

High Wycombe Town Committee Minutes

Date: 21 January 2020

Time: 7.05 - 9.30 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, R Farmer, S Graham, A E Hill, M Hussain JP, A Hussain, M Hussain, M E Knight, B E Pearce, R Raja, S K Raja and Ms J D Wassell,

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Asif, M P Davy, M Hanif, M A Hashmi and N J B Teesdale

ALSO PRESENT:

Melanie Williams HWBIDCo

17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

18 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the High Wycombe Town Committee held on 10 September 2019 be agreed as a correct records and signed by the Chairman.

19 HWBIDCO UPDATE

The Committee were provided with a presentation on the priorities and work of HWBIDCo by Melanie Williams, BID Manager.

In her presentation Melanie provided information on BID statistics, growth and the type of BIDs that were increasing. It was noted that the largest increase in BIDs were for town centres. Members noted the legislation, current developments and how BIDs were accredited. It was reported that BIDs aimed to deliver a number of aspects which included: representing business, boosting the economy, reducing business costs, linking with stakeholders and public bodies. Melanie provided data from the VOA that indicated that weak city centres have too many shops and not enough office space. It was noted that HWBIDCo supported Wycombe District Council with the Future High Street fund bid. Members were also provided with information on the team members and the work and projects that had been undertaken and plans for the year ahead.

Members raised a number of points and received responses in respect of various questions. Main points were as follows:

- There was a possibility of Desborough Road having its own Christmas lights switch on in the future.
- A member offered to contact local businesses so that people from ethnic minority groups could be represented on the board of directors.
- Investigations had been made in replacing the Christmas lights. It was noted that WDC owned the lights and if replaced a cost would be incurred. Various options were being considered.
- A dementia friendly group met on a regular basis in the library and further work was being done.
- HWBIDCo were congratulated on the use of the concrete balls in the high street as Christmas decorations.
- The Desborough carnival had been a great success.
- Regarding the closure of pubs it was noted that focus on the night-time as an economy would help.
- Working with smaller independent shops had been difficult as a consistent approach was needed and this was difficult for smaller establishments. The financial benefit of larger stakeholders was important as they influenced the ballot for the BID.
- HWBIDCo was unable to influence the high street market as the contract was dealt with by WDC. If there was an opportunity in the future then HWBIDCo would be interested to engage in discussions. The Chairman noted that the contract was not yet up for renewal and could not be changed at the moment.
- Regarding an indoor market, using the Chiltern Shopping centre was a good idea however the market would need to diversify.

The Chairman thanked Melanie for her presentation and suggested that she be invited to a future meeting once the unitary authority had been established.

20 HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN CENTRE ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: PRESENTATION

The Committee received a presentation from John Callaghan, WDC and Ian McGowan, BCC on the High Wycombe Town Centre Masterplan, including the alternative route.

Information was provided on policy, routes, communication and consultation on design schemes, monitoring and evaluation across all six phases of the masterplan. It was noted that monitoring and evaluation was on-going and more would be undertaken following completion of the current schemes. There were plans for further surveys including noise, air quality and journey time surveys. Future work would include the replacement of the planters.

Following a detailed presentation members asked a number of questions and provided comments. A number of responses were received these included:

- A member requested that more priority should be given to Totteridge Road over Amersham Hill in terms of signal timings. It was reported that the traffic signals junction at the station exit was under review and improvements should be made within the next few weeks. There had been an issue regarding the synchronisation of these traffic signals with those at the Crendon St/high St junction which was having an effect on the traffic flow.
- The traffic signals along Amersham Hill and along the A40 were fitted with SCOOT (Split Cycle and Offset Optimisation Technique) and when fully operational this should bring about improvements to the flow of traffic.
- Air quality and other factors were being monitored in the town centre and the findings would be reported later in the year.
- There were concerns about vehicles making right turns at the top and bottom of Suffield Hill. Officers explained the rationale behind the design. There were no plans to add a yellow box to the road on Suffield Hill, however these are other issues were noted and would be highlighted as part of a Safety Audit to be conducted on the alternative route as a whole, supplementing the audits undertaken on the different sections..
- The planters had been a disappointment however there was a proposal to replace these with something that would be attractive and durable. .
- Members noted that whilst generally right turn bans should be 'self-enforcing', the banned Crendon Street right turn to the High Street appeared to be working well without physical measures.
- A Member showed concern regarding the shared space concept and commented that this was no longer supported by central Government. Officers clarified that the design approach was not based on shared space
- Monitoring and evaluation would continue on the Cressex junction and officers were working with businesses in the area to explore the scope for further improvements serving the business park.
- The work undertaken on the Cressex Road had taken longer than planned because of constraints on the site. This was due to drivers needing access to the road during the works.
- Phase 1 to 6 of the Town Centre Masterplan had been delivered and were completed. Further phases were not yet funded, but remained as planning policy. Next steps would be outlined in the Regeneration Strategy.
- Whilst there were no plans to remove the tree on Desborough Road, there was a sign in advance of the tree that needed to be reinstated.
- A Member commented that many of the road changes had been positive and had encouraged more courteous driver behaviour towards pedestrians. The issues regarding the planters had been due to drivers.
- A Member stated that he would be against any plans to give greater priority to Totteridge Road over Amersham Hill in terms of signal timings.
- A member suggested that the traffic signals at the western end of the flyover appeared to be out of sync. Officers agreed to investigate this.

The Chairman thanked Ian and John for their presentation.

21 NEW CEMETERY REPORT

Members were provided with a report from Nigel Dicker, Head of Housing, Environment and Community Services, requesting an increase to the budget for the new cemetery at Penn Road. It was noted that the report would also be taken to the Shadow Executive and WDC Cabinet members for approval; recommendations also included delegated authority to enter into a build contract.

The new cemetery had previously received approval for an initial budget of £1,679,790 from High Wycombe Town Committee and Cabinet. The costs of the works had increased by £253,210 with a total project cost of £1,933,000. The Committee were being asked to authorise funding of £143k from the Special Expenses Reserve to help meet the costs and recommended release of £500,000 CIL to help meet this.

Regarding the expected number of burials and adequate space at the new cemetery, Sue Drummond, Community Services Manager, confirmed that there were 3750 spaces supporting 150 burials a year over 25 years until the cemetery would reach capacity. It was reported that the current grounds maintenance contract was due for renewal in two years' time when the arrangements regarding 7 days burials could be considered.

Members were concerned that the budget for new cemetery was listed in the wrong portfolio in the draft budget for the new unitary authority. Concern was raised that in general the Special Expenses funds were not being considered correctly in the draft unitary budget. These concerns would be taken back to the Shadow Section 151 officer for investigation. An information sheet was requested regarding Special Expenses within the new Buckinghamshire Council budget. The Chairman confirmed that this would be investigated. The Monitoring Officer noted that she was not aware of any changes regarding the Special Expenses arrangements. The Chairman also confirmed that the High Wycombe Town Committee would continue in Buckinghamshire Council. It was noted that the decision regarding the Community Governance Review was for the new council to make in the future.

In response to a query Andy Sherwood, Contracts Manager, noted that spaces for child burials should not be at capacity for another 12 months which would provide adequate time for the new cemetery to be built. It was also noted that this would be the first space to be opened up at the new cemetery.

In response to a query the annual maintenance costs would be to look after both the old and the new cemetery.

Members noted the recommendations to Cabinet and **recommended that the remaining funding of the project from the Special Expenses Reserve: £143k and CIL: £500k be authorised.**

22 SPECIAL EXPENSES BUDGET 2020/21

Jacqueline Boosey, Business Partner, presented a report which set out the details of the 2020/21 Special Expenses Budget and explained the Council Tax precept.

Members noted that the estimated net cost of services for 2020/21 was estimated at £357k, this was a decrease of £15k from the previous year.

Various options were provided for Members' consideration which presented the impact to the annual surplus/deficit and to working balances and how this impacted the maximum level the Shadow Executive could increase Council tax. Officers recommended a 24p increase to the Council Tax Band D to £12.06 for the unparished area of High Wycombe as this would not have any adverse impact on working balances and provide Buckinghamshire Council with the ability to implement the full 1.99% increase permissible.

During the discussion it was noted that £20k was allocated as grant funding to voluntary groups. Also a Member noted his disappointment with the budget in that he felt that the needs of residents and community groups were not being met. The Chairman in response noted that the Committee had allocated £2m on the new cemetery and did look after the needs of residents in High Wycombe. Members sought clarification on the recharging of management fees and it was noted that these should now say Buckinghamshire Council rather than WDC. The Chairman again clarified that the Committee would continue under Buckinghamshire Council and the Special Expenses budget would continue under the remit of High Wycombe Town Committee.

It was also requested that a breakdown of the management recharge be provided to members of the Committee.

Members considered the options outlined in the report. Councillor M Clarke, seconded by Councillor M Hussain, proposed not to increase the Band D Council Tax. After being put to a vote this was agreed by the majority of the Committee and recommended to Cabinet.

RECOMMENDED TO SHADOW EXECUTIVE:

- i) That in respect of the Special Expenses Council Tax setting for 2019/20, a Nil increase to the Band D Council Tax be recommended.
- ii) That a 3% increase in Fees & Charges be recommended.

23 INFORMATION SHEET

RESOLVED: That Information Sheet 04/2019 Q3 Budgetary Control Report be noted.

24 HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN COMMITTEE - FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee's work programme looking ahead to March 2020 was presented for review. It was noted that the Q3 budget report was incorrect as this had been presented to the Committee at the current meeting.

RESOLVED: That the forward work programme be noted.

25 SUPPLEMENTARY ITEMS (IF ANY)

There were no supplementary items.

26 URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

There were no urgent items.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

J Durkan	Senior Democratic Services Officer
K Khanna	Principal Solicitor & Monitoring Officer
N Dicker	Head of Housing, Environment & Community Services
A Sherwood	Contract Manager
J Boosey	Business Partner (Financial Planning & Analysis)
S Drummond	Community Services Manager
J Callaghan	Team Leader (Environment and Infrastructure)