

**BARNARD CASTLE TOWN COUNCIL
SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING****13TH DECEMBER, 2010**

PRESENT:- Councillor Cooke (Town Mayor) (in the Chair); Councillors Mrs Bailes, Blissett, Mrs Dixon, Mrs Hamilton, Harrison, Hinchcliffe (Minutes 137 to 140 inclusive), Peat, Watson, Wood (Minutes 134 to 143(1) inclusive) and Yarker.

Officer:- Mr Bosworth (Town Clerk).

134. APOLOGIES:- None.

135. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with this Council's adopted Code of Conduct (Minute 20/Jan/07 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 the need arose during discussion. There were no declarations of interest at this juncture.

136. BARNARD CASTLE VISION

Submitted – In accordance with the standard arrangements, a report incorporating a briefing note (jointly written by Mrs A. Ward of the Barnard Castle Vision and the Clerk) providing an update on the Vision's ongoing projects. Specific references were made at the meeting to The Witham Hall redevelopment situation and the Vision's links with the Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership.

Information was also provided on the outcomes of the Town Mayor's meeting with the Vision Chairman on 19th November, 2010. It was also reported that the two most recent scheduled meetings between the Clerk and the Vision Chairman had been cancelled for differing reasons. Despite previous discussions and decisions on the subject, concerns were expressed at the meeting about this Council's current liaison arrangements with the Vision, there being particular concerns about the cancellation of the briefing meetings for all Town and County Councillors and the non-attendance of Vision representatives at Town Council meetings.

Finally, pursuant to Minute 97/Oct/10, it was confirmed that the Finance Committee had, because of the urgent situation, provisionally approved this Council's commitment to the wayfinding scheme (Committee Minute 32/Nov/10 refers).

Resolved – (a) That the submitted information be noted.

(b) That the Barnard Castle Vision be asked to reconsider the following:-

- (i) the attendance of a Vision representative at a number of Town Council meetings throughout the year; or
- (ii) the re-introduction of the briefing meetings for all Town and County Councillors.

137. SERVICE AND PROJECT UPDATES

Submitted – A report providing updates of some of this Council's services and current projects. The three items included in the report were as follows:-

(1) Poppy Appeal/Remembrance Sunday

It was reported that the arrangements for the 2010 Poppy Appeal had gone well. Details were provided of the procedures involved and the support received. It was further reported that the total raised to date was £6,577.61, the highest collection figure achieved since this Council took over the Appeal's administration in 2006. An appropriate letter was to be sent to the media.

The arrangements for Remembrance Sunday 2010 had also gone well, not least in respect of timings prior to the Church service and the fact that wreaths were again allowed in the Church following a year's moratorium. Some minor difficulties regarding the Parade and the sound system were not likely to occur again. A query was raised at the meeting regarding music during the wreath-laying but the Clerk stated that this was not advisable, bearing in mind that announcements were made during that part of the proceedings.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

(2) Christmas Festival Event

Pursuant to Minute 95(6)/Oct/10, reference was made to this Council's Christmas event on 26th November, 2010. The event proved to be well-attended and largely went according to plan. The various component parts were outlined in the submitted report and it was stressed that sponsorship of £200 had been received, thereby offsetting the overall costs.

References were made to the perceived need for a more cohesive approach with other organisations throughout the Christmas period and to the fact that a 'fallow year' in respect of the Christmas lights meant that the Christmas Festival Committee could fully investigate the event in particular and 'the Festival' in general.

Resolved – (a) That the information be noted.

(b) That the Christmas Festival Committee be requested to consider the following as a matter of urgency:-

- (i) a general review of 'the Festival';
- (ii) the co-ordinated involvement of Barnard Castle organisations; and
- (iii) the provision of collection tins/buckets at this Council's event.

(3) Newsletter/North Ward Vacancy

It was reported that, pursuant to Minute 95(2)/Oct/10 and because of further workload pressures, the production of the next edition of the Newsletter had been further delayed and would now hopefully be produced in January 2011. The resultant effect on the production of the two other editions scheduled for publication during 2010/11 was referred to and the potential of an underspend was highlighted. It was further reported that the North Ward vacancy situation was interlinked with the issue of the next Newsletter and had had to be postponed accordingly.

Specific reference was made at the meeting to the recommendations of the Editorial Board and the Finance Committee to reduce the size (and cost) of the editions of the Newsletter in 2011/12 and further consideration of those recommendations was suggested.

Resolved – (a) That two further editions of the Newsletter be published during 2010/11 (one in January 2011 and the other in March 2011), resulting in three of the four scheduled editions being issued, with a resultant underspend on the Newsletter budget.

(b) That the Editorial Board be requested to revisit its recommendation on the arrangements for the 2011/12 Newsletter with a view to further budgetary reductions being made.

138. TEESDALE ACTION PARTNERSHIP MATTERS

Submitted – Pursuant to Minute 98/Oct/10, a report summarising the outcome of the Teesdale Action Partnership's Forum meeting on 17th November, 2010 when the Partnership's future priorities were determined. Those priorities were outlined in the submitted report and it was generally considered at the meeting that the process for choosing the priorities was flawed. It was further reported that the informal officer meetings to discuss the working arrangements between the Partnership and local councils were ongoing. Details were provided of the next Partnership Board meeting.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

139. CHARTER REVIEW PROCESS – UPDATE

Submitted – Pursuant to Minute 98/Oct/10, a report summarising progress on the review of the Charter between Durham County Council and local councils. Following a full consultation process, a report had been produced by the Durham Rural Community Council on the major issues arising from the consultation. A recent focus group meeting had not been attended by the Clerk because of other work commitments.

Resolved – That it is considered that adherence to the Charter by a large cross-section of officers at Durham County Council is extremely disappointing and that appropriate representations be made to the four local County Councillors and the County Durham Clerks' Co-ordination Group.

140. SERVICE DELEGATION SCHEME – CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Submitted – A report incorporating a proposed Service Delegation Scheme between Durham County Council and local councils. The document had been produced by a Working Group which had included local council representatives. The document was to be used as a base document when local councils applied to take on services currently provided by the County Council. A number of crucial points were outlined in the submitted report and it was emphasised that there was an opportunity to express interests in particular services and pilot studies. Comments on the document were required by 12th January, 2011.

Resolved – That, in the light of the Government's Localism Bill and a number of unresolved double taxation issues, the Service Delegation Scheme document can only be supported in theory at this stage.

141. NEW BUDGETARY ITEMS FOR 2011/12

Submitted – Pursuant to Finance Committee Minute 33/Nov/10, a report outlining new items for potential inclusion in the Council's 2011/12 budget. It was confirmed that, at this stage, the Council was not making final decisions as to included budgetary items, albeit that the excluded items would not re-appear later in the budgetary process.

Resolved – That the following be agreed on the eight submitted items, with those items incorporating budgetary amounts progressing to the next stage of the budgetary process:-

- (1) Lighting to footpath surrounding Ten Fields – That no further action be taken;
- (2) Fencing to boundary of Marwood Drive Play Area - £1,250;
- (3) Fields in Trust's Annual Play Area Inspections - £260;
- (4) Additional Play Area Quarterly Inspections - £315;
- (5) Additional Work to Chains of Office - £1,000;
- (6) Additional features for Website – That, at this stage, only cost-free options be undertaken;
- (7) Mayoral Christmas Cards - £270; and
- (8) Office Move - £5,000.

142. FINANCIAL PAYMENT METHODS – UPDATE

Submitted – Pursuant to Minute 72(4)/Sep/10, a report stating that it had been recently announced that local councils were, from mid-2011, being given the freedom to abolish current payment methods (particularly cheque payments) and adopt modern banking methods such as electronic transfers. The implications of this, with particular reference to safeguards, were outlined in the submitted report. Current authorisation arrangements within this Council were also referred to.

Resolved – That this Council has no objection to the proposed changes and the continuation of the current reporting methods used within the Council.

143. CONSULTATION DOCUMENTS

(1) Minerals in County Durham

Submitted – A report on the following four consultation documents which had been produced by Durham County Council:-

- (i) New Minerals and Waste Sites in County Durham;
- (ii) Towards a Minerals Delivery Strategy for County Durham;
- (iii) Energy Minerals in County Durham; and
- (iv) Safeguarding Mineral Resources for the Future.

Summaries were provided of each document, on which comments were required by 14th January, 2011.

Resolved – That it is considered that haulage routes, particularly in Teesdale, should be given special consideration.

(2) County Durham Settlement Study

Submitted – A report on the production by Durham County Council of a County Durham Settlement Study which would help to determine a settlement hierarchy in the County Durham Plan. The criteria applied to the exercise were outlined, with comments on the document to be submitted by 14th January, 2011.

Resolved – That it be agreed that Barnard Castle should be classed as a Main Town settlement type.

144. PROPOSED DISCUSSIONS WITH COUNTY COUNCILLORS

It was reported that a suggestion had been put forward that an informal meeting between Town Councillors and the four local County Councillors would prove beneficial for all concerned. It was considered that there were a number of common issues and that improved liaison arrangements might result.

Resolved – That an informal meeting between the Town Councillors and the four local County Councillors be scheduled for Monday, 10th January, 2011 commencing at 7.00 p.m.

145. GREEN FLAG AWARDS

It was reported that the Green Flag Award Scheme, providing a national benchmark for the best green spaces in the County (with particular references to play areas and allotments) was seeking applications by the end of January 2011. The Scheme was outlined, including the fact that the Award could be used as a tool to attract and retain funding. It was confirmed that currently only two local councils in County Durham held a total of five Green Flag awards but it was considered that more local councils should be encouraged to apply.

Resolved – That this matter be referred to the Floral and Open Spaces Working Group for further investigation.

146. BIG TREE PLANT FUNDING

It was reported that as from April 2011, £4.2m would be made available to support community groups and non-profit-making organisations to plant trees in towns, cities and residential areas throughout England, with local councils fitting the criteria which were outlined in the submitted report.

Resolved – That this matter be referred to the Floral and Open Spaces Working Group for further investigation.

147. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (in respect of Minute 148 below)

Resolved – That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the matter referred to at Minute 148 below on the grounds that it may involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 7 of Schedule 12A of the said Act.

148. CLARIFICATION OF PREVIOUS AUDIT PROCESSES

Submitted – Pursuant to Minutes 37/Jun/10 and 85/Sep/10, a report providing a further update on the situation in respect of a previous audit process, with specific decisions to be made on a number of the issues raised.

Resolved – That the courses of action, as now determined, be agreed.