

OPEN SESSION: There were no members of public present.

MINUTES OF THE POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Held on Wednesday 21st September 2005 at 7.00pm

PRESENT: Cllr P Chambers (Chairman)
Cllr N J Chard
Cllr N G R Clarke
Cllr M F J Daly
Cllr L C Ford
Cllr Mrs V A Sullivan
Cllr B H Terry

IN ATTENDANCE: Terry Simpson, Town Clerk
Jo Stannard, Deputy Town Clerk
Martin Townsend, Finance Manager (for part of the meeting)
Cllr M H Thierry
Cllr J H Heron (for part of the meeting)

F/3815 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr D E Cracknell, Cllr N W Light and Cllr W S Rippon-Swaine.

F/3816 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

F/3817 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 20th July 2005, having been previously circulated, be agreed and signed as a correct record.

F/3818 TOWN CENTRES STRATEGY STUDY

Graham Ashworth and Louise Evans from the District Council's Policy & Plans team informed members that the Council was now preparing to undertake background work on the Core Strategy Document, as part of the new Local Development Framework. This document would contain broad principles to govern the future direction of planning in the district. As part of this work, the Council was in the process of commissioning consultants to look at the economic health of town centres and to advise the Council on what it should do to maintain the vitality and viability of towns in the district. There would also be detailed work on both Ringwood and Totton town centres. It was hoped that this work would be complete by Spring 2007.

It was noted that the South East Plan would set the broad framework for development in the district, but this was not due for adoption until 2008. However, this would not hinder work by the District Council, which would focus on what is right for the district and try to influence the South East Plan.

It was agreed that, as the Town Council was about to start work on a Town Plan, there would be a need for close liaison between the two authorities. Indeed, it was felt that the timing of the Town Plan was opportune in that it would be looking at the widest health of the town and would link in with consultation on the Local Development Framework and proposed housing allocations and give local people a chance to have their say about the future of the town.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the arrangements being made by the District Council for a Town Centres Strategy Study be supported.
- 2) That the District Council be requested to liaise fully with the Town Council on development of the Strategy.

With the agreement of the Committee, agenda item 9 was taken next to enable the District Council officers to have an input.

F/3819

DISTRICT-LEVEL HOUSEBUILDING TARGETS

Members considered the Town Clerk's report (*Annex 'A'*) on district-level housebuilding targets to be included in the South East Plan, and the decision taken by the Planning, Town & Environment Committee on 16th September on this matter. It was noted that the Plan proposed little or no development in the New Forest district and this meant that there would be no opportunity for growth in the town. In fact, there would not be sufficient provision to meet the requirements of reducing household size, let alone for the children of the town or any inward migration.

Cllr Clarke said that the current rate of building was between 30 and 35 dwellings per annum and members agreed that there would be a major shortfall in housing provision if no new development was allowed. There was also concern that Ringwood was bordered by areas that would see a great deal of development over the next few years, such as Southampton and Bournemouth and Poole and this could lead to Ringwood being passed by. Members therefore agreed that there was a need to look seriously at returning the vitality to the town and giving people a hope of being able to buy homes in the town.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1) That the Town Council respond to the consultation on district-level housebuilding targets in favour of option 5.
- 2) That representation be made to the District Council stating that the proposed housebuilding targets are too modest for a sustainable community and calling for a fundamental review of policies for Ringwood in the light of the decision to exclude the town from the National Park.

Cllr Heron, Graham Ashworth and Louise Evans left the meeting.

F/3820

MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORTS

Members considered the Monthly Financial Reports (*Annex 'B'*). The Finance Manager informed members that the Council's bank accounts had now been consolidated, as previously agreed, and the Council was now only operating two bank accounts. It was noted that the forecast in interest earnings had increased and the Finance Manager reported that he would be asking members at a future meeting to approve a formal investment policy, giving him a mandate in which to operate.

It was further noted that estimated employee costs had now been allocated to committees to give an indication of what the service actually costs.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the list of cheque payments on the Imprest account be approved.
- 2) That the list of Petty Cash payments be approved.
- 3) That the Statement of Town Council Balances be received and noted.
- 4) That the Inter Account Transfers be authorised. The report was signed by Cllrs Chambers and Clarke.
- 5) That the Summary Budget Reports be received and noted.

F/3821

INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2004/05

Members considered the response to the Internal Audit Report 2004/05, prepared by the Town Clerk and Finance Manager (*Annex 'C'*). It was noted that travel allowances for employees and councillors would now be paid through payroll and the Finance Manager confirmed that these allowances were not taxable. It was also noted that work was in hand to bring the Asset Register up to date.

RESOLVED: That the response to the Internal Audit Report 204/05 be approved.

The Finance Manager left the meeting.

F/3822

GRANT AID

i) Bisterne Village Hall

Bisterne Village Hall had applied for a grant towards the purchase of tables and chairs to replace ones that were over 50 years old.

RESOLVED: That a grant of £250 be awarded to Bisterne Village Hall towards the cost of tables and chairs.

ii) Hampshire Children and Families Forum

Hampshire Children and Families Forum had applied for a grant towards updating the Local Children and Families Directory, giving invaluable advice and information to parents of young children. Cllr Mrs Sullivan spoke in support of this organisation. She had attended one of its meetings when between 30 and 40 volunteers had been present, all working for the benefit of local children.

RESOLVED: That a grant of £200 be awarded to Hampshire Children and Families Forum towards the re-production of the Local Children and Families Directory.

iii) Fordingbridge Stroke Club

Fordingbridge Stroke Club had applied for a grant towards a trip to the pantomime for members of the Club. It was noted that this was a self-help organisation and members were keen to support it.

RESOLVED: That a grant of £100 be awarded to Fordingbridge Stroke Club towards a trip to the pantomime for members of the Club.

iv) Community First New Forest

Community First New Forest had applied for a grant to support the Nightstop project for homeless young people. It was noted that Community First was an umbrella organisation and only seven people had been assisted in the last two years.

RESOLVED: That no grant be awarded to Community First New Forest.

F/3823

PREPARATION OF TOWN PLAN

Members considered the Town Clerk's report (*Annex 'D'*). The Town Clerk reiterated the fact that it was proposed the Town Council should lead the process and work closely with the public, rather than being led by a partnership, which was the Countryside Agency's vision.

It was noted that the post of Project Officer would be advertised in the next week. When appointed, the officer's first priority would be to set up the framework, inform and involve the public in what we are doing and carry out initial consultation.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That members of the Town Plan Working Party be appointed to carry out interviews and make the appointment of a Project Officer for the Market Town Healthcheck and preparation of the Town Plan.
- 2) That, subject to the appointment of a Steering Group, as outlined in paragraph 6 of Annex 'D', in place of a Market Town Partnership, the general principles for undertaking a Healthcheck as outlined in the Market Towns Healthcheck handbook of 2005, be adopted.
- 3) That the offer from Dorset County Council for joint working on cross boundary issues be welcomed and the Town Plan Working Party be authorised to appoint appropriate representatives to any joint Working Parties.

F/3824

PARKING CLOCK

Members considered the proposed changes to the parking clock as outlined in the District Council's Cabinet recommendation to Council (*Annex 'E'*).

It was noted that the Town Council had previously considered reducing the maximum stay in the long-stay car park to 8 hours, in an attempt to deter people parking in the town and going to work elsewhere. However, the Chamber of Trade had been opposed to this and, taking this view into account, the Council had rejected the proposal. It now appeared that, with the proposed introduction of an £80 fee, the Chamber of Trade now supported the introduction of reduced waiting hours.

There was concern that the £80 fee would not free up any additional parking and that people working in the town would feel that they had not been treated fairly. Cllr Chard asked if a different clock could be provided at a reduced cost for people living and working in the town. However, this would have significant administrative cost implications for the District Council and was unlikely to be supported.

There was some support for the proposed scheme, although members felt that the surplus funds should be used to explore a long-term solution to parking in Ringwood.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1) That the shoppers clock, at a cost of £8 for 2006, be accepted.
- 2) That the district-wide parking clock, at a cost of £80 for 2006, be rejected for Ringwood.
- 3) That the shoppers clock be applicable to all car parks in Ringwood, including the long-stay car parks.
- 4) That the District Council be asked to reduce the maximum period for which vehicles may wait in the long-stay car parks in Ringwood to 6 hours, for an experimental period.

At 9.10pm, with the agreement of the committee, it was agreed to continue the meeting.

F/3825

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

The Town Clerk reported that the majority of the wayleaves had been signed to allow the fixing of electric boxes to buildings in the town. There was only one business that would not give permission and it may therefore be necessary to fix a post in the ground, at an additional cost of £400. It was noted that Southern Electric Contractors would be carrying out the work on 28th September and it was envisaged that all the necessary paperwork would be complete by this time.

RESOLVED: That the Town Clerk's verbal report be noted.

F/3826

WORK AT "GREENWAYS"

Members considered the Town Clerk's report (*Annex 'F'*), which outlined works required to the roof at "Greenways" and presented the possibility that the roof space could be converted for use as offices.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That a feasibility study, at a cost of up to £1,000, should be carried out into the possible conversion of the roof void into office accommodation, with a report being submitted to members which should include estimates of the cost of the works and annual rental income.
- 2) That, subject to the result of the feasibility study, the necessary works to strengthen the roof of "Greenways" should be included within the budget for 2006/07.

F/3827

PARKING OF MINIBUSES AT "GREENWAYS"

A request had been received from the Community Association to park two minibuses at the rear of "Greenways" on a permanent basis. It was noted that the Council currently experiences difficulties with parking on occasion and, whilst it is possible to use the grass area during the summer, this was not possible for the remainder of the year.

RESOVLED: That the Council continue to allow only one minibus belonging to the Community Association to park at the rear of "Greenways"

F/3828

HAMPSHIRE ASSOCIATION OF PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS – 58TH AGM

Members considered the Schedule of Resolutions to be debated at the Association's AGM (*Annex 'G'*). It was noted that Cllr Mrs Sullivan would be attending the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council support the first resolution with regard to the Licensing Act 2003, but that it oppose the remainder.

F/3829

URGENT BUSINESS

i) Community First AGM

It was noted that this meeting would take place on 26th October in Colbury Memorial Hall.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council would not send a representative to the meeting.

ii) Access across Town Council property

The Town Clerk asked members if they were aware if the Council had ever given authority for the owner of 14 Woodstock Lane to have an access onto the Council's property at the rear of "Greenways".

RESOLVED: That no members were aware of any agreement being in place.

F/3830

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED: That under section 100 (A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information. (*Annex 'H'*).

F/3831

COMMUNITY FACILITIES IN RINGWOOD

Members considered options to provide a community facility in Ringwood.

Cllr Thierry put forward his proposal for a new two-storey building on land owned by the District Council on the South-West corner of the Furlong Car Park. He said that this would be an ideal location for a community building and municipal complex and would be an opportunity to achieve five key objectives:

- New toilets
- Improved Visitor Information Centre
- A central location for the Public Offices
- A central location for Ringwood Town Council
- A community hall on the first floor

He added that there would be no major planning issues as this area of land was identified in the Local Plan for development. Cllr Thierry felt that, if supported, this proposal could become a reality in 2007.

Members briefly discussed development at Carvers and agreed that the people of the town would not support any building at this location.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Town Council accept the need for a community building in the town.
- 2) That the proposal for a community hall and council offices in the Old Town Hall be rejected.
- 3) That the proposal for a community hall and council offices at Carvers be not pursued.
- 4) That the principle of development on the South-West corner of the Furlong Car Park to provide a community hall, municipal building and toilets be supported.
- 5) That proposals for the provision of community facilities be included in the consultation process to be undertaken in connection with the Town Plan.

F/3832

CIVIL WAR RE-ENACTMENT – FESTIVAL 2006

Members considered a report with cost schedules and correspondence with The English Civil War Society, which set out details of the proposed event. It was noted that when the Council had originally supported the battle re-enactment, it had been expected that it would be required to underwrite expenditure up to £15,000. The costings carried out to date showed estimated expenditure at over £33,000 with other costs not yet qualified. It was believed that these could bring the final costs to £40,000. In view of the likely income levels from entrance fees and concessions, it seemed to members that the event could leave the Council funding a deficit of between £10,000 and £20,000. Members also noted that, although a substantial fee was payable to the Society, it was not prepared to include provision for a guaranteed minimum number of participants in the battle activities in the contract with the Council.

Cllr Clarke believed that such an event was straying from the original objectives of the Festival and that it would require a diversion of resources at a key time and events in the town could be overshadowed. There was also concern that the event would be disruptive to local residents and could lead to traffic chaos.

RECOMMENDED: That the Council does not proceed with the Civil War Re-enactment as part of the 2006 Festival.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 10.10pm.