

UNADOPTED

POLEGATE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 2nd October 2006 in the Council Chamber, 49 High Street, Polegate at 7.30 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. G. Carter (Town Mayor), Mrs C. Berry, Mrs E. Coleman, M. Cunningham, M. Fitzgerald, G. Gibbs, J. Harmer, Mrs D. Joy, R. Martin, Mrs V. Morson, Mrs M. Piper, Mrs I. Scarborough, Mrs. J. Voyce and T. Voyce
Mr G. Parish - Internal Auditor
Mr S. Goacher - Temporary Finance Officer

2 members of the public

1 member of the press

The Mayor welcomed councillors, Mr Parish, Mr Goacher and members of the press and public to the meeting and requested the inclusion of two additional agenda items. This was agreed by all, the two items being 17a Fire Risk Assessment and 17B Pelham Homes Planning Applications.

7270 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr. Barber.

7271 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest but Cllr. Martin mentioned at this point that he would not be taking part in the Pelham Homes discussion.

7272 Minutes of the Council meeting held on 4 September 2006

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2006 were agreed as correct and signed by the Mayor.

Minutes of the Special Council meeting held on 21 September 2006

Minute 7241 It was pointed out that part of this minute should state that no credit cards should be released to any member of staff until all the necessary paperwork was in place - noted and the minute to be amended accordingly.

7273 Matters arising from the meeting held on 4 September 2006

a) **Queen's Award for Voluntary Organisations** - members were advised that confirmation had been received that local branches of organisations could be put forward for an award and the nomination papers were now to hand.

7274 Final Accounts for the year 2005 - 2006

It was proposed, seconded and agreed by all to suspend Standing Orders to allow the temporary Finance Officer to take members through the Final Accounts and answer any queries.

STANDING ORDERS SUSPENDED

Members were given some background information to the way in which the accounts had been prepared and the details they contained. The general account showed a breakdown of charges and other expenditure, subscriptions, salaries etc. together with the relevant income from the precept and investment income. The Public Works Loan Board capital and interest payments were shown separately because even if Council made the decision to dispose of the assets the liability to pay off the capital still remained.

With regard to the allotment sites, the expenditure had been split down to that of general maintenance and relative income and an adjustment had been made for tenants' deposits because these are effectively a liability to the Council. A breakdown of expenditure and income for the pavilion and the Wannock Centre was also provided. With regard to recreational facilities it was explained that the expenditure and income had generally been split for each area managed.

The highways account included anything connected to the highway, eg. bus shelters, seating, flower beds, grass cutting contract.

From the previous accounts there are items earmarked or reserved for specific purposes, i.e. from 2003/2004 reserves are earmarked for the Youth Development Service and the town map.

The accounts surplus and deficits are almost the same. The balance carried forward is represented by the list of debtors/creditors carried forward into 2006/2007 and the summary shows the total expenditure and balance carried forward.

Members then put some questions to the Finance Officer for clarification.

With regard to the Wannock Centre it was queried whether it had been established what proportion of the water rates, electricity and other utilities were being paid by Eastbourne Downs PCT. This had not yet been addressed as quite a degree of research was required and the priority had been the production of the final accounts. However it was agreed to look into this matter as soon as possible and report back to Council.

Clarification was sought regarding item 1, section 1 of the Annual Return. It was explained that the 'explanation' was shown on page 2, the differences being the debtors and creditors - noted.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed by all that a vote of thanks be expressed for the hard work and effort put in by the Internal Auditor, the temporary Finance Officer and the Assistant Town Clerk to produce an excellent set of accounts. It was refreshing to see the information presented in an easily understandable format and in such detail.

It was then proposed, seconded and agreed by all to accept the Final Accounts for the year 2005 - 2006 as presented and that the Town Mayor signs the Annual Return on behalf of the Council. The Annual Return to be signed at a later date when a minute number was available.

REINSTATEMENT OF STANDING ORDERS

7275 Fencing at Wannock Road Recreation Ground

It was noted that expenditure for this item could account for 10 per cent of Council's precept. In addition one of the contractors that had supplied an estimate for the works was not willing to install replacement fencing in its existing position because of the close proximity of the overhead power cables and had recommended moving the fence further forward into the recreation ground.

Comment was also made that the fencing had been in situ for the past 40/50 years and had not presented a problem during that time so why change it now.

However it was pointed out that a health and safety issue did exist because of the condition of the fencing. It was therefore proposed, seconded and agreed to discuss this item under confidential section.

7276 Replacement heaters at the Pavilion, Wannock Road Recreation Ground

Members were advised that this was an historical item which had never quite been completed in that the electricity supply to the Pavilion and the Wannock Centre needed to be separate. Some work to supply separate meters had already taken place. The existing night storage heaters did not provide heat when required and convector heaters would be more practical as they could be fitted with a time switch. This would avoid the situation of the heaters being left on indefinitely as the switch would cut in. The estimate was provided by the contractors who had carried out the electrical work in the Pavilion to date.

After some discussion it was agreed that two more estimates should be obtained, and the existing quote verified for length of validity, plus pictures to show what the units would look like and assurance that they were silent when running - noted.
--

7277 Financial matters

a) Accounts for payment - it was clarified that the payment to Lyco was for a replacement light fitting for the gent's toilet in the recreation ground and that the missing amount against cheque no. 201432 was £67.56 in respect of replacement chains for the cradle swings.

A query on another item was requested to be discussed in confidential section and this was agreed by all.

b) Replacement street light lantern - it was queried whether the lantern had been inspected before agreement given for its replacement. It had not but it was agreed that future replacement items would be inspected prior to replacement works being agreed.

7278 PCSO

Members were advised that the PCSO had accepted an alternative position within the police force and that it had been with immediate effect. Unfortunately because of an ongoing investigation it was not possible to provide a replacement PCSO at the present time. However, there would soon be a new recruitment drive and it was hoped to provide a replacement PCSO from the next selection. As a result of this situation the Council will not be charged for additional services with effect from 1 September 2006 - noted.

7279 Adoption of Minutes of Standing Committees

a) Personnel of 11 September - the Chair of Personnel presented the minutes and proposed adoption but also wished to take one item forward (minute no. 7227b) into confidential section. This was agreed by all.

b) Planning of 19 September 2006 - the Chair of Planning presented the minutes and there being no matters raised, proposed that they be adopted. This was resolved unanimously.

7280 Communications from the Town Mayor

Members were reminded that the Assistant Town Clerk would be on holiday from Wednesday 11 October until Monday 23 October and that the office would be closed during that period.

Notification of dates and venues for stakeholder events being held by the NHS - if any councillors wished to attend further details could be obtained from the office.

It was noted that approximately 5,000 people participated in the recent march to safeguard services at the DGH.

The play bark at Wannock Road Recreation Ground needed to be topped up and as this was a task that would take more than one day for one man working alone, it was proposed, seconded and agreed by all to complete the top up in two separate phases and not to engage outside contractors, provided the cost of two separate deliveries did not exceed the cost of engaging outside assistance.

7281 Notification of matters dealt with as 'urgent'

There were none.

7282 Report of the Tree Warden

There was nothing to report.

7283 Outside representative to the Community Centre

It was resolved that Cllr. Mrs Joy would take on this office for the remainder of the year.

7284 Town Clerk's Report

a) Vandalism report - the only item to report was that three 15/16 year olds had been observed jumping on the bouncy bridge at Oakleaf play area with the obvious and deliberate intent of causing damage. They were requested to get down from the bridge but refused. They were also requested to leave the play park, but again refused.

It was noted that WDC did not appear to be carrying out weekend litterpicks at the skatepark and this was causing concern because of the amount of broken glass on the site. The Assistant Town Clerk was asked to check with Wealden why the service had stopped and to see if it could be reinstated.

b) Responder scheme - members were advised that the recent meeting had been very successful and that a provisional list of 14 volunteer trainee responders had been compiled. It was noted that there were at least 3 defibrillators in the town.

7285 Reports from District and County Councillors

It was reported that an aluminium handrail had been removed from the footbridge at Sayerland Road. The police and Highways Agency were aware and a new handrail should be in place shortly. In the meantime red warning tape had been requested but it is believed this was taken down by vandals.

There is apparently a rumour that the Gilda Crescent Resource Centre was again scheduled for closure despite previous assurances that it was going to be expanded. It is intended to ask the ESCC cabinet member who is responsible for homes closures if there is any truth in the rumour and, if so, why, given the previous assurances of expansion of services at this site.

The problems with grass cutting etc. at the Cophall roundabout are still on going. A meeting between ESCC, the Highways Agency and Polegate Town Council had been suggested some months ago but it had not been possible to arrange because of the problems of getting hold of the relevant officers. The grass has however been partly cut and a particularly poor area cordoned off but the streetlights were still not working. The problems had been highlighted on BBC local news, local people had been interviewed and a reporter had experienced the problems of trying to navigate the lanes around the roundabout. The Eastbourne MP, Nigel Waterson and Cllr. Nick Ellwood from Hailsham Town Council were also present.

Members were advised that Cllr. Shing had been removed from both the District and County Council Liberal Democrat Groups. However he was still standing as an independent. It was stressed that Cllr. Shing is not a member of the Wealden Independent Group.

7286 Public Speaking Policy

As it had been informally agreed that a public speaking policy would be very helpful, both to members of the public and the Council, a draft leaflet had been produced for agreement which clearly set out the procedure for speaking at Council meetings. This was an A4 sheet which could be folded into three to make a leaflet which would fit into the public literature racks in the hallway as well as being available at the reception and at meetings. It was suggested that a space could be utilised to display councillors names but as there were a number of other means by which this information was readily available, this proposal was not taken up.

It was queried whether there was any way in which members of the public could ask questions about items not on the agenda, perhaps taking the question and dealing with it by letter, or at least information as to how residents could bring matters to Council's attention. It was noted that the way to bring a matter to Council's attention when it is not an agenda item should be by letter to the Council office.

Members were aware that it must be frustrating for residents to have to wait until the end of a meeting to speak on an agenda item, particularly if they are in possession of information that could be useful to the discussion. It was therefore, proposed, seconded and agreed by all that the time allowed for public speaking should be at the beginning of the meeting.

It was then suggested that a member of the public present at the meeting be asked to give an opinion on the proposed policy and leaflet and standing orders were therefore suspended to allow for this.

STANDING ORDERS SUSPENDED

The response was that the policy was acceptable and as long as the public put their points across succinctly there should be no problem.

The Mayor thanked the resident for this input and reinstated Standing Orders.

STANDING ORDERS REINSTATED

It was then proposed, seconded and agreed by all to accept the draft policy document as presented but with the inclusion of an explanation as to how to bring matters to Council's attention by letter.

7287 Fire Risk Assessment

Members were advised that the current Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations require the completion of a formal fire risk assessment. In October the new Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order will become law. Therefore Council needs to carry out a fire risk assessment. Enquiries had been made with other local Councils who were in various stages of commissioning assessments or carrying them out in house. Hailsham TC had just completed their own and had accessed the relevant templates via their insurance company. However no such service was available from this Council's insurers. Ballpark figures had also been obtained from three private companies with an average price of £500.00 for both the pavilion and Council office.

It was suggested that it might be possible to purchase some time from Hailsham Town Council to carry out the assessment or that an approach could be made to a retired Fire Officer. There may also be some templates on the Clerk's toolkit cd. It was agreed to look into these options before a decision is taken.

7288 Pelham Homes

Cllrs. Martin and Mrs Scarborough left the chamber for the duration of the discussion of this item and took no part in the proceedings.

It was reported that following a meeting held between the Town Mayor, the Chair of Planning, the Assistant Town Clerk and Officers from the Majors Team at Wealden, new and significant information had come to light which it was felt materially affected the decision previously taken by the Council to support the Pelham Homes planning application.

1. The Highways Agency has serious concerns regarding the projected volume of traffic on the trunk road which in their opinion is under estimated by about 50%.
2. Further details are required for the road with regard to the general layout and the camber of the road.
3. The Parkway station was a principal component at the early stages of consultation with Pelham Homes. This has been sidelined within the application (there is a dedicated document for the bat bridge but not a single detail about the station, e.g. siting or its impact on the town centre).
4. It was stated that the grade separated roundabout could be achieved with Phase 1 of the application together with contributions from other developments within the area - it would not require Phase 11 to finance it.

As the six month rule applies within which Council is able to reverse a decision unless new information is brought to light which materially affects the original decision, it was proposed that given the circumstances and the new information that had just been shared, Council does rescind its previous decision to support the Pelham Homes development.

A resolution was then proposed by the Chair of Planning as follows:

With the agreement of one third of this Council, namely Cllrs. Mrs Voyce, Mrs Piper, Carter, Fitzgerald and Voyce, I would like to propose a rescission of Council's previous resolutions - Full Council minute nos. 7266 of 24.07.2006 and Planning Committee minute no. 7194 of 14.08.2006 - to support Phases 1 and 11 of the Pelham Homes application in the light of additional information received (in accordance with Section 39 of Standing Orders). I also propose that we do not support Phase 1 until Council's concerns have been satisfied.

Members then voiced their own opinions and concerns regarding this application particularly with regard to the grade separation of the roundabout and the uncertainty regarding the Parkway station and how the stops would be split. The planning application seemed to suggest that only one station would be serviced which would mean the loss of the station in the High Street. It was considered that this would effectively kill the town. No financial assessment was available on the Parkway station or the implications it would have for the town.

It was generally agreed that it would be prudent to resist the development at least until a grade separation at the roundabout is on the table, and that as a starter. There will be contributions from other developments to achieve the separation on phase 1.

The Local Plan states that no houses should be occupied until the trunk road is built but that proviso has been taken out and therefore Polegate could end up with 1,000 houses with no grade separation, station etc. The planning applications proposed for the Dittons Road area would provide a better integration and would fulfil the housing allocation without the add-ons.

A vote was then taken in respect of the Resolution previously proposed as follows:

In favour 11

Against 1 (Cllr. Mrs Berry)

Therefore the Council's official response to the Pelham Homes development is not to support it in the present format.

7289 Correspondence

a) Request for grant aid from East Sussex Hearing Resource Centre - some discussion ensued as concern was expressed that staff are salaried, not volunteers, and the organisation had a good balance of monies. However it was advised that the lipreading class did not get much of the grant and that lipreading was a specialised skill. It was proposed that as a gesture of goodwill Council could offer to pay for the hire of the room at a cost of £240.00. The proposal was seconded and a vote taken as follows:

In favour 10

Against 3

Discussion also revealed that as the lipreader is salaried, and not a volunteer, it meant that the lipreading service would not be eligible for nomination for the Queen's Award - noted.

b) District & Parish Conference - members were reminded that the conference was scheduled for 1 November 2006 and were invited to indicate if they would like to attend. The Town Mayor, Deputy Town Mayor and the Assistant Town Clerk would attend and as it was often possible to obtain an additional place councillors could advise the office if they wished to attend.

7290 Dates of the next cycle of meetings

Full Council 6 November 2006 and
11 December 2006

Planning as and when required

7291 Resolution

It was proposed, seconded and agreed by all that owing to the confidential nature of the next business to be transacted the press and public be excluded from the rest of the meeting.