

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF MUCH WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL HELD IN THE GUILDHALL MUCH WENLOCK AT 7.30 PM ON THURSDAY 14 JANUARY 2010

Present: The Mayor, Cllr Mr T Pinches, in the Chair.

Councillors: Mrs P Daffurn, Mrs A Dugdale, Mrs L Durbin, Mr M Grace Mr M Green, Mr E W Humphries, Mr R Stuart, Mr D R Turner and Mr P M Whiteman OBE.

In attendance: The Town Clerk, Mr R D May.

In the absence of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, Cllr Grace took the chair.

25 Apologies: Cllr Mr T Lathe

26 Declarations of Interest

Personal

None

Prejudicial

None

27 Additional Urgent Business: The Town Clerk advised that there were two additional items of business.

28 Much Wenlock 2012 Legacy Group update

Cllr Grace provided an update to councillors on the council's work with Shropshire Council to develop a number of Much Wenlock-related items to be included in a Shropshire tourism package bid that is linked to Defra's Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). Cllr Grace advised that the Legacy Group had received an invitation to participate in a meeting on 19 January to develop the bids. After a discussion it was agreed that Cllrs Durbin and Daffurn should represent the council at the meeting. Cllr Grace tabled a report on Advantage West Midlands' 2012 Fund proposals.

29 Annual Town Meeting

The Town Clerk advised that the proposed date for the Annual Town Meeting was in a school holiday period. After a discussion it was agreed that the Annual Town Meeting would be held at 7.30pm on Thursday 29 April 2010 at Priory Hall.

30 Confidential Business: In view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it was

RESOLVED: The press and public be excluded from the meeting pursuant to Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

31 Budget Estimates and Council Tax Precept for 2010/11

The Town Clerk introduced the draft budget papers that had been issued before the meeting. The paper included a steady-state budget (with council tax and reserves information), recommendations re salaries, wages and rents, a number of submissions for specific expenditure items and a recommended process for arriving at the agreed budget and precept for 2010/11.

Salaries and Wages

The Town Clerk and Town Clerk's Assistant are both on national pay scales which are the subject of national agreements. The council agreed that no action was required.

The hourly rates of the other Town Council employees (Handyman, Cleaner, Head Curator and Curators) were raised wef 1 October 2009 as a result of changes to the National Minimum Wages structure. (Ref MWTC Minute 235, 87/09).

The council agreed to leave current rates unchanged and review in October 2010.

Corn Exchange Rentals

The Town Clerk advised that the Corn Exchange Rent Valuations had been discussed at the 2 October 2008 Town Council meeting when revised rents through to April 2010 had been agreed. He added that the steady-state budget included the rents from 1 April 2010.

The council agreed that no further action was required but that a rent review should be conducted during 2010/11 for implementation wef April 2011.

Linden Lodge

The Town Clerk advised that a decision was needed re the rent for 2010/11. The current rent is £550 per month. Balfours, the council's managing agents have suggested that an increase of £10-15. After a discussion the council agreed that the rent for Linden Lodge should be increased to £560 per calendar month wef 1 April 2010.

Stall Charges (Corn Exchange and Guildhall Buttermarket)

The council agreed that it would be appropriate to increase some stall charges for 2010/11, given that they had not been increased the previous year. The following were agreed:

- Corn Exchange: Charity / Fund-raising Saturday morning stalls – £22 - no change.
- Corn Exchange: Much Wenlock Country Markets (Thursday mornings) increased from £22 to £23 per session.
- Guildhall Buttermarket: Farmers Market (Friday mornings) – increased from £10 to £11 per stall.
- Guildhall Buttermarket: Bric-a-brac (Thursdays) – increased from £10 to £11 for half-day and from £20 to £21 for a full day (per stall)
- Guildhall Buttermarket: Bric-a-brac (Saturdays) – increased from £20 to £21 for a full day (per stall)
- Guildhall Buttermarket: Shropshire Craft Co-operative (Sundays) – increased from £90 to £95 per day.

Guildhall Hire (Court Room / Council Chamber): The council agreed that the normal charges should be £10 an hour for local and non-profit-making organisations and £25 an hour for commercial organisations – with the proviso that the Town Clerk had discretion to vary the rates according to circumstances. It was agreed that the local Chamber of Trade should be charged £5 an hour for their second year of operation.

The Mayor, Cllr Pinches, joined the meeting.

Guildhall commission: It was agreed that for 2010/11 the commission on sales should increase from 10% to 20%.

The Mayor then took the chair and apologised for his late arrival.

Steady-state Budget

The Town Clerk advised how the steady-state budget had been created. The aim was to create a baseline budget which could then be modified to reflect the council's priorities for future years, and 2010/11 in particular. After a discussion the steady-state budget was agreed in principle. The Town Clerk was asked to amend the current year figures to show the £25,000 income from Advantage West Midlands in the spreadsheet.

The council then discussed additional budget proposals submitted by the Town Clerk, councillors and working groups.

Administrative Assistant's hours – Town Clerk's submission

The Town Clerk introduced the item referring to a submission previously issued to councillors. He advised that the Town Clerk's workload would be eased if the Administrative Assistant was employed for more hours. Currently, the Administrative Assistant is employed for two mornings a week (7 hours in total) with occasional additional hours. He advised that there were a range of options – from a small increase in hours up to full-time equivalent (37 hours per week) which could be accommodated through a job-sharing arrangement. The Town Clerk proposed that a sum of £3,000 be included in the 2010/11 budget that would enable the Administrative Assistant to be employed for an additional 7 hours a week.

Councillors then discussed the proposal and it was agreed in principle that an additional £3,000 be added to the 2010/11 budget for administration salaries and wages.

Property Management Working Group submission

Cllr Turner introduced the item referring to a submission produced by the Property Management Working Group and previously issued to councillors. He reminded councillors that at the council meeting on 2 April 2009, the Town Council had approved a proposal to issue invitations to tender re property condition surveys "with the aim of understanding the wants of repair and costs over a 5-year period in order that budgeting can be carried out in an informed manner, and help avoid the peaks and troughs of expenditure." Cllr Turner stated that this work had now been completed by Balfours and, in summary, the budget costings over the next five years amounted to £177,705 including management fees but excluding work to the Museum which is the responsibility of Shropshire Council. Cllr Turner then described three options for phasing the work and associated costs. He highlighted the cost of work relating to the Cemetery Chapel – a building that is currently only used for storage. The Working Group concluded that recommending an equal spread over the next five years would achieve the original intention and minimise the increase that is likely to impact on the precept in the forthcoming year. This approach would require an expenditure of £35,541 for 2010-11 with no additional associated income. Cllr Turner advised that it was anticipated that Balfours would be responsible for aggregating work and seeking quotes to ensure that the best value for money is obtained. It was anticipated that urgent works would be underway before the start of the financial year and, being a five year programme, would continue to 2014-15 by which time, a further five-year maintenance cycle would be planned. Cllr Turner then concluded by stating that the budget bid was made on the basis of professional condition surveys. Balfours' expertise has been employed in assessing the likely costs. The associated risks were likely only to be where costs are significantly different from prediction and only inflationary pressure was likely to have this impact – and this was thought to be unlikely.

Councillors discussed the proposal and agreed to exclude Cemetery Chapel from current budget planning and that alternative options should be investigated – including with Balfours. It was also agreed that alternative sources of funding should be sought.

Councillors then discussed the proposal and it was agreed in principle that £25,000 be allocated for property management for the 2010/11 budget.

Pedestrian, Traffic and Street Scene Working Group

Cllr Durbin introduced the item referring to a submission produced by the Pedestrian, Traffic and Street Scene Working Group and previously issued to councillors. She stated that the council-owned Christmas lights were in need of replacement, that the current incandescent lights were being phased out, and that there was some wear and tear showing on the cabling. There was a desire to extend the current lighting to other locations eg under the Corn Exchange, outside the Gaskell Arms and along Barrow Street in order to make the most of the commercial potential of the town at Christmas. She added that the town needed to reduce its carbon footprint and embrace energy-efficient solutions. Cllr Durbin said that the working group believed that £5,000 was a reasonable starting figure to set aside; allowing the working group to further the decisions of the last Town Council meeting. She added that the working group was willing to prepare a funding bid to an outside body eg O2 or Npower and that the Much Wenlock Chamber of Trade had expressed support and were prepared to organise a fundraising effort. She said that the expectation was that some of the £5,000 cost would be met by outside funding, though at this stage there was no indication of exactly how much money could be raised externally and on that basis the working group proposed that in the initial stage of the project the council set aside the whole sum. She said that the working group would return to the council with a more definite cost breakdown within four months. Cllr Durbin asked that the council set aside £3,500 to be added to the £1,500 provisioned in the 2009/10 budget for Christmas lights, making a total of £5000.

The Town Clerk advised that the Christmas lights budget also covered Christmas trees and that £105 had been spent this financial year on trees for the High Street.

Councillors discussed the proposal and agreed that the property-related work would, of necessity, limit other opportunities for the next financial year.

Councillors agreed in principle that an additional £2,000 be allocated for Christmas lights for the 2010/11 budget (resulting in a revised budget of £2,500). Councillors also agreed that the working group should engage with the Chamber of Trade to discuss fund-raising for new and replacement Christmas lights for the town.

Flood Management Working Group

Cllr Turner introduced the item referring to a submission produced by the Flood Management Working Group and previously issued to councillors. He said that the council had an opportunity to improve local flood emergency management. The proposed solution was to develop a community flood plan involving flood wardens. There may be a need for laminated cards bearing emergency information and advice for a number of at-risk households. Meetings would be needed to launch the initiative, with a possibility of a web-based back-up. Cllr Turner suggested allocating £1,000 expenditure to the item and stated that it was anticipated there would be no associated income - although enquiries had not yet been made. He added that significant input would be required from working group members and that there might be a modest involvement from the Town Clerk in an advisory capacity.

Councillors then discussed the proposal and it was agreed in principle that £500 be allocated for Flood Management Working Group work in the 2010/11 budget.

Gaskell Play Area

Cllr Durbin introduced the item referring to a submission re the Gaskell Play Area that had previously been issued to councillors. She advised that the average life of playground equipment was 15 years and that the cost of the recent refurbishment was c. £53,000. She stated that the Town Council had accepted lottery funding with an agreement that it would put a 'repair and renewal' fund in place that would accrue year-on-year. She added that there could be a Lottery Board audit at some stage and that the council could be selected. She proposed that £2,000 be placed into reserves for future repairs or renewals to play equipment.

Councillors then discussed the proposal and it was agreed in principle that an additional £1,000 be allocated to the Gaskell Recreation Ground / Play Area in the 2010/11 budget – increasing the budget to £2,000.

Community Engagement and Consultation Working Group

Cllr Turner introduced the item referring to a submission produced by the Community Engagement and Communication Working Group and previously issued to councillors. He said that at its inaugural meeting the working group had discussed how the council might enable as many members of the community as possible to positively engage with the Council in its work. A number of options had been discussed including a web-based solution, probably through either a major overhaul of the current website or a new one. Notice board usage, understanding best practise from other similar councils and meeting locations had also been discussed. Cllr Turner suggested allocating £1,500 expenditure to the matter and stated that it was anticipated there would be no associated income. He added that a certain amount of input would be required from the working group and Town Clerk in approving designs and functionality together with assembling and providing the information to populate the site.

Councillors discussed the proposal and it was agreed in principle that £1,000 be allocated to Community Engagement and Consultation work in the 2010/11 budget.

Guildhall Development Working Group – Proposal 1

Cllr Durbin introduced the item referring to a submission re the Guildhall Development Working Group that had previously been issued to councillors. She reminded councillors that the council had adopted the 'Resetting the Gem' strategy study in 2008. The working group had subsequently been steadily working to achieve the aims of the strategy document. Much had been achieved during the previous year for very little expenditure. An aim of the working group was to increase footfall and sales at the Guildhall and over a period of time making it into the main tourist attraction in the town.

Cllr Durbin reported that the working group had looked at the Guildhall's sources of income and expenditure and were seeking to improve the overall ambience of the Guildhall and visitor experience to increase foot fall and sales. Cllr Durbin described a number of proposed improvements, which included re-decorating, provision of a new reception desk and sales showcase, replacement artwork and posters, a decorative banner, UV filter curtains, and new spotlights. The total budget for these items was estimated at £9,654.

Councillors then discussed the proposal and, mindful of the other budget candidates, it was agreed in principle that £2,500 be included in the 2010/11 budget for Guildhall development work.

Councillors asked the Guildhall Development Working Group to review Guildhall entry charges and report back to the council.

In response to a proposal for the use of the town seal image to be reproduced on gift items for sale at the Guildhall eg bookmarks and coasters, the council agreed to defer a decision to the next council meeting.

Guildhall Development Working Group – Proposal 2

Cllr Durbin introduced the item referring to a submission re the Guildhall Development Working Group that had previously been issued to councillors. She advised that the council, mindful of the access constraints at the Guildhall, should set money aside a reserve sum (£20,000 to £30,000) in the 2010/11 budget to enable preliminary works and investigations for the installation of an elevator lift. She reported that the conservation officer had visited the Guildhall and in principle would not object to a lift installation.

Councillors then discussed the proposal and agreed that the council needed to work towards improved access to the Guildhall. However, councillors were mindful that the installation of a lift was included in the Shropshire Council-commissioned Guildhall feasibility study, and agreed that it was premature to make a provision in the 2010/11 budget – but that the matter would be reviewed when the feasibility study report was received.

Much Wenlock 2012 Legacy Group

Cllr Grace introduced the item referring to a submission from the Much Wenlock 2012 Legacy Group that had previously been issued to councillors. He stated that the Town Council was fortunate in having access to a dedicated budget held by Advantage West Midlands (AWM) to facilitate 2012-related activity in the town. This fund had already financed work on local tourism, the Gaskell Field and exploring further sponsorship opportunities at little or no cost to the Council. A further bid from the Much Wenlock 2012 Legacy Group was being drafted for consideration by AWM for 2010-11 and, hopefully, would again enable further work of direct interest to the Council. As the London 2012 Olympic Games draws nearer, there will inevitably be additional demands on the Council to lead and engage with activity that has a 2012 theme. Already the Council and other local partners have, at short notice, been asked to inform the content of a bid by Shropshire Council for RDPE funding to support rural tourism in the County, with Much Wenlock's Olympian connections to 2012 being cited in part-justification. Some of these proposals will be closely aligned with and often prompted by the Council's own objectives e.g. the improvement of the Guildhall, enhancements to the Gaskell Field or provision of better community facilities that can support the visitor experience as well. In these cases the Council's own budget allocations for these assets or activities can be used to match and support external funds. There would, however, most likely be a number of unforeseen opportunities over the next year or two which might require the Council to help facilitate action or other investment through a small 'matching' contribution of its own. This proposal is to ask the Council to set aside a sum to call upon as and when these opportunities present themselves. The type of activity could be quite wide-ranging eg formal civic receptions for visitors, organising, marketing and advertising of specific events, sponsorship of community inspired activity, further work on the WPB Foundation. Council approval to fund each proposed use would still be required. The allocation of a sum will give confidence to partners that the Council is serious in its approach to creating a legacy from the impact of the 2012 Olympic Games. The proposal was to set aside a sum of £2,000 to use as a source of funding or match funding for currently unforeseeable 2012 related activity. If the budget was not required, this would remain in reserves or could, at a later stage in the year, be transferred to other Council activity.

16/10

Councillors then discussed the proposal and, mindful of the other budget candidates, it was agreed in principle that £2,000 be earmarked in the 2010/11 reserves for 2012-related activities.

Councillors then reviewed their decisions and after further discussion agreed the following additional allocations to the steady-state budget:

- £3,000 for additional Administrative Assistant's hours
- £24,000 for Property Management
- £2,000 for Christmas lights
- £500 for Flood Management
- £1,000 for the Gaskell Field Play Area
- £1,000 for Community Engagement and Communication
- £2,500 for Guildhall Promotion

The Town Clerk advised that the additional items would result in £176,610 total planned expenditure and a £139,283 Precept for 2010/11. The 2010/11 Council Tax for Band D would be £115.80 compared to £98.86 for 2009/10 – an increase of £16.94.

[Post-meeting note: on 21 January 2010 Shropshire Council approved a revised discretionary Council Tax discount in relation to long-term empty properties and as a result have approved a revised Council Tax tax-base for 2010/11. As a result the 2010/11 Council Tax tax-base for Much Wenlock Town Council has increased to 1.207.47 Band D equivalents, therefore reducing the Band D Council Tax amount to £115.35 – a net increase of £16.49 cf 2009/10.]

Having reviewed the draft budget, it was

RESOLVED: The press and public be re-admitted to the meeting.

32 Council Tax Precept for 2010/11

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: The council tax precept for 2010/11 be approved at £139,283.

It was also unanimously

RESOLVED: The Town Council precept £139,283 from Shropshire Council for the financial year 2010/11.

It was agreed that the council should prepare a public statement explaining the rationale, priorities and decisions behind the agreed budget and precept.

Signed Chairman

4 February 2010

Approved