

## BERKHAMSTED TOWN COUNCIL

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### Minutes of a Meeting of BERKHAMSTED TOWN COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre on  
Monday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2022 at 7.30 pm

#### MEMBERS PRESENT:

##### Councillors:

W. Conian (Chairman, Town Mayor)  
N. Taylor (Deputy Town Mayor)  
S. Cloughton  
G. Corry  
A. Foster  
J. Jones  
G. Stevens  
P. Fisher  
R. Freedman

##### ALSO PRESENT

Sue Severn, Town Clerk.

##### Members of Public

One member of the public was present

#### FC 01/23 Apologies for Absence

The following apologies for absence were **received** and **accepted** from Councillors P. de Hoest who has a clashing date in his diary, P. White who is away on business, M-J Hardinge detained on business.

Apologies were accepted unanimously.

#### Opening remarks

The chair welcomed Mr Derek Beavers from DCK Beavers accountants.

#### FC 02/23 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Stevens declared an interest in the civic awards.

#### FC 03/23

The **Minutes of the Previous** Berkhamsted Town Council **Meeting** held 14<sup>th</sup> November 2022 (previously circulated) were received and approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

#### FC 04/23

##### Open Forum

A resident, as a town council representative on the Salter Foundation. Cllr Corrie represents the council on both the Bourne and Salter Foundations. Mrs Johnson (resident present) advised that the secretary has resigned and no meeting has been held. It's an educational grant foundation and Mrs Johnson asked if the TC could find out what was happening with the foundations. Without

meetings there could be no grants. The chair said it was useful to know especially in current economic climate and asked the clerk to follow up and see what we could find out.

Mrs Johnson asked whether the draft budget should not have been made publicly available in advance of the meeting. Cllr Freedman advised that until the council adopts the budget and precept it has no legal standing. He explained that the Finance & Policy Committee meeting minutes were available online. She asked that in advance of the full council meeting to discuss the budget it be made available online. This will be considered before next budget round.

The chair thanked Mrs Johnson for her input.

Updates from Dacorum Borough and Hertfordshire County Councils:

Cllr Taylor advised the outcome of the 20mph survey with residents. Despite a low turnout it was over 80% in favour. He continues discussion with Highways about this project.

Cllr Stevens advised that the Borough would be talking about charging points; a motion was being put forward on the cost of living crisis; and what can be done to increase government funding to encourage take up on heat pumps.

#### **FC 05/23**

##### **Police & Neighbourhood Planning.**

The PCSO reported that there had been complaints about anti-social behaviour in the town. This included the Waitrose car park as well as around the skatepark and football club. To help build relationships with the young people who are in these venues, the police suggested meeting the young people on 'their turf' alongside youth workers from the Swan. This will enable them to talk to them about what they need and why they are there; and to advise them of how the antisocial behaviours are negatively affecting those living around these areas. The police have to offer an educational opportunity to enable them to see the consequences of their actions. In addition, they are looking at how the car park in Waitrose could be changed so that it doesn't attract the skaters.

There is also evidence of substance misuse around these areas and it may be that some educational work on the dangers of substance misuse is needed, once police have built up good relationships with these young people. (This is a long-term goal).

Cllr Corrie mentioned Lagley Meadow was another problem area, of which the police are aware. She suggested that they report to the council on this area. Cllr Foster said that the Lagley House residents were concerned about anti-social behaviour. Again, police are aware. The Clerk was asked to speak to the sergeant.

The police will be asked to attend TC meetings, or send a written report for each meeting.

#### **FC 06/23**

##### **Planning and Neighbourhood Planning**

No urgent planning applications were received for consideration.

The clerk reported that the neighbourhood planning grant funding had been applied for and this was expected to be confirmed within ten days. To enable the grant an estimate was required from a consultant and Chapman Planning have confirmed cost for initial stages at £927 which is sufficient to kick off the process and do initial work up to 31<sup>st</sup> March.

**Finance and Council Administration**

The following matters were considered:

**Finance**

Budget: The council's budget for the year 2023/24 was considered as recommended by the Finance & Policy Committee

Cllr Freedman explained that the budget focus was on key running costs, with a reasonable project list for next year. A number of projects had been deferred to maintain financial stability. In terms of operation of the council he didn't think there would be significant change. There was room for improvement, e.g., managing energy costs. The clerk and team have taken on a material cost-saving challenge. The budget is zero based looking at what the council needs for day to day operation.

Mr Derek Beavers (DB) talked to councillors about general reserve. He explained that the Practitioner's Guide to Account & Audit Regulations, published by the National Association of Local Councils, with the National Audit Office, Society of Local Council Clerks and the Association of Drainage Authorities. The Guide is the 'bible' of proper accounting practices for smaller authorities and sets out proper practice. It is followed by professionals and councillors and includes, at section 5 best practice on the level of reserves: Earmarked reserves are unlimited, provided their extent and purpose is reviewed regularly. (These include election fund, CIL, and any other minor reserves such as the Alan Dickman Fund). No other rules apply on these funds, other than review. There is a recommendation on minimum level of general reserve, although a recommendation if the council departs from it, there must be good and sound reasons.

DB advised that the minimum level of general reserve should be not less than 3 months net revenue expenditure – operating less capital and loan costs. Based on 2022/23 budget DB suggested minimum £99,250 it is expected at end of 2023 to be £69,472. At the start of the financial year 2023/24 there should be £105,000 in general reserve carried forward. Action is therefore needed to correct the shortfall.

Cllr Freedman concurred with DB's comments and advised that the expected year end position at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 equates to approximately two months' general reserves. It's worth pointing out that the reason for the shortfall is that there was a difference of understanding of some items of expenditure being spent from earmarked reserves, e.g., CIL, and this is why the council finds itself in this situation where a new clerk noted that general reserves were low. Whilst the council could decide not to raise the precept the clerk could refuse to take on responsibility for managing a budget.

Cllr Conian asked why six months general reserve recommended? Cllr Freedman said it should equate to 50% of the operational budget for the next year, despite the absolute minimum requirement of three months. The issue is that some projects have utilised CIL funding and going forward this would not be the case and that all expenses and total budget have been thoroughly reviewed.

Cllr Jones asked why we couldn't use CIL money. DB explained it was for infrastructure items in the community made necessary following increase in the size of a town, not for revenue items.

Cllr Cloughton asked if the precept increase was needed to raise the general reserve in one year. Cllr Freedman stated it was arrived at following consultation with others. It could be built up more slowly and there would be a chance of further increases in future. The budget circulated included various different precept levels with consequent reserve levels. Cllr Cloughton asked why during a cost of living crisis this was needed.

Cllr Foster said with proposed precept level it would only give three months. Cllr Freedman stated money to be spent (last year £380K) is considered as usual operating costs. Grants and support of external bodies are included as ongoing revenue items; they could be stopped if funds were not available. If the budget is agreed it becomes committed.

Cllr Taylor asked if the precept suggested would restore reserves to three months at the end of this financial year, based on budgeted numbers. He asked if the reserves could be built over a longer period. Cllr Freedman stated that although this was a large increase Berkhamsted has a very low precept in comparison with other towns and parishes. He ran through the proposed figures for a Band D (average) property which are £52.17 per annum or property and for a suggested budgeted increase the actual increase would result in a total amount of £1.01 per week which would allow the council and do well. Cllr Freedman stated that he believed that it was a question of either putting the precept up or not. He considered what the situation would be if all projects and discretionary spend were stopped and the conclusion was that just to maintain running the precept would have to be increased. The council should not operate with a less than recommended level of reserves and therefore there was a need to have an increase.

Cllr Taylor stated that he was asking if it could be split in different way, but spread over two years. DB clarified following this discussion that for peace of mind the recommended showed a net spend of budgeted total operating costs, less income excluding precept giving a bottom line precept of £450,000. Even at this level BTC only adds £28,000 to general reserve, if spread over two years it would only save £14,000 on the precept.

The chair asked councillors for their views on agreeing the budget, as proposed, at £500,368 net operating costs. Those in favour 5; against none; abstentions 3.

**It was resolved** that the Precept demand for BTC for the year 2023/24 be £450,000 resulting in a Precept equivalent for a Band D property of £52.17, or £1.01 per week.

Proposed by Cllr Freedman. Seconded by Cllr Conian.  
Agreed unanimously.

**The monthly financial reports**, as circulated, including receipts and payments schedule were noted.

**The interim audit report** was received.

The chair thanked Dori, Derek and Sue and the team for their hard work on this.

### **Administration**

- An update to Standing Orders was adopted:

On page 31, Section 8: Quorum and apologies for absence: *"Councillors should respond to the Summons to attend meetings with apologies and reasons for absence in advance of the meeting date"*.

The amendment was agreed and adopted with immediate effect.

This was agreed

- Alan Dickman Foundation:

The clerk reported that the Bursary for students of all ages to study pharmacy and pharmacy technologist qualifications has not been awarded for some years. The remaining funds are £9000 which would provide nine bursaries. It was necessary to publicise the Bursary and as a first step she suggested BTC contacts the senior schools and pharmacies in Berkhamsted to see if there was any student planning to study these subjects who might wish to apply for a bursary. The details of the scheme had been forwarded to Councillors, and this course of action was

agreed unanimously. Cllr Conian recommended contacting the schools and also careers officers, it should be included in the Annual Town Meeting presentations.

FC 08/23

## Community and Events

### Events

Events and community initiatives to be managed by BTC (with community groups where appropriate) were considered:

#### - Coronation

Councillors considered the proposal to hold a free event on 8<sup>th</sup> May and agreed the outline plan and budget of £30,000 maximum. The event would take place in the High Street. Cllr Foster advised Dacorum had offered a free film screen for the Sunday which would have resulted in an event built around it, but the logistics proved difficult. In interests of doing something different a street party in the High Street had been suggested and cricket club was originally not available, although it now was. She stated that while it would be easier at cricket club, the costs would probably not be that different. A road closure would be needed for High Street, if at the cricket club it would be a picnic and a project manager would be needed. Businesses in town are keen to take part and do 'click & collect' for food or open on bank holiday.

Cllr Stevens said that along the way we started we couldn't have cricket club now we see we can and in terms of weighing up the two and having had some experience of putting on major events he favoured something simple. High Street would be massive exercise and would be 'something different'. To put together a relatively low cost and attract around 1000 people to high street and cricket club could accommodate them more safely. Safeguarding and access would be needed at cricket club. Once in ground they would look after themselves.

Cllr Conian asked what sunk cost was if the weather was dreadful – Cllr Foster stated tables/chairs, road closure, security etc., would be lost. Cricket club could be less. Space could be included for 2000 on high street and there is enthusiasm. It is more complex than handing over to event manager. She envisaged a free non-ticketed event. Large raffle with decent prizes would feature, with money going to free children's events in summer as part of cost of living.

The decision needed to be made on venue: Cllr Freedman stated that if in High Street it would be like a table 'beer hall' type of set up, but entertainment wouldn't be great. Cricket club would give a stage focused event. Cllr Foster said not a concert more of a fun event - in 1953 street parties were those that were enjoyed as an event with a specific purpose.

Cllr Stevens stated there hadn't been much publicity to date but he felt people will be encouraged to do own street parties and this might compete with what BTC were doing in High Street.

Weekend in question is end of election campaign which councillors will be heavily involved in and will not be physically able to do the hard work on the day. Getting a team of volunteers would be very hard.

Cllr Foster proposed that the event be held in the High Street, seconded by Cllr Jones.

**It was resolved** to go ahead in High Street.

Cllr Foster would like to involve as much of the community as possible she's approached schools, Lagley House, Brownies Guides, Open Door.

- *Dementia Friendly Town*: Councillors agreed that this initiative should be taken forward in conjunction with local specialist organisations as a joint-venture for the benefit of all.

- *Summer Front Garden Competition*: Cllr Conian advised that a brief meeting had been held with representatives from Transition Town and Wildlife Trust to flesh out the proposal and it had decided to recommend to Council that the competition be used to kick off Berkhamsted's 'making space for nature' initiative. Details would be completed and marketing materials produced to launch the competition and provide suitable advice to gardeners to make their gardens wildlife-friendly. This would extend to various activities to encourage wildlife. Cllr Freedman said no professionally maintained gardens should be considered. Brief is being put together and it will be published shortly.

- *Free summer activities for children*: Berkhamsted does not host any free summer activities for children and it had been suggested that proceeds from a Coronation raffle be utilised to offer a series of outdoor activities/sports for children and young people in the summer.

### **Community**

**FC 09/23**

Citizens Awards: The Council agreed unanimously the awards recommended by Rotary: Senior Award 2022: Mr Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby. Junior Civic Awards 2022: Imogen Jacques and Eva-May Wood.

Cllr Stevens stated that the Town Council will write to recipients and invite them to attend the Annual Town Meeting to receive their prizes. Councillors congratulated the awardees and thanked them for their considerable service to the community.

### **Committees and Working Groups**

Allotments: The Clerk reported that the amended Tenancy Agreement was being given to new tenants; existing tenants will be advised on their invoice that payment is due within 14 days of receipt.

Finance & Policy Committee: The minutes of the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2023 were received.

**FC 10/23**

### **Communication**

Berkhamsted News: Cllr Taylor thinks we should put a communication out in next month about Coronation event to tell people about it. It was agreed to distribute a leaflet to show all BTC event this summer in Berkhamsted.

It was decided that the next edition of the News would be published after May's election to include the details of new Councillors. Topical news, the BTC Annual Report and events will be included.

**FC 11/23**

### **Meetings and matters of report**

Cllr Jones advised it was a good idea to receive these reports. Cllr Freedman has attended 3 Trustee meetings of the Swan and reported that they had a full complement of Trustees. They have brought in fundraising and communications experts and they continue to put on new, innovative programmes. He had asked them to approach TC for a meeting to talk about upcoming funding. Cllr Jones had been to Northchurch PCC meeting and reported that they raised £600 for Christmas gifts. Cllr Foster has met various residents, and had meetings at DBC concerning lack of parking enforcement in Berkhamsted and flooding in Waitrose car park.

**FC 12/23**

**Date of next meetings**

It was resolved that the full council would meet monthly on the first Monday of each month (apart from August and December); and Committees and working groups as business required. Cllr Taylor suggested May differs to allow for the annual town council meeting. (Calendar to be confirmed).

Next full council meeting would be held on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> February. Dates will be published as fist Monday, excluding August and December.

**FC 13/23**

**EXCLUSION OF PRESS & PUBLIC (was not required as no public or press present)**

**Staff incremental progression**

It was **resolved** in accordance with her terms and conditions of employment the Finance Officer should progress to salary point 28 on the pay scale LC2 (24-28) with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2023.

Agreed unanimously.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.20pm.

**Signed:**

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**Dated:**

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**Dates of next Full Council meetings**

Monday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2023.