

High Wycombe Town Committee Minutes

Date: 17 January 2017

Time: 7.00 - 9.27 pm

PRESENT: Councillor A R Green
(in the Chair)

Councillors K Ahmed, Z Ahmed, M Asif, Ms A Baughan, H Bull, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, M Clarke, R Farmer, S Graham, M Hanif, 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:

Mr Chandler

Inspector Gill Fox

Thames Valley Police

23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Davey, Councillor Hashmi and Councillor Hill.

24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

25 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 22 November 2016 be agreed as a correct record.

26 CONSIDERATION OF THE PETITION RECEIVED- PROTECT GRAVES AT WYCOMBE CEMETERY

The Committee was asked to consider a petition which had been presented to Council in October 2016 and Cabinet in November 2016. The petition, which read "To provide CCTV to Protect Graves from People Stealing and Anti-Social Behaviour Within the Cemetery" raised a number of issues relating to security and anti-social behaviour. The petition which contained 2,035 signatories had been considered by Cabinet on 14 November 2016 and referred to High Wycombe Town Committee for consideration.

Whilst referring to the petition, the petitioner supported the plans to record the removal of items from graves but requested the consideration of CCTV, improvement of fencing, the option to use dummy cameras and more patrolling of the cemetery.

The Cabinet Member for Community had provided a response to the petition which was included in the report. This had been referred to the High Wycombe Town Committee by Cabinet as the funding of the installation of CCTV would fall within the Special Expenses budget, which was within the remit of the High Wycombe Town Committee.

The Committee noted that processes had also recently been reviewed, with officers now taking photographs of each grave before items were removed that either detrimentally affect nearby graves or had started to weather and deteriorate.

Members made a number of points and the following clarification was received:

- The cost of CCTV was significant and a number of cameras would be required.
- There had been a low number of incidents of vandalism and anti-social behaviour reported, with one reported over the last three years.
- The fencing at the cemetery (Benjamin Road side) would be investigated and improved if required.
- Dummy cameras would not be considered as these were not permissible by law.
- Additional lighting would require planning permission and lighting was not normally provided in unsupervised areas.
- Footpaths would not be permanently closed off as it was preferred to encourage people to visit the cemetery and provide natural surveillance.
- An officer worked and lived on site, provided security and supervised work undertaken by contractors. Any items on graves that were damaged during any contractor works would be recorded and reported almost immediately.
- Toilets on site were not locked during the day; the toilets and gates were locked at night.
- The signage regarding information to report complaints at the cemetery would be checked to make sure this was clear and available to visitors.

The Chairman thanked the petitioner for attending and presenting the petition.

RESOLVED: That it be recommended to Cabinet

- i) that High Wycombe Town Committee acknowledges the distress caused under circumstances such as these;
- ii) the number of reported incidents be monitored alongside the new process for recording the removal of items from graves by Council officers.
- iii) That a report be brought back to the High Wycombe Town Committee in a year's time providing information on the number of reported incidents that have been recorded during that period.

27 POLICING UPDATE

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

Inspector Fox presented the performance data and a breakdown of crimes statistics for High Wycombe. It was noted for the Wycombe District there had been a 29% increase in reported hate crime for the year to date. This represented 193 reports which was an additional 43 incidents compared to this time last year.

It was noted that in Wycombe East (Terriers/Totteridge/Micklefield) there had been an increase in sexual offences of 69%. Inspector Fox noted that these figures included a majority of reported historical crimes which could be a result of media coverage of high profile cases. Also burglaries in Wycombe West (Castlefield, Booker, Downley) had increased by 69% however arrests had been made and there was an expected downturn in these offences.

Inspector Fox informed the Committee of several initiatives which were currently being undertaken or were planned within the town. These included:

- A residents meeting had taken place at Tadros Court to tackle anti-social behaviour in the area. Following a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme there had been an 84% reduction in anti-social behaviour.
- The consideration of the use of a charity card scheme and media campaign to heighten awareness around homelessness to reduce street begging.
- A new Public Spaces Protection Order to include street drinking within the Desborough area.
- A 'Have Your Say' event in the Desborough area to understand concerns of the whole community, including businesses, to enable the appropriate response to problems in the area.
- Work being undertaken to tackle youth anti-social behaviour that was taking place between groups across the Wycombe area.
- Working with the local community in Micklefield to raise awareness regarding speeding and the anti-social use of motorcycles. Also the NH team would be looking to work with Bucks CC to consider road improvements with the introduction of speed humps.

Inspector Fox explained that a force restructure was currently being undertaken and this would result in a small reduction in frontline resources on Local Police Areas. However it was noted that this would streamline services and enable the officers to focus the right resources and deliver a good service to the public and vulnerable communities.

Members reported that businesses on the Desborough Road were concerned by the anti-social behaviour and street drinking taking place. An incident was specifically noted relating to an issue that the owner of Lansdale Pharmacy had reported when a street drinker had urinated on the front of the shop. Inspector Fox confirmed that this had been investigated and a plan was in place to manage the individual concerned.

In response to further queries it was reported that:

- Stop Hate Crime Awareness Week took place every year and included campaigns, tweeting, advertisement on the Thames Valley Police website and the distribution of leaflets.
- Figures to support the data provided had been obtained though incidents reported through 101 or the TVP website.
- Some websites provided a service for people to report hate crimes who did not want to contact the police directly.
- Any anti-social driving should be reported so that the police could investigate and tackle any problems within neighbourhoods.
- Thames Valley Police were happy that the restructuring of the force would create enough resources to tackle issues directly with the right officers.
- Issues relating to the reports of increased activities of prostitution in specific areas would be investigated. However it was noted that there had been no reports relating to prostitution in the Desborough Road and any activity relating to these offences was encouraged to be reported.

The Chairman thanked Inspector Fox for providing the update.

28 MAJOR PROJECTS UPDATE

The Committee welcomed Charles Brocklehurst, the Council's Major Projects and Estates Executive, to the meeting who gave an update on projects in the town centre.

The Committee were informed of projects across the town which included:

- Planning consent for the Costco proposal was still being considered.
- The 3rd and 5th phase of the Handy Cross project was being worked up which included a hotel and a day nursery respectively.
- Work is underway with Bucks CC on Cressex Business Park access and street parking.
- The Easton Street car park is ageing and consideration is being given to regenerate this sector of town.
- Discussions have been undertaken with the Department for Transport and Chiltern Railways regarding the future of the goods shed but as yet no resolution.
- Public consultation will be undertaken next month on a masterplan for the Baker Street area.
- One element is to replicate 'containerville' area to provide low cost accommodation for artists from Leigh Street retailers.
- The use of gazebo type pop-up stalls on the market.
- Future consideration to use Little Market House as glazed street food court.
- The Red Squirrel Brewery Company had successfully opened in Church Street and The Works had also opened for trading on the High Street.
- Plans to potentially purchase 4-5 Cornmarket, to be possibly refurbished as an independent baker.

- The former Reggie Goves centre would be refurbished as a late night opening Cuban style café/bar/club.

It was noted that Chiltern Shopping Centre now has a thriving Polish supermarket and there are plans to open a gym. The Committee were asked to consider an option of returning a fountain to Frogmoor, however the majority of the Committee were not in favour of the idea. It was noted the new parking bays on Frogmoor may need to be reviewed if the current short term parking arrangement was not being continued.

In response to member queries, it was noted that Sword House, Totteridge Road had been purchased and there were plans to look at the area for regeneration in the future dependent on resources. Regarding the refurbishment of shops in the old town it was explained that once purchased, the shops were stripped of previous shop fittings and then offered to tenants as a basic shell, at reasonable rents.

Members thanked the Major Projects and Estates Executive for his presentation.

29 HWTC BUDGET AND TAX SETTING 2017/18

The Committee considered a report which set out the details of the 2017/18 Special Expenses Budget and which explained the Council Tax precept. Members noted that due to the increase in properties the precept would increase by £8,065.11 if the Band D Council Tax Charge was left unchanged.

Also as part of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review announcement in December 2016 the Council Tax Reduction Scheme had been reduced significantly for 2017/18. As a result, the amount given to the Town and Parishes has been reduced in line with this and for High Wycombe Town it would be £31,708 in 2017/18 a reduction from 2016/17 level of £37,500.

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. It was noted that anything above a 1.25% reduction would impact on the Council's ability to levy the maximum Council Tax increase permitted by Central Government.

In discussion Members sought clarification on group management costs and it was reported that this was in relation to management costs including recharged salaries and support services such as finance and IT. Regarding recreation grounds it reported that there had been an increase in the recharged maintenance costs due to the renegotiation of the contract which now included play areas being separately identifiable and recharged to the Town Committee.

RESOLVED: That it be recommended to Cabinet that Option 1 in the report in respect of the Special Expenses council tax setting for 2017/18 be agreed, which would see the precept reduced by 1.25%

30 MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH MIRPUR

The Committee considered the proposal for a Memorandum of Understanding between the High Wycombe Town Committee and Mirpur City to reflect the significant contribution the city of Mirpur has made to the life and economy of High Wycombe.

In discussion the Committee noted that a Memorandum of Understanding had been signed in 2012 by the then Mayor and therefore the Committee agreed that there was no requirement for a further document.

31 NEW CEMETERY - FEASIBILITY REPORT

The Committee considered a report which outlined the estimated funding requirement of £1,963,332 for a new Cemetery. The costs were brought to the attention of the Committee in line with the decision relating to the budget setting.

In response to Member queries it was noted that the Snowdrop Cemetery would be at capacity in approximately 18 months - two years' time. A new child burial section could be undertaken at the new site as soon as funding had been secured. Further information would be brought to the next meeting. It was also noted that service requirements meant that use of volunteers was more usual in closed cemeteries

The final budget request would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee in March 2017.

RESOLVED: That the estimated funding requirement be noted and a further report be brought to the March meeting of the Committee.

32 INFORMATION SHEETS

RESOLVED: That Information Sheet 06/2016 Community Notice Boards be noted.

33 HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN COMMITTEE - FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee's draft work programme looking ahead to November 2017 was presented for review.

It was noted that the work programme for March would include the new Cemetery funding request and an update on the CIL allocations.

Due to the amount of items for the March meeting the Chairman suggested that the Chiltern Rangers update be moved to the June meeting. It was also agreed to review the scheduled report for March on PSPO and whether this would be required.

RESOLVED: That the forward work programme be noted and updated as above.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

Mrs J Durkan	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Mr I Hunt	Democratic Services Manager
C Brocklehurst	Major Projects and Property Executive
Ms E Jewell	Head of Community
Nisar Visram	Financial Services Manager