

Minutes of the Meeting of the **GENERAL OPERATIONS COMMITTEE** held at the Town Hall, Swanage on **WEDNESDAY 13th NOVEMBER 2019** at **3.30 p.m.**

Chairman: - Councillor M Bonfield	Swanage Town Council
Present: - Councillor A Harris Councillor D Monkhouse	Swanage Town Council Swanage Town Council (from 3.40 p.m.)
Councillor C Moreton Councillor J Page Councillor C Tomes	Swanage Town Council Swanage Town Council Swanage Town Council
Also present: - Councillor M Whitwam	Swanage Town Council
Dr M Ayres Mr G Brookes Miss C Johnston	Town Clerk Interim Operations Manager Operations Department Administration Officer
Mr A Bennett	Prospect Allotment Association (until 4.00 p.m.)
Mr M Jones	Prospect Allotment Association (until 4.25 p.m.)
Mrs P Lancaster	Prospect Allotment Association (until 4.00 p.m.)
Mr M Green	James Smith Funeral Directors

Public Participation Time

There were four members of the public present at the meeting.

The following matters were raised during Public Participation Time:-

- A statement was read with regards to Northbrook Cemetery including requests for the installation of an information board and changes to the grounds maintenance routine.
- Comments were made in support of the installation of CCTV to help safeguard the newly installed bandstand.
- Remarks were made regarding exclusion of press and public from Council meetings and a request for information regarding dog fouling.

Councillor Monkhouse joined the meeting at 3.40 p.m.

1. Apologies

Apologies for their inability to attend the Meeting were received from Councillor Finch and Mr R Marsh (Swanage Fishermen's Association).

2. Declarations of Interest

Members were invited to declare their interests and consider any requests for

Grants of Dispensations in accordance with paragraphs 9 – 13 of the Council's Code of Conduct and regulations made under chapter 7 of the Localism Act 2011.

Councillor Bonfield declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 5.b having previously been involved in determining a question raised by a local resident regarding this issue under the Council's Complaints Procedure.

3. Matters Arising from Minutes of the Meeting of the General Operations Committee held on 19th June 2019

4. a. Allotment Matters – Matters raised by the Allotment Association

The Allotment Association representatives requested an update on their previous request for CCTV. The Chairman made reference to the last meeting whereby it was noted that such a request should be put in writing.

4. Allotment Matters

a) Smoking restriction at the allotments

A letter from an allotment tenant requesting the banning of smoking at the allotment site was considered. It was agreed that it would be difficult to restrict or prohibit smoking and there is little that can be done legally to prohibit smoking in the open air. It was agreed that all tenants should be asked to consider and respect their neighbours when smoking on site.

b) Frequency of inspections

Further to concerns having been raised regarding the efficacy of the Council's allotment inspections, consideration was given to the Council's policy in relation to the frequency of allotment visits. It was noted that this had been previously discussed at meetings of the General Operations Committee held on 15th November 2017 and the Allotments Committee on 15th November 2006. The Chairman suggested that allotment inspections should be carried out two weeks prior to General Operations Committee meetings and should include a member of this committee, preferably the Chairman. Information from the inspections would then be reported back as an agenda item to this committee. The Operations team would still carry out interim monthly inspections. In 2006 it had been agreed that there should be four inspections but it was suggested that there should be three from now on.

It was therefore proposed by Councillor Tomes, seconded by Councillor Monkhouse, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That full allotment inspections be carried out three times a year, two weeks in advance of each meeting of the General Operations Committee, with the Committee Chairman, or a substitute, in attendance.

c) Matters raised by Prospect Allotment Association

The Association representatives questioned why all new allotment holders were charged the full annual tenancy fee rather than a pro-rata amount dependent on the date when they took up occupation of their plot. It was also noted that when a tenant gives up a plot prior to the end of their tenancy agreement there is currently no refund. The possibility of charging a reduced fee for those taking untidy plots was also raised, but it was agreed that plots are taken as seen.

After lengthy discussion it was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Moreton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Council review these matters and that a report be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

Other matters raised included a request for a skip to be provided to assist in the clearance of an overgrown plot and the need to address a tree overhanging plot 38C.

Mr T Bennett and Mrs P Lancaster left the meeting at 4.00 p.m.

5. Cemetery Matters

a) Northbrook Cemetery upkeep

Consideration was given to a letter received from a member of the public suggesting changes to the future care and maintenance of Northbrook cemetery. These included a reduction in the size of the area currently managed as a Living Churchyard in the summer months and the establishment of a Friends group to assist with maintenance tasks, especially in relation to the graves of war veterans. It had also been suggested that an information board should be installed to inform visitors as to the location of Commonwealth War Graves and those of other notable individuals.

It was noted that the proposals to change the grass-cutting regime needed to be given greater consideration, especially in light of the Council's commitment to improving biodiversity, although attention was drawn to support given to the proposed changes by a representative of Dorset Wildlife Trust. The Interim Operations Manager and his team were tasked with considering how best to implement these proposals.

It was AGREED:

That the Chairman and Councillor Monkhouse be appointed as a working party to meet with the author of the letter and representatives of the Operations Department to discuss the contents of the letter and the formation of a Friends of Northbrook Cemetery group.

It was reported that a memorial planter had been produced by the Veterans Forge, and that this would be placed on the grave of an unidentified World War One soldier in Northbrook Cemetery. A short service was planned in the near future that would be attended by the Deputy Mayor on behalf of Swanage Town Council.

Further to his declaration of interest under Minute No. 2 Councillor Bonfield chose to leave the room during consideration of the following item and Councillor Harris, Deputy Mayor, assumed the chair in his absence.

b) Pre-purchase of graves at Godlingston Cemetery

Consideration was given to a briefing note prepared by the Town Clerk that had been circulated prior to the meeting, setting out questions that had been raised regarding interpretation of the Council's existing policy on the transfer of grave rights. The Town Council first introduced a charge for the transfer of rights into its published scale of fees and charges in the 2012/13 financial year. This was done to enable the rights of burial in a grave to be transferred from one person to another.

A question had been raised as to whether the Council would permit a grave owner to transfer the rights in an unused pre-purchased plot to a different grave space in another section of the cemetery. It was noted that the effect of such a transfer would not be in accordance with the Council's agreed policy to only permit the pre-purchase of a grave adjoining a plot in which a close relative had been interred. Were the Council to permit the exchange of grave plots this could lead to administrative errors being made in the cemetery records, increasing the risk of interments being made in incorrect grave spaces or the records of purchased rights becoming confused. It was also noted that an alternative remedy to the issue existed, in that a refund could be made in respect of the purchase fee paid for the rights of burial in any plot that was no longer required.

Consideration was given to the possibility of authorising an exchange of grave plots in limited circumstances, such as between plots in different sections of the cemetery. Rather than offering individuals a free choice of plots, it was noted that the Council could allocate a specific grave space adjoining graves containing existing interments. However, it was noted that this outcome would not address the matters previously discussed regarding proximity to the grave of a family member and increased risk of errors in the cemetery records.

Following further discussion it was proposed by Councillor Tomes, seconded by Councillor Moreton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Council does not authorise the transfer of grave rights from one plot to another as it is not in accordance with the Council's policy of only authorising the pre-purchase of graves adjoining a plot in which a close relative has been interred, and if introduced would increase the risk of errors being made in the cemetery records with potential consequences for future interments.

c) Approval of cemetery chapel repairs

Attention was drawn to the need to address defects in the Godlingston cemetery chapel. There is currently no budget, in this financial year, for the estimated £9,000 cost of these urgent repairs. It was noted that estimated costings had been provided by Dorset Property via their framework contractors.

It was proposed by Councillor Tomes, seconded by Councillor Harris, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That an estimate of £9,000 be approved for repairs to the Godlingston cemetery chapel, to be added to the revenue budgets for the current financial year

d) Matters raised by James Smith Funeral Directors

The James Smith Representative requested assurance that the Christmas and New Year closure period would not commence prior to 24th December this year. It was confirmed that cemetery services will not be available from 24th December 2019 until 2nd January 2020.

The Chairman praised the 50+ Information Day held by Douch Funeral Services on the 30th October at Swanage School.

6. Fishermen's Huts and Jetties

a) Matters raised by Swanage Fishermen's Association

In the absence of a representative of the Swanage Fishermen's Association no matters were raised. It was confirmed that the capital works to the fishermen's huts and slipways had been completed.

Mr M Jones left the meeting at 4.25 p.m.

7. Capital Projects Sub Committee

a) Approval of Terms of Reference

Consideration was given to draft Terms of Reference for the Capital Projects Sub-Committee. These had been considered by members of that sub-committee and were recommended for approval. It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Page, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the draft Terms of Reference be approved.

b) Matters arising from minutes of recent meetings of the Capital Projects Sub-Committee and review of one-off revenue items

- **Cemetery extension**

The James Smith representative was concerned that the cemetery extension project will be delayed. The Town Clerk gave assurance that the project was being monitored by the sub-committee and it had been recommended that a specialist company should be engaged to take the project forward. It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Tomes, and

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That a specialist company be engaged to take forward the cemetery extension project.

- **Revenue expenditure 2020/21**

It was reported that officers had put forward estimated costs of four new schemes for possible inclusion in the revenue budgets for 2020/21, as follows:

- Beach Gardens perimeter fencing £3,500
- Beach Gardens staging outside Tea on the Green £2,000
- Allotment fencing £3,000
- Air conditioning for the depot £4,000

It was proposed by Councillor Page, seconded by Councillor Monkhouse and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-**

That the four projects listed above be included in the draft revenue budgets for 2020/21 to be given further consideration at the Policy, Finance and Performance Management Committee meeting to be held on 11th December 2019.

- **Revenue expenditure 2019/20 - Update**

The Interim Operations Manager provided an update on revenue budget items for the current financial year. The following changes to existing budgets were discussed:

- The Downs/Seymer Road boundary wall – if the wall is to be rebuilt it is estimated the cost will increase from £15,000 to circa £85,000. This will be clarified once tree works have been undertaken.
- Peveril Point Road stabilisation – works include resurfacing and making the area stable. A geotechnical survey is still awaited, but an increase in budget to £20,000 is anticipated.
- Annexe repairs – dry rot, floorboards and stairwells need to be addressed at an anticipated cost of £16,000.
- Public Conveniences, North Beach Car Park – an increase in the budget from £9,500 to £13,000 is required to fund the removal of all pods and installation of a single DDA-compliant public lavatory.

It was reported that all of the above works could be undertaken before the next financial year, making use of Dorset Council's minor works framework agreement wherever possible.

In respect of the Downs/Seymer Road wall, it was noted that tree works in the sum of £3,500 were required in order to prevent future damage, and the committee authorised this work. Attention was drawn to the fact that replanting would take place in a suitable location to ensure that there was no overall loss of trees.

It was proposed by Councillor Page, seconded by Councillor Harris and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the adjusted budget costs for the above projects included on the one-off revenue expenditure list for 2019/20 be approved.

- **Revenue expenditure 2019/20 – Replacement/Improvement of Beach Hut Doors, Shore Road**

Further to debate at recent meetings of the Capital Projects Sub-Committee, including a site visit, detailed consideration was given to four options for improving or replacing the beach hut doors on the Shore Road Beach Huts, which were now 5 years old. The existing budget was £30,000. The options were as follows:

Option 1 - Re-paint and repair veneer to existing doors and install a kick plate = £31,600

Option 2 - Replace door with Glass Reinforced Plastic (GRP) finish = £38,000

Option 3 - Replace with new hardwood timber stable doors = £52,000

Option 4 - Replace with GRP finish stable door = £105,000

It was confirmed that GRP doors have the longest lifespan and are therefore the best long-term solution. The difficulty in maintaining stable doors was noted. It was therefore proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Page and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That budget approval be granted for the installation of replacement GRP doors on the Shore Road beach huts during the 2019/20 financial year.

- **Revenue expenditure 2019/20 – Additional projects requiring approval**

It was reported that officers had put forward estimated costs of two new schemes for addition to the revenue budgets for 2019/20, as follows:

- Depot installation of extractor fan £2,000
- Main Beach car park electrical box installation £6,000

It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Tomes and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the additional budget costs for the above projects be added to the one-off revenue expenditure list for 2019/20.

- **Revenue expenditure 2020/21**

Consideration was given to an additional item of revenue expenditure for the 2020/21 financial year, being the installation of mezzanine decking in the Depot workshop at an estimated cost of £14,000. It was proposed by Councillor Page, seconded by Councillor Moreton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the installation of mezzanine decking at the Depot at an estimated cost of £14,000 be incorporated in the draft revenue budgets for 2020/21, to be given further consideration at the Policy, Finance and Performance Management Committee meeting to be held on 11th December 2019.

The Town Clerk advised that any projects approved for the current financial year at an estimated cost of less than £10,000 could now proceed. Those with a higher

value would be brought back to full Council for final approval in line with financial regulations.

A question was asked as to the preferred date for the next meeting of the Capital Projects Sub-Committee. Members agreed that there was no need for a further meeting prior to the meeting of the Policy, Finance and Performance Management Committee on 11th December 2019.

8. Weed clearing and road sweeping

Attention was drawn to the very limited amount of mechanical street sweeping carried out by Dorset Waste Partnership (DWP) in the town during 2019. This was felt to be a key issue for Swanage as the mounting detritus along the kerbs encouraged weeds to grow, and this had proven to be a significant problem around the town in the late spring and early summer. The matter had been raised with DWP on many occasions over recent years, but although it was acknowledged that the service was inadequate the combination of staff shortages and a lack of plant meant there was little prospect of improvement during 2020.

The Interim Operations Manager advised that a combined programme of increased weed clearance and street sweeping could be provided by the Town Council during 2020/21 at a cost of approximately £14,000. This would include the expense of all materials, training and the hiring in of a mechanical street sweeper. The Committee welcomed the proposal but wished to record its disappointment and concern that any improvements for next year would have to be funded via the Town Council's precept.

It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Page and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the sum of £14,000 be included in the draft revenue budgets for 2020/21 to cover the costs of additional weeding and street sweeping, to be given further consideration at the Policy, Finance and Performance Management Committee meeting to be held on 11th December 2019.

9. Dorset Highways – Consideration of ‘Working Together’ document

Further to Item 8 above, it was noted that weed clearance was one item included in a list of ‘non-essential functions’ which town and parish councils could supplement under the Dorset Highways Working Together proposals. It was agreed that the Town Council should seek to regularise the arrangements it has in place for carrying out urban grass cutting, weed clearance and the provision of community salt bins on behalf of Dorset Council. This would be taken forward by the Town Clerk and a further report made to a future committee meeting.

10. Bandstand CCTV

Brief consideration was given to a proposal to install CCTV in the vicinity of the newly refurbished bandstand. The Friends of Swanage Bandstand had drawn attention to this as a means of deterring vandalism to the fully restored structure. It was therefore proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Page, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That CCTV be installed in the vicinity of the bandstand and that an estimate of £2,500 be added to the revenue budgets for the current financial year.

11. Parade Railings update

Consideration was given to an e-mail from a visitor to the town requesting information about proposals to replace the Parade Railings, and seeking reassurance

that the existing design would be retained. Members approved the retention of the 'rope' design posts, although it was felt that the remaining bottom sections of the lamp-posts should be removed from the scheme. It was proposed by Councillor Tomes, seconded by Councillor Monkhouse and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-**

To ensure that the scheme to replace the Parade railings retains the rope design posts.

Members also gave consideration to an Inspection Report prepared by Dorset Council into the condition of the railings, which listed many sections as heavily corroded. The report had been shared with relevant officers at Dorset Council, including the coastal engineers and the senior Purbeck ranger.

It was noted that neither tier of local authority acknowledged responsibility for the maintenance of the railings, but that a replacement scheme was being worked up jointly as part of proposed repairs to the sea defences scheduled to take place towards the end of the current financial year.

Consideration was given to the potential requirement to take steps to advise people of the railings' poor condition. It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Page and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-**

That officers be given delegated authority to liaise with Dorset Council and take whatever steps are deemed necessary to appropriately manage the risk arising from the corroded state of the Parade railings.

12. Budget setting 2020/21

a) Revenue budget 2020/21

It was noted that draft revenue budgets for the Operations Department would be presented to the Policy, Finance & Performance Management Committee meeting being held on the 11th December 2019.

Further to Minute No. 4 of the Policy, Finance and Performance Management Committee held on 6th November 2019 consideration was given to the appointment of a working party to consider the future use of the old depot site on Kings Road, which was currently being used in connection with community safety purposes. It was **AGREED:-**

That Councillors Bonfield, Page and Tomes be appointed to a working party to consider the future use of the old depot site in Kings Road, to meet in the New Year.

b) Scale of Charges 2020/21

A query was raised in respect of the £6 charge for youth football teams and it was suggested that this could be waived. The suggestion was noted and officers agreed to look into this further and report to the meeting of the Policy, Finance and Performance Management Committee on 11th December 2019. It was also suggested that consideration could be given to the introduction of a single annual fee rather than separate payments for each game. However, it was noted that this was unlikely to be introduced at the current time.

It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Tomes, and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-**

That the draft scale of charges for 2020/21 be taken forward to the next meeting of the Policy, Finance and Performance Management Committee for further consideration as part of the budget setting process.

13. Health & Safety

Report since June 2019

The Interim Operations Manager provided an update on health and safety at work and was pleased to report that during the last quarter there had been no reported incidents of slips and trips causing injury, nor of RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences). The absence records for the year to date showed 341 sickness days lost in total. There had been nil reported incidents at the Depot and no incidents requiring medical attention. Internal tool box talks continue to be carried out as part of the continuation of safety training.

The Council's newly appointed advisors, Ellis Whittam, had commenced an audit of the existing health and safety system, and all departments had received a visit. Steps would be taken to address any recommendations in priority order.

14. Interim Operations Manager's Report

- **Festive lights** – the new festive lights had been installed around the town centre. It was reported that the contractor is scheduled to return on 25th November to dress the Christmas tree at the station prior to the Switch On on 30th November.
- **Bowling Green** – the Council's bowling green had been leased to Swanage Bowling Club, who now have full maintaining liability.
- **Sea defences** – temporary measures had been installed by the Environment Agency, removing the principal reason for deploying sandbags in the Lower High Street.
- **Electrical checks** – portable appliance testing has been completed. The 5 yearly electrical checks on Council-owned buildings and property would soon be completed.
- **Emergency Tree Works** – trees had been cut down in Godlingston Cemetery and Days Park. This was due to inclement weather causing the splitting of the tree bases and the trees were in danger of falling.
- **RNLI** – the RNLI lifeguard base and the bathing zone buoys had been removed from the beach for the winter.
- **Dog Fouling** – it was reported that the problem of dog fouling continued, in particular in Northbrook Cemetery, King George's playing field and the Recreation Ground. This is a significant hazard for the Operations team when grass cutting.
- **Electric vehicles** – the Interim Operations Manager thanked the committee for the purchase of the Council's new vehicles.

The Chairman thanked the Council's Operations team for what they have achieved in making the town look exceptionally well cared for. It was noted that the Recreation Ground and War Memorial looked fantastic for Remembrance weekend.

14. Items of Information and Matters for Forthcoming Agendas

- a) Financial support for litter picking and street furniture maintenance.

15. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for 4.30 p.m. Wednesday 1st April 2020.

The Meeting closed at 5.25 p.m.
