



FARNHAM TOWN COUNCIL



Notes Strategy & Resources

Time and date

9.30 am on Tuesday 5th December, 2023

Place

Council Chamber - Farnham Town Hall

Strategy & Resources Members Present:

Councillor David Beaman
Councillor Alan Earwaker (ex-Officio)
Councillor Tony Fairclough
Councillor George Hesse
Councillor Andrew Laughton
Councillor Graham White (Lead Member)

In attendance: Councillor George Murray, Cllr Sally Dickson (via Zoom).

Officers:

Iain Lynch, Iain McCready (part), Jenny de Quervain (part)

1. Apologies

2. Declarations of interest

Cllr Fairclough declared an interest for any relevant matters as a Waverley Borough Council Executive member.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17th October were agreed as a correct record.

In response to a query regarding Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contribution for the Farnham Infrastructure Programme, the Town Clerk advised that as no application had been received, there had been no specific consideration of a sum towards the project but when the matter had previously been discussed, an indicative sum in the region of £50k had been mentioned.

4. Farnham Town Council Strategy Workshop

The Working Group considered the report of the facilitator, David Carden, on the Strategy Workshop held on November 4th, attached at Annex I to its agenda. Members felt the session had worked well and welcomed the comprehensive report circulated to all councillors.

The Working Group noted there had been meetings of the Younger People's Task Group and the Environment Working Group which had added, to the thinking on the Younger People and Climate issues arising at the Workshop.

In the provisional budget, £90,000 had been earmarked for additional support for Younger People activities in the coming financial year, but how it would be used would be subject to further discussion. This would include whether the resources should be used to underpin and strengthen existing community groups providing services for young people or whether Farnham Town Council should create a new role to co-ordinate other organisations services or provide direct delivery of youth work. The Working Group noted this was set out further in the notes of the Younger People's Task Group. It was agreed that the costs and risks of direct delivery would need to be carefully considered with a preference to strengthen existing organisation such as Hale Community Centre, 40 Degreez and the Wrecclisham Community Centre where there could be to make an early impact.

The Working Group noted matters progressed since the Workshop, on climate issues, a planned review of the website, and a meeting with residents' groups and others on the Neighbourhood Plan update. The Working Group heard of discussions with Waverley Borough Council on the town centre cleansing arrangements (considered to be difficult to extract from the wider contract) and the potential of future assets transfers. Priority for these in the short term could be:

1. Borelli Walk (after Brightwells is completed but excluding responsibility for the bridges),
2. The Brightwells green space (although this may be sought by the County Council)
3. Morley Road Recreation Ground (given its links to the allotments).

It was confirmed that none of the existing activities of the Town Council should be stopped and **agreed to recommend that the 'big subjects' in section 5 of the Facilitator's report would continue to be important in the short to medium term:** In addition to Youth provision and climate and sustainability priorities, these included the Farnham Infrastructure Programme; the Farnham Neighbourhood Plan update, the impact of Brightwells; relationships with Principal authorities given the financial pressures faced by them. In discussion, creating synergy with the emerging Business Improvement District; and consolidating and strengthening Farnham's position as a World Craft Town as a key part of the local economy would be key areas of focus. It was noted an all-councillor meeting about Gostrey Meadow was scheduled for January 2024.

The Working Group agreed that a Business Plan with clear objectives, outcomes and resourcing over a five year period would be the follow-on stage of the Strategy Workshop and it was agreed to continue with the assistance of a facilitator.

One of the items discussed at the Strategy Workshop was around time and length of meetings. The amended times for meetings that had been adjusted since the Workshop were agreed for **Recommendation to Council:**

- **Environment Working Group at 4.30pm**
- **The Community Working Group at 10am**
- **Strategy & Resources at 2pm on Tuesday afternoons.**

- **Planning & Licensing at 9.30am on a Monday**
- **Council to start at 6pm.**
- **Task Groups to meet at times that fit with the membership with a preference for late afternoons.**

In terms of the Council's vision, the **Working Group agreed to recommend to Council that the existing vision be endorsed:**

“Farnham Town Council strives to be the influential and effective voice for Farnham bringing together the views of all organisations working for the good of the town and enhancing the well-being of all the community.

Farnham Town Council aims to be an efficient and effective organisation providing high-quality, sustainable services and facilities for the residents and businesses of Farnham whilst addressing the climate challenge, with a strong and respected voice representing Farnham's best interests”.

5. Finance Report

The Working Group received the summary of the income and expenditure accounts and the position of Reserves at 30th November prior to discussing in detail the draft budget report at Appendix D and the draft budget for 2024-25 and the explanatory notes that were appended.

The Town Clerk set out the pressures facing the Council and that careful consideration had been given to absorbing inflationary impacts where possible despite the fact that a number of elements were essentially best estimates at this stage. A more detailed report would be attached to the Full Council agenda.

The Working Group emphasised the priority emerging from the Strategy Workshop to make a step change support for younger people and the allocation of £5 per Band D property (£90,000) to make a real difference. It was noted that there would be discussions with organisations receiving funding support from the Council, and that the details of how this support would be implemented would be discussed further in early 2024. The Town Clerk advised that once the draft budget were approved by Council, ways of meeting the shortfall would form part of the precept report at the January meeting. This could include use of reserves, increased income targets or an increase in the precept. The Working Group noted that the FTC precept was well below the national average for town and parish councils despite the amount of activity carried out by Farnham.

The Working Group agreed to recommend to Council a budget of £1,806,950 for 2024-25.

6. Contracts & Assets update

The Business and Facilities Manager provided an update on contracts and assets matters attached at Appendix E to the Working Group agenda.

The report covered:

Gostrey Meadow playground works; council vehicles and steps to find a replacement Goupil vehicle; a number of matters relating to IT equipment, including the purchase of a second Owl camera and an Owl bar to improve the experience for remote meeting attendees; and the retendering of the IT Support contract in 2024; the Gostrey Meadow project meeting scheduled for 11th January 2024 with representatives of the Ridgeway School; the Wrecclesham gateways project; and matters around the potential acquisition of land.

It was noted that depending on which sites were targeted, there were different cost implications both in terms of staff and machinery and the Working Group was advised of discussions that had taken place with Waverley identifying that the optimum time for a transfer was when the grounds contract ended in Autumn 2024.

Cllr Fairclough advised that Waverley Borough Council was currently simplifying the community asset transfer process and prioritising initial projects across the Borough which would be in the first tranche.

Discussion also took place on the potential acquisition of buildings currently owned by WBC and Surrey (such as Montrose House and the Library) to see whether or not these could be used as a community hub to deliver Council priorities. The Working Group also noted that the South Street Club appeared to have gone into liquidation and the future of the building was uncertain. The Working Group was advised that the Government's Community Ownership Fund allowed for investment in buildings owned by town and parish councils (and could be used to refurbish publicly owned assets (eg public conveniences) or purchase assets that may be lost for the community.

It was agreed to recommend to Council that: Officers investigate whether:

- 1) The Community Ownership Fund was suitable for Farnham projects;**
- 2) There were transfer of ownership opportunities from Waverley or Surrey, whether land or buildings;**
- 3) There were beneficial options, in discussion with the liquidators, for retaining the South Street Club as a community asset.**

Cllr Brown arrived at this point.

7. Farnham Infrastructure Programme

The Working Group reviewed the provisional Town Council comments, prepared by Cllr Beaman, on the design of the town centre improvement scheme.

The draft had been informed by councillor comments and discussion at the Infrastructure Planning group meeting held on 21st November to which all councillors had been invited. **An amended version including comments raised at the meeting is attached at Annex I and subject to some collective responses on questions raised by Cllr Beaman, recommended, for endorsement by Council.**

Cllr Fairclough said that comments needed to be realistic recognising there is a fixed sum of money agreed for the works and that expected delays in the programme would see greater pressure on the money available.

Cllr Hesse suggested there were savings that could be put forward that would allow for some flexibility, such as removing the cycle route in High Park Road as being unnecessary with Scholars Way available, and the swapping of some footway widening in the top half of Caste Street for additional residents' parking spaces, and the downgrading of some traffic light controlled junctions to Belisha Beacon crossings.

Concern was expressed about the lengthy period of road works that were anticipated with East Street works connected with the Brightwells scheme, utility works in South Street, works at Water Lane.

Cllr Laughton and the Mayor left at this point.

Comments for further consideration were whether:

- the space North of Long garden Walk could be used for additional parking rather than wider footways
- the mini-roundabout at Bear Lane and High Park Road could be removed
- Use of granite setts for the taxi rank instead of ironstones, and for setts to line the edge of the ironstones elsewhere
- There can be a crossing across Longbridge between Gostrey Meadow and the Maltings, funded by the savings, noting this was always considered part of the scheme before.
- Seating and bike racks placed between the street trees especially in the Borough and Downing Street to minimise addition clutter. Possibly include bike repair stations in key locations.

There was still concern over the suitability of the right hand turn at the bottom of Castle Street, but the amendment to the bus layby was welcomed.

There was still need for mitigation in North and South Farnham to deal with the impact of the changes.

8. Reports of Task Groups

- 1) The Working Group received the Notes of the Infrastructure Planning group which included details of the presentations by Elaine Martin (SCC) on the design for the Town Centre Improvement Scheme, and by Andrew Longley on 'Preparing the new Local Plan' presentation which was considered by representatives of community groups on 23rd November when the next steps for the update of the Neighbourhood Plan was considered.

It was intended that there could be a joint call for sites and that information was to be shared by Waverley prior to the call for sites being activated in December.

It was suggested that Farnham Town Council could start with looking at issues and priorities across Farnham as part of evidence gathering. This would include where infrastructure (such as sports pitches could be improved to support new development and land uses. It was noted that the community was keen to get the update/review underway.

- 2) The Working Group received the notes of the Younger People Task Group held on 15th November with the wider partners who had shared progress reports on their work and discussed ideas for the future. The Working Group received an update on discussions that had taken place subsequent to the Task Group over a potential community lottery and on ideas for taking forward the priority on supporting younger people activities through the proposed allocation in the 2024-25 budget.

The Working Group heard that Cllr Jackman had advised that there was some more follow-up work to be done which would be forthcoming in the New Year once preparatory works have been completed. These included a) discussions with another lottery provider as an alternate and b) working on potential recommendations for ways forward to support organisations (following on from grant discussions with 40 Degreeez and Hale Community Centre etc).

9. Consultations

The Working Group welcomed the Traffic Camera Enforcement

- 1) The Working Group welcomed the Traffic Camera Enforcement consultation (concluding on 15th December) to help with the management of HGVs. **The recommendation of the Working group was that Council should respond highlighting that the proposed penalty was too low and should be the maximum allowed under the legislation.**
- 2) The Working Group considered the Waverley Borough Council proposal for a Solar Panel in the Upper Hart Car Park. It was noted the detail of the location of the battery and electrical infrastructure was not shown in the illustrative drawings but the concept of the scheme was welcomed. It was understood the generation could potentially be used by a local business or academic institution.
- 3) The Working Group considered the Surrey CC consultation on Amendments to Waiting and Parking Restrictions in Waverley. It was recommended that ward councillors look at the detail of the proposals in their own wards and respond directly to the consultation as ward members prior to the 4th January.

The Working Group recommended that the FTC response included the need for the ringfencing and reinvestment of income back into Farnham improvements as was the original agreement for the introduction of on-street charging in the town.

10. Town Clerk update

- 1) The Town Clerk advised that the Pay Agreement for 2023/24 had been agreed between The National Joint Council for Local Government Services including employer and union representatives and was being implemented in the December payroll in accordance with the scheme of delegation. The settlement of £1,925 per annum (broadly representing £1 per hour) up to scale point 43 and 3.88% otherwise was effective 1st April.
- 2) The Town Clerk provided a staffing update.
- 3) The Town Clerk advised that he, the Mayor and Cllr Beaman had attended a presentation by Boom Credit Union to consider ways of supporting the most vulnerable avoid doorstep lenders. A report would follow.

11. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Tuesday 16th January 2025 at 2pm.

The meeting ended at 5.46 pm

Notes written by Iain Lynch