

**BARNARD CASTLE TOWN COUNCIL
SERVICES COMMITTEE**

11 DECEMBER 2017

PRESENT: Councillors Peat (in the Chair), Miss Blissett, Child and Mrs Thompson.

Also in attendance: Councillor Blissett; one member of the press.

Officers: Mr King (Town Clerk) and Mrs Woodward (Deputy Clerk).

53. ACCEPTANCE, OR OTHERWISE, OF APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Chatterjee and Hallimond.

Resolved – That the apologies be accepted.

54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with this Council's adopted Code of Conduct (Minute 12/May/17 refers), Members were asked whether they had 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 were reminded that a declaration could be given later in the meeting if a need arose during discussion.

55. SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING – 16 OCTOBER 2017 – MINUTES

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

56. ALLOTMENTS

(i) General update

There were no vacant allotment gardens; one would be available in the New Year following the successful completion of a garden swap by an existing tenant. One new application had been received since the last meeting, bringing the waiting list total to sixteen.

Following the issue of a 2nd warning letter to a tenant, discussions had taken place and a plan of action agreed. Progress would be monitored and a full review would take place at the end of March 2018.

Formal inspections of all sites were due to take place in the next few weeks. The water supply at all sites was to be turned off during the winter months.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

(ii) Allotments Improvement Action Plan

Quotations for path work improvements at Raby Avenue site were considered in exempt session, under item 68, below.

(iii) Budgetary bid 2018/19

Submitted – a report considering an Allotments budgetary bid for inclusion in the overall Town Council budget for 2018/19.

Members were reminded that the plot rental for 2018/19 had already been determined at £47 as 12 months' notice had to be given to tenants.

It was reported that there were now 86 active plots. The Allotments annual income also included £150 received from Northern Powergrid (Northeast) Ltd in respect of the annual rental for the electricity sub-station, sited at Crook Lane allotment and £25 annual income relating to the licence granted to the Dog Agility Group for access to the water supply at the Demesnes allotment. The Allotments Service was self-funding, with any underspends transferred into the 'Allotments Improvements Holding Account', to progress projects on the Allotments Improvements Action Plan.

It was recommended that prior to the 2018/19 season, Allotments Management Software was purchased for the office to enable more efficient administration and to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation in force from May 2018. A cost was to be considered at a later meeting.

Resolved – (a) That the 2018/19 Allotments Expenditure be £4,217 (increase of £127) and Income be £4,217 (increase of £127); and
(b) That the allotment rental for 2019/20 remain at £47 (no change).

57. PLAY AREAS

(i) Repairs and Maintenance

It was reported that Park Lane Playgrounds had carried out a quarterly inspection of the town council's five play areas on 6 October. There were a number of issues to be addressed as part of ongoing maintenance, including removal of graffiti at two play areas, which had already been actioned.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

(ii) Green Lane Playground Improvements

Estimates for potential works were currently being sought from play providers to be brought to a future meeting.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

(iii) Budgetary bid 2018/19

Received – a report considering a budgetary bid for Play Areas 2018/19 for inclusion in the overall Town Council budget for 2018/19.

Members were reminded that the Play Areas expenditure budget covered the costs of annual general maintenance (grass cutting and litter picking etc.), play area inspection fees and also included an allowance for essential play area equipment repairs.

The Play Areas income budget included rental of Tens Field. A gate licence fee was no longer collected (Minute 68(ii)(b)/Feb/17 refers).

This was the third year of a rolling 'Play Areas Repairs and Future Provision Reserve Fund', with a minimum of £2,500 allocated, along with any underspends.

Contracts were exchanged for the freehold transfer of Scar Top play area to the town council in October, with the Demesnes play area also due for transfer. Additional costs for inspection of Scar Top were estimated to be £140 per year and up to £300 for grounds maintenance and litter picking. It was felt that this additional expenditure could be accommodated within the overall budget.

The Dawson Road Play Area Earmarked Reserve was resolved to be used for future MUGA lighting (Minute 68(iii)(b)/Feb/17 refers).

The Tens Field Lease Earmarked Reserve was no longer needed, since a new lease had been drawn up based on the template approved by Fields in Trust, as custodian, without the need for legal expenses to be incurred by the town council.

Resolved – (a) That the Play Areas 2018/19 Expenditure budget be £11,500 (no change);
(b) That the Play Areas 2018/19 Income budget be £100 (£21 decrease);
(c) That any Play Areas budgetary underspends continue to be transferred into a Play Areas Future Provision and Repairs Reserve Fund;
(d) That Members review current arrangements for play area inspections for the 2018/19 financial year;
(e) That the Tens Field Earmarked Reserve be retired at 2017/18 year end, with £500 returned to general reserves; and
(f) That it be recommended to Resources Committee that the budgeted £21 income from 2017/18 gate licences be written off.

58. SCAR TOP PLAY AREA/ MINI GOLF FREEHOLD ASSET TRANSFER

It was reported that the transfer was now complete and that, as a consequence, provision for cleaning and inspection of the play area would be made from within the existing budget in 2017/18. The surface had been pressure hosed and the board had been etched onto the shield of the wooden play fort.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

59. DELIVERING DIFFERENTLY

There was no substantive progress since the last meeting.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

60. MINI GOLF

(i) Review of 2017 season

Received – a report providing members with a review of the 2017 mini golf season.

A total number of 5,471 rounds were played over a period of 30 weeks 8 April to 29 October inclusive; averaging 45 visitors per day. The net income was £11,565. 2017 was the first season that Mini Golf was registered as a taxable supply (Minute 42/Oct/16 refers).

Expenditure to date was £6,312, however, it was noted there would be final expenditure from the 2017/18 budget in respect of grounds maintenance, repairs/modifications following the winter period, costs associated with equipment replenishment and recruitment, prior to the start of the 2018 season. Members were informed that from April 2018 the National Living Wage would be £7.83 an hour for workers aged 25 and over, with the National Minimum Wage increasing to £7.38 for those aged 24 and under.

Members were reminded that Mini Golf was run as a 'self-funding service' with a 'Mini Golf Holding Account' set up to enable underspends to be set aside for future repairs and upkeep.

It was recommended that consideration be given to improvements to the Mini Golf kiosk for the 2018 season.

Resolved – (a) That the information be noted; and
(b) That consideration be given to improvements to the Mini Golf kiosk for the 2018 season as part of the 2018/19 budgetary bid.

(ii) Budgetary bid 2018/19

Submitted – a report considering a budgetary bid for the 2018/19 Mini Golf service and fees and charges for inclusion in the overall town council budget for 2018/19.

Members considered the proposal for installation of power to the Mini Golf kiosk to improve heating and lighting for attendants, enabling payment for tickets by credit/ debit card and use of the course out-of-season for events etc. There were adequate funds in the Mini Golf Holding Account to cover the installation of power, dependent on the lease transfer of Woodleigh Grounds from Durham County Council.

Resolved – That it be recommended to Resources Committee on 15 January:

(a) That the 2018/19 Mini Golf Expenditure be £10,000 (no change) and Income be £10,000 (no change);

(b) That the 2018/19 Mini Golf fees and charges be as follows:

£3.00 per round for all users (£2.50+20%VAT);

£9.00 group ticket (up to 4 players – saving £3.00) (£7.50+20%VAT);

£15.00 loyalty ticket (7 rounds in advance – saving £6.00) (£12.00+20%VAT);

£1.00 lost ball (83p+20%VAT); and

£6.00 damaged club (£5.00+20%VAT);

(c) That consideration of quotations for installation of power to mini golf kiosk prior to 2018 season, be considered at Resources Committee on 15 January 2018.

61. WAR MEMORIALS

(i) Update

Pursuant to Minute 46/Oct/17, a decision on the grant submitted to the War Memorials Trust on 28 September, was expected on 15 December.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

(ii) Budgetary bid 2018/19

Members noted that a Maintenance Plan and Annual Inspection of each Memorial and its immediate surrounds were carried out each year by Councillor Blissett and a member of staff. Any issues identified at those inspections were dealt with and a small budgetary allocation was required to cover such unforeseen maintenance issues.

Since its relocation to The Remembrance Garden, The Aviation Memorial was also now under the responsibility of the Town Council and was included in the annual inspection for the first time in June 2015.

During 2013/14, all the Memorials were professionally cleaned and during the 2013/14 budgetary process, it was also agreed that a 3-yearly maintenance programme be put in place, with £710 required in each of the years 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17. There was currently £3,000 in the Earmarked Reserve. It was now felt that the War Memorials budget could be reduced.

The Aviation Memorial was cleaned during its installation in March 2015. Three War Memorials, with the exception of the Aviation Memorial, had been treated with moss remover during 2017.

Resolved – (a) That a 2018/19 budgetary allocation of £500 (reduction of £210) be recommended to the Resources Committee meeting scheduled for 15 January 2018; and (b) That an estimate be sought to repair the town memorial, in the grounds of The Bowes Museum, prior to the commemoration of the centenary of the end of WW1 in 2018.

62. WEDNESDAY MARKET

(i) Update

In the eight weeks from 11 October to 29 November, total rental receipts were £1,185, an average of £148 per week. The waiting list stood at five. Two charities had benefitted from the free charity pitch.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

(ii) Durham County Council Support for Street Markets

Information had been received from Durham County Council of a scheme which subsidised the cost of a standard market stall/awning. This scheme was available to new entrants to market trading and would be advertised to prospective traders contacting the town council about trading from the Wednesday Market, who might not otherwise be aware of the scheme. Members gave considering to the town council purchasing a subsidised stall for use by charities and other occasional users of the Wednesday Market.

(iii) Budgetary Bid 2018/19

As in the first year of operation, where the anticipated income and expenditure for the Wednesday Market was set by council at £5,000, based on figures to date, and allowing for reduced income over the Winter in line with performance in 2016/17, the anticipated out-turn income was £7,300. This reduction was due to worse weather during the summer months. Expenditure was similarly anticipated to be approximately £2,300, relating primarily to the costs associated with setting out and returning the market barriers. Thus the net surplus remained at the budgeted £5,000.

Resolved – (a) That Wednesday Market expenditure is set at £3,000 and Income at £8,000 for 2018/19 (No change);

(b) That the scale of fees and charges remains as set in February 2017 (72(ii)/Feb/17); and

(c) That a report be prepared on the costs and benefits of purchasing a subsidised market stall for use at the Wednesday Market to be considered by Committee on 19 February.

63. FLORAL AND OPEN SPACES

(i) Floral Displays 2017/18

Winter bedding plants had been purchased for the Gateway bed (outside Niche Living).

Resolved – That the information be noted.

(ii) Upper Demesnes Tree Planting

It was reported that Trees for Teesdale had successfully applied for a grant from Durham County Council to plant five suitable trees (3 sliver birches and 2 rowans) on the Upper Demesnes, by the stream. The trees would have protection from sheep and rabbits. There was no cost to the town council.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

(iii) Budgetary bid 2018/19

Received – a report considering a Floral and Open Spaces 2018/19 budgetary bid for inclusion in the overall Town Council budget for 2018/19.

Members were informed that there was a predicted underspend in 2017/18, due to the failure to transfer green and open spaces from Durham County Council. It was recommended that, at year end, underspends should be transferred to the existing earmarked reserves for Floral and Open Spaces and Grounds Maintenance.

The earmarked reserves would then stand at a level where it was capable of funding any revenue expenditure growth occasioned by the transfer of Woodleigh Grounds, Scar Top etc. Members noted that in later years, there would need to be an increase in revenue expenditure to maintain this spending.

Resolved – (a) That the Floral and Open Spaces 2018/19 budget be £9,500 (reduction of £2,200);

(b) That the 2017/18 underspend be earmarked for 2018/19 floral displays, with at least £2,200 earmarked for additional Grounds Maintenance in 2018/19;

(c) That the Galgate Greens Improvement Project earmarked reserve remain for repair of bollards; and

(d) That Lowfield Gardens be requested to carry out the 2018/19 floral displays watering service.

64. FLOODLIGHTING BUDGETARY BID 2018/19

This Council continued to be responsible for the electricity and maintenance costs of the castle floodlights. The electricity costs were recharged to this council by Durham County Council on an annual basis. From 2015, following installation of external floodlighting to the Market Cross, the revenue costs, including electricity, of this lighting scheme were now met by the town council on the same basis.

There had been no indication to date that the electricity recharge costs for 2018/19 would increase dramatically.

Resolved – That the 2018/19 budgetary allocation for Floodlights remains at £700 (no change).

65. PUBLIC SEATS

It was confirmed that the memorial bench scheme continued to progress and that, since the start of the 2017/18 financial year, one further donation had been received.

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 necessary to keep the benches in good condition.

Currently, £722 remained in the Public Seats Earmarked Funds account to date. Therefore, at this time, a Public Seats 2018/19 budgetary allocation was not considered necessary.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

66. DURHAM WILDLIFE TRUST – NEW BUDGET ITEM 2018/19

Pursuant to Minute 49/Oct/17, members considered a project proposal from Durham Wildlife Trust, working in partnership with the town council, to employ a dedicated project officer one day a week, to lead and support volunteers in the town.

Resolved – (a) That members support the project with Durham Wildlife Trust, in principle, up to a maximum of £1,000, as a potential new item during 2018/19 for recommendation to Resources Committee on 15 January 2018; and

(b) That delegated authority be given to the Clerk, to explore project specifics and tangible outcomes with Durham Wildlife Trust, together with Chair of Services Committee and Cllr Child, to be reported to Resources Committee on 15 January 2018.

67. DOG FOULING – BUDGETARY BID 2018/19

Received – a report considering a budgetary bid for dog fouling in 2018/19 for inclusion in the overall town council budget for 2018/19.

Members were reminded that £338 remained in the Dog Fouling Earmarked Reserves for the provision of 'smoke and dog free' play area signage (Minute 74/Apr/15 and Minute 50/Dec/15 refers).

Members revisited the possible provision of a part-time warden, to enforce dog control alongside market supervision, litter enforcement and play area inspection, as previously considered in preparation of the 2017/18 budget.

Resolved – (a) That it be recommended to Resources Committee on 15 January that the 2018/19 dog fouling budget be £300 (no change); and
(b) That creation of a part-time warden post for 2 days a week (14.8 hours) at a total cost of £9,035, part funded with income from the Wednesday Market, be recommended as a new item during 2018/19 to Resources Committee on 15 January 2018.

68. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (IN RESPECT OF ITEM 69 & CONTINUATION OF ITEM 56(ii) BELOW)

Resolved – That, under the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 §1(2), the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the matters referred to at item 69 & continuation of item 56(ii), below.

69. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

Submitted – a report determining a recommendation from Services Committee to extend the town council's existing Grounds Maintenance Contract for the 2018/19 season at full Council on 22 January 2018.

Resolved – That the 2018/19 Grounds Maintenance contract be awarded at full Council on 22 January.

56(ii) QUOTATION FOR PATH WORK – RABY AVENUE ALLOTMENT

Submitted – a report considering a quotation for identified path work improvements on the Raby Avenue Allotment site and seeking to appoint a company to undertake the work.

Resolved – That the Raby Avenue pathway improvement work be awarded to 4 Nature at a total net cost of £1,120 with 10 tonnes of stone surplus to be stored by the town council.