

**HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 9 November 2020

At 6.00 pm in the Virtual Meeting Room via Zoom

Present:

Councillor M Jones (Chair)

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|--------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Councillors: | J Aitman | L Duncan |
| | L Ashbourne | V Gwatkin |
| | T Ashby | J King |
| | O Collins | |
| Officers: | Nicky Cayley | Democratic Services Officer |
| | Adam Clapton | Office Manager |
| | Sharon Groth | Town Clerk |
| | John Hickman | Operations & Estates Officer |
| | Tomas Smith | Venue Manager |
| | Angus Whitburn | Compliance and Environment Officer |
| Others: | 1 member of the public. | |

H370 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

H371 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting.

H372 MINUTES

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2020. Cllr King advised that he had given apologies for that meeting.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2020 be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

H373 OPERATIONAL REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report on the Operations and Estates Officer, covering hall maintenance and repairs to 51a Market Square.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

H374 **PUBLIC HALLS REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Venue Manager, covering the current Covid-19 lockdown implications.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

H375 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Although this item was initially to be taken after the minutes but as the member of the public – Mr John Richards - who had put the request in for the cinema was now present, the Committee agreed to allow him the opportunity to address the committee. The Committee adjourned for this item.

Following Mr Richard's address, the Committee reconvened.

Mr Richards left the meeting at this point, the time being 18.20.

H376 **REQUEST TO RUN A CINEMA IN THE CORN EXCHANGE**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Venue Manager on the proposal to run a cinema in the Corn Exchange. Mr Richards had proposed that he would hire the films and provide the equipment and the Town Council would run everything else including ticket sales. The profits would be split 50/50 after Mr Richards had paid for the hire of the film – around £150- £190. The Venue Manager felt that all the risk would be for the Town Council as it would be a Town Council event. Officers would need to work out capacity and a price point.

Members expressed some concern as there had been plans for the Corn Exchange to run cinema events independently as part of its programme.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and that the proposal from Mr Richards be referred to the next meeting of the Corn Exchange Working Party on 7 December 2020.

H377 **CEMETERIES & CLOSED CHURCHYARDS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations and Estates Officer. This covered Closed Churchyards including topple testing work to be done, Tower Hill Cemetery and the Windrush Cemetery. A report on the Windrush Cemetery access that had been to the last Climate, Planning and Biodiversity Committee was included.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

H378 **REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S CEMETERY REGULATIONS**

The Committee had been previously circulated with the current rules and regulations relating to the Council's cemeteries.

Due to a recent request for a Saturday interment of ashes, the Chair suggested she wanted to review the times of opening Tower Hill Cemetery, to be able to offer this service, if possible. The Town Clerk advised that this should be taken to the Personnel Sub-Committee for consideration as there would be implications on staffing and advice would be needed on employment law.

Members discussed this suggestion and felt that perhaps Saturday interments/burials could be done for special circumstances and subject to the Town Clerk's discretion. The Town Clerk suggested that this could be by request and not as an advertised service. Fees would also need to be increased from the weekday charges.

The Chair raised the issue of access and the Operations and Estates Officer explained that the cemetery was always open during daylight hours in the week and that the bollard that prevented cars entering the top of the cemetery was removed at weekends. The main gates were locked at weekends but anyone wishing to enter could apply to the Friends of the Cemetery for the code to open the gates. The Chair said that she wanted the bollard to be removed completely so that there could be car access at all times to that area and added that some people struggled to open the main gates. At the request of a member, the Operations and Estates Officer provided some background history to the bollard being introduced, which had involved cars damaging graves and memorials and near misses involving cars almost hitting pedestrians and on one occasion a member of staff.

A member proposed that Officers should risk assess the roads and access to the cemetery and bring back recommendations, that the additional gate should be progressed and that officers should see what could be done to make the bottom gates easier to open.

The Committee also discussed personal possessions being left on graves, the types of alternative memorials permitted, particularly those that could not afford headstones, and the general grounds maintenance of the cemeteries, as there had been several complaints over the past few months.

Another member proposed that a booklet for those burying or interring people in the cemeteries be composed that would provide a "bit of a hug from the Town Council". She acknowledged that there was already a booklet but wanted something a little nicer.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the opening hours of the Cemeteries be reviewed, particularly being able to offer interment of ashes on Saturdays, be referred to the Personnel Sub-Committee to look at the implications on staffing and legal issues;
2. that the Operations and Estates Officer and the Compliance and Environment Officer carry out a risk assessment on the permanent removal of the bollard, which prevents car access to the top end of Tower Hill Cemetery and the whole vehicular and pedestrian access to that cemetery;
3. that Officers continue to look at an additional pedestrian entrance at Tower Hill Cemetery;
4. that the Operations and Estates Officer brings a report back to the next meeting on the specific issues raised;
5. that a new handbook for the cemetery be designed with the emphasis being on compassion for the bereaved.

H379 **ALLOTMENTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations and Estates Officer. There followed a discussion about sheds on the new Windrush Place Allotments, which would be brand new and should be maintained by the Allotment Association. Officers felt that in providing sheds they would look more uniform in colour and size to the surrounding houses.

Another member wanted it to be clear that sheds were for the storage of gardening items only. The Operations and Estates Officer believed that it would be covered in the legal work.

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted.

H380 **FINANCIAL REPORT**

The Committee received and considered financial reports from the Town Clerk/RFO.

a) REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2020/21 AND BASE REVENUE BUDGET FOR 2021/22

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk/RFO which had been circulated prior to the meeting. She had written a comprehensive report in order to try and explain each individual cost centre and budget line. She advised that there were still several unknown factors at this stage and therefore it was the first draft budget for the Committee and would be presented to the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee on 23 November. If the information on the tax base was received by that point from the District Council, she hoped that the Council would be in a position to agree the budget on 14 December.

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted and that the revised base revenue budget for 2020/21 and the draft estimated base revenue budgets for 2021/22 as presented, be agreed in principle, subject to any further adjustments, as necessary.

b) SCHEDULE OF PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES 2021/22

The Committee received and considered the proposed schedule of fees and charges for 2021/22 in respect of the Council's Cemeteries and Halls as circulated with the agenda. The Town Clerk advised that the increases were in line with the budget parameters agreed by full Council with an inflationary increase of 1½%.

RECOMMENDED: that the fees and charges in respect of the burials and hall hire, as presented, be agreed.

c) REVISED CAPITAL AND SPECIAL REVENUE PROJECTS PROGRAMME 2020/21

The Committee had received a schedule listing the up to date financial position on the current year's capital and special revenue projects programme.

A member queried the projects listed as abandoned or deferred in the report and the Town Clerk/RFO explained that she had been trying to make savings in

the current year due to COVID-19 and that members should look at the list and see which projects could be deferred to the following year or the year after

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted.

d) REVENUE GROWTH ITEMS AND CAPITAL/SPECIAL REVENUE PROJECTS PROGRAMME 2021/22 AND BEYOND

The Town Clerk explained that this schedule covered projects for 2021/22. The projects that were listed as deferred under the previous agenda item could be put back in and then reviewed to see if they could be afforded. This would also be looked at the next Policy, Governance and Finance Committee. Members requested that the pedestrian gate at Tower Hill and provision for a cinema at the Corn Exchange be considered.

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted and that a pedestrian gate at Tower Hill and equipment for a cinema at the Corn Exchange be added to the budget – which the Venue Manager would look into costings for the next meeting.

H381 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: that in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted.

H382 REQUEST TO SUB-LET LANGDALE HALL

The Committee received and considered correspondence from the Managing Director of the ICE Centre, concerning a request to sub-let a top floor room. The Town Clerk advised that the lease did not allow any part of the building to be sub-let so if the Committee decided to permit it, it would need to go through a legal process.

Members thought the idea was good but there was some concern it could set a precedent. The Town Clerk advised that it could be stipulated that it was only permitted to be sub-let to that specified in the correspondence.

RECOMMENDED: that the Council agrees in principle to The ICE Centre sub-letting a top floor room to that specified in the confidential correspondence providing that all necessary legal work was completed and at the expense of the ICE Centre.

The meeting closed at: 7.54 pm

Chair