

MINUTES OF THE CIVIC COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 8 SEPTEMBER 2015

PRESENT

The Mayor – Councillor Baddeley
The Deputy Mayor – Councillor Salt
Councillor Davies
Councillor Hall
Councillor Hart
Councillor Jackson
Councillor Jones
Councillor Lawson
Councillor McGuinness
Councillor Redfern
Councillor Rogers
Councillor Rushton
Councillor Sheldon MBE
Councillor Swift
Councillor Whilding
Councillor Wood

24.15. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Lovatt
Town Crier

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- a Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Dispensations: none were declared.
- b Other Interests: none were declared.

26. MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to sign the Minutes of the meeting of the Civic Committee held on 11 August 2015.

27. VILLAGE SIGNS

The Chairman invited local artist Mrs Deane to address the meeting. She explained that this project had been discussed many times over the years, with high costs being the biggest problem. She had recently decided to paint one of the signs and had visited a local carpenter for the wood. He had offered to carve these signs, ready for Mrs Deane to paint.

The main reason this didn't go forwards had been the cost, but County Councillor Lawson had offered to pay for this from his community fund. All aspects were, therefore, taken care of but Mrs Deane would like the blessing of the Town Council. She also asked what planning permission would be needed. The main reason they were so keen on this project was that Biddulph was once a collection of

villages/settlements and it was important that this history and knowledge of our heritage was maintained. There could be an interpretation of each sign to answer people's questions.

Councillor Jones asked where the signs would be sited and what they would look like. Mrs Deane said that the original idea was on a wooden post, like a pub sign.

Councillor Salt proposed that the Council supports the idea and suggested we make a tourism trail feature. She asked about future maintenance and Mrs Deane felt that this would be minimal, possibly re-painting every five years.

Councillor Rogers felt that locations were delicate, but was in favour of the idea. Councillor Sheldon seconded the proposal, saying that she fully supported enhancing the villages that make up Biddulph and wishing the project every success. All were in favour.

28. WAR MEMORIAL PUBLIC REALM WORKS

The Chairman reported that there had been articles in the local press and letters supporting the idea of moving the Memorial to Station Road. He felt that before any more money was spent on the current location the Council should perhaps consider this question.

Councillor Jones said that if it were to be moved at all, we should look at re-siting to the town hall frontage. Councillor Wood agreed that the landscape of the town was now changed and we should have the debate. He understood the historical aspect, but felt that a more serene location would be favourable.

The Chair said that a thorough public consultation was needed and suggested that this could perhaps be done via the local newspaper.

Councillor Rogers felt the railings should be retained for protection to the memorial and Councillor Sheldon said we should not lose sight of the fact that money was due to the Station Road area from Sainsbury's S.106.

Councillor Hart asked if there had been any comments in from the public yet. The Chief Officer replied that there had been two, both strongly opposed to moving the War Memorial. Councillor Hart felt it should be the decision of the public.

Councillor Hall commented that we hadn't been able to do anything about the traffic/pollution in its current location. Would it be better for the monument to be in a setting like Station Road?

Councillor Jackson said that those people who were most passionate about this would be the most vocal and that everyone else would be more ambivalent and wouldn't comment. He felt it was safer where it was with regards to pollution, but he feared that we would not be able to reach a consensus of opinion. There was a division within this Chamber already.

Councillor Jones said that a lot of people have an interest in the Memorial – look at recent Remembrance Sunday turnouts. We should definitely canvas opinion. Councillor Baddeley this Council could not make a decision without consulting the whole of the town.

Councillor McGuinness also pointed out that the town's traffic flow had changed – if it was moved, there would be seating and in a prime position, facing the Methodist church. War Memorials are always in the town centres.

Councillor Sheldon felt that the first step should be to ask our own British Legion what their feelings were. Councillor Salt thought that we would also need to consult the War Memorials Trust.

The Chair offered to contact the Royal British Legion to request their views and said that the consultation could be carried out via the local press. Councillor Jackson commented that this appears to have come from one letter in the Chronicle which made the front page. Councillor Sheldon said that this had been simmering for a while and had just come to the fore again.

29. SHOPPERS SURVEY

Councillor Salt spoke about the survey that she and Councillor Nicosia undertook during Biddulph by the Sea. Most people surveyed were there for Biddulph by the Sea. She said that they would do a comparison study later this month to see how the figures changed.

Independent shops didn't fare as well as Sainsbury's. The reasons given for not shopping in Biddulph were mainly poor choice, people wanted to see a clothes shop in Biddulph and a bigger variety of goods. Councillor Salt felt that this Council could encourage people to use the shops more in various ways.

The Chair thanked Councillor Salt for this excellent work. Councillor Lawson commented that the last market with car boot had proved very successful. This was obviously the way forwards.

Councillor McGuinness also thanked Councillor Salt for the survey and asked the Chair about the non-food retail area by the telephone exchange. Councillors felt this could be a death knell for the High Street.

Councillor Rogers commented that when we had a Town Centre Co-ordinator there was someone who could put time in to promote the town and the independent retailers. Town Centres were struggling everywhere, but it was nice to see people were coming in especially for events.

Councillor Hall said that much was in the hands of the businesses themselves. We could help, but they must help themselves. Councillor Hart said it was a matter of use them or lose them – internet shopping had really taken over. However, it didn't make it easier when shops close at lunch/half-day. Shops would close permanently if people did not use them. If a discount supermarket

opened on the by-pass we would lose more town centre shops. Councillor Hart Congratulated Councillor Salt on good snapshot survey

Councillor Jones agreed that the situation was not just here, it was all over the country. We were all guilty of going elsewhere. The days of a High Street purely for retail were numbered, but would need to look at being more of a social space.

The Chair said that it was clear to see from the survey how much people liked events and Councillor Lawson agreed we did need to put quality in. Councillor Wood informed members that Leek had just opened a Premier Inn and it was sold out completely. We should be looking at encouraging something similar. We needed to think outside the box how to attract people to the town centre, an attraction where people can stay would be excellent.

Councillor Sheldon said that the bypass land did get as far as a planning application, but that it wasn't progressed due to the economic climate. Every time you lose a retail outlet you undermine all the others. She was not feeling as gloomy as other members, as there are new shops opening and rumours of more. The other important issue was that Biddulph lacks work. Many residents work out of town and this is where they also shop. Councillor Sheldon felt we should invite all of the town centre to an informal meeting to resurrect the business group and to see how Town Council can help them.

Councillor Rogers informed Councillor Sheldon that there were moves for the Business Chamber to resurrect.

Councillor Redfern felt that this was an interesting survey, although done in the town centre so not getting views of those who don't use the town centre. Many people were housebound and so needed to rely on internet shopping.

Councillor Jackson thanked Cllrs Salt and Nicosia, saying this was a useful exercise. He said that he had learned, at the District Council, that 96% of people in Leek buy their food in Leek. Leek had a better range of shops, but its population was about the same size as Biddulph's. He thought that there was scope for another cheaper end supermarket here. Traders have to fend for themselves and come up with clever ideas.

Councillor Hart added that the dreadful recession meant the non-food retail didn't happen. We currently had 14% vacancies in Biddulph. He suggested we ask Sainsbury's what was happening to the shop units and ask the Regeneration Manager of the District Council also to find out.

Councillor Jones commented that there was still no coach parking in Biddulph. Councillor Salt said we should try to work with the Business Chamber and help them to get up and running and also invite the Regeneration Manager to a joint meeting.

Councillor Court said that the Biddulph Business Chamber was very successful when there was a Town Centre Co-ordinator in post – a driving force. The trouble was, there were not many retail businesses left. Many vacant units were

too small and very old – unsuitable. He agreed with the need for destination businesses. We should encourage businesses you cannot get on internet.

Councillor Swift felt that what we really want is what we've lost – it was sad that Biddulph could not even support a fresh vegetable shop.

30. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

- a Kissing gates project: a positive result on the structural survey of the footbridge had been received. We could now go ahead.
- b Fingerposts: the Chair had walked around town and listed possible sites where signage was needed. Some areas were quite cluttered with signs – we could possibly use an existing post in some places. He estimated we required two posts and four fingers and proposed to get costings. Other members made suggestions.

Councillor Jones requested one for Biddulph Moor Village Hall and one for the Trent Head. This would be looked at.

Councillor Jackson said that one post with lots of fingers was better than lots of posts with fewer fingers, to avoid street clutter.

The meeting closed at 8.35 pm.

Signed Date