



FARNHAM TOWN COUNCIL

A

Minutes Council

Time and date

6.00 pm on Thursday 25th January, 2024

Place

Council Chamber - Farnham Town Hall

Councillors

Councillor Alan Earwaker (Mayor)
Councillor David Beaman
Councillor Mat Brown
Councillor Sally Dickson
Councillor Tony Fairclough
Councillor George Hesse
Councillor Chris Jackman
Councillor Andrew Laughton
Councillor Michaela Martin
Councillor Brodie Mauluka
Councillor Mark Merryweather
Councillor Kika Mirylees
Councillor George Murray
Councillor John Ward
Councillor Graham White

Apologies for absence

Tim Woodhouse

Officers Present:

Iain Lynch (Town Clerk), Iain McCready Business and Facilities Manager, Jenny de Quervain (Planning & Civic Officer).

There was 1 member of the public and 1 member of the press in attendance.

Prior to the meeting, prayers were led by Pastor Michael Hall of The Wey Church.

C90/23 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Tim Woodhouse.

C91/23 **Disclosures of Interest**

Cllr Beaman reported a disclosable pecuniary interest as a Trustee of Creative Response. Cllr Fairclough disclosed an interest as Deputy Leader, and Cllr Merryweather disclosed an interest as Finance Portfolio holder, at Waverley Borough Council.

C92/23 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

C93/23 **Questions and Statements by the Public**

Zofia Lovell, Chair of the South Farnham Residents Association expressed her thanks to Council for pursuing the possibility of a Statutory Review of the Waverley Lane Planning appeal decision and saw it as very positive that it had not been dismissed out of hand.

With reference to item 16 on the Council's agenda - the update on Waverley Lane it was understood there are three items for the hearing and from a residents' point of view '*The Merits of the Case*' was the most relevant.

During the Appeal for Waverley Lane and at other Appeals residents have raised the question about "how much "weight" (in planning terms) would be given to the Neighbourhood Plan.

It was not a question about whether it was five years old or not it was about the Community view of where housing was wanted, how the environment is protected and the willingness of the community to support it. To Residents it is about the principle on which it stands. Failure to look at the detail beyond the "timescale" is the greatest flaw.

Zofia Lovell said residents were well aware that housing was very much top of the agenda for all political parties and the pressure would be high for budgets, land supply and delivery. She also said that if residents were to commit to a Review of the Farnham Neighbourhood Plan they need the assurance that it was worthwhile.

She said that when going to law residents understood that finance and budgeting would undoubtedly be debated and urged Farnham Town Council to carry the case forward within the budget where possible. She thanked councillors for the support on the principle of the challenge.

C94/23 **Town Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor advised that the first month of the year was always a quieter one as organisations planned for the year ahead.

He was looking forward to unveiling a new Town Council banner at the Farnham Town Football Club and also celebrating Chinese New Year with the Orpington Chinese Language School's Farnham Branch.

He wished Reel every success with their new venture as they opened their multiscreen cinema in Brightwells Yard.

In February there would be another first with the arrival of Fiona Byrne as Farnham's first World Craft Town Artist in Residence funded by the Farnham South Street Trust. The Mayor would be hosting a welcome reception for her, to which all councillors would be invited, along with the World Craft Town Partners.

Finally, on behalf of Council the Mayor thanked Revd Dr Michael Hopkins for his service to the Town and wished him well as he leaves the Spire Church for a wider role as moderator of the United Reformed Church's Wessex Synod.

C95/23 Questions by Members

There were no Questions by Members submitted.

C96/23 Working Group Notes

I Community Working Group

- a) Cllr Mirylees introduced the Notes of the Community Working Group at Appendix B to the agenda. Council noted the events that had taken place and welcomed the new events being planned including an extended Music in the Meadow focussing on folk/traditional music and a World Music event. Council noted that initial discussions had taken place with Reel Cinema over the possibility of hosting a gaming convention or competition in partnership with Farnham Town Council and UCA.
- b) Cllr Mirylees explained that the Gin and Fizz Festival would not be progressed in 2024 because of clashes with other similar events but this would allow for development of other initiatives.
- c) The Working Group had discussed the need for an improved visual presence and marketing for World Craft Town including a sculpture on Coxbridge roundabout. There was also an idea for a festival of light with lanterns being created by the community, and this concept was being considered for implementation.
- d) Council noted the latest position for the Farnham Business Improvement District following the successful ballot in October. A Bid Manager was being recruited, the new company limited by guarantee being created and a more detailed business plan being prepared. FTC had agreed to provide a loan for expenditure until the first levy was received, subject to confirmed agreement for repayment.

On a recommendation from Cllr Hesse, seconded by Cllr Dickson, it was RESOLVED unanimously that Cllr Murray be the FTC observer on the Farnham BID.

- e) Cllr Mirylees reported on discussions on Community Grants for 2024-25. There had been a series of discussions with organisations that receive a contribution to general running costs or projects and work to a light touch Service Level Agreement (SLA). Community grants of less than £2,000 for one-off projects also considered.

It was RESOLVED unanimously that the following grants be approved.

Organisation	SLA grants 24/25
Farnham Maltings	£10,000
Citizens Advice South West Surrey (CASWS)	£20,000
40 degreez	£5,000 <i>(for general running costs only)</i>
Hale Community Centre	£5,000 <i>(for general running costs only)</i>
Hoppa Community Transport in Farnham	£10,000
Brightwells Gostrey Centre	£5,000 <i>(for general running costs only)</i>
Space2grow	£4,000
TOTAL	£59,000

One off grants from the Community Initiatives Fund 2023-24

Organisation	Grant
Farnham Repair Café/UCA	£1,000
Farnham Youth Choir for World Choir games	£4,000
I choose Freedom (Women's Refuge)	£2,000

Grants to be funded from Service budgets

Green Up Britain	£415.00 (from FIB budget)
Hale Carnival Committee	£1,000.00 (from Events budget)

Community Grants 2024-25

Name of organisation	Farnham Town Council contribution
Badshot Lea Community Association	£1,100.00
Challengers	£1,320.00
Creative Response	£1,500.00
FADEG. Farnham Art & Design Education Group	£600.00
Farnham Assist	£600.00
Farnham Brass Band	£195.00
Farnham Voices Together Community Choir	£800.00
Farnham Youth Choir	£1,000.00
Helen Arkell Dyslexia Charity	£1,000.00
Hive Helpers CIC	£750.00
Home-Start in Waverley	£1,500.00
Kind To Mind	£500.00
New Ashgate Gallery Trust Ltd	£2,000.00
Rowledge Tennis Club	£1,000.00
Rural Life Living Museum	£1,030.00
Weydon School	£1,500.00
Wrecclesham Fete	£500.00
TOTAL	£16,895.00

2 Strategy & Resources Working Group/

In introducing the Notes of the Strategy & Resources Working Group, attached at Appendix C to the Council agenda, Cllr White advised that the Precept report and the Risk Management reports would be considered separately.

- a) **Quarterly Finance.** Council considered the quarterly finance review conducted robustly by the Working Group noting income was at 105% whilst expenditure was running at 74%. The review included the
- Bank Reconciliation
 - Income and Expenditure Report by account code and Committee
 - Statement of Investments
 - Reserves
 - Outstanding aged debtors

The Working Group also reviewed the proposed fees and charges (at Annex 1) and agreed the commissioned charged for the use of the SumUp machine would be absorbed within banking charges.

The 2024/25 Investment Strategy (at Annex 2) was agreed for recommendation to Council.

The dates for the closing of the 2023-24 accounts were agreed with papers going to the April Strategy & Resources and Council and the dates for public inspection agreed for recommendation to Council.

It was RESOLVED unanimously:

- 1) The 2024-25 Fees and Charges (at Annex 1) be adopted.**
- 2) The Investment Strategy and 2024/25 Investment Plan (at Annex 2) be adopted.**
- 3) The Dates for Public Inspection of the accounts in 2024 take place between Monday 3rd June and Friday 12th July.**

b) Internal Auditor's report. All councillors had received the Internal Auditor's Interim report and the Officers' comments on it. The first visit had covered the following:

- Review of opening balances and reporting of 22-23 audit opinion
- Follow up previous recommendations
- Testing of expenditure first 6 months of financial year
- Testing of income – first 6 months of financial year
- Risk management and insurance
- Budget monitoring reports
- Arrangements for inspection of accounts
- Bank reconciliations.

The Internal Auditor had advised that the Council continues to operate a satisfactory system of financial control and had a few recommendations for consideration by Council. The Officers' recommendations at Annex 3 were recommended for adoption. It was agreed to increase the level of Fidelity insurance; to improve ease of access to the transparency data on the website through the website review, and to review the potential use of electronic order pads.

It was RESOLVED unanimously to accept the Officers' recommendations on the Internal Auditor's first report.

c) Financial Ombudsman's Decision. Council noted the Financial Ombudsman's report on a complaint submitted in April 2022 by Farnham Town Council into the refusal by HSBC to increase the Commercial Card limit as approved by Council, without a traceable personal financial check on one of the Council's individual signatories despite their personal finances not being connected with the Council's finances. The decision in the Ombudsman's case (PNX-4672897-PON2) is that they have no jurisdiction in legislation to look into the complaint by Farnham Town Council. This clarification and decision has implications for all town and parish councils in the country and requires a change in the legislation or there will be no recourse for poor service or problems encountered by town and parish councils with financial institutions.

It was RESOLVED unanimously that Farnham Town Council raises the issue with the National Association of Local Councils and the local MP of the need to update the legislation to resolve the fact that town and parish councils have no access to the Financial Ombudsman to resolve financial disputes.

- d) **Farnham Infrastructure Programme.** Cllr Beaman reported that the Council's comments from the last Council on the town centre design had been submitted but FTC was yet to receive a response. There had been further discussions about the potential problems of the proposed in-line bustop. Cllr Hesse hoped that Cllr Beaman would use every effort to get the railings removed around town now the 20MPH zone had been implemented as everywhere was looking untidy.

Council noted that Cllr Oliver had expressed a desire at the Last FIP Board that work should commence in the summer of 2024 and that road space had been booked by Surrey.

- e) **Contracts and assets.** Cllr White advised that the Working Group had reviewed the Assets Task Group's consideration at a special meeting held on 11th January to which all councillors had been invited to bring councillors up to speed on plans for improvements in Gostrey Meadow. Cllr Fairclough, chair of the Task Group, advised that representatives of the Ridgeway School and their architects outlined their vision for the Café and playground and what they wanted for their pupils. The Task Group focussed on what it felt was needed i.e. a new playground and new toilets and did not feel it could deliver what the Ridgeway school wanted. The Working Group was quite clear it wanted to support the Ridgeway School and Cllr Murray was looking at options to help with other organisations in town such as the Spire Church and Jubilee café.

Cllr Hesse had proposed that street traders could be invited to Gostrey Meadow instead to trade on a hard standing and Cllr White suggested that a large canopy could be erected to provide cover for picnics and enjoy cover from the elements. Councillors felt this was a less risky solution for the Council.

Iain McCready confirmed he had discussed the outcome with the school and they were disappointed but welcomed the offer of support from Cllr Murray. They would consider the suggestion of a mobile unit that could be used in Gostrey Meadow and elsewhere.

Council supported the proposal from the Working Group to commission a new design.

It was RESOLVED unanimously that:

- 1) **Plan A Architects be engaged to provide a series of drawings including a new toilet block, a new play area, an area for increased covered and uncovered storage for event equipment; a hard standing area suitable for concession use, and a covered area /canopy area;**
 - 2) **FTC support Ridgeway School in achieving their aim of providing work opportunities for their students**
- f) **Younger People Task Group.** Cllr White reported on the presentation by the Town Clerk and Youth Services Manager at Godalming Town Council. Hearing their experience and recommendations was very helpful. It was important to make indicative or provisional allocations of funding. Council noted the desire to make an immediate impact with the funding agreed in the budget and that the additional provision and outreach in central Farnham was recommended to be earmarked for 40 Degrees; in north Farnham earmarked for the Hale Community Centre and some additional resource covering Wrecclesham and other parts of Farnham. Part of the focus would be to effectively reduce levels of anti social behaviour in the town recognising the significant reductions in financial support from SCC for youth facilities. Cllr Beaman had suggested Council would have to consider how far FTC was drawn into a situation that might require ever greater financial support and officer time to pick up responsibilities for which FTC had no statutory requirement to provide.

Council noted initial discussions had taken place with representatives of the Hale Community Centre, 40 Degreez and the pastor of Jubilee Church. A further report would go to the next cycle of meetings. The Working Group was concerned about the challenges facing 40 Degreez and considered how best to support them and agreed that Cllr Murray and the Mayor would have a further discussion with them.

It was RESOLVED unanimously that provisional allocations be:

- 1) £30,000 for additional town centre outreach earmarked for 40 Degreez as proposed in the SLA discussion;**
- 2) £30,000 for activities/outreach in Hale and Wreclesham (allocations to be determined).**
- 3) £20, 000 for research in 2024-25 on priorities, need and potential funding requirements by FTC for 2025 and beyond to continue to develop a future-proof strategy for youth organisations within the FTC area;**
- 4) £10,000 for additional programmed activities by partners to provide sustained activity for younger people over the longer holiday periods.**

Infrastructure Planning Group. An update on the Statutory Challenge on the Waverley Lane planning application was received by Council with details of Mr Justice Julian Knowles decision to hold a rolled up hearing attached at Appendix P. The 'rolled up hearing' would have three elements. The first on whether the extension of time request submitted by FTC's solicitor should be allowed. The second on whether the Aarhus Cost Capping Convention applied in this case and the third on the substantive merits of the request for leave to appeal. Council would discuss the detailed elements in exempt.

Council also noted the latest position with the Farnham Neighbourhood Plan and the Waverley Local Plan with a call for sites currently underway. There would need to be further discussion on what was considered a 'strategic site'.

C97/23

Precept 2023-24

Cllr White introduced the precept report at Appendix D advising that the Strategy & Resources Working Group was mindful of the financial pressures on the local community but also of the need to invest in the future of the community particularly for opportunities for younger people and the challenges of climate change.

Cllr White said that whilst there was no capping on Town and Parish Councils, increasingly they were expected to take on services being stopped by principal authorities. Paragraph 6 in the report was helpful, showing the exemplary stewardship by Farnham Town Council. In 2013 it was spending £5.60 above the average of town and parish councils but in the current year it was £6.14 below the average. The Town and Parish element of Council Tax represented 3% of the total.

After careful consideration, the Working Group was recommending a £4.93 increase in the band D level for the year ahead, representing just 9p per week. This would result in a total precept of £78.15 or £1.50 per week per Band D property, still placing FTC below the national average whilst fulfilling the commitment to invest £90k in supporting younger people.

Council noted that further consideration was given as to whether income targets could be further increased and that other inflationary pressures were being absorbed within the budget. The Working Group had proposed using some reserves to minimise the level of increase.

It was RESOLVED unanimously that:

- 1) Reserves of £22,382 be used to reduce the 2024/25 precept increase;**

- 2) **The 2024/25 precept be set at £1,424,818 representing a Band D equivalent amount of £78.15 per annum or £1.50 per week.**

C98/23 Risk Management Report

Cllr White Introduced the Risk Management report at Appendix E. Council noted that each of the Working Groups had reviewed the risks affecting their areas and were supported by an independent risk review by Worknest, financial risks review by the independent Internal Auditor as well as by Council policies and procedures.

It was RESOLVED unanimously that:

- 1) **The Risk Management report be welcomed and adopted;**
- 2) **The work done by the Working Groups in managing risk be noted.**

C99/23 Planning and Licensing Applications

Cllr Laughton introduced the notes of the Planning & Licensing Consultative Group meetings held on 8th and 22nd January attached at Appendices F and G to the agenda.

Some of the highlights included an application for a 65 bed care home next to Bishops' Meadow where the Town Council supported concerns raised by the Bishops meadow Trust, and a 26 dwelling application in Wrecclesham Hill which was contrary to the Farnham Neighbourhood Plan. An application in Vicarage Hill should have a detailed Transport Management Plan as it is a restrictive site and comments had been made to an application in Gong Hill Drive for outbuildings needing to be in line with the building line and not too close to the road.

In terms of licensing there was concern over an application to extend hours to 2.30am which would have a detrimental effect on neighbours.

C100/23 Actions taken under the Scheme of Delegation

There were no additional actions to report.

C101/23 Reports from Other Councils

There were no reports from other councils.

C102/23 Reports from Outside Bodies

Cllr Dickson reported that the Revd Alan and Revd Lesley Crawley were leaving Badshot Lea and Hale with a final service on 4th February. Council noted the contribution they had made to the communities in North Farnham in which their churches were located.

C103/23 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was agreed as 14th March at 6pm.

C104/23 Exclusion of the Press and Public

On a proposal from the Mayor, **it was RESOLVED unanimously that the press and public be excluded for discussion of two exempt items from the Strategy & Resources Working Group.**

C105/23 **Any confidential matters (if required) arising from discussions of the Working Group notes.**

Exempt items arising from the Strategy & Resources Working Group.

- 1) **Younger People Support.** Consideration of contractual matters for the allocation of funds for developing activities for Younger people.

Council reviewed the allocations in terms of agreements that needed to be put in place to ensure the outcomes desired could be delivered by the organisations that would be receiving the funds. These included future use of building and Service Level Agreements in the initial year of support.

Council noted that some of the support was to help younger people who were facing challenging circumstances and should be supported by Surrey County Council, particularly given the rise of mental health issues since covid.

Cllr Fairclough and Cllr Merryweather left at this point.

- 2) **Statutory Challenge for Waverley Lane.** Council discussed the approach to the hearing for the legal challenge and the three elements that were to be considered in the rolled-up hearing. The support of the local community was welcomed, and it was important to fight for the Neighbourhood Plan as the decision on the Waverley Lane application was a travesty.

The Mayor closed the meeting at 8.57 pm

Chairman

Date