

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 20 FEBRUARY 2018

PRESENT

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

also in attendance

Councillor Hawley
Councillor Redfern

75.17 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence and reasons accepted were received from:

Councillor Salt
Councillor Swift
Councillor Whilding

Councillor Flunder

76. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- a Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Dispensations: Councillor Sheldon anything pertaining to Biddulph in Bloom.
- b Other Disclosable Interests: None.

77. MINUTES

- a. It was moved to sign the Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 16 January 2018.
- b. It was moved to receive the CONFIDENTIAL notes from the Town Deal meeting held on Friday 26 January 2018.
- c. It was moved to receive the Notes from the visit to the West Midlands Ambulance Service, Stoke Hub on Friday 26 January 2018
- d. It was moved to receive the Minutes from the Strategic Plan Working Group meeting on Thursday 8 February 2018

e. It was moved to receive the Minutes of the meeting of the Town Burial Grounds Sub-Committee on Monday 12 February 2018

78. DEFRA CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS TO TACKLE CRIME AND POOR PERFORMANCE IN THE WASTE SECTOR & INTRODUCE A NEW FIXED PENALTY FOR THE WASTE DUTY OF CARE (CONSULTATION CLOSES 26 MARCH 2018), EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ATTACHED - CLLR HART

Councillor Hart introduced this item. Householders have a responsibility to ensure that waste is disposed of properly, or face a £400 fine. He felt that most districts and boroughs would take this on board.

Councillor Lawson wondered who would be responsible for the removal of hedge cuttings.

Councillor Rogers felt it could be awkward to manage if a householder was having building work done- how would you control the disposal? This would be punishing the innocent and would be very difficult to manage.

Councillor Hart responded that householders have a duty of care to ensure that a suitable contractor is employed.

Councillor Jones added that contractors would issue a certificate of disposal and urged people to be diligent.

Councillor Wood had seen, first-hand, fly tipping on an industrial scale on Congleton Road and in Brown Lees; the cost for removal falls on the landowner. He added that this was a massive industry for criminal-minded people. The penalties are not as severe as they should be. There is a weakness in the current system and he welcomed changes that would crack-down on this criminality.

Councillor Lovatt welcomed the initiative but felt that it would not affect industrial/commercial tipping, and she was unsure if there were enough officers at SMDC to issue fixed penalty notices.

Councillor Hawley felt this was another reason to keep the tips open in Staffordshire.

Councillor Jackson added that China was no longer accepting plastic waste and wondered what impact this would have on the plastic recycling industry; he thought it would be massive.

Councillor Sheldon felt it was very, very unfair when tipping was carried out on private land or farm land; the owner became responsible for what was tipped. There were great gaps in the law and it was extremely unfair to individuals.

Councillor Hart queried what the Town Council's response should be.

Councillor Lawson proposed to support the consultation proposals; this was seconded by Councillor Jones and agreed.

Councillor Hart suggested that a letter is written to the District Council offering broad support and noting the points made by Councillors Jackson and Lovatt.

Councillor Lovatt asked for a further addition; Councils must make 'free of charge' provision at tips for small scale building debris. This would be added.

79. VERBAL UPDATE ON VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT EVENT

The Chief Officer and Events and Partnerships Officer had been working to coordinate a volunteer recruitment event. Groups across the town were in need of volunteers. The Events and Partnerships Officer had met with officers from Support Staffordshire. An event would be held on Friday 6 April 2018 running in conjunction with the Artisan Market, from 10-6pm. Anyone interested in volunteering should come to the Town Hall for more information. Kids activities and refreshments would be provided as this date is in the school holidays.

All were happy with this approach.

80. BIDDULPH GRANGE COUNTRY PARK- CLLR JONES:

a) REPORT ON FRIENDS MEETING, NOTES ATTACHED

Councillor Jones reported that the constitution had been adopted and agreed. The restoration of the leat had been agreed as a future project and a grant application had been made to the Moorlands Partnership Board. The next projects would be the restoration of the top path at the Himalayan Walk and the cave at the top of the Mile Walk.

b) VISITOR CENTRE MANAGEMENT

Councillor Jones gave a brief update; in September discussions had been ongoing in relation to the Town Council taking over the tenancy of the Visitor Centre. Since then, there has been rodent damage of the wiring. It would cost £2000 to make the building safe and £10,000 to make the kitchen safe.

Councillor Jones had suggested to Councillors Keith Parker and Edwin Wain (Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, SMDC) that the Biddulph Grange Country Park Friends (BGCPF) may possibly be interested in taking the Centre on in its current state, and would make it safe and useable. Councillor Hall had talked with Paul Hare (Assets Manager, SMDC) who would contact Councillor Jones regarding the proposal.

Councillor Jones noted that he had not made any commitment, but asked if the Town Council would be supportive if the group took on the Centre.

Councillor Wood asked if there was anything in the BGCPF constitution which protected Councillor Jones if it all went wrong. Councillor Jones responded that it was his goal not to be the Chair much longer, but BGCPF would not be taking liability on at all. Their role would be assistance with management; insurance and liability would be the responsibility of SMDC or Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, as appropriate. Councillor Jones saw this as an opportunity to have some premises to make use of, which might make some money.

Councillor Hall proposed that this Council support the scheme, in principle; this was seconded by Councillor Davies and agreed. Councillor Jackson wondered if this would limit the use of building for the future. Councillor Jones responded that if BGCPF took it on, it could become anything, such as a visitor centre. If the café was not viable, vending machines could be installed and the other spaces sublet.

Councillor Hart thought there was tremendous potential, the building was dry and clean.

Councillor Rogers agreed that it should be taken on in principle, but wondered if this Council would have control.

Councillor Jones responded that he was convinced it would not cost £12,000 to put the building right, but, if the management became our responsibility, any revenue would come to the Town Council.

Councillor Davies noted that local management was better as it could be run at a reduced cost. The garage could accommodate the market equipment. Careful measurements must be taken; he suggested that the tractor is taken down first to see if it can be accommodated. He cautioned that the tractor was not roadworthy on public roads.

Councillor Jones praised Sue Fletcher and the Chief Officer for the outstanding work done on the leat application and constitutions.

81. CONSIDERATION OF THE RE-INSTALEMENT OF A CROSSING PATROL AT KNYPERSLEY TRAFFIC LIGHTS - CLLR NICOSIA

Councillor Nicosia circulated drawings and statistics of the area.

The School Crossing Patrols (SCPs) had been removed from the crossroads in the summer and the lights had been changed from pelican to puffin. Large groups of children used the crossing to access the three schools that were in close proximity. The usage of the crossing by children under the age of 11 and the inability to use the crossing correctly were exacerbated by poor driving ability, e.g. 'red light running'.

Councillor Nicosia had carried out a study since the service had ceased. She explained the map of the crossings made by pedestrians. Councillor Nicosia had observed the crossing when taking her child to school, over about 3 sequences each time. There would be many more crossings over the morning.

Councillor Nicosia proposed that there needed to be a School Crossing Patrol, and this should be re-instated. It may be appropriate for the existing patrol on Tunstall Road to be re-located to Newpool Road. She felt that the 'warden' gave an authoritative figure in the area. This would also help to relieve the congestion on the A527, the main arterial route into the Potteries.

Councillor Nicosia noted that in 36 years of living close to the crossing, she had never seen it as bad as it was now.

Councillor Nicosia proposed that County Highways is asked to prioritise the reinstatement of the patrol on 'exceptional circumstances' and consider the feasibility of relocating the patrol from Tunstall Road to Newpool Road.

Councillor Jones could not see how this would stop the behaviour outlined, he suggested that the barriers are extended; this would go some way to prevent the diagonal pedestrian route. He applauded the work done by Councillor Nicosia.

Councillor Lawson agreed with Councillor Jones, there were two barriers at the spot, which did very well. Getting volunteers to patrol the crossing for 5 days a week was quite a job, which was why a puffin was installed; he felt it worked very well if used properly. Councillor Lawson considered that the danger was routes led by adults.

He confirmed that Councillor Flunder had suggested allocating money from the DHP fund to provide more barriers.

Councillor Hawley noted that the one main highway concern identified in the Neighbourhood Plan was the traffic lights and Knypersley crossroads. The patrol had been removed from a major artery of Biddulph; major concerns had been raised for the safety of our children. He asked if the diagonal crossing had ever happened when the patrol had been in place. Councillor Nicosia confirmed that it hadn't.

Councillor Hawley noted that loss of life had been a major concern; he supported Councillor Nicosia that this was special circumstances.

Councillor Hall congratulated Councillor Nicosia, he supported entirely her ideas of reinstatement or relocation of the patrol; this should be considered in conjunction with any additional barriers that Councillor Flunder could fund. This matter should also be brought to the attention of the parents.

Councillor Sheldon offered thanks to Councillor Nicosia for bringing a worrying situation to this Council and going to the trouble of making the maps. She supported additional barriers and cameras, and the reinstatement of the patrol. The number of pupils was increasing, the crossing had very, very intensive use by young people at certain times and the situation had come to a head.

Councillor Rogers felt it had become ten times worse since the patrol had been removed. The Tunstall Road crossing was a very quiet area; the patrol could be moved tomorrow, then the barriers installed.

Councillor Jackson thanked Councillor Nicosia for the work and time put in; the area where the current SCP was positioned was congested, it could alleviate one bottleneck if the patrol was moved and there would be no cost implication.

Councillor Davies supported the option to move the patrol and wondered whether the cameras could be moved to view the crossing, to support the proposal.

Councillor Nicosia noted that the beeps stop when a person was only half way across, which can cause concern, even though the light was still in favour of pedestrians. She added that at Wolstanton there was a zebra crossing with two patrol officers. She suggested that the Highways consultant that was to be commissioned by the Town Council should include this area.

Councillor Hall was concerned that funding for barriers would be lost if the work was not carried out before the end of March 2018; he proposed that the offer from Councillor Flunder for additional barriers is accepted, and that the request should be made for a SCP at this junction. This was seconded by Councillor Jones; all were in favour.

82. CONSIDERATION OF THE DRAFT ACTION PLAN FOR THE TOWN COUNCIL, 2018/19 - FINAL VERSION TO BE CONSIDERED BY TOWN COUNCIL ON 20 MARCH 2018.

The Chief Officer tabled a draft action plan for Councillors to consider. She reported that different projects had been discussed when setting the budget and the Strategic Plan Working Group had considered an early version of this document.

Members were encouraged to consider the draft action plan at their leisure for discussion at the next meeting of the Town Council.

The Chief Officer noted that the Neighbourhood Plan should reach a conclusion at the end of 2018 and would contain a section for 'Town Council recommendations'. This section would help to develop a Strategic Plan for 2019-2022.

It was proposed to receive this document by Councillor Hall and seconded by Councillor Rogers; all agreed.

83. CHIEF OFFICER'S REPORT

1. Support Staffordshire- Transport to Leek

Support Staffordshire have three minibuses, based in Leek. They are working with Staffordshire County Council to look at options for those that are isolated as a result of the removal of the 93 bus service. Support Staffordshire approached the Town Council to consider whether a scheme could be developed to support those Biddulph residents that can no longer get to Leek, possibly with a monthly transport scheme.

With approval from Committee members, this can be discussed in greater depth at the March General Purposes Committee meeting.

2. Maintenance of Biddulph Clocks

There are currently three clocks that require servicing in the town and three separate contracts. The Chief Officer is seeking quotations for a service contract that will cover all three clocks, for three years.

Quotations will be considered at the March General Purposes Committee meeting.

3. Improving services for young people

Councillor Flunder wishes Councillors to be aware that he is visiting local services with a view to considering improvements, as part of the ongoing investigations of the All Party Members Group to review services.

Exclusion of the Press and Public

The Chair to move:-

"That, pursuant to Section 100A(2) and (4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings whereby it is likely that confidential information as defined in Section 100A (3) of the Act would be disclosed to the public in breach of the obligation of confidence or exempt information as defined in Section 10 I (1) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act would be disclosed to the public by virtue of the Paragraphs indicated."

The meeting closed at 9.02 pm

Signed Date