

MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL HELD ON WEDNESDAY 7TH APRIL 2021, AT 7.00PM

Committee Members present:

A Cooper - Chairman, S Buck, Mrs A Clarey, B Collier, Mrs M Cooper, S Dhaliwal, S Hayes, Mrs J Hyde, D Matthews, C Phelps, H Pickering, G Russell, B Saunders (& CBC Cllr), J Talbot

Also present:

Mrs K Elliott-Turner – Town Clerk, Central Beds Council Ward Member S Dixon

53/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

54/21 DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS INTERESTS ON MATTERS CONTAINED IN THE AGENDA

Nothing to declare. Members were reminded that if at any time during the meeting they feel they have an interest in an item being discussed, they should declare it at that point.

55/21 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS & CIVIC ATTENDANCE

Civic attendance

28th February – All Saints Church Civic Service, Leighton Linlade Town Council – attended virtual event

18th March – High Sheriff of Bedfordshire Awards evening – attended virtual event

56/21 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – QUESTIONS, COMMENTS & RESPONSES

None present.

57/21 CASUAL VACANCY – CO-OPTION OF NEW MEMBER

The Clerk advised that no applications had been received, and a further round of advertising will begin shortly.

58/21 CLERK'S REPORT, CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED & MATTERS ARISING FOR INFORMATION

Correspondence

- Central Bedfordshire Council Town & Parish Council Bulletin – April edition

59/21 COUNCIL MINUTES

Members were asked to note and sign as a correct record, the minutes of the council meeting held on Wednesday 3rd March 2021.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the council meeting held on Wednesday 3rd March 2021 be taken as read and confirmed and signed as a correct record.

60/21 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING MINUTES

Members noted the draft minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 5th March

2020, previously circulated.

61/21 VIRTUAL MEETINGS LEGISLATION AND PREPARING FOR RETURN TO FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS

Members considered a report from the Clerk regarding the decision of Government not to extend the period permitting virtual meetings under The Local Authorities Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Despite requests and cases put to Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State, MHCLG for The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 to extend beyond the expiration date of 6th May 2021, Luke Hall MP, Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government, has written to Principal Authorities to advise that the Government will not be extending the period. The legislation has already been extended in Wales, so Parish and Town Councils there can continue to meet and make decisions virtually.

The Local Government Association has subsequently submitted a letter of objection to Robert Jenrick MP, issued a formal statement, and is providing support as the representative body for councils in legal action being taken by Lawyers in Local Government, the Association of Democratic Services and Hertfordshire County Council to declare that councils already have the powers needed to hold online meetings.

There is also still much uncertainty around how legislation or COVID-19 risks and restrictions may change over the coming weeks and months.

NALC's position remains that all local councils should continue to meet remotely while the regulations are in force. The NALC guidance circulated to members provides help to local councils to prepare for remote council meetings becoming unlawful from 7th May 2021.

Steps as per Spring 2021 'Roadmap'

- Step 2 (12th April earliest) of the Government's 'roadmap' permits use of community buildings for limited and specific use.
- Step 3 (17th May earliest) of the 'roadmap' permits wider use of community buildings, and subject to social distancing and maximum capacity limits – as per the previous Tier system.
- Step 4 (21st June earliest) of the 'roadmap' aims to lift restrictions, with a review of social distancing, Covid-19 Secure and work from home requirements being undertaken.

Relevant legislation

- The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 requires that (except by specific exclusion resolution) all meetings of the council shall be open to the public to observe, without placing restrictions on the number attending.

- The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps) (England) Regulations 2021, Exception 3 - advises that a gathering is allowed where it is necessary for certain purposes which include “for work purposes or the provision of voluntary or charitable services”.

Options and implications

1. Continue to meet virtually

Although, technically not permitted, this route is being suggested by some other councils. Although the risk of legal challenge is low, decisions could be challenged in the courts as ultra-vires.

2. Hold face-to-face meetings

This would be in line with the advice from NALC. The Council Chamber (Greenacre Centre) in which council and committee meetings take place, has a maximum capacity at Step 3 of 15 people, with appropriate social distancing measures in place. Due to restrictions in room capacity whilst in the ‘roadmap’, during a council or committee face-to-face meeting, provision would need to be made to enable the public to continue to view the meeting ‘live’, i.e. streamed via Facebook or You Tube. The council does not currently have suitable technology in place to allow this to happen.

The holding of face-to-face meetings could pose a reputational risk to the council if public perception is that these should not be held until restrictions are lifted.

Council will also need to take into account the fears and concerns of both councillors and officers over returning to face-to-face meetings whilst restrictions are still in place and the duty of council to ensure safety of its staff and members. Particularly those who are unvaccinated, have been shielding, or have other health concerns.

The Government’s ‘roadmap’ states that staff should continue to work from home where they can up until Step 4 – 21st June 2021 earliest “Office workers should work from home if they can. This guidance will remain in place until at least step 4 of the roadmap, when the work from home guidance will be considered as part of the wider review on social distancing.” Members/officers attending a meeting would fall under this.

3. Temporary delegation of responsibilities to the Clerk

As in the first lockdown period and before legislation enabled virtual meetings, issue the Clerk with temporary delegated responsibility from 7th May 2021 until council decides that a return to face-to-face meetings was safe, or that the delegation should cease on change of legislation. Such delegated responsibility to enable the Clerk to take any actions necessary, with associated expenditure, to protect the interests of the community and ensure council business continuity during the period of the pandemic coronavirus, informed by consultation with members of the council where appropriate. Such delegation is above that already available to the Clerk, contained in Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. Delegation does not extend to matters expressly reserved to the council in legislation, i.e. approval of annual accounts – these have to be approved and returned by

30th June, and so could be considered and approved after Step 4 and before deadline.

Members also put forward other possible solutions and considered factors such as whether all members will have had their second vaccination by 21st June or would even feel comfortable meeting face to face, the difficulties of meeting in the Council Chamber with restricted numbers and social distancing measures. Having given full consideration to this matter, it was:

RESOLVED that virtual meetings continue until end of 6th May 2021; that council uses the time between this council meeting (7th April 2021) and the expiration of legislation enabling virtual meetings (6th May 2021), to hold such virtual meetings as are required to ensure continuance of council's services and activities. Subject to there being no positive change to legislation, there will be no meetings in May after expiration of the legislation enabling virtual meetings and, subject to the Government's agreement to bringing in Step 4, after 21st June, but before 30th June (audit deadline), a full council meeting is held face to face, with limited numbers if required (subject to quorum), in order to approve the Council Annual Return for audit. By the time of the Annual Council Meeting on 5th May, there may be more information on whether permission for virtual meetings will be extended, or on the success or otherwise of the current legal challenge, and subject to that update, consideration will be given at the May Council meeting as to whether virtual meetings will continue, or whether meetings are held off until after the August 'sabbatical'.

For note, the Government is 'seeking views on the use of the current arrangements which have allowed local authorities to hold meetings remotely or in a hybrid format during the coronavirus pandemic'. Consultation closes 17th June 2021. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-authority-remote-meetings-call-for-evidence/local-authority-remote-meetings-call-for-evidence>

62/21 COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE REVIEW

Following a review of committee Terms of Reference, members considered adopting the recommended updated Terms of Reference for the Buildings Management Committee, Cemetery Management Committee, Planning Committee, Establishment Committee, Town Strategy Committee and Recreation Grounds, Public Lands & Lighting Committee.

RESOLVED that the reviewed and updated Terms of Reference for the council's committees are adopted and will form part of council's Standing Orders.

Councillor Mrs Hyde joined the meeting at the start of this item.

63/21 COMMUNITY SAFETY PLAN FOR STOTFOLD

For note, Central Bedfordshire Council has adopted its Community Safety Partnership Strategy for 2021-2024 (provided to members). Safer Central's Priorities for this period will be: To identify and disrupt County Lines/drug dealing and cuckooing; To raise awareness of domestic abuse. An emerging issue is Cybercrime.

As requested at the previous council meeting, members discussed and

identified long-term community safety issues for Stotfold, which our community safety representatives, Councillors Buck and Talbot, are to take back to the Safer Communities Involvement Officer in producing a Community Safety Plan for Stotfold.

RESOLVED that the following items, identified as long-term community safety issues for Stotfold, are taken back to the Safer Communities Involvement Officer as part of work on producing a Community Safety Plan for Stotfold:

- Electric scooters on footways
- Pedestrian, cyclist and driver safety due to shared cycle/pedestrian routes, rather than clear cycle routes
- Condition of footways around the town are very poor
- Parking on pavements and grass verges

64/21 REPORTS

a) Central Beds Council Ward Member Report

Councillor B Saunders

- The new Restart Grant Scheme is now available to non-essential retail businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Councillor S Dixon

- With regard to previous discussions about e-scooters, they are illegal to use on public highways or footways and can only be used on private land, unless they are rented from a company. They can only be rented where the Local Authority has permitted a trial to take place. Considering the Government's 'green' agenda, Councillor Dixon invited thoughts on whether we feel e-scooters are positive or negative, and if positive, what do we feel could be introduced in terms of regulation around them. There is more pressure to use them in towns than in villages, particularly with the drive to reduce vehicle use.
- Government has given Central Beds Council £255,000 as 'start-back' monies, which will be passed to Town Councils to use at their discretion.
- A stop notice was served last week in regard to recent earth movement works at Tudor Oaks. However, works have been continuing, and Central Beds Council will be pushing for that to not go any further.
- With regard to the planning application for development on Arlesey Road behind the Saunders yard, Councillors Dixon and Saunders are meeting tomorrow with Planning Officers to look at the proposals in more detail. Councillor Dixon is also in possession of a plan which clearly shows further phases beyond the current application. This is an area from Pix Brook Academy to Waterloo Farm. Phase 1 is the current Linden Homes development directly off Arlesey Road, Phase 2 is the development as per planning application out for consultation and Phases 3 and 4 is the land between Pix Brook Academy and Waterloo Farm on Arlesey Road (north).

b) Member and Nominated Representatives on Outside Bodies

St Mary's Church of England Academy – Community Governor, Councillor Mrs A Clarey:

- All pupils returned to school for 3 weeks prior to the Easter break and settled in well.
- Fun was had dressing up for red nose day and generous donations totalled over £470.
- As the school were unable to go to church this easter, the Reverend Bill Britt organised an open-air service, accompanied by a donkey and children carrying palm crosses. This is available to view on the school website.
- The new term starts on 13th April.

Central Beds Councillor Dixon left the meeting during this item.

Town Plan Implementation Group – Councillor Mrs Anne Clarey

- The Stotfold Good Neighbour Group quarterly return has shown that 355 activities have taken place. Health, transport and collection and delivery of prescriptions form a greater part of this. 800 telephone calls to over 200 clients and 16 outreach library visits also feature. Three members of the group took part in a zoom meeting on 17th March, organised by BRCC – John Talbot and Wendy Craig were able to share details of our database with the 50 or so attendees. At least one enquiry is being made. This makes the job of the Good Neighbour Group a lot easier.

65/21 ACCOUNTS

- a) Members considered the Expenditure Report for April 2021 and the income received during March 2021 in the Income Report.

RESOLVED that all payments on the Expenditure Report are approved and are to be paid, and the Income Report be noted.

- b) Members considered the monthly committee budget report and bank balances as at end March 2021.

RESOLVED that the monthly committee budget reports and bank balances for month end March 2021 are noted.

66/21 RECREATION GROUNDS, PUBLIC LANDS & LIGHTING COMMITTEE – 10TH MARCH 2021

Members of the Recreation Grounds, Public Lands & Lighting Committee confirmed that the minutes of their meeting held on 10th March 2021 are a correct record. There were no recommendations from the committee. The minutes were noted by council.

67/21 PLANNING COMMITTEE – 10TH MARCH 2021

Members of the Planning Committee confirmed that the minutes of their meeting held on 10th March 2021 are a correct record. There were no recommendations from the committee. The minutes were noted by council.

68/21 PLANNING COMMITTEE – 31ST MARCH 2021

Members of the Planning Committee confirmed that the minutes of their meeting held on 31st March 2021 are a correct record. There were no recommendations from the committee. The minutes were noted by council.

69/21 CEMETERY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – 17TH MARCH 2021

Members of the Cemetery Management Committee confirmed that the minutes of their meeting held on 17th March 2021 are a correct record. There were no recommendations from the committee, with the exception of Terms of Reference which have been dealt with in an earlier agenda item. The minutes were noted by council.

70/21 BUILDINGS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – 17TH MARCH 2021

Members of the Buildings Management Committee confirmed that the minutes of their meeting held on 17th March 2021 are a correct record. There were no recommendations from the committee, with the exception of Terms of Reference which have been dealt with in an earlier agenda item. The minutes were noted by council.

71/21 TOWN STRATEGY COMMITTEE – 31ST MARCH 2021

Members of the Town Strategy Committee confirmed that the minutes of their meeting held on 31st March 2021 are a correct record. There were no recommendations from the committee, with the exception of Terms of Reference which have been dealt with in an earlier agenda item. The minutes were noted by council.

72/21 ESTABLISHMENT COMMITTEE – 31ST MARCH 2021

Members of the Establishment Committee confirmed that the minutes of their meeting held on 31st March 2021 are a correct record. There were no recommendations from the committee, with the exception of Terms of Reference which have been dealt with in an earlier agenda item. The minutes were noted by council.

73/21 QUESTIONS FROM ELECTORS ON ITEMS ARISING FROM THE MEETING

There were none.

74/21 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY

The defibrillator cabinet has now been fixed to the outside of the Memorial Hall, with the defibrillator being installed within the cabinet in coming days.

A member referred to the UKLand document regarding education, which forms part of the planning application for the large development to the rear of Arlesey Road/Hitchin Road. Some members have expressed concerns about the future numbers of places available in schools in Stotfold, particularly in view of the large number of houses which are being built, and future houses which are being planned. Within the next few years, we are very likely to issues providing sufficient school places, particularly with the change of status in schools. Central Beds Council is planning new building within some of the local schools to accommodate, but there is a real possibility that we may see the situation we saw 5 years ago when pupils were directed to schools out of town because our local schools did not have sufficient pupil places. A request was made for this matter to be considered at a future meeting.

The Rotary Club Christmas Sleigh visited Stotfold on 18th December last year, supported by two Town Councillors. A gift of £100 from Rotary has been forwarded to the Town Council, from the funds collected, and is to go towards the Stotfold Christmas Lights. Thanks were given Baldock Rotary on behalf of the Christmas Lights Committee. Two Stotfold organisations, Mossman Centre and The Need Project have recently benefited from grants from Baldock Rotary.

The Clerk advised of forthcoming meetings for members' diaries:

April

Wednesday 14 th	Planning Committee
Wednesday 14 th	Recreation Grounds, Public Lands & Lighting Committee
Thursday 15 th	Planning Committee
Wednesday 21 st	Cemetery Committee
Wednesday 21 st	Establishment
Thursday 22 nd	Annual Town Meeting

May

Wednesday 5 th	Annual Council (statutory) Meeting
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With regard to the Annual Town Meeting, a request was made for the following reports to be forwarded to the Clerk at the earliest opportunity: Central Beds Council Ward Member, Eleemosynary Charity of William Field, Mayor's Report and RFO's Finance Report. These will be distributed to council members before the meeting, and a section will be allocated on our website for these documents in order that members of the public can read them prior to the meeting – where we would usually have paper copies on seats.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 8.17pm

MINUTES APPROVED (date):

SIGNED BY CHAIRMAN: