



# Buckinghamshire Council

## High Wycombe Town Committee

### Minutes

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2020 IN VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE MS TEAMS, COMMENCING AT 7.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 9.50 PM**

#### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

K Ahmed, Z Ahmed, M Asif, A Baughan, M Davy, R Farmer, T Green, M Hanif, M Hashmi, D Hayday, A Hill, A Hussain, M Hussain, M Hussain JP, M Knight, W Mallen, B Pearce, R Raja, S Raja, N Teesdale and J Wassell

#### **OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE**

H Bishop, J Durkan, J Ford, S Garwood, L Hornby, R Nawaz and A Sherwood

#### **Agenda Item**

#### **7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Sebert Graham, Cllr Mrs Lesley Clarke OBE and Cllr Marten Clarke.

#### **8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Hill declared an interest in item 4 as a member of Member of the Market Traders Association.

#### **9 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of the High Wycombe Town Committee held on 9 June 2020 were agreed.

#### **10 HIGH WYCOMBE MARKET UPDATE**

Jacqueline Ford, Economic Development Officer, provided a report and presentation on the High Wycombe Market. The following main points were noted:

- Quarterbridge had been appointed to carry out a review of the market. Two engagement sessions had taken place with local councillors. Trader engagement and a public survey had also been undertaken.
- The survey showed that the main reason for people visiting the town centre was to visit the Eden shopping centre. However, some people said the market was their first and secondary reason to visit the town centre.
- During lock down there was a different cohort using the town centre i.e. residents who usually travelled elsewhere for work and who would be rediscovering the town.

- In the survey farmer's markets, craft markets, Christmas markets and food markets were indicated as the most popular with regards to the kind of markets people liked to attend.
- 79% of responders stated that they recognised the market as an asset to the town – even if they didn't visit it regularly.
- Some people travel to other areas to visit a market, however the survey indicated that if there were more events and options they would visit the High Wycombe market.
- Many respondents indicated that they still like to visit a town to shop.
- A surprisingly large number of respondents think that High Wycombe does not promote the town and local business to the wider community enough.
- Comments included requests more stalls - variety and quality, fresh food, speciality markets and events.
- Five traders provided feedback on the market and stated that improvements were needed around poor signage, poor appearance, perceived lack of footfall and a request for more business support.
- Opportunities for the future include use of the undercroft of the Guildhall, new starter stalls, new gazebos, better signage, better social media, linking with the community board and HWBIDCo.
- Benefits from moving the market management from Estates Team to the new Local Economic Growth Team include operational and strategic opportunities, and consideration of best practice across Buckinghamshire for the markets.
- A further update on the market would be provided to the Committee at the next meeting.

In response to questions the following points were noted:

- There had been an allocated budget of £10,000 for the Quarterbridge report. The independent company had been appointed to provide a new view and ideas for the market.
- Parking concessions could be considered however all links and aspect of the town centre need to be considered.
- Costings for gazebos were being considered and further information would be provided once the process for these had been confirmed.
- There was concern regarding the lack of management of the market with regards to hazards and tidiness. It was noted that a new market manager had been appointed and the observations of members would be raised and investigated.
- It was suggested that Easton Street car parking costs be reduced / removed on a Saturday to encourage shoppers at the eastern end of town.
- Regarding the age of the survey participants, it was reported that there was a broad breakdown of people who completed the survey from 18 to over 65.
- It was suggested to change bus routes so that more people would have to go through the market to improve footfall – although other members raised concerns of safety and air quality
- The wider relationship with the town and the market would all have to be considered with regards to location.
- The numbers in the survey were statistically representative, the wider breakdown with ethnicity and gender would be reported.
- It was suggested that the town centre was not as busy due to planning, parking issues and the pandemic. It was noted the survey was done ahead of lockdown. The challenges that our towns faced pre-Covid have been accelerated - but there could be advantages to changes in the behaviour of shoppers following the pandemic. There were different operating models to consider.
- It was noted that the new gazebos would not need to be fixed to the road as the new style were suitably weighted to prevent these from damage in high winds.

- There was inconsistency with the apparent success of the market on different days.
- Consideration would be given to the quality and diversity of the market offer.
- Quarterbridge had national case studies of success in their report which would be provided at the next meeting. There had been challenges for other markets in the county.
- Consideration would be given to future events but this would be a challenge due to COVID 19.
- Investigation would be undertaken with regards to the new market management contract next year and the role of members to help shape / provide view on this operational arrangement would be clarified.
- Activities around parking and footfall would also be investigated.
- It was suggested that the management of market should be brought back into the council or the market traders.
- Free parking on Saturdays at Duke Street car park was suggested.
- Some of the high street could be used for performances for groups such as schools to encourage people to the market area.
- Car boot sales were very popular in the area and it was suggested to use elements of these events to boost footfall at the market.

The Chairman thanked Jacqueline for the update and it was noted that a further update would be provided to the meeting in November.

## **11 SPECIAL EXPENSES Q1 2020/21**

Anne Begley, Interim Finance Business Partner presented a report to the Committee to note the Q1 forecast position for 2020/21. In response to Member questions the following points were noted:

- It was noted that to carry forwards any underspend this would be considered a change to the current budget and would have to be recommended through Cabinet/Council to be agreed, as the previous year end was now closed and could not be carried forward. It was confirmed that the money was held under the special expenses reserved balance.
- As of the day of the meeting £2500 had been spent from the grants allocations and a further two applications for £1500 each were in process.
- The income for the allotments was retained by the contractor for the management and the council pay for the ground maintenance of the sites.
- There were three war memorials: All Saints, Kings Road and a new one by the cemetery. Cleaning had been undertaken on all which had increased the usual expenditure.
- The only income was from the cemetery and this had increased.
- It was confirmed that the motion to carry forwards the underspend to the next year's budget had not been taken to Cabinet following officer advice as the year end accounts were closed.
- Chiltern Rangers maintained some areas of woodland for the council however the funds for this did not come out of the Special Expenses budget.

The Chairman thanked Anne for the update and members were asked to email Anne directly if they had any further queries.

## **12 CIL ALLOCATIONS UPDATE**

Rub Nawaz, Principal Infrastructure Officer presented a report on the anticipated income, funds collected and funds allocated in 2019/20. Also an update was provided on projects funded by the Town Committee.

In response to questions the following points were noted:

- Regarding the Bull Lane Service Yard Gates the total money required was approximately £35,000. A written response would be provided regarding the match funding from Travelodge and any alternative options if this funding could not be secured.
- It was suggested that as Travelodge and other shop owners would benefit from these gates they should contribute to the cost. There was a commitment in 2019 of £9000 from the Travelodge manager. A discussion would be undertaken with Nick Adkins, Anti-Social Behaviour Team leader, regarding this matter and information would be circulated.
- It was confirmed that £688,000 was expected income from demand notices issued the previous year for funding that had not been received. The total estimated income was before COVID 19 was approximately £4mln. Further demand notices had been issued for approximately £850,000.
- The River Wye Interpretation Board provided history regarding the river and how it is benefited and improved the lives of residents in and around Wycombe.
- Some CIL bad debtors have requested instalment payment plans and enforcement policies have been adopted. An update regarding the bad debtors was requested to be provided at the next meeting.
- With regards to funds for CCTV in shopping areas it was suggested to contact the Communities teams for further information.
- The Government has provided guidance on late payment charges as part of the COVID 19 laws; there were no charges for late payments as part of a formal deferral request. Work was undertaken with developers on referrals and was a maximum of four months.
- Concern was raised regarding the cost of the Bull Lane Service Yard Gates.
- Suggestions were made regarding areas of interest around High Wycombe for the Interpretation Boards and signposts such as the St John's ruins and the Peace gardens. It was requested that costs for these should be provided.
- Regarding the Arnison Avenue and Totteridge Road scheme it was noted that the funds for this had already been received.
- In January 2019 the Committee agreed to expand the remit of the Local Centres Project to cover other areas and there was scope to use funding elsewhere. Members had also agreed to bring forward new schemes and consider match funding from outside organisations.
- The commitment from Travelodge regarding the Bull Lane Service Yard Gates was a soft commitment and this was not part of the planning permission conditions. There were enforcement procedures in place with developers.

The Chairman thanked Rub for his update.

### **13 ALLOTMENTS UPDATE**

Andy Sherwood, Contract Manager presented a report providing an update on allotments within the unparished area of High Wycombe. In response to queries the following points were noted:

- Information on the number of individuals on the waiting list could be provided. It was noted that there was a minimum of 32 people on the waiting list however some may have applied for multiple sites.
- Some plots had been sub-divided to make them more manageable.
- It was suggested that planning departments could be ask for developers to consider allotment schemes during the planning process.
- The Daws Hill development do have an allotment provision however this could be managed privately, and officers were waiting for further details regarding this matter.
- Popularity of allotments had varied over the years and it was noted that the current level was at a reasonable level to maintain.
- The traditional size of plots were 250m<sup>2</sup>, some of these sized plots had been split in half and

even smaller to help people as the larger sizes are more difficult to manage. Less than 125m<sup>2</sup> would be too small to cultivate.

- Additional allotments sites were found at Castlefield and Queensway following the closure of the Bassetsbury site and it had been difficult to find suitable cost effective additional sites.
- An area in Sands had not been allocated as an allotment site and this may not have been suitable due to the slope of the site.
- The time on the waiting list could vary from a year to longer and individuals were contacted when a site became available. They were taken off the list when no longer interested and added on as per application and date order.
- The income from the site for this year from the sites was £6177 and the £500 from Idverde to the Council was fixed on an annual basis.
- There were inspections every four weeks by the contractor to check the plots and three letters go out at four weeks, two weeks and then a final termination letter if a plot was not improved.
- Some people apply for one site, however some also go on the waiting list for other sites.
- No other allotments sites were being considered, it was difficult to find land suitable for only allotments.

Cllr Green, seconded by Cllr Farmer proposed that the Strategic Sites Planning Committee or relevant department be requested to consider that during the development of major sites that planning for allotment space be included, for the community benefit. After being put to a vote the Committee agreed to put this request to the relevant body.

The Chairman thanked Andy for his update.

#### **14 TRANSPORT STRATEGY UPDATE**

The Chairman tabled an item updating the Committee on the emerging High Wycombe Transport Strategy. Hannah Bishop, Transport Strategy Lead Officer, presented a report on the progress of the Strategy, this had been previously circulated to members of the Committee in advance of the meeting.

The Committee were invited to a workshop to consider a recommended package of future transport schemes for High Wycombe. It was noted that these were long term aspirational schemes until 2050.

Members supported a workshop to offer views. Regarding cycle ways it was difficult to cycle around High Wycombe due to the hills and it was noted this was being considered. An e-scooter trial was being undertaken in High Wycombe and there were plans for an e-bike trial to also take place. A member raised concern regarding the speed of e-scooters.

The Transport Strategy would take into account the town centre masterplan however the timeline would look further ahead than masterplan. The Strategy would be considering public transport plans and how people would travel in and around High Wycombe in the future.

A member raised concern regarding accessing the motorway and rail system from High Wycombe due to traffic. It was noted that this Strategy would support less traffic and for people to use more public transport such as cleaner buses. The Strategy would provide an evidence base to apply for government funding in the future to support these aims.

There was a separate piece of work being undertaken on electric charging points in High Wycombe to support individuals who would like to buy electric cars. There were currently no electric buses in the county; these required considerable investment and the Strategy would

also provide an evidence base to support applications for funding in this area.

It was noted that the Transport Strategy was to be published at the start of 2021 however a public consultation would need to be undertaken ahead of publication and invites for a workshop would be organised as soon as possible.

The Chairman thanked Hannah for the information.

## **15 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee's draft work programme looking ahead to March 20201 was presented for review.

Simon Garwood, Localism Manager, suggested that in relation to the grants criteria review a small cross party working group to consider this matter would be organised. It was also suggested that Kerry Rackstraw, Commissioning Team Leader, would also be asked to attend as she was involved in a wider community grants review currently being undertaken. Members were asked to email Simon Garwood directly to volunteer for the member working group.

Also a separate working group would be established to consider and understand the roles and responsibilities of the High Wycombe Community Board and the High Wycombe Town Committee. Volunteers were also asked to email Simon or the Chairman to volunteer for this group.

The Chairman requested that Penelope Tollitt and John Shaw from the Chiltern Rangers be invited to the next meeting with regards to projects being undertaken on climate change.

## **16 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting would take place on 24 November at 7pm.