



FARNHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes Council

Time and date

7.00 pm on Thursday 27th January, 2022

Place

Council Chamber - Farnham Town Hall

Councillors

Councillor Alan Earwaker (Mayor)
Councillor David Attfield
Councillor David Beaman
Councillor Roger Blishen
Councillor Carole Cockburn
Councillor Sally Dickson
Councillor John "Scotty" Fraser
Councillor George Hesse
Councillor Andy MacLeod
Councillor Mark Merryweather
Councillor Kika Mirylees
Councillor John Neale

Apologies for absence

Michaela Wicks, Paula Dunsmore, Michaela Martin and John Ward

Officers Present:

Iain Lynch (Town Clerk)
Iain McCready (Contracts & Facilities manager)

Cllr Edmonds and Cllr Evans attended remotely

There were 2 members of the public in attendance.

Prior to the meeting, prayers were led by Pastor Michael Hall.

C95/21 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Dunsmore, Martin, Ward and Wicks.

Cllr Edmonds and Cllr Evans attended remotely.

C96/21 Disclosures of Interest

Cllr Evans made a disclosable interest as a Trustee of the Hale Community Centre.

C97/21 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16th December 2021 were agreed for the signature of the Mayor.

C98/21 **Questions and Statements by the Public**

There were no questions or statements by the public.

C99/21 **Town Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor announced that Farnham Town Council had been chosen as *Not for Profit Organisation of the Year 2021/22* in the Corporate Livewire Prestige Awards. This was recognition for all FDTC does for its residents and businesses and he thanked councillors and staff for their ongoing contribution.

The Mayor had attended the Holocaust Memorial Day Tree Planting at Rowledge School. He said it had been a moving occasion, one of 80 nationally organised by the Association of Jewish Refugees, and it had been a privilege to be part of it.

C100/21 **Questions by Members**

There were no Questions by Members.

C101/21 **Working Group Notes - Tourism and Events**

Cllr Evans introduced the Notes of the Tourism and Events Working Group held on 12th January attached at Appendix B to the agenda. She advised the Christmas events had worked well and there were plans to make more of a spectacle of the Christmas Lights Switch-on next year. It was interesting to see the Netflix Witcher snow globe Installation in Castle Street which had resulted in a £500 donation to the Mayor's charity.

It had been agreed not to hold the Music in the Vineyard In January and February because of the changing covid rules and these would be kept under review.

Cllr Evans invited Cllr Mirylees to outline the programme for the inaugural Literary Festival taking place in March and she described the wide range of events planned as a result of enormous effort by staff and volunteers.

Cllr Evans highlighted the programme for the year ahead which included special events for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in addition to regular events.

It was agreed that the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Lead Member for Tourism and Events would be on the Panel for the appointment of the new Town Crier, noting that this was a Civic post.

C102/21 **Working Group Notes - Strategy & Finance**

Cllr Neale introduced the Notes of the Strategy & Finance Working Group that met on 18th January, at Appendix C to the agenda.

i) Quarterly Finance

In terms of Finance, the Working Group had reviewed the 9 month position with income running at 117% specifically because of CIL and Section 106 funding received whilst expenditure was at 62% with some significant projects about to start. A detailed review of Income and Expenditure, by both account code and committee, the Statement of investments and reserves, and an update on outstanding payments had taken place.

The Working Group had reviewed fees and charges, and also rates for the Residents' Guide and Invest in Farnham brochure, for the coming year with a schedule attached for adoption. There was also a recommendation for some flexibility in sponsorship to get the best deal for the council.

The 2022/23 Investment Strategy was reviewed for adoption by Council.

It was RESOLVED *nem con* that:

- 1) The fees and charges set out in the report at Annex I be agreed;**
- 2) The Town Clerk be authorised to use discretion to negotiate the best arrangement for the Council in relation to Sponsorship and items where more complex arrangements are planned using the approved Fees and Charges as the basis for discussion;**
- 3) The Investment Strategy 2022/23 be adopted.**

ii) Internal Audit

Cllr Neale introduced the first Interim report of the new Internal Auditor, Mike Platten. The issues raised were addressed in a response by the officers, and the points set out were endorsed for recommendation to Council.

It was RESOLVED *nem con* that:

- 1) The Internal Auditor's report be welcomed**
- 2) The Officers' responses be agreed.**

iii) Timetable of meetings

It was noted that the 2022/23 Timetable of meetings had been circulated and discussion had taken place on whether there should be a review of all the Working Groups ahead of 2022/23. It was felt that it was not practical to make a recommendation to Council at this stage, and this was agreed.

iv) Risk Management

Cllr Neale introduced the comprehensive Risk Management Review that had taken place with input from each of the Working Groups on potential risks and mitigation for their own areas of activity, considered during the autumn cycle of meetings. Council noted the work of the Internal Auditor (using *Governance and Accountability - a Practitioner's Guide* as the basis for his work) was a key element of the financial and corporate risk management, whilst health and safety issues were independently assessed each year by the Council's contract with Worknest. Their report had just been received and would be considered separately. Council noted the responsibility that all employees, councillors and volunteers had in maintaining a good and safe environment and that the responsibilities were set out in policy statements agreed by Council.

It was RESOLVED *nem con* that:

- 1) The 2021/22 Risk Management Report be welcomed and adopted;**
- 2) The work done by Working Groups in managing risk be noted.**

v) **Contracts and Assets**

Cllr Neale updated Council on a number of projects being progressed including the refurbishment of the Central Car Park toilets; the West Street Cemetery Gates and the resolution of the fire in the greenhouses.

Council noted some additional safety improvements were proposed in the ladies toilets and that there was a recommendation to use some of the Community Infrastructure Levy funding for the improvements being made. It was noted that CCTV would be installed to cover the works from within approved budgets. In terms of the CIL contribution, members noted that it had been agreed to spend the limited CIL pot on agreed FTC projects initially but it was expected that the CIL Task Group would convene in the new municipal year.

In terms of the replacement greenhouse, and preparations for the forthcoming growing season were discussed. A review of several options for had taken place with an option to acquire a second-hand greenhouse in good structural condition being favoured (with the approval of the insurers). The greenhouse would be dismantled and rebuilt by specialist greenhouse movers. Council noted the reuse of an existing greenhouse was better environmentally if it met the Council's needs and it was agreed this option should be investigated further and the greenhouse be adapted with appropriate heating and watering systems within the settlement sum.

It was RESOLVED *nem con that:*

- 1) **The proposed safety improvements in the ladies toilets be incorporated at a cost of £10,099;**
- 2) **A CIL allocation of £40,000 for the Public Toilets refurbishment in Central Car Park be agreed.**
- 3) **The arrangements for the 2022 planting season be noted;**
- 4) **The concept of acquiring and adapting a secondhand greenhouse from Secretts be pursued in consultation with the Council's insurer.**

Cllr Ward arrived at this point

vi) **Community Grants 2022/23**

Cllr Neale introduced the proposals for Community Grants 2022/23 attached at Annex 5 to the Strategy & Finance Notes with funding proposed as follows:

Service level agreements:	£54,500
In year community grants:	£17,500
Grants funded from other budgets:	£6,000
Small Grants (in year allocation)	£2,000

Cllr Neale advised there had been concern raised over the seeming lack of support for the Hale Community Centre from Vivid Housing Association. Council noted the Town Clerk would write to them and also enlist Waverley's support to the request to encourage funding for the valuable work done by the Hale Community Centre for Vivid's tenants.

It was RESOLVED *nem con that:*

The Community Grants listed for 2022/23 be agreed.

vii) **Farnham Infrastructure Programme**

Cllr Neale provided an update on the Farnham Infrastructure Programme. He advised that the list of Medium Term Interventions had now been published. There

had been concern expressed by the Working Group that the list did not seem to accord with the Town Council's responses over many months and appeared to be broadly based on projects that already had section 106 or other designated funding. Members were concerned that Section 106 funding should be spent where it was needed and not be in a pooled pot. There was specific concern over a project in Badshot Lea where an application to vary the Section 106 had been made. Council discussed the issues further emphasising that Section 106 funding was to mitigate specific development and not to be pooled into a wider pot where its benefits could be dissipated.

Cllr Neale stressed that FTC was looking for visibility of both interventions and funding and he would raise this again at a meeting he and the Town Clerk were attending with officers of SCC.

Council noted the work going on the Wayfinding project and that FTC officers had re-raised issues that had not been addressed and had also asked for ward councillors' input.

viii) Consultations

Cllr Neale advised that FTC had already responded initially to the Surrey Hills AONB consultation. Further detailed information and evidence in the format requested had been discussed. The Working Group highlighted the need to include Tice's Meadow to link up to the wider area, and also the importance of extending the boundary outlined in the Neighbourhood Plan evidence prepared by HDA consultants, to link up with Dockenfield and Rowledge as well as Badshot Lea and avoid gaps in designation.

It was proposed by Cllr Cockburn, seconded by Cllr Attfield and **RESOLVED *nem con that:***

Farnham Town Council agrees to extending the green area outlined in the Farnham Neighbourhood Plan and HDA evidence in support of the AONB to avoid gaps in designation; and also supports an extended AONB reflecting the character of the land include in Dockenfield and Rowledge and from Badshot Lea to Tices Meadow.

C103/21 Working Group Notes - Cemeteries and Appeals

Cllr Cockburn introduced the notes of the Cemeteries and Appeals Working Group held on 20th January, attached at Appendix D to the agenda.

The Working Group discussed the outcome of a public meeting with the community of Hale to see if there were any further options to raise funds to rebuild the chapels and noted an idea presented by Richard Hunt of the Farnham Society to address a number of buildings at risk.

The suggestion did not bring new ideas or resources at this stage and would add further delay in the restoration of the area. As a result, the Working Group recommended to Council that its earlier decision to sympathetically reduce the chapels and create landscaped garden be reaffirmed and architects be commissioned. Cllr Fraser advised that he had further worked on trying to save the chapels with the community for four months and whilst there was sympathy and interest there was no practical solution and he felt there was no alternative to the option proposed.

It was RESOLVED with Cllr Fraser objecting:

- 1) To reaffirm the Council's decision to part demolish the Hale Chapels to create a landscaped garden.
- 2) To seek external experts to develop designs for a new garden.

Cllr Cockburn advised that West Street and Badshot Lea would be in the South and South East in Bloom this year and that Green Lane would be included in 2023. The purpose was not to win awards but to receive advice on further improvements that could be made to create exemplary green spaces.

C104/21 Precept 2022-2023

Cllr Neale outlined the report from Strategy & Finance at Appendix E to the agenda on the proposed precept for 2022/23. He reminded Council that it had approved a gross budget of £1,474,800 and, after discretionary income was taken into account, a revised net budget of £1,231,570.

The report set out that the 2021/22 Band D rate of £67.37 raised £1,189,377 resulting in a shortfall of £42,193. In determining the level of precept Council should consider whether it wished to use any of its reserves to meet the shortfall; increase further the income targets for services, or set unallocated in-year savings targets. Council could also consider other options such as reducing the precept level further by using more reserves; applying a freeze on the Farnham Town Council proportion of the Council tax; funding the agreed budget with an increase in the precept; or funding the budget with a combination of reserves, additional income and precept. Council noted that Farnham Town Council had consistently managed to minimise its precept increases over the past seven years and was now significantly below the average for the sector.

Cllr Neale drew attention to the spending plans and projects for the year ahead which included more support for young people, and World Craft Town, investing in toilet refurbishments and Gostrey Meadow, supporting businesses and continuing with Community Grants. It was prudent for the Town Council to sustain its purchasing power to meet future demands and pressures that came along as a result of changes affecting the principal authorities.

Cllr Edmonds advised that had he been present in person he would have voted against the recommendation for an increase that was above the increases being received by older people. Cllr Merryweather drew attention to Bank of England estimates that inflation was expected to be running in excess of 8%.

Cllr Neale advised that Strategy & Finance recommended that a modest below inflation increase of 4.6p per week or £2.39 per annum per Band D property be approved taking the Band D amount to £69.76 (£1.34 a week).

It was RESOLVED *nem con* that:

The 2022/23 precept be £1,231,570 representing a Band D equivalent amount of £69.76.

C105/21 Planning and Licensing Applications

Cllr Fraser introduced the Notes of the Planning & Licensing Consultative Group meetings held on 10th and 24th January at Appendices F and G to the agenda.

In these meetings there had been 85 applications considered nine of which were key or large applications, 34 important ones needing detailed consideration and 42 which were largely uncontroversial in nature.

The notes for the meetings extended to 45 pages underlining the hard work undertaken by the officer and members. There were an excessive number of documents for each application and these were difficult to access because the Borough's planning portal was ponderous and many key documents (particularly history and constraints) were not available.

Cllr Fraser advised that the number and use of 'non material' amendments was of concern as they were increasingly material matters.

The Planning Group remained concerned that developers were landbanking permissions for their profitability and yet the Local Planning Authorities and communities were not able to deliver a five year land supply as found in recent appeals.

It felt as though political conflict was getting in the way of common sense and Members felt there should be a penalty on developers who did not deliver permissions granted.

On a lighter note, Cllr Fraser was pleased to see that the benches outside the Hop Blossom were still in place.

In discussion, Council noted that Waverley was considering challenging a recent Inspector's decision over his judgement of the five-year land supply situation and also noted the difficulty of delivering housing when key sites such as Dunsfold were in abeyance.

C106/21 Actions taken under the Scheme of Delegation

There were no actions to report.

C107/21 Reports from Other Councils

There were no reports from other councils.

C108/21 Reports from Outside Bodies

Cllr Evans left at this point.

Cllr Neale reported on the Public Art Trust which was still looking for a new home for the Farnham Flame. It was hoped the new position could be on the flan wall on the Brightwell development.

C109/21 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Thursday 17th March 2022 at 7pm.

The Mayor closed the meeting at 9.30 pm

Chairman

Date