

## **IN ATTENDANCE**

Cllr E. Bruce (Chair); Cllr A Bruce; Cllr P Malpass; Cllr M.Young Cllr P. Davies; Cllr S. Sutherland; Cllr J. Cairns; Cllr L. Rundle; Cllr H. Taylor Cllr L. Rundle Cllr. V Collinson

Also in Attendance: Town Clerk (PC) Accountant (DS) Durham County Council's Outdoor Facilities Officer (BA)

**OM 9/3/21 01. APOLOGIES** Cllr L. Dixon

**OM 9/3/21 02. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** None received.

**OM 9/3/21 03. DISPENSATIONS** None received.

## **OM9/3/21 04. PLAY AREAS**

In view of the attendance of BA the Chair used her discretion to vary the order of the items on the previously circulated agenda, so that BA could give his presentation and leave the meeting.

BA explained that there was £62,000 available s106 monies available for play provision within Chilton that had to be claimed before June 2021, or it would go back to the developers. BA put forward a proposal that the Town Council should enter into an SLA with Durham County Council for their weekly, quarterly, and annual play inspections. BA explained that if the Town Council entered into this 3-year service level agreement, then his team would make the application to draw down the full amount of the s106 agreement without any charge for the commission or any management fee, ensuring that the full amount of £62,000 would be invested in play.

He advised that he had visited our Play Areas and had an idea of where investment was needed.

Given the urgency of the timescale **IT was AGREED** that the following decisions be immediately implemented without the delay of awaiting ratification by Council.

- i) That the Town Council enter into a three-year Service Level Agreement with Durham County Council for their play area maintenance and inspections, as outlined in his presentation to the meeting.
- ii) That BA be authorised to put in place the application to draw down the available £62,000 s106 monies to improve the existing play areas in Chilton, based on the priorities identified in the Annual Playground Inspections already in our possession and to be undertaken by his team.

**OM9/3/21 05 COUNCIL MINUTES** In relation to the previously circulated minutes: -

IT was AGREED: -

- a). To defer consideration of the minutes of the January 2021 Ordinary Meeting.
- b). To agree the minutes of Ordinary meeting dated 9th February 2021 as amended as a true and correct record.
- c). To agree the minutes of the Special Meeting dated 2nd March 2021 as a true and correct record.

### **OM9/3/21 06. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No Members of the public were present.

### **OM9/3/21 07. AGAR 19/20 AUDITORS REPORT & LETTER**

Consideration was given to the previously circulated report and covering letter from the Council's External Auditors, Mazars both dated 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021. The Town Clerk explained that the opening of the separate account for the Chilton Miners Welfare Trust had been impacted upon by COVID as all Trustees had to sign to agree that they consented to the opening of the bank account and this had been impacted upon also by the fact that three Councillors (who are consequently Trustees) had resigned and new Members had been co-opted.

#### **IT was AGREED:-**

1. To receive, agree, note and confirm that the Town Council would act in full accordance with the recommendations set out in the External Auditor, Mazars report and accompanying letter both dated 14<sup>th</sup> Januarys 2021.
2. To receive, agree and note those matters set out in the section of the report under the heading "minor scopes for improvement" AND
3. To await the outcome of the forthcoming local election in May, when the identity of the new Trustees would be established, before proceeding further with the new current account for The Chilton Miners Welfare Charitable Trust.

### **OM9/3/21 08 REVIEW OF INTERNAL CONTROL**

DS addressed the meeting in relation to his previously circulated report highlighting the difficulties that COVID had presented in relation to the review of the Council's internal audit plan, he advised the meeting that he would need to speak to the Council's internal auditor regarding his audit plan and the fact that the Council needed to review their Financial Regulations, a task that he was happy to undertake. He remarked that he had noted in completing his report that the Council had adopted an Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy; Member Officer Protocol; and that the Council had in August 2020 received a report from the Town Clerk undertaking a full Corporate Risk Assessment. In concluding his address to the meeting DS advised that for a small organisation of our size there were no issues at Chilton Town Council of concern to him from an internal control point of view.

**IT was AGREED** to receive and accept the officers report.

### **OM9/3/21/09 CEMETERY MATTERS**

- a) Memorial Safety update.

PC updated Members on the situation regarding Memorial Safety inspections and the options available to the Council reminding Members that it had been discussed previously at the Cemetery Working Group but that it had subsequently been agreed that the responsibility for Memorial Safety inspections would become a responsibility of the Councillors Ground Maintenance Contractor when these works were put out to tender, but that given the decision made to remain with our existing contractor for a further year this was no longer an option.

**IT was AGREED** that the Town Clerk would approach CDALC enquiring if any of our neighbouring larger local Council's who had their own staff trained in this area would be willing to undertake this work on our behalf under a Service Level Agreement.

Further discussion took place about the issue of rabbits in the Cemetery and the levelling of graves. P.C advised the meeting that she had sought expressions of interest from people suitably qualified and insured to address the issue but that because of staffing issues throughout, November 2020, December 2020, January 2021 and February 2021 she had not been in a position to progress this and her request for assistance in the selection process had been unsuccessful.

**IT was further AGREED** that Cllr Davies would supply PC with the details of a local gentleman who may be able to assist.

b) Freedom of Information Request received

PC updated the meeting about a Freedom of Information request in relation to Cemetery matters that she had received on the day that she returned to work following her recent ill health.

**IT was AGREED** that PC should respond to the Freedom of Information request as follows.

*Chilton Town Council have not been informed of any recent thefts in their Cemetery, one report of damage was received some time ago, but on investigation it was felt that the damage to a floral tribute was probably as a result of high winds. Our advice to anyone experiencing thefts or damage to their loved one's graves would be to report the matter to the Police.*

*The Town Council did give some consideration to the installation of CCTV Cameras to the Cemetery gates, but it was agreed not to action this.*

*For the period 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 there were a total of 24 internments in Chilton Cemetery.*

*For the period 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019- 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 there were a total of 31 internments in Chilton Cemetery.*

*For the period 1<sup>st</sup> January 20 -31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 there were a total of 29 internments in Chilton Cemetery.*

*There are a total of 960 plots left available to purchase in Chilton Cemetery and on this basis, there is sufficient capacity for at least the next 20 years.*

c) To confirm charges from 1st April 2021.

**IT was AGREED** that there would be no increase in Cemetery Fees and Charges, reaffirming the decision already made in the budget setting process.

## **OM9/3/21 10 COVID 19 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILTON TOWN COUNCIL IN RELATION TO THE GOVERNMENTS ROUTE MAP TO END ALL COVID RESTRICTIONS.**

Consideration was given to the implications for Town Council Services in relation to the Government's current route map to ease lockdown measures. It was noted that if all went according to plan matters should return to normal from June 21<sup>st</sup> 2021.

**IT was AGREED** that in light of the fluidity of the situation that Chilton Town Council would continue to monitor and review the situation on a day-to-day basis based on current Government and Health and Safety guidance as and when it is issued.

## **OM9/3/22 COMMUNITY EVENTS**

The Chair outlined the current position relating to the following proposed Community Events and the provisional dates set for these events if they can proceed, depending upon the status of any ongoing COVID restrictions.

**IT was AGREED** that the following events should proceed on the dates set out below, subject to and COVID restrictions.

- a) Fireworks Display. Provisionally booked for 5th Nov 2021
- b) Remembrance Sunday 14th Nov 2021
- c) Armistice Day. Thursday 11th Nov 2021
- d) Christmas Light Switch on Friday 26th November, *(the purchase of new lights and repair of existing lights was considered as a separate item later in the agenda).*
- e) Civic Carol Service. Possible date Thursday 9th December.
- h) Durham Miners Gala —CANCELLED THIS YEAR

Further discussion took place about organising some sort of post COVID event for the Town after all COVID restrictions are lifted and **IT was AGREED** that some sort of small-scale local music festival involving local bands and solo artist's may be a good idea to take forward.

## **OM9/3/21 23 IT UPDATE**

The Chair outlined the difficulties that had arisen in relation to accessing emails when both members of the office staff were unwell and absent from work and consideration was given to the previously circulated correspondence from our officer contact within D.C.C IT department.

**IT was AGREED** that in future should the situation arise where both Members of staff were away from the office at the same time, all incoming Town Council emails would be diverted to an appropriate Member.

Further discussion took place on the issue of purchasing additional tablets for use by Members who did not have IT to access remote meetings. On the basis that the current regulations permitting remote meetings are due to cease on May 7<sup>th</sup> 2021

and the local election may return Members who have access to their own technology **IT was AGREED** that this matter be left in abeyance.

Given the difficulties around purchasing equipment online without a debit or credit card for the Council's Current account **IT was AGREED** that the Town Clerk should approach the bank to seek their advice as to what would be the best option and proceed on that basis and that she should also liaise with the internal auditor to agree suitable protocols and risk management arrangements around the use and storage of any credit or debit card.

#### **OM9/3/21 24 UPDATE ON GREEN ENERGY**

Consideration was given to the previously circulated report from County Councillor Christine Potts in relation to the Green Energy project for West Chilton Terrace and Dene Bridge Row properties.

Following discussion around the related issues **IT was AGREED** that the Town Clerk should write to the Green Fund asking them to attend a meeting with the Council. **IT was further AGREED** that it was felt inappropriate that they use Hutton House as their registered office as this gave the community the impression that they were in some way connected to the Town Council and that the Town Council are aware fully aware of their activities.

**OM9/3/21 25. CITIZENS ADVICE** – Members gave consideration to the previously circulated request from CAB Head of Finance and IT was AGREED to defer this matter so that the Town Clerk could arrange a ZOOM meeting with the writer so that Members could ascertain the take up of the service by Chilton residents.

#### **OM9/3/21 26 NORTHUMBRIA IN BLOOM CHILTON IN BLOOM**

**IT was AGREED** that the Council would proceed with their entry into this year's COVID restricted competition.

#### **OM9/ 3/21 27 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**IT was AGREED that in accordance with Paragraph.**

**1(2) of The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings Act 1960 the press and public shall be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the remaining items on the Agenda on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.**

#### **OM9 / 3/21/28 GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT**

**IT was AGREED** to note that our current contractor had agreed to the Council's proposals regarding the extension of his current contract until March 31<sup>st</sup> 2022.

*Owing to difficulties with accessing her electronic agenda the Chair used her discretion to change the order of the following items of business.*

### **OM9/3/21/29 ALLOTMENTS**

Following discussion **IT was AGREED:**

- a) That the rent notices for the year 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 –31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 be issued as soon as possible without any increase from the rent and water charges levied for the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.
- b) That tenants be also be notified of the fact that we would move to the new charging system from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 based on the size of the allotment as previously agreed following the attendance of David Banks from the Northern Counties Allotment Association at various previous meetings.
- c) That those matters relating to allotments that had previously been done on a voluntary basis by the former Chair and Vice Chair of the Allotments Committee be incorporated into the duties to be undertaken by the Council's Grounds Maintenance Contractor.

### **OM9 /3/21/ 30 CHRISTMAS LIGHTS**

Consideration was given to the email circulated by the Office Manager earlier that day with regard to the purchase of new Christmas Lights, following a long discussion

**IT was AGREED**

- a) That new lights should be purchased to replace the damaged lights near the Wheatsheaf Public House and on the Roundabout.
- b) That a star should be purchased for the apex of the frame on the roundabout.
- c) That a star should be purchased for the top of the Christmas Tree.
- d) That the Town Clerk investigate with the Highway Authority the potential for further Christmas lights to be added to the route into Chilton via Rushyford roundabout in the future together with the costs of testing additional lighting columns.

### **OM9/3/21 31. STAFFING MATTERS**

The Chair in her capacity as Chair of the Council's H.R Committee updated the meeting regarding the difficulties that COVID had presented in arranging a H.R. Committee that was quorate given that the two Members had resigned and had not yet been replaced.

It was also discussed how COVID had impacted on the ability of staff to take their annual leave entitlement.

Consideration was also given to a letter from a member of staff that was read to the meeting.

**IT was AGREED: -**

- a) That considering the close proximity of the election, it would be better to appoint new Members to the H.R. Committee after the election at the Annual Council Meeting.

- b) That staff with outstanding holiday entitlement should be paid in lieu of their holidays.
- c) That the contents of the letter from the member of staff be noted and confirmed.

There being no other business to discuss the meeting closed at 8.10pm