

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF RINGWOOD TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 at 7.00pm

The meeting took place in a virtual environment using “Zoom” video conferencing technology and members of the public and press were given the opportunity to observe or participate in the meeting.

PRESENT: Cllr Tony Ring, Town Mayor  
Cllr Philip Day, Deputy Mayor  
Cllr Andy Briers  
Cllr Gareth Deboos  
Cllr Hilary Edge  
Cllr Rae Frederick  
Cllr John Haywood  
Cllr Jeremy Heron  
Cllr Darren Loose (*until 9.03pm*)  
Cllr Gloria O’Reilly  
Cllr Steve Rippon-Swaine  
Cllr Glenys Turner

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Chris Wilkins, Town Clerk  
Mrs Jo Hurd, Deputy Town Clerk  
Cllr Michael Thierry, Hampshire County Councillor

ABSENT: Cllr Peter Kelleher

**C/6576  
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were several members of the public in attendance for agenda item 4 – land at Moortown Lane.

A member of the public referred to the NFDC Local Plan policy for Strategic Housing Sites, which specifically draws attention to the need for smaller to medium size homes, a need that is well known in Ringwood. The Local Plan also proposes that for market homes, 30-40% should be 1- and 2-bedroom houses. He asked if St Congar would be constructing this proportion of such homes.

**C/6577  
APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Peter Kelleher.

**C/6578  
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None were declared at this time.

**C/6579  
LAND AT MOORTOWN LANE**

Members received a presentation from St Congar and the project team on development proposals for Strategic Site 13 – land at Moortown Lane.

It was explained that St Congar is a land promotion business specialising in residential development on large scale sites. They had recently purchased the site (67 acres) and intended to submit an outline planning application in accordance with the site allocation in the adopted Local Plan. The vision was to create a well-designed and considered landscape led development, which positively integrates with the existing urban area of Ringwood, fosters a strong sense of community and brings forward new recreation opportunities for local residents.

The site is allocated for at least 480 new homes, provision of public open space and delivery of remaining sections of the previous RING3 allocation including 2 hectares of employment land on the north west of the site and allotments. The land is in two ownerships, with St Congar controlling the majority, including land to the south of Moortown Lane (the 10-acre field currently used for football). Two areas (employment use and residential) are in the ownership of Hampshire County Council, and development proposals for these areas will be brought forward separately.

The following issues were identified during the presentation and the questions and answers that followed:

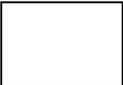
**Access and Movement**

- The main vehicular access to the site will be off Moortown Lane with a network of roads allowing for possible future connections to the north and east through land in HCC's ownership.
- New walking and cycling routes are proposed to the north and south, improving connectivity to local services and facilities.
- A new pavement in Moortown Lane will connect the site with Christchurch Road.
- The road network will be designed to accommodate buses, and discussions will be held with Go South Coast about the potential to extend its existing route to the site.
- A Transport Assessment will assess the impact of the development cumulatively with other proposed developments. This will identify any improvements that may be required, for example at the junction of Moortown Lane with Christchurch Road. A range of different options were being considered with NFDC and HCC, with the developers preferred option at this stage being a priority junction with 2 lanes exiting Moortown Lane. Members were of the view that a roundabout would be necessary to cope with the increased volume of traffic.
- The development will enable delivery of a connected framework of streets and fulfil the policy objective of providing a connected route from the A31 to Christchurch Road. It was agreed that this matter would need very careful consideration and would be assessed through traffic data (new data would be collected after 12<sup>th</sup> April) looking at existing movements and projecting future traffic flows. Concern was also raised about the suitability of the surrounding road network to cope with increased volumes of traffic.

**Concept Masterplan**

- Most of the built development was proposed for the west of the site, with ANRG (alternative natural recreational greenspace) proposed for the east of the site in the flood risk zone.
- Development on the western boundary will respond sensitively to the adjoining residential area. Gardens of new homes will back on to the boundary with additional landscaping – this was one aspect that would be explored in more detail. Concern was raised about the drop in ground level to Moorland Gate and the possibility of overlooking.
- A green buffer will separate Moortown Lane from the built development.
- The design is evolving and all comments made during public consultation will be considered.

**Open Space**



- There will be approximately 15 hectares of new public open space and ANRG. This will include both informal and formal open space, with opportunities for children's play, dog walking, formal sport, cycling and other general recreational activity, and new habitat creation, as well as a network of village greens. New trees and hedges will be planted, and an informal footpath network will be provided.
- It was noted that the town has a deficit of formal recreation space, and that the development would generate an additional need. The 10-acre field makes up part of the existing provision and there was concern that the masterplan showed a section of this being converted to ANRG. The developers' intention was to retain the majority of football pitches but to allocate part of this existing area as a multifunction space, although it would remain as open land. They wished to provide a sustainable solution for all residents and to enhance provision in a way that would ensure best use all year round for the whole population.

### **Primary School**

- Policy requires that land is reserved for a new primary school on land south of Moortown Lane. Technical data suggests that the most appropriate way of providing additional capacity would be to expand existing Poulner schools, however this is an issue for NFDC and HCC as education authority to determine. Concern was raised that Poulner was too far away to accommodate the schooling needs from this site, but it was noted that HCC had determined that it was not possible to increase capacity at Ringwood schools. It was expected that there would be a redistribution of school age children.

### **Housing**

- 491 dwellings are proposed, from 1/2 bed apartments to 5-bed family homes. These will generally be 2-storey, although some 3-storey will be included in the centre and on the northern boundary. Density will range from 20-25dph to 35-40dph.
- The mix of housing will adhere to the policy requirement and will be weighted towards smaller 2/3 bed properties. There will be a 50/50 split of market and affordable homes. Affordable homes would be a mix of tenures, with an element of shared ownership and rented.

### **Minerals Extraction**

- The site is in a mineral safeguarding zone. Discussions were ongoing with HCC as to whether extraction is feasible, necessary and appropriate; it was the developers' view that it was not feasible, but ultimately this would be determined by HCC.

It was noted that this was the start of a journey and the project team would be open and approachable going forward. A dedicated website/email address/phone line would be provided shortly, and a public consultation event would go live in April.

### **C/6580**

#### **POLICE REPORT**

There was no report.

### **C/6581**

#### **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

C/6571 - Cllr O'Reilly queried the wording of the minute relating to the grant to Ringwood Coronavirus Assistance Directors "for the purposes of funding the provision of carbon dioxide monitors to the four infant and junior schools in the parish. This would enable rooms to be regulated and ventilation varied, in order to manage coronavirus transmission risk." It was noted that the same wording had been included in the Policy & Finance minutes of 17<sup>th</sup> February, which had already been approved and signed as a correct record.

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the Meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021, having been circulated, be approved and signed as a correct record.

**C/6582  
RECREATION, LEISURE AND OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE**

Cllr Briers presented the minutes of the Recreation, Leisure and Open Spaces Committee meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021.

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the Recreation, Leisure and Open Spaces Committee meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021 be received.

**C/6583  
PLANNING, TOWN & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

Cllr Day presented the minutes of the Planning, Town & Environment Committee meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2021. He updated Members on the following:

P/5812 – A special meeting of the Committee has been scheduled for 7pm on 20<sup>th</sup> April to consider application 21/10042 for land north of Hightown Road.

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the Planning, Town and Environment Committee meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2021 be received.

**C/6584  
POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Cllr Heron presented the minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021 be received.

**C/6585  
STAFFING COMMITTEE**

Cllr Haywood presented the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> March. 2021.

Cllr Loose wished to appeal the decision to dispose of the benefit of parking clocks for staff, which had been made by a small number of Members and only been positively supported by 2 councillors. He said the Council, as a good employer, should continue to offer this benefit to existing staff in order to maintain loyalty and keep staff motivated. It was noted that the 6-month rule applied in this assistance, which meant that a decision could not be reviewed within 6-months of being made.

It had been agreed that the Town Clerk seek to negotiate a settlement with staff to dispose of the benefit and would report back on the matter in due course.

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021 be received.

**C/6586  
MEETING ARRANGEMENTS AND DELEGATION OF POWERS**



Members considered the Town Clerk's report and issues for decision (*Report A*).

The Town Clerk explained that the Council currently has the legal power to meet remotely, providing the press and public can participate, and make lawful decisions. However, the regulations that allow this cease to apply after 6<sup>th</sup> May and will not be extended by government. HALC and NALC have taken the view that councils will not have the power to meet remotely or to hold hybrid meetings after 6<sup>th</sup> May, but this is not a universally held view; judgement is expected before 6<sup>th</sup> May on a court order that claims pre-existing legislation does not positively prohibit remote meetings and such meetings should continue to be lawful.

Members considered the recommendations outlined in the report to establish a way forward.

*Members agreed to continue beyond 9.00pm.*

*Cllr Loose left the meeting at 9.03pm.*

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the Annual Meeting scheduled for 26<sup>th</sup> May be brought forward to Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> May and held as a remote meeting.
- 2) That the Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces Committee scheduled for 5<sup>th</sup> May be moved to 12<sup>th</sup> May.
- 3) That meetings scheduled between 6<sup>th</sup> May and the date of Step 4 of the government's roadmap out of lockdown (if later and whatever that date may be) proceed as remote meetings; making decisions as usual if lawfully permitted, but if not, being confined to the giving of advice to officers in the exercise of delegated powers rather than making decisions.
- 4) That a decision on delegation of powers, as outlined in paragraph 3.3 of Report A be deferred to the Annual Meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> May.
- 5) That officers should work towards being able to facilitate "hybrid" meetings of the Council and its Committees and Working Parties as soon as practicable.

<b>ACTION</b> <b>C Wilkins</b>
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**C/6587**

**SPORTS DEVELOPMENT PROJECT AT LONG LANE**

The Town Clerk reported that the pre-application discussions with NFDC Planning had been productive and anticipated site surveys necessary to support the planning application would be carried out shortly.

It was noted that discussions were ongoing regarding public open space requirements for the two strategic sites, but that this project would not be held up as a result.

**RESOLVED:** That the verbal report be noted.

<b>ACTION</b> <b>C Wilkins</b>
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**C/6588**

**COMMUNICATIONS TO BE RECEIVED**

The Town Mayor reported:

- 1) He and the Town clerk had been in discussion with various parties about the installation of memorial benches – a report would be considered by RL&OS Committee in due course.

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- 2) He had attended a meeting in West Street with representatives of Ringwood Society and HCC to discuss the refurbishment of the Victorian posts and rails.
- 3) The Twinning Association was planning a recruitment campaign in July.

**C/6589**

**REPORTS FROM TOWN COUNCILLORS AND STUDENT ADVISORS**

Cllr Haywood said that several residents on Bickerley had been in touch to report parking issues, and in particular restricted access for emergency vehicles.

Cllr Frederick encouraged all councillors to take part in Plastic Free Ringwood's community litter pick on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> April. She had been informed that this event was not being supported by NFDC, and Cllr Rippon-Swaine agreed to follow this up as NFDC had made a commitment to support such events.

**C/6590**

**REPORTS FROM COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLORS**

County Cllr Thierry made no report due to purdah. Cllr Deboos said that Highways England would install an air quality monitor on the A31 for the duration of the improvement scheme; he asked if this could stay as a permanent feature.

District Cllr Rippon-Swaine reported on work of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel. He said that a Task & Finish Group had been appointed to review the Parking Standards Supplementary Planning Document, which would look at issues such as standards for different uses, air quality and guidance on electric vehicle charging points. NFDC had agreed that the default option for small vans would be electric, and all small plant and tools would be replaced by electric models. Also, work on the Waste Strategy was currently on hold whilst HCC and other collecting authorities carried out their own reviews.

District Cllr Heron reported that Cabinet on 7<sup>th</sup> April would, amongst other items, receive an update on the Freeports bid.

**C/6591**

**FORTHCOMING MEETINGS**

Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces	7.00pm	Wednesday 7 <sup>th</sup> April 2021
Planning, Town & Environment	10.00am	Friday 9 <sup>th</sup> April 2021
Policy & Finance	7.00pm	Wednesday 21 <sup>st</sup> April 2021
Full Council	7.00pm	Wednesday 28 <sup>th</sup> April 2021

There being no further business, the Town Mayor closed the meeting at 21:36pm.

APPROVED

*28<sup>th</sup> April 2021*

TOWN MAYOR

**TOWN COUNCIL****31<sup>st</sup> March 2021****Report on meeting arrangements and delegation of powers****1. Introduction and reason why decision required**

- 1.1 The powers contained in The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, by which the Council has been able to meet remotely using video-conferencing technology, cease to apply after 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021. It is therefore necessary to consider what arrangements to make in respect of the Annual Council Meeting, other meetings and the making of decisions about the performance of Council functions after that date.

**2. Background information, options, impact assessment and risks**

- 2.1 Opinions are divided on the question of whether councils like this one can lawfully meet remotely after 6<sup>th</sup> May. The question may turn on the proper interpretation of the earlier legislation (much of it passed in the 1960s or 70s) and Standing Orders drafted without express consideration of the matter. They can be read as either not clearly authorising meeting remotely or as not clearly prohibiting it. It is possible that the government may yet take steps to extend the 2020 Regulations or that a ruling will be obtained from the courts on the point but neither is certain.
- 2.2 If a council were to meet otherwise than in a lawful manner, what consequences would follow? First, it should be clearly understood that this is not a criminal matter; nobody is suggesting that members or officers could be prosecuted, convicted, fined (or worse). In the analogous case of a council meeting without the agenda having been circulated the requisite three clear working days beforehand, it has been ruled that this did not nullify the proceedings; the decisions made were allowed to stand and be acted upon.
- 2.3 It is also relevant to consider the government's roadmap out of lockdown (even though it does not mention local authority meetings specifically, it does address questions of social-distancing at meetings indoors and out). Current expectations are that Step 2 will be no earlier than 12<sup>th</sup> April, Step 3 than 17<sup>th</sup> May and Step 4 than 21<sup>st</sup> June. From 7<sup>th</sup> May (Step 2), the rule of six or two households will apply outdoors with no mixing indoors. From 17<sup>th</sup> May the limit on outdoor meeting will rise to 30 and the rule of six or two households will apply to indoor meetings (subject to review). Only after 21<sup>st</sup> June will there be no legal limits on social contacts.
- 2.4 The Council is required by law to hold an Annual Meeting in May (on a date to be agreed by the Council). It should also be noted that the Annual Governance and Accountability Return has to be considered and approved at a meeting of the full Council. This cannot be done until completion of the internal audit after the financial year end (on 31<sup>st</sup> March) but is usually subject to a filing deadline in July, with the result that it has generally been done here at the June Council meeting. This task cannot be delegated.
- 2.5 It is unclear at present whether councils will be able lawfully to meet remotely after 6<sup>th</sup> May, or physically before 21<sup>st</sup> June. (Members may be aware that some councils have taken to meeting in hybrid fashion, with some attendees physically gathered and others attending remotely. The uncertainty about the lawfulness of wholly remote meetings apply equally to such hybrid meetings.) HALC has issued a paper recommending that member councils re-schedule their Annual Meetings for the period 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> May.

# A

- 2.6 Given the present uncertainty officers concur with the recommendation from HALC and recommend that the meeting of the Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces Committee scheduled for Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> May be cancelled and the Annual Meeting scheduled for 26<sup>th</sup> May be brought forward and held remotely on that date instead. This will have the unfortunate effect that the new councillor elected on 6<sup>th</sup> May will be unable to take part but that drawback is outweighed by the benefit of ensuring that the election of the Mayor and other essential annual tasks are completed in a manner that is indisputably lawful.
- 2.7 For meetings scheduled after 6<sup>th</sup> May but before Step 4, several options present:
- 2.7.1 Proceed with them remotely as at present; or
  - 2.7.2 Cancel them; or
  - 2.7.3 Proceed with them remotely but treat them as giving “advice” to officers rather than making decisions.

If the second or third options are preferred, it might be advisable to review and enlarge the delegation of powers to officers. The Council already delegates many day-to-day operational decisions to the Town Clerk. Decisions about policy and strategy and many significant operational decisions are in practice made by members in meetings to which the public has access but if this is impracticable, such enlarged delegation may be the only alternative to paralysis.

- 2.8 For meetings scheduled after Step 4, there are, again, options. The Council could simply resume meeting physically but some members may feel uncomfortable about this and prefer the option of remote attendance. Presuming they are not declared unlawful, hybrid meetings would pose a further technological challenge but perhaps this should be met? There may well be a specific difficulty in dealing with the AGAR but since there is a little time available and the likelihood of further developments, officers recommend that no decision be taken about this now.

### 3. Issues for decision and any recommendations

#### Whether:

- 3.1 **the Council should cancel the meeting of the Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces Committee scheduled for Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> May and bring the Annual Meeting scheduled for 26<sup>th</sup> May forward to be held as a remote meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> May instead**
- 3.2 **the meetings scheduled between 6<sup>th</sup> May and the date of Step 4 (if later and whatever date that may be) should:**
- 3.2.1 **proceed as remote meetings but otherwise as normal; or**
  - 3.2.2 **be cancelled; or**
  - 3.2.3 **proceed remotely but be confined to the giving of advice to officers in the exercise of delegated powers rather than making decisions.**
- 3.3 **the Council should with effect from 6<sup>th</sup> May until the date of Step 4 (if later and whatever date that may be):**
- 3.3.1 **Delegate to the Town Clerk (i) the power to make any decision on behalf of the Council which the Council itself could lawfully make and lawfully delegate to the Clerk at the time of such decision (whether such delegation is lawful now or not) and (ii) the power to delegate any such decision to the Deputy Town Clerk, the Finance Manager or other officer of the Council; and**
  - 3.3.2 **Instruct the Town Clerk to take all steps necessary to ensure the Council fulfils its responsibilities to Ringwood residents and in doing so to confer with the Town Mayor, relevant Committee chair**

**and other councillors where practicable and by such means as shall appear expedient from time to time.**

- 3.4 officers should work towards being able to facilitate “hybrid” meetings of the Council and its Committees and Working Parties as soon as practicable.**

For further information, contact:

Chris Wilkins, Town Clerk  
Direct Dial: 01425 484720  
Email: [chris.wilkins@ringwood.gov.uk](mailto:chris.wilkins@ringwood.gov.uk)

Jo Hurd, Deputy Town Clerk  
Direct Dial: 01425 484721  
Email: [jo.hurd@ringwood](mailto:jo.hurd@ringwood.gov.uk) gov.uk