander and June Tobin, lead of the Leighton-Linslade Helpers (one of the organisations forming the Leighton-Linslade COVID-19 Task Force) both gave a verbal presentation of their work within the voluntary sector during the pandemic. It was felt that the Leighton-Linslade response to the pandemic had been exemplary and felt it was very important to continue this, as people affected by COVID would continue to require support even after the initial emergency phase was over. The services provided included food parcels, counselling, listening, collection and delivery of prescriptions as well as other help to individuals and families in the area. Over 1000 families had been given assistance since March.

Both representatives of the Task Force were thanked for their presentation and for attending the meeting.

It was noted that the Leighton-Linslade Helpers, as one of the groups under the Task Force umbrella, was about to become registered as a charity and this would enable it to seek funding.

It was proposed and seconded that in order to continue the meeting past 2200 hours, Standing Order 3(x) be suspended for a maximum of thirty minutes.

RESOLVED to suspend Standing Order 3(x) for a maximum of thirty minutes.

The Chair invited comment and two amendments were proposed by Councillor Owen and seconded by Councillor Goodchild; one to add to the recommendation in the report presented to Council and one to replace it, by requesting that a more detailed review take place at the next Council meeting rather than waiting until January 2021.

Debate took place regarding the original report and the proposed amendments. Several members of the Council reiterated their thanks to, appreciation of and admiration for all the volunteers who had set aside their personal circumstances to work so hard for others during the pandemic.

Councillor D Scott left the meeting.

Differing views were expressed regarding the second amendment, with

several councillors of the view that increased clarity was needed to improve the current structure and others of the view that any additional layer of bureaucracy would be unnecessary and possibly hamper the Task Force's ability to respond quickly and flexibly to the local demands of the pandemic.

A further suspension of Standing Order 3(x) was proposed and seconded in order to continue the meeting past 2230 hours, Standing Order 3(x) be suspended for a maximum of five minutes.

RESOLVED to suspend Standing Order 3(x) for a maximum of five minutes.

The two amendments proposed were seconded by Councillor R Goodchild and put to the vote with 9 in favour, 7 against and 1 abstention. One Councillor did not participate in the vote. The motion was carried.

RESOLVED:

1. That this Council places on record its appreciation of the organisations and individuals, whether members of the COVID Task Group or not, who have carried out such selfless work on behalf of the community of Leighton Buzzard and Linslade during the Coronavirus pandemic over the past four months.

2. That the Council wishes to review its role going forward in dealing with the pandemic, and instructs the Town Clerk to bring a paper to the Council meeting on 24 August that gives options on how best to continue that work including –

- (a) which organisations and individuals to partner with, rather than assuming that the present COVID Task Group is the best available going forward.**
- (b) how the democratic involvement of councillors can best be achieved.**
- (c) the objectives and terms of engagement with those groups/individuals.**
- (d) the funding needed for this continuing work.**
- (e) how the Town Council could be involved in a future lock-down if that happened.**

The meeting closed at 10:35pm.

I HEREBY CONFIRM THAT THE FOREGOING IS A CORRECT AND ACCURATE RECORD OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 27 JULY 2020.

Chair

24 AUGUST 2020