

High Wycombe Town Committee Minutes

Date: 21 January 2014

Time: 6.30 - 8.15 pm

PRESENT: Councillor A R Green
(in the Chair)

Councillors M Hussain JP, K Ahmed, Z Ahmed, I Bates, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, R B Colomb, C A Ditta, R Farmer, S Graham, M Hanif, A E Hill, A Hussain JP, M Hussain, Ms R Knight, Ms P L Lee, Miss S Manir, S F Parker, B E Pearce, C Shafique MBE and T Snaith,

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M E Knight and Ms J D Wassell

27 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2013 be agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman declared an interest in minute 30 (Special Expenses Budget 2014/15) in view of his chairmanship of the High Wycombe Town Twinning Association, which received funding from the Special Expenses budget. The Chairman remained in the Chamber throughout discussions.

29 HIGH WYCOMBE CEMETERY FEES FOR 2014/15

The report before the Committee proposed prices for burials, interments and other cemetery related charges to be applicable from April 2014. It was noted that price increases of 2.7% were being proposed for burial rights, memorial charges, Saturday fees and steel framed burials.

A table of comparative costs was discussed. This showed that Wycombe's charges were generally around average for the local area. Differing approaches to arrangements were highlighted.

It was recalled that, in 2004, the High Wycombe Town Committee Cemetery Sub Group had recommended that the cemetery charges be increased progressively with the aim of achieving full recovery of costs. However, subsequent decisions by the Committee had superseded this.

During discussions, two proposals from Members were put to the Committee for Interment fees, these were:

- Option 1 – to break even on current costs of Interment; and
- Option 2 – to continue to use the current pricing structure with prices to increase in line with inflation, plus a 5% surcharge.

On a vote it was

RESOLVED: That (i) the proposed prices for burials, interments, Saturday fees, memorial permits and other cemetery-related charges be recommended to Cabinet for approval from April 2014; and

(ii) Option 1 to break even on current cost of Interment be supported.

30 SPECIAL EXPENSES BUDGET 2014/15 - DETAILED ESTIMATES

The Committee considered the report which set out details of the 2014/15 Special Expenses budget and which explained the Council Tax precept. The senior accountant explained that there had been an increase in the Council Tax base for the High Wycombe town area from 2014/15.

Members noted that, if council tax was maintained at current rates, the increase in the number of households in the area would result in an increase in income. Various options had been costed for Members' consideration which would keep the tax rate at or below 2013/14 levels, enabling the Council to qualify for the Government's freeze grant.

It was also noted that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme grant would reduce from the 2013/14 level of £62,100 to £53,400.

The senior accountant presented the report to the Committee and informed the meeting of the effect on the budget from the Committee's decision on minute no 29, High Wycombe Cemetery Fees. He commented that £10,000 had been omitted from the report and should be listed under the Community Grants Account.

All Members concurred with the view that the Council Tax Precepts should be reduced for residents within the High Wycombe town area.

A proposal to reduce Council Tax Precepts by 2% was put but fell and it was therefore;

RESOLVED: That (i) Option 2 in the report be implemented in respect of the Special Expenses council tax setting for 2014/15 which would see a reduced precept and the charge for a Band D property reduce from £18.08p to £17.80.

31 ALLOTMENT ANNUAL FEES FOR 2014/15

The Committee considered the report inviting Members to give further consideration to the allotment plot rents from January 2015. The report had been reviewed previously by the Committee at its meeting on 5 November 2013. However, the Committee had requested that it be brought back with further information comparing the fees for High Wycombe town allotments with other local providers.

The Committee considered the report which proposed changes for allotment plot rents from January 2015. Members agreed the recommended option for prices to increase based on an inflation percentage of 2.7%, aligning with Customer Price Index.

RESOLVED: That the Committee support the proposed charges for plot rents for allotments as presented in Option 1 in the report and recommend to Cabinet that they be approved.

32 HIGH WYCOMBE CEMETERY LODGE

The Committee considered proposals for a scheme to refurbish High Wycombe Cemetery Lodge to provide a service tenancy, financed by £43,000 from the Special Expenses working balances.

The proposal had been put forward because the property was vacant and the future of the lodge needed to be agreed along with any necessary funding. The lodge required significant refurbishment to meet the Habitable Homes standard. It was noted that the property could not be purchased under the Right to Buy scheme. A financial estimate of £43,000 from Special Expenses for maintenance costs was proposed as part of the arrangement.

There was considerable concern that the property had not been sufficiently maintained. However, Members were informed that maintenance checks would take place annually to ensure the property was adequately maintained in the future.

Many Members spoke in favour of the proposals which were widely welcomed and supported. The majority of the Committee held the view, that the rent should be negotiated to reflect current service tenancy rates.

RESOLVED: That the Committee recommend to Cabinet that:

- (i) £43,000 be committed from the Special Expenses contingency to fund the refurbishment work;
- (ii) the works be tendered for the refurbishment of the Lodge;
and
- (iii) delegated authority be granted to the Head of Community in consultation with the Chairman of the High Wycombe Town

Committee to agree a rental for a service tenancy agreement in 2014/15.

33 UPDATE ON ALLOTMENT REVIEW

The Community Commissioning Manager provided an update on the District Allotment Review, which detailed the Council's responsibility to provide allotments for the residents of High Wycombe Town.

There was general support for the proposal that the Council should divide the plots in two as they become available to reduce the waiting list for allotments.

RESOLVED: That the Committee recommend to Cabinet that:

(i) the 250 square metre plots be divided in two as they become available and as appropriate;

(ii) the waiting list on an annual basis be reviewed and if demand increases review the site appraisals and seek Committee approval for funding when required;

(iii) The Abbey Barn South provide an additional site to the south of the town as and when the site is developed;

(iv) When the master plans for Ashwells, Terriers, and Abbey Barn North sites are developed, provision for new allotments be included; and

(v) feasibility work into Desborough Castle and Castlefield Wood options be agreed, as these appear to be most capable of being progressed and of meeting the demand the town was experiencing. That £10,000 funding for Desborough Castle and £13,000 for Castlefield Wood be released to complete the feasibility work.

34 COMMEMORATING WORLD WAR ONE

The Committee considered proposals to commemorate the centenary of the start of World War in August 2014. The proposed projects were as follows:

- An event based around the town to commemorate the start of World War One
- Links to existing known commemorative events
- The unveiling of the Victoria Cross commemorative paving slab
- A significant event that could involve High Wycombe's twin town, Kelkheim

There was support for the Council to work with other authorities on events. Members were encouraged to discuss project ideas within their area and relay any suggestions back to Community Services for consideration.

35 INFORMATION SHEETS

RESOLVED: That the list of Information Sheets issued since the previous meeting be noted.

36 HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN COMMITTEE - FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted.

37 URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

RESOLVED: That, all future High Wycombe Town Committee meetings commence at 7pm.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

Miss C MacKenzie	Principal Democratic Services Officer
Mr D Ruddock	District Solicitor
Mr J Bacchus	Senior Accountant
Ms S Randall	Community Commissioning Manager