

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 18 APRIL 2017

PRESENT

The Deputy Mayor – Councillor Wood
Councillor Baddeley
Councillor Davies
Councillor Hall
Councillor Hart
Councillor Jones
Councillor Jackson
Councillor Lawson
Councillor Lovatt
Councillor McGuinness
Councillor Nicosia
Councillor Rogers
Councillor Rushton
Councillor Sheldon
Councillor Swift
Councillor Walley

Also in attendance:
Councillor Court
Councillor Hawley

96.15 APOLOGIES

The Mayor – Councillor Salt
Councillor Whilding

97 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- a Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Dispensations: Councillor Sheldon in any matters concerning Biddulph in Bloom. Councillor Hart in the Local Plan site specifics
- b Other Disclosable Interests. Councillor McGuinness as Churchwarden at St Lawrence's Church.

98 MINUTES

- a It was moved to sign the Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 21 March 2017.
- b It was moved to receive the Minutes of the meeting of the Burial Grounds Sub-Committee meeting held on 11 April 2017. Burial Grounds Committee was meeting more often due to increase workload.
- c It was moved to receive Notes from the Strategy Working Group meeting held on 3 April 2017.

99. CONSIDERATION OF THE ACTION PLAN FOR 2017/18

The Chief Officer introduced the action plan for the 2017/18 period that had been developed by the Strategy Working Group. This was ambitious and included all the current projects that were being considered.

Councillor Nicosia asked for clarification of a 'pop up shop'. Councillor Hart clarified that this was one method of using empty shops and providing opportunities for new traders.

Councillor Hawley noted that in relation to section 19 there was a 'big black hole' for Biddulph; no environment work been completed. Costings would be sought for this work as part of the Neighbourhood Planning process; the Chief Officer would investigate this further.

Councillor Rogers was pleased that consideration would be given to finding a suitable site to house a museum.

Councillor Hall proposed that the action plan should be adopted; this was seconded by Councillor McGuinness. Agreed.

100. NATWEST CLOSURE ON HIGH STREET, BIDDULPH

The Town Council had been informed that the Biddulph branch was closing on 12 October 2017. This was as a result of more customers using the telephone, online and mobile banking services. Congleton would be the nearest branch; customers could also deposit cash at the Post Office.

Councillor Rogers noted that there was always a queue at NatWest, it was disgusting that Biddulph was losing the facility; he noted that you cannot draw money out or pay money in online. The facility was needed in town; the closure left Biddulph with only one bank.

Councillor Wood thought the decision was disappointing. This town was losing a valuable asset; however, he felt it was a sign of the times. Royal Bank of Scotland made millions of pounds of profit, but the ones who had made this possible would suffer inconvenience or have to go through the process of changing banks. It was a case of 'profit before people'. Councillor Wood thought this was a sign of the times, we were losing things 'hand over fist' and protests 'fall on deaf ears'. He noted that elderly people did not like online banking.

Councillor Jones echoed Councillor Wood; he was disappointed that the Caring/Sharing image on television did not fit with reality. He felt the hardship of local people having to travel to the next town. He was very disappointed and felt that writing to NatWest would not make a difference. He mentioned an elderly lady on Biddulph Moor who would have to travel on 2 buses to Congleton to visit the bank. Councillor Jones could not understand the rationale; the Biddulph branch was always busy. He felt it 'beggared belief' and noted that NatWest must be keeping the building as it was retaining the cash machine facility.

Councillor Hall thought this Council should think differently; there were mobile banks years ago, he wondered if the multi-function facility of Councils Connect could be utilised to bring services back into town.

Councillor Lawson noted that in nearby Congleton, NatWest customers were queuing out of door. He noted that the Royal Bank of Scotland was owned by the taxpayer and was shutting branches in villages; however Biddulph still had the TSB.

Councillor McGuinness noted that years ago Biddulph had four banks he thought that a bank could not have a monopoly in a town. Councillor Hart thought that this was a

commercial decision and no longer under the rule of monopoly. Councillor McGuinness noted that business account holders cannot use the Post Office.

Councillor Hawley had worked in the banking industry on IT projects. He advised that banks had to consider the number of transactions over the counter in a branch and the proximity of the nearest branch. He was appalled that there were only two banks in the town, shortly to be reduced to one. He proposed that the Council's account is moved to the TSB as he did not wish it to close and encouraged everyone to do the same. Councillor Hart thought this was good advice

Councillor Jackson thought this was wrong; Biddulph had a population of 21,000, it was a sizeable town and this decision was 'morally wrong'; that a state owned facility could withdraw from this town. He was concerned about the impact of the decision on potential investment in the town. This Council would be failing in its duty if it did not raise concerns, Councillor Jackson condemned the decision and proposed that this Council write a strongly worded letter to NatWest Headquarters in the strongest possible terms condemning their decision; this was seconded by Councillor Rogers and agreed.

Councillor Nicosia noted that her teenage daughter was mortified that she would have to change banks; there would be another empty premises in the High Street. Councillor Nicosia noted that it was a nice looking building and she had heard of community banks starting up.

Councillor Rogers was dubious but thought this Council should fight.

Councillor Jackson proposed that a representative should come and talk to this committee, even though it was very unlikely that Natwest would change their decision. He noted that a number of elderly people do not like using cash machines due to security concerns. Councillor Hart thought that larger premises could be shared by several banks. Councillor Hawley thought this was very unlikely as each would require different access terminals at the counters. All were in favour

Councillor Hall proposed that the idea that Council Connect could host mobile banking be investigated. This was seconded by Councillor Lawson and agreed.

CHIEF OFFICER'S REPORT

1 Police and Crime Commissioner March Updates

- Biddulph Town Gladiators Lads and Dads Football Team have been awarded funding to purchase new training equipment for their Under 14's Football Team. They have used the funds to purchase new footballs, fitness equipment and mobile goals for the team.

2 Proposed Permanent Traffic Regulation Order

No Waiting at Any Time on A527 Congleton Road, Smithy Lane and Halls Road.

Objections to be received not later than 27 April 2017.

The meeting closed at 8.25 pm.

Signed Date