

**BARNARD CASTLE TOWN COUNCIL
SERVICES COMMITTEE**

19 OCTOBER 2015

PRESENT: Councillors Peat (in the Chair); Harrison, Hinchcliffe, Mrs Grady (from Minute 30 ii) and Mrs Thompson (from Minute 30 iii).

Also in attendance: One member of the press.

Officers: Mrs Woodward (Deputy Clerk).

27. ACCEPTANCE, OR OTHERWISE, OF APOLOGIES:

Apologies were received from Councillor Yarker (who was away).

Resolved – That Councillor Yarker's apologies be accepted.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with this Council's adopted Code of Conduct (Minute 72(a)/Sep/12 refers), Members will be asked whether they have any personal or prejudicial interests in any matter on the agenda and, if so, to declare those interests at this point of the meeting. Members are reminded that a declaration can be given later in the meeting if a need arises during discussion. Councillor Harrison declared an interest in respect of Item 30.

29. SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING – 20 JULY 2015 – MINUTES

Resolved – That the Minutes be accepted as a correct record.

30. ALLOTMENTS

(i) General

It was reported that there were no vacancies on any of the allotment sites. One rental payment remained outstanding for the 2015/16 season. Arrangements were in place to review the situation at the end of October 2015.

Five new applications had been received on the waiting list, which currently stood at 25.

Councillor Harrison had volunteered to attend a Rodent Control Course on 23 October 2015 in Durham, organised for members of the National Allotments Society (NAS).

The NAS North East Region Allotment Officers' Forum was on 19 November 2015 hosted by Middlesbrough Council. It was confirmed that Mrs Farren, Services Officer would attend.

Resolved - That the information be noted.

(ii) Bonfires

It was reported that a letter had been received from a tenant on The Demesnes Allotment site requesting that consideration be given to amending Allotment Rule 2015/16 No. 7 in respect of bonfire restrictions. The Tenant requested that the months when fires were permitted on the Demesnes allotment site be increased, (particularly to include September) and that the stated time restriction be lifted. Currently the rule stated:

7 Bonfires:-

(ii) On Demesnes and Raby Avenue allotment sites, no bonfires will be permitted between the beginning of May and the end of September in any year. During the remainder of the year, bonfires will only be permitted after 4.00 p.m.;

Members were reminded that the Allotment Garden Tenancy Agreement and Allotment Rules were normally reviewed by Services Committee on an annual basis at the beginning of each new season, prior to the new agreements/rules being issued. The next scheduled review was at Services Committee on 22 February 2016.

There were obvious environment and health and safety issues associated with bonfires and the majority of local authorities had strict policies in place.

Members were reminded that there should be little necessity to burn garden waste as most could be composted, or in the case of non-compostable material, disposed of at a recycling centre. However, there were certain circumstances when it was necessary for waste to be incinerated (i.e. in the case of diseased vegetation).

Members noted that the Demesnes site was rural and had its own access difficulties; in recognition of these difficulties, it was decided in 2011 that a skip be provided bi-annually. However, in November 2014, the Council resolved that skips would only be provided in exceptional circumstances as it was viewed as a costly facility (Council Minute 85(1)(a)/Nov/14 refers).

Resolved – That a review of the bonfire rule be undertaken across all town council allotment sites at next scheduled review of Allotment Rules on 22 February 2016.

(iii) Allotments Improvement Action Plan

It was reported that the Allotment Improvement Holding Account stood at £1,224 and it was anticipated that a similar amount would transfer at 31 March 2016 making a total of £2,448. Following the sale of land to the rear of numbers 9 and 11 Bede Road and pursuant to Resources Committee (Minute 24/Sept/15 refers), it was resolved that the capital receipt of £19,000 be allocated to the Allotment Improvement Holding Account and that Services Committee approve a programme of capital works within the allotment improvement programme.

The following improvements were proposed for members' consideration:

- Path refurbishment for The Demesnes, Raby Ave and Town Head sites (due to health and safety).
- Creation of new path for the Demesnes site to link plot nos. 24, 24A & 24B (due to health and safety).
- Water Regulation Compliance – Review and possible replacement of reduced pressure zone valves on all sites (It was a legal requirement to have the devices checked on a regular basis, at least yearly, to ensure they provided the backflow protection required).
- Crook Lane site - Hardstanding area

Resolved – That £8,000 remain in the Allotment Improvement Holding Account to carry out improvements in line with the Allotment Improvement Action Plan and £11,000 be transferred into general reserves to be used towards other town council projects.

(iv) Allotments 2016/17 Budgetary Bid

Received – a report considering the Allotments 2016/17 budgetary bid for inclusion in the overall Town Council budget for 2016/17. Members were reminded that the Allotments Service was self-funding and that the Allotments 2015/16 budgetary allocation was £3,846 for expenditure and income. It was confirmed that the plot rental for 2016/17 had already been determined at £45 (12 months' notice was required to be given to tenants). Over

the last two years there had been a rental increase of 12.5% to accommodate increased utility and grounds maintenance costs and to allow completion of essential maintenance works.

Resolved – That (a) the 2016/17 Allotments Expenditure be £4,065 (increase of £219) and Income be £4,065 (increase of £219) and;

(b) the allotment rental for 2017/18 remain at £45.00 with a view of possible increase in 2018/19.

31. PLAY AREAS

(i) General Update

The town council had been notified that Durham County Council was no longer offering the play area inspections. Alternative options were being sourced.

Resolved - That the information be noted.

(ii) Marwood Drive Flooding

Submitted – a report seeking a decision regarding the issue of flooding to a rear garden adjacent to the Marwood Drive Play Area, following consideration of the funding position by Resources Committee (Minute 15/Jun/15 and 29/Sept/15 refers) and clarification received from Northumbrian Water and Fields in Trust.

Evidence from the Environment Agency demonstrated that there was a medium risk of flooding from surface water. It was established in law that the council could not accept any liability for the natural flow of surface water.

It was confirmed that there was no budget for additional works and no guarantee that these would resolve the flooding issue.

Councillor Peat informed members that he had visited the resident affected by the flooding and that there was a significant wet area in the play area by the goal posts, indicative of existing drains being blocked. It was deemed prudent to rod and flush the existing drains before pursuing any new works.

Resolved – That a growth bid to secure funding of £1,000 be made as part of the 2016/17 play areas budgetary bid to carry out remedial drainage works to the playing area.

(iii) Play Areas 2016/17 Budgetary Bid

Received – a report considering a budgetary bid for Play Areas 2016/17 for inclusion in the overall town council budget for 2016/17. The 2015/16 Play Areas expenditure budget was £10,500, with predicted expenditure of £7,500 by 31 March 2016. The 2015/16 income was £117.

Members were reminded that this was the first year of a rolling 'Play Areas Repairs and Future Provision Reserve Fund' with a minimum of £2,500 allocated, along with any underspends, to replace play areas safety surfacing in future years.

For 2016/17 the annual general maintenance costs had slightly increased. Annual Play Area Inspections would cost the same. However, there was still the issue of quarterly inspections. It was reported that there was a two day playground inspection course and RPII Inspector Qualification which cost £445, with registration lasting 3 years. It was felt that this was a more cost effective option.

It was noted that members had previously resolved to secure a growth bid of £1,000 for remedial drainage works to Marwood Drive (Minute 31 (ii) refers).

It was further reported that Barnard Castle Football Club (BCFC) were reviewing current funding and the business case for redeveloping facilities at Ten Fields compared to Green Lane. It was deemed prudent to delay progression of the 'Vision for Play' strategy for Green Lane – Ten Fields – Kalafat.

Resolved – (a) That the Play Areas 2016/17 expenditure budget be £11,500 (increase of £1,000).
(b) That the Play Areas 2016/17 income budget be £117 (no change from 2015/16);
(c) That any Play Area budgetary underspends continue to be transferred into a Play Areas Future Provision and Repairs Reserve Fund;
(d) That Councillor Harrison be nominated to attend a play area inspection course to be qualified to carry out quarterly inspections;
(e) That the play development strategy for Green Lane – Ten Fields – Kalafat Playing Fields be delayed until the outcome of Ten Fields Lease Renewal be confirmed.

32. MINI GOLF 2016/17 BUDGETARY BID

Submitted – a report considering a budgetary bid for the 2016/17 Mini Golf Service and Fees and Charges for inclusion in the overall Town Council's budget for 2016/17. Members were reminded that this was a self-funding service. Any remaining income, after all expenditure, was transferred to the Mini Golf Holding Account to build up funds to future proof the facility. The fund currently stood at £9,301.

Members were reminded that during the 2015/16 budgetary process, it was resolved to reduce the expenditure figure by £1,000 resulting in £1,000 of the mini golf income being used to offset the precept demand instead of being reinvested back into the service.

It was reported that income for the 2015 season was down on the 2014 season, primarily due to a very wet August. The likely figure to transfer into the Mini Golf Holding Account for 2015/16 at the end of March 2016 would be in the region of £2,800. It was therefore proposed that for 2016/17 both income and expenditure levels reverted back to a balanced net position.

Members were reminded that from April 2016, changes to the National Living Wage (April) and National Minimum Wage (October) would be taken into account. The National Living Wage was set at £7.20 per hour for those aged 25 and over.

Councillor Harrison suggested that the mini golf hut would benefit from an electric point and Councillor Peat added that lights would be beneficial along the path leading from the mini golf area.

Resolved – (a) That the 2016/17 Mini Golf Income be £10,000 (no change) and Expenditure be £10,000 (increase of £1,000);
(b) That the possible impact of the National Living Wage from April 2016 be noted
(c) That the following fees and charges be recommended to Resources Committee on 2 November 2015:
£2.00 per round for all users (no change)
£6.00 group ticket (up to 4 players) (no change)
£10.00 loyalty ticket (7 rounds in advance) (no change)
£0.50 lost ball (no change); and

£5.00 damaged club (no change)

33. WAR MEMORIALS 2016/17 BUDGETARY BID

2015/16 was the second year of a three-yearly maintenance programme.

Members were reminded that the Aviation Memorial was now included, so the town council was now responsible for four memorials. Three Memorials would need cleaning again in 2016 and the Aviation Memorial would be included within the three-year cleaning programme for the first time in 2019/20.

Resolved – That a 2016/17 budgetary application of £710 (no change) be recommended to the Resources Committee meeting scheduled for 2 November 2015.

34. CASTLE & MARKET CROSS FLOODLIGHTING 2016/17 BUDGETARY BID

The town council continued to be responsible for the electricity and maintenance costs of the castle floodlights and electricity costs were recharged to this council by Durham County Council on an annual basis.

There had been no indication to date that the electricity recharge costs for 2016/17 would increase dramatically.

The town council had instigated a project by Durham County Council to install external floodlighting to the Market Cross. The revenue costs, including electricity, of this lighting scheme would be met by the town council on the same basis. Based on the power consumption of the lighting units to be installed and their projected hours of operation, the unmetered electricity costs of this lighting scheme were estimated to be £300.

Resolved – That the 2016/17 budgetary allocation for Castle Floodlights be £400 (no change) and £300 for the Market Cross Floodlights (£300 new item) resulting in a budgetary bid of £700 (increase of £300).

35. PUBLIC SEATS

It was confirmed that the memorial bench scheme continued to progress and that, since the start of the 2015/16 financial year, two further donations had been received and as a result, refurbishment to two benches had been carried out (one in lower Galgate and one in the Remembrance Garden). Two RAF Memorial benches donated to the town council by HMYOI Deerbolt had also been restored and were yet to be sited.

Due to the success of the project, there remained only a few benches which were in need of refurbishment. However ongoing maintenance and repairs were still needed to keep the benches in good condition.

Currently £450 remained in the Public Seats Earmarked Funds account. Therefore, at this time, a Public Seats 2016/17 budgetary allocation was not considered necessary.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

36. DELIVERING DIFFERENTLY

Received – a report explaining the progress made in discussions with Durham County Council for the transfer of assets and services related to green and open spaces and to the provision of public toilets in the town.

It was reported that Durham County Council had indicated that it was willing to proceed with transfers on the basis of 30-year operating leases (Demesnes, Scar Top and Woodleigh Gardens) and freehold transfer (Galgate Greens). 50% responsibility for the Market Place public toilets would also transfer from the county council, with the addition of the public toilets adjacent to Morrison's, again on a leasehold basis. Cllr Mrs Grady queried why it was a 30-year lease and not freehold and suggested that further clarification be sought.

The town council had been awarded an enabling sum of £10,000, payable in the event transfers were completed, to cover transitional and implementation costs.

The actual costs of grounds maintenance relating to the Demesnes, Galgate Greens and Scar Top/Woodleigh would be subject to the letting of a contract, which would be scoped to include those areas currently maintained by the town council, including Green Lane, Kalafat and Dawson Road play areas and elements of the allotments. Members deemed it prudent to make a growth bid of £3,000 in the Floral and Open Spaces budget for 2016/17.

Members noted that there was no commitment from the county council to undertake this transfer, nor a timetable for doing so.

Resolved – (a) That clarification be sought on the terms of a 30-year lease over a freehold transfer, before recommending to the town council that agreement be sought with Durham County Council for the transfer of assets and services relating to the Demesnes, Galgate Greens, Scar Top, Woodleigh Grounds, Market Place public toilets and public toilets adjacent to Morrison's:

(b) That Durham County Council's operational information regarding current grounds maintenance service areas be queried as to why some areas were omitted (Sculpture Garden, Amen Corner, Woodside, Bridgegate etc.);

(c) That a 'Public Toilets' budget be established under the Services Committee at a total expenditure of £12,924 (to include £4,924 currently accounted for under the Resources Committee);

(d) That a growth bid of £3,000 be included under the heading of Floral and Open Spaces, to enable the transfer of open spaces from the county council; and

(e) That it be noted that the town council had been awarded a one-off sum of £10,000 under the Delivering Differently scheme, in the event of these transfers being completed.

37. FLORAL AND OPEN SPACES

(i) Floral Displays

It was reported that Elm Ridge Gardens Ltd would be carrying out winter planting on 27 October. The summer planting had been very well received. Councillor Peat reported that there were two wooden barrels still in storage and a third donated.

Resolved – (a) That the information be noted and;

(b) That the two wooden barrels be placed at King Street entrance to carpark in time for winter planting and that the donated barrel replace the black plastic tub on Scar Top.

(ii) Floral Development Volunteer Group

Councillor Peat proposed to set up a town council led community volunteer group to maintain and weed shrub beds, rake leaves in Woodleigh grounds and plant bulbs. It was proposed that regular volunteers would be responsible for specific areas of the town. The

aim was to enhance the quality of the town's floral displays and instil ownership and pride. Expressions of interest were requested to the office and a meeting would be arranged when enough people showed an interest.

Resolved – That a floral development group be established.

(iii) Floral and Open Spaces 2016/17 Budgetary Bid

Submitted – a report to consider a Floral and Open Spaces 2016/17 budgetary bid for inclusion in the overall Town Council budget for 2016/17.

The 2015/16 budget was £6,000, plus £1,282 from 2014/15 underspend. The current total expenditure was £6,909, with an anticipated underspend of £845. It was proposed that the 2016/17 budget be increased by a small amount to maintain growth of the town's floral displays.

Lowfield Gardens had confirmed that it was willing and able to carry out the watering service again.

Members noted that a growth bid of £3,000 was resolved at Minute 36, to enable maintenance of open spaces transferred from Durham County Council. Members considered the need for comparable quotes for the entire Grounds Maintenance Service, as the transfer would materially change the grounds maintenance contract.

It was confirmed that £148 remained in the Galgate Greens Improvement Project earmarked reserve funds.

Resolved – (a) That comparable quotes be sought for the entire Grounds Maintenance Service, in the event of Asset & Service transfer;
(b) That £148 remain in the Galgate Greens Improvement Project earmarked reserve fund;
(c) That underspends from 2015/16 budget be used for winter planting of the Gateway beds and Summer and Winter planting of the Gateway beds in 2016/17;
(d) That the Floral and Open Spaces 2016/17 budget be £9,500 (increase of £3,000) and;
(e) That Lowfield Gardens be requested to carry out the 2016/17 floral displays watering service.

(iv) Interpretation Board – Sculpture Garden

It was reported that Heart of Teesdale (HoT) had funding to replace the interpretation board at the sculpture garden (former gasworks site) and HoT had requested that the town council considered commissioning a new interpretation board.

Resolved – That a new interpretation board be commissioned for the sculpture garden, funded by a grant from HoT.

38. DOG FOULING

(i) General Update

The town council had been notified that Durham County Council (DCC) would not be offering dog waste bags at the town's customer access point once the current stock ran out. DCC would continue to direct people to the town council office.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

(ii) Dog Fouling 2016/17 Budgetary Bid

Received – a report considering a Dog Fouling 2016/17 budgetary bid for inclusion in the overall Town Council budget for 2016/17.

The 2015/16 dog fouling budget was £500. It was reported that £204 remained unspent and together with the £338 underspend from 2014/15, there was currently a balance of £542. Members considered reducing the budget for 2016/17.

Resolved – That the Dog Fouling 2016/17 budgetary bid be £300 (decrease of £200).

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