

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 18 JULY 2017

PRESENT

The Mayor Councillor Wood
The Deputy Mayor – Councillor McGuinness
Councillor Court
Councillor Davies
Councillor Hall
Councillor Hart
Councillor Jones
Councillor Jackson
Councillor Lovatt
Councillor Nicosia
Councillor Redfern
Councillor Rogers
Councillor Rushton
Councillor Sheldon
Councillor Salt
Councillor Swift
Councillor Walley
Councillor Whilding

Also in attendance:
Councillor Hawley
Councillor Redfern

18.17 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence and reasons accepted were received from
Councillor Baddeley
Councillor Harper
Councillor Lawson

Councillor Flunder

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- a Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Dispensations: Councillor Sheldon in any matters concerning Biddulph in Bloom. Councillor Hart in the Local Plan residential site specifics in Biddulph. Minute 22 Councillors Court and Jones walk their dogs in the Country Park; Councillor Redfern was a member of the SWT and had previously donated money to SWT and Friends of Newpool Meadows. Minute 25.1 Councillors Salt – her husband is a firefighter, and Wood a retired firefighter. Minute 26 Councillor Hart – Bridestones had some involvement in the building of his home.
- b Other Disclosable Interests. Councillor McGuinness – Churchwarden at St Lawrence's Church.

20. MINUTES

- a It was moved to sign the Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 20 June 2017.
- b It was moved to receive the Minutes of the meeting of the Burial Grounds Sub-Committee held on 11 July 2017.

21. TOWN COUNCIL INVOLVEMENT WITH THE LIFELINE SCHEME

A letter had been received from Mr David Boothroyd – Secretary of Biddulph Lifeline asking for help in recruiting volunteers.

Councillor Salt noted that after reading the letter she had contacted members of the local families who were raising money for Cardiac Risk in the Young (CRY); some expressed willingness to become involved. Councillor Salt was happy to investigate further.

Councillor Hall noted that a lot of effort had gone in and he did not want to see the group fold; he proposed calling a special meeting of the Finance Committee to discuss this item in more detail. This was seconded by Councillor Salt, a vote was taken and unanimously agreed by members of this Committee.

Councillor Lovatt had been involved as a Ward Councillor in locating a box at the Youth and Community Zone. Ownership had not been an issue, it was owned by the whole community of Biddulph; insurance had been a consideration, in relation to whether the box should be insured by the owners of the building. Councillor Lovatt had believed that Biddulph Rotary was to become involved with the scheme.

Councillor Harper noted that Biddulph Rotary was no longer considering this.

Councillor Jones thought it good news on the volunteer front but disappointing financially that such a small grant had been awarded; he felt this should be reviewed that evening.

Councillor Hall noted that ongoing maintenance was an issue; not just the financial question, but recruiting volunteers and who would take responsibility. This would all be discussed at the special meeting.

Councillor Salt asked if the volunteers would be allowed to attend the meeting. Councillor Hall confirmed that Standing Orders could be suspended so they could take part in at least some of the meeting. Councillor Harper thought it would be useful for the volunteers to attend for two reasons: a) to get a grip of the costs and b) as an eye-opener as to what they might be taking on and what would be expected from everyone

Councillor Harper noted that the hard work was mostly complete, there were 14 defibrillators and the main task was checking them regularly and replacing parts. He felt that the scheme could be expanded to cover more of Biddulph Moor.

Councillor Salt asked for clarification, were more volunteers needed. Councillor Harper agreed that they were, but that the letter had been sent independently of the group.

Councillor Lovatt asked that costs are brought to the meeting; to make it clear what is actually needed and noted that there were in fact 16 defibrillators in the town

Councillor Harper remarked that he was moderately happy with the outcome.

22. BIDDULPH GRANGE COUNTRY PARK- COUNCILLOR JONES

Councillor Jones reported that Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (SMDC) may be transferring ownership of 12 parks to Staffordshire Wildlife Trust (SWT). Councillor Jones wanted to table motion at this meeting seeking support for Biddulph Grange Country Park to be taken out of the discussions for the time being.

Councillor Jones stated that he was not anti-SWT, but would prefer that it was not involved until the alternatives had been discussed. He would like Councillors to approve that a motion could be tabled at this meeting as the timescales were tight and discussions were ongoing. Councillor Jones moved that the Committee consider the motion; this was seconded by Councillor Whilding. A vote was taken and all were happy to receive the motion. Councillor Hart was then happy to accept the motion.

Councillor Jones noted that there were one or two other parks where people were not happy; he believed that the District Council should rethink the whole idea, it should not just be about saving money.

Councillor Wood noted that he was Vice Chair of the District Council Service Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the first he knew of this proposal was when he saw the paperwork; he felt that it was disgraceful the way that it had been handled. There had been much dissent from many District Councillors in other areas; none of the groups had been consulted and no information had been provided. Councillor Wood knew that finances were tight, but without consultation it was a shocking way to act; he hoped to call-in the decision and fully supported Councillor Jones.

Councillor Nicosia stated that she was a fledgling Councillor, somewhat naïve in assessing how councils worked with each other. Councillor Nicosia was shocked that the District Council could liaise with SWT without also liaising with this Town Council when it had been seeking our support to put in the Heritage Lottery bid. Councillor Nicosia felt this was disrespectful and expressed concern for the Friends of Newpool Meadows who had carried out a lot of work, both physically and in relation to fund raising activity. Councillor Nicosia felt that in this case the costs were negligible and that in 'one fell swoop' these areas would no longer be in the realm of voluntary work, resulting in many disappointed people in the local community.

Councillor Harper asked how much money would be saved. Councillor Hall responded that the figure was £50,000 over 12 parks in the Moorlands. Councillor Harper queried if this Council could take control of the Country Park. Councillor Hart noted that this was an option, but would require a degree of support from the Town Council.

Councillor Salt supported the motion and was concerned that if the park was transferred to SWT, Biddulph would lose its heritage; she echoed Councillor Nicosia that it was a vital part of Biddulph's heritage and should be controlled at a local level. Councillor Salt was concerned that democracy was not working well at the SMDC; officers were coming up with plans which Councillors knew nothing about.

Councillor Redfern endorsed the motion. He did not see SWT as bad. He was concerned for a group such as the Friends of Newpool Meadows, who had fought a long battle to secure the land in a legal manner, with people taking on the management of land and involving the whole community; this enhanced the wildlife tenfold and they should be consulted. Councillor Redfern resented the District Council coming in and giving control to SWT without any guarantees about how the group would carry on; he would expect some consideration of the options.

Councillor Sheldon was not for or against SWT; she noted that many people were members or past members. She was not for or against Biddulph Town Council taking an active role. Councillor Sheldon felt that we were desperately short of information so did not feel that she could make a judgement at this time. The Country Park would need a significant amount of money spending on it; the District Council had made some attempts, but expensive work needed to be done. If the Town Council took it on, it would have very big issues to face; this would be a huge responsibility. Councillor Sheldon would prefer that it was kept under the stewardship of the District Council, but that it does a better job. The Park was Grade

I listed landscape with Grade II listed buildings. Councillor Sheldon felt that the District Council had not provided information for this Council to make a decision.

Councillor Hall thought this was a very important motion. He thought that more detailed information would come through and that the District Council had been looking for options and carrying out consultation; SWT was the only option.

Councillor Jones then formally read the motion:

'Biddulph Town Council insists that the management of Biddulph Grange Country Park is not transferred to any third party until such time as all other options have been thoroughly explored'.

This was proposed by Councillor Jones and seconded by Councillor Wood, a vote was taken and this was agreed. Councillor Sheldon abstained from the vote. Councillors Court, Harper and Redfern were not members of the Committee.

Councillor Jackson reminded fellow Councillors to stick to the motion

Councillor Jones noted that to keep the Country Park open would not be expensive, however to restore it to its former glory would be. Councillor Jones reminded everyone that Biddulph Grange Country Park consultation event would be held on Sunday 23 July 2017 between 10 am – 4 pm to gather local support.

23. LENGTHSMAN TENDER- COUNCILLOR JONES

Two tenders had been received and would be reviewed at the meeting on Thursday; recommendations would be provided after this meeting. Councillor Jackson suggested that for speed it should be taken to the next meeting of the Town Council. Councillor Hart agreed that this was appropriate. This was agreed

24. TRANSPORT COORDINATOR UPDATE- COUNCILLOR MCGUINNESS

Councillor McGuinness read a letter about subsidised bus journeys. Consultation would begin on 24 July 2017 for 8 weeks online; paper copies would be available at Biddulph library. Councillor McGuinness noted that route 93 was currently subsidised and served Biddulph Moor, Pennine Way, Gillow Heath, Biddulph town centre and then went off to Leek. He was concerned that if the service was withdrawn, the Gillow Heath area would become as isolated as it was when the water works were being carried out Mow Lane; he was especially concerned about Washington Close residents. Councillor McGuinness encouraged the Chronicle reporter to publicise the consultation and encourage readers to complete it.

Councillor Rushton noted that this service also ran along Kingsfield Road.

Councillor Salt asked what the options actually meant and how did it relate to Biddulph. The Chief Officer would write for clarification about the 4 options. Councillor Lovatt asked that this was done forthwith. Councillor Salt asked that the information is shared via the Council's Facebook page too. It was suggested that the volunteer driver transport members could also become involved.

Councillor Jackson reminded members that the 93 was essential and was the only subsidised route; we should find out how heavily it was subsidised and how much it was used. He noted that some of Biddulph's young people use the service when attending Leek College, losing the service might impact on their courses. Councillor Jackson was concerned that outlying Moorlands areas may lose their 'dial a ride' service. He was unclear how many buses were subsidised; this information may be deemed commercial and therefore confidential.

Councillor Harper was concerned that cuts would disadvantage people who had to use the bus to attend hospital and queried whether they would still be catered for.

25. CHIEF OFFICER'S REPORT

1. Police and Crime Commissioner Updates

The Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) in Staffordshire are undertaking a consultation on the future joint governance of the Police and Fire and Rescue Services in Staffordshire. M·E·L Research have been asked to run the consultation as an independent organisation. The consultation is being run from 10th July 2017 for an 8 week period, finishing on the 4th September 2017.

People in Staffordshire Moorlands are being urged to step forward to join an independent panel to influence policing in their communities. Anyone aged 18 and over in Staffordshire Moorlands is able to join their local Safer Neighbourhood Panel to help hold the Local Policing Team Commander to account as well as look at wider criminal justice and community safety issues in their area.

Councillor Wood felt that the movement for collaboration was a step too far and urged members to respond to this adding that every Chief Fire Officer had started off as a Probationer. He requested that this is referred to the August meeting of the General Purposes Committee. Councillor Salt urged everyone to speak to firefighters and police officers: 'do your homework'.

2. Society of Local Council Clerks- branch meeting

Biddulph will be hosting the Staffordshire branch meeting of members of the Society of Local Council Clerks in September.

Exclusion of the Press and Public

The Chair to move:-

"That, pursuant to Section 100A(2) and (4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings whereby it is likely that confidential information as defined in Section 100A (3) of the Act would be disclosed to the public in breach of the obligation of confidence or exempt information as defined in Section 10 I (1) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act would be disclosed to the public by virtue of the Paragraphs indicated."

The meeting closed at 8.27 pm.

Signed Date