

# High Wycombe Town Committee Minutes

Date: 19 January 2016

Time: 7.00 - 10.00 pm

**PRESENT:** Councillor A R Green  
(in the Chair)

Councillors K Ahmed, Z Ahmed, Ms A Baughan, H Bull, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, M Clarke, M P Davy, R Farmer, S Graham, M Hanif, M A Hashmi, A E Hill, M Hussain JP, A Hussain, M Hussain, M E Knight, B E Pearce, R Raja, S K Raja, N J B Teesdale and Ms J D Wassell,

**ALSO PRESENT:**

John Shaw	Chiltern Rangers
Paul New	Chiltern Rangers
Lindsay Horler	Chiltern Rangers
Inspector Tim McGirr	Thames Valley Police

## 28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Asif.

## 29 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was noted that regarding item 22 the pedestrian safety measures were in relation to the roundabout on Hatters Lane.

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2015 be agreed

## 30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor M Hashmi declared an interest in minute 33 (Provision of 7 day a week burial service) as the Honorary Secretary of the Self Help Bereavement Society. Councillor Hashmi remained in the Chamber throughout the discussions.

Councillor R Raja declared an interest in minute 33 (Provision of 7 day a week burial service) as the Chairman of the Self Help Bereavement Society. Councillor Raja remained in the Chamber throughout the discussions.

Councillor S Graham declared an interest in minute 34 (Castlefield Allotment site) as a member of the Castlefield Community Centre. Councillor Graham remained in the Chamber throughout the discussions.

The Chairman declared an interest in minute 37 (Urgent Item - Special Expenses Budget 2016/17) 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.

### **31 CHILTERN RANGERS UPDATE - PRESENTATION**

John Shaw, Managing Director of the Chiltern Rangers Community Interest Company, gave a presentation to the Committee detailing the achievements of the Chiltern Rangers over the last year. Members were informed of a number of projects being undertaken in the area engaging with a wide range of community groups. It was noted that 1,200 volunteers from numerous organisations were involved giving 4500 hours to the range of projects.

John was joined by Paul New and Lindsay Horler who provided an update on the Heritage Lottery Fund Young Roots project. Members heard that Chiltern Rangers and Wycombe Youth Council had designed an 18 month project to create a heritage trail along the River Wye from The Wycombe Swan area to Kingsmead. It was noted that 400 young people had been introduced to the project through Inspire sessions with schools and youth organisations and a core team 20 young people would be on the Wycombe Council Board or Young People Project Management Team. There would also be 150 adult volunteers working on the project. Members were invited to identify any groups within their wards that might be interested in being involved in the project.

Members noted that the age range aim for the project was 11 to 19 year olds however all ages were welcomed to be involved. It was noted that the Environment Agency had been involved in project meetings on the wider impact of the project as part of multiagency working. The project would include encouraging the use of the accessible routes along the river and enhancing the environment.

Members were asked to note that Conservation Community Group met on a regular basis and the information was available on the Chiltern Rangers website.

The Committee expressed support for the work being carried out by the Chiltern Rangers and the Chairman thanked John, Paul and Lindsay for their presentation and wished them well in the future.

### **32 UPDATE FROM THAMES VALLEY POLICE**

The Chairman welcomed Inspector Tim McGirr of Thames Valley Police to the meeting and was invited to provide an update on policing matters within the town.

Inspector McGirr presented the performance data and reported that crime was down by 1.1%. However there had been a slight increase in burglaries and theft from motor vehicles. Also the reporting of crimes in relation to domestic violence had increased however this was considered positive due to awareness being raised on the issue of domestic violence.

Inspector McGirr informed the Committee of several initiatives which were currently being undertaken or were planned within the town. These included discussions taking place with Bucks County Council on enhancing the role of Neighbourhood Watch and expanding responsibility to wider communities; raising awareness of cybercrime; and a Street Triage service in partnership with the Oxford Health and Berkshire NHS Trusts in the town centre to provide the appropriate care for people experiencing mental ill health. The Committee were also informed of a grant provided by the home office to offer extra support in tackling gang crimes. It was noted that the Gangs Multi-Agency Partnership (G-MAP) would be working to identify and assist young people who were at risk of being involved with or affected by youth violence. However Inspector McGirr emphasised that there was no indication of gang problems in the area and that the grant in line with partnership working provided greater support for young people in Wycombe.

The Chairman thanked Inspector McGirr for providing the update.

### **33 PROVISION OF A 7 DAY A WEEK BURIAL SERVICE**

The Committee considered a report on the provision of a 7 day burial service at High Wycombe Cemetery.

It was noted that, at present, the Council offered both short notice and pre-booked burials on a Saturday to all who requested it, and Members noted the cut off timings associated with a Saturday burial for it to take place on the same day. The Committee was also provided with a summary of the number of Saturday burials over the last six years.

The Head of Community explained that research had been undertaken on the provision of a 7 day a week burial service, and a short survey was sent to 28 burial services in council areas known to have populations of Muslim residents. As a result of the survey 19 responses were received of which 11 provided a weekend burial service covering Sundays and Bank Holidays. In all cases a paid staff member of the council or contractor attends. It was noted that Chesham Town Council had not been included in the survey.

The provision of a full 7 day service would incur additional standby charges from the existing contractor, as the contract did not include any provision for burials on Sundays and Bank Holidays. Members also noted the additional interment costs and costs for the attendance of Council staff. It was noted that the existing contract with the contractor currently included Saturdays, and hence this did not attract additional charges. The Head of Community commented that the contract would be up for renewal in 2019 and suggested that this may present an opportunity at that time to reduce costs for introducing a full 7 day a week burial service.

Members made a number of points and received clarification of various queries which included:

- Officers had visited Chesham Town Council's cemetery and the Gardens of Peace Muslim cemetery in Ilford. Members were asked to contact the Head of Community if they would like to have a visit arranged.

- Survey respondents included one district council and at least one metropolitan council.
- Costs were based on seven funerals on a Sunday across the year. If requested, the Head of Community would provide written confirmation from the Insurance and Finance Technical Advisor regarding the Chesham burial service, it was noted that detailed legal advice on that model would be needed if it was to be considered.
- The Council's Constitution sets out the responsibilities for Members and Officers. Legal verification processes were for officers and not Members to undertake because these were operational issues delegated to Heads of Service and their relevant officers.

Members expressed concern at the additional cost of the burials for a full 7 day a week service. It was proposed that no changes be made to the current provision, and the status quo remain in place.

Upon being put to a vote, following the Chairman's second vote, this was agreed.

As a result, it was noted that no recommendation to Cabinet was required as no changes to the service provision were being proposed. At the appropriate time a report could be brought to the Committee to incorporate a 7 day service into the next Green Space Contract.

**RESOLVED:** That, having fully considered the options and costs for extending the existing provision to a 7 day a week service, the status quo be maintained and no changes be proposed at this time.

### **34 CASTLEFIELD ALLOTMENT SITE**

The Committee received a report which considered the results of feasibility work for new allotment sites in Castlefield.

In September 2014 the Committee requested a feasibility study to be undertaken on two new potential allotment sites in Castlefield. Soil surveys had been completed on Site A which was a former allotment site within Castlefield Wood, and Site B which was adjacent to Desborough Castle and the current allotment site. It was reported that Site B was likely to be unsuitable for an allotment site and that Site A had passed the tests. To create the new allotment site in Castlefield the project would require up to £61,000 from Special reserves, providing 25 new plots and helping to reduce the allotment site waiting list.

During the discussion the Committee received clarification on various queries which included:

- Section 106 and CIL funding could not be committed to the project at present as the 2016/17 allocations had already been assigned.
- It was difficult to find suitable land for allotment plots as flat land was required.
- If approved by Cabinet then work would begin in Summer 2016 for use at the start of the allotment season in January 2017.

- The plots were the smaller half size.
- The Council is responsible for providing allotments.

**RESOLVED:** That, subject to a successful felling licence and necessary amendment to the lease to Chiltern Ranges CIC of Castlefield Wood, the Committee recommend to Cabinet the allocation of £61,000 from Special Expenses reserves to create a new allotment site in Castlefield.

### **35 HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN COMMITTEE - FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee's draft work programme, looking ahead to November 2016 was presented for review.

It was noted that there was now only one presentation due to the March meeting and it was suggested that the High Wycombe Town Centre Master Plan presentation also be brought to the meeting in March.

### **36 URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)**

The Chairman requested that the Special Expenses Budget 2016/17 report be added to the agenda. The report included recommendations for setting of the Council Tax for the High Wycombe Town area and the next meeting of the Committee would be too late as it occurs after the Council tax has been set at Council in February.

The Committee considered the details of the 2016/17 Special Expenses Budget which explained the Council Tax precept. Nisar Visram, Financial Services Manager explained that the increase in properties means that the precept would increase by £5,039 if the Band D Charge was left unchanged. Also as part of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review announcement in November 2015 the Council Tax Reduction Scheme had been reduced significantly for 2016/17. As a result, the amount given to the Town and Parishes has been reduced in line with this and for High Wycombe Town it will be £37,500 in 2016/17 a reduction from 2015/16 level of £45,200.

Various options had been costed for Members' consideration which presented the impact to the annual surplus/deficit and to working balances and how this impacted the maximum level the District Council could increase Council tax.

In discussion Members sought clarification on salary costs and it was reported that salary costs had been moved to overheads and were now reported as Group Management costs. On another query the Chairman confirmed that if applications for grants matched the criteria then they would be approved, however not many applications were submitted.

A proposal to reduce Council Tax precepts by 1.09% was put to the vote but fell, and on a further vote it was

**RESOLVED:** That Option 5 in the report in respect of the Special Expenses council tax setting for 2016/17 be recommended to Cabinet which would see the precept reduced by 1% and the charge for a Band D property reduce to £17.33.

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Chairman

**The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:**

Mr I Hunt

Ms E Jewell

Nisar Visram

Democratic Services Manager

Head of Community

Financial Services Manager