
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
HELD IN ARDEN HALL, CASTLE BROMWICH
ON WEDNESDAY 13TH JUNE 2007
AT 19.30 HRS**

Those present:

Chairman: Cllr J Gibbins

Councillors:

Cllr E Knibb
Cllr J Riordan
Cllr A Terry
Cllr S Ward
Cllr Mrs. B Wilkins

Officers: Mrs. C Tibbles **Public:** No members of the public.

The Chairman invited members to silently remember Cllr Mick Hughes who had recently died and praised his common sense approach and friendly, genuine contributions.

1.

Apologies.

The apologies from Cllr A Bull, Cllr D Feasey and Cllr D Franklin were accepted for the reason given. The Chairman welcomed everyone to his first meeting as Chairman of this Committee and wished them 'Happy New Year'.

2. Declarations of Personal or other interests.

None declared at this stage.

3. Election of the Vice Chairman.

ON THE PROPOSITION of Cllr Knibb, **SECONDED** by Cllr Terry, **IT WAS UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that Cllr Bull be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee for the Civic Year 2007-2008.

4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting.

ON THE PROPOSITION of Cllr Mrs. Wilkins, **SECONDED** by Cllr Riordan, **IT WAS RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Meetings held on Wednesdays 28th March, 11th April, 18th April and 25th April, 2007 be signed as a true and correct record.

5. Planning Applications.

The Chairman explained that the Parish Council was not a planning authority and could not make actual decisions or carry much weight with the Borough Council, however recommendations were always submitted to give a local view. Planning Applications and any Decision Notices received since the last Meeting were considered by the Committee, and the recommendations thereon are set out overleaf. Appeal by Revelan Group to be heard on Tuesday, 24th July at 10 am at the Civic Suite for application no. 2006/1940 at 362-364 Chester Road for 10 residential apartments and 4 houses.

6. Village Green Parking Issues.

Members discussed the potential problem of BT vans seeking alternative parking but heard

that the Leisure Services Committee had supported residents in their request for parking restrictions, subject to consultation of those affected. **ON THE PROPOSITION** of the Chairman, **IT WAS RESOLVED** to recommend support of the Borough Council plans. The Chairman reminded members of the unadopted cul-de-sac owned by the Parish Council at the Village Green and suggested consideration be given to charging local residents/businesses an annual fee for parking with a permit and clamping of those unauthorized to do so, as historically had happened. Cllr Mrs. Wilkins and Cllr Ward asked about liability for any damage to vehicles if they had paid the Parish Council to park. Cllr Mrs Wilkins felt residents should be able to park outside their own home and the Chairman replied that the proposals of the Borough Council would not affect residents this way. Cllr Knibb supported the Borough Councillor's approach about widening the road slightly but felt the 'Keep Clear' areas should be enforced. The requests from both Mr. & Mrs. Snape and Demma to the Parish Council for help and enforcement regarding access problems were briefly referred to and the Clerk undertook to check the minutes to clarify what action had been resolved by members. The Chairman thought the financial implications should also be checked.

7. Resident's Concerns.

Noted with interest and considered. The concern from Mr. Lampton (Log 81/1) regarding the noise problems from BT was discussed and **IT WAS RESOLVED** that he be advised to seek help from the Borough Council Environmental Services as this problem was outside the powers and jurisdiction of the Parish Council. Cllr Mrs. Wilkins referred to the complaint about flooding from the park and Cllr Riordan summarised the actions recommended at the last Leisure Services Committee meeting. Cllr Ward said that the new drain discovered would be the responsibility of the householder. The Chairman said that he had spoken to Mr. Lane sometime ago and agreed that he could cut channels in his clay subsoil and join into the Parish Council drainage ditch at the rear of the tennis courts but unfortunately Mr. Lane's cut through was lower than the drainage ditch and therefore unlikely to work. The concern from Mr. Stanton regarding the precept increase was discussed and **IT WAS RESOLVED** to send the last two years budget plans and year end accounts, the professional advice warning about inadequate reserves. Cllr Riordan suggested that the latest internal audit summary also be included. The Clerk undertook to notify Caroline Spelman, MP, of the information that would be forwarded.

8. Communications.

Routine communications received since last meeting were noted as follows: Thank you letters for Chairman's Charity donations from Castle Bromwich Brownies, Castle Bromwich Infant School, Castle Bromwich Friends of Acorns, Age Concern, Castle Bromwich Junior School, Castle Bromwich Cubs and Scouts, North Solihull Voluntary & Community Alliance newsletter promoting 'Volunteering Week' and Networking Event on 5th June at 10 am / Dog Control Order – Solihull MBC 'Notice of Intention' / Veterans World newsletter / Planning Appeal 362-364 Chester Road on 24th July / Heartbeat NHS / Castle Bromwich Gazette / Colebridge News / Regeneration community involvement / DIS Bulletin and NALC updates / WALC bulleting and updates / New Horizons Conference for Democratic Planning on 23rd June / North Solihull Business Forum newsletter / National Savings Interest Rates / Your Solihull magazine / new bus stop locations in Chelmsley Wood / Grant Aid application for Fusion project / copy of letters to Solihull MBC from Cllr Bull requesting bollard repair, bollard replacement, street sign replacement and missing fire hydrant sign / Opportunities bulletins / 'Reachout' drug information / Solihull Trading Standards warning on tarmac gangs / HM Revenue & Customs employer update / Notification of closure of Investment Account by 10th August / Clerk Journal / Sustain Bulletin and Funding information and questionnaire / Vol-u-me Council for Voluntary Service Exchange Newsletter / WM Police Authority update on consultation / Grapevine Mobile Bars / Children's Centre

Stakeholder Meeting on 23rd May / HR Procurement and Finance seminar on 23rd May / reference request for supplier / VAT booklet 'Reliefs for disabled people' / Safeguarding local children poster / Fire Marshal training opportunities / NHS Community Rehabilitation support / Smokefree advice / Solihull Tree Wardens Group Minutes / Standards Board Code of Conduct information / nPower change of rate to Climate Change Levy / Supplementary Consultation Paper on Draft Freedom of Information and Data Protection (2007) changes / notification of National Minimum Wage changes from 1st October / BT broadband amended terms and conditions / Lottery Application notification of reference number / sales brochures.

The Chairman referred to the Tree Warden information and Cllr Terry expressed an interest in having more information. Cllr Mrs. Wilkins referred to the letters written by Cllr Bull regarding problems he had been approached to help with by residents but was concerned that political stationery was being used in the name of the Parish Council. The Chairman replied that he had not seen the correspondence and she suggested that members should look at them. The Chairman felt that political views were best left at the door in parish councils and thought that could be outlined at the next full Council meeting. Cllr Knibb added that the new Code of Conduct referred to this matter. Cllr Gibbins asked the Clerk if there had been any news on the lottery application and she replied that only acknowledgements had been received, although there was still a need for preparation by the council whatever the result was. The Chairman said it was important to look at the problem of the deteriorating frontage of Arden Hall.

9. Report of Working Parties.

The Clerk summarised the reports given at the last Leisure Services Committee meeting for Marketing. Cllr Riordan said the Marketing Working Party was vital to the future of Arden Hall and as the Hall Manager was missing from this group, felt that the gap should be filled. Cllr Mrs. Wilkins offered to join. Chris Beebee appeared to have been co-opted but could not always attend due to commitments.

The Chairman reported on the Hire Working Party but he was struggling to make sense of the insurance situation and had arranged to discuss existing parish council cover with a commercial broker, without charge. The Clerk was asked if the insurers had replied to the questions but she had not received any questions to forward to them. Cllr Mrs. Wilkins knew that a definition was needed of commercial hirer and private hirer. The Chairman thought the Working Party needed to meet and would arrange it.

10. Youth Parish Council – Proposed Questionnaire.

Members considered the tabled information and **IT WAS UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that the work of the Youth Council should be commended but the present format of the questionnaire be re-defined to include more focus.

11. Year End Accounts 2006/07 and Audit Requirements.

Members discussed the documentation which made clear that members had to be responsible for undertaking more checking and be able to prove next year that they had not handed over entire responsibility to the Clerk. Cllr Mrs. Wilkins was missing some information but knew she would be responsible for signing them at the Council meeting. Cllr Knibb thought a Working Party would be useful. Following a query by Cllr Terry a discussion followed on bar prices, bond deposit for hire damage (awaiting draft procedures from Mr. Witten), support for the physical inspections needed before/after hire, insurance and evidence from other operators, insurance was confirmed as paid until 31st May 2008. Cllr Knibb asked several question on the accounts which the Clerk was able to clarify. Cllr Gibbins offered to draft a letter to the licence holders by Hob Farm stating the Parish Council could sell the former entrances to them but the Clerk advised that a formal decision

had not been made. **ON THE PROPOSITION** of Cllr Mrs. Wilkins, **SECONDED** by Cllr Knibb, **IT WAS RESOLVED** to place this subject on the agenda for the next Council meeting. No resolution was made on the draft accounts.

12. Grant Aid Applications.

An application had been submitted by Ian Clarkson on behalf of the Fusion Project at Hob Farm to fund diversionary soccer coaching to prevent anti-social behaviour through sport, on the recommendation of the police and after consultation with the Parish Council, for £909.95. The Chairman explained the background and the benefit of the scheme but had told Ian Clarkson the Parish Council had a difficult financial position and doubted the application could be afforded. The scheme was run by the Borough Council and he was reluctant to recommend baling them out because they had not undertaken other fundraising. **ON THE PROPOSITION** of the Chairman, **SECONDED** by Cllr Mrs. Wilkins members were asked to approve an offer of £200 as a small donation, subject to acquiring funding from other sources. Cllr Riordan **PROPOSED** an amendment to granting the full amount requested and disputed the perilous financial situation referred to by the Chairman as the budget had been planned for use. As no-one seconded the proposal, the amendment was not voted upon. Cllr Riordan warned the council was throwing away a golden opportunity. Cllr Knibb asked if the proposal would be for recommendation by full council and Cllr Riordan said that members of the Leisure Services Committee would not be consulted on this recommendation and he knew their members had a real heart for Hob Farm. Cllr Mrs. Wilkins understood the reasoning of the Chairman to encourage Ian Clarkson to get funding but felt he could re-apply and be reconsidered. The Chairman referred to another Fusion project to take place at Park Hall School which the Parish Council could consider supporting but the Clerk pointed out no application had been received and the next meeting to consider Small Grant applications was October. Cllr Knibb asked for an explanation of why this Committee considered applications and it was confirmed that the precept funded grant aid and that the annual allocation for the current year of £2060 was available. The Clerk said that the previous year the Committee had granted £500 out of the £2000 allocation and in 05/06 granted £1500 out of the £3600 allocation. Cllr Riordan asked to register his disgust with the Chairman's proposal which he felt penalised Hob Farm residents, fearing that the project would fail without this funding. The Chairman agreed with Cllr Riordan that the council should encourage reasonable use of Hob Farm but thought that Solihull MBC was not committed to the project. Cllr Terry asked if it would benefit local children. This was confirmed and grant aid was firmly required to be in the interests of the parish and/or its inhabitants. Cllr Gibbins thought local residents could support it and perhaps Maria Dickson could be approached to help if £200 had been promised by the Parish Council. The Chairman asked for members to vote on the proposal and **IT WAS RESOLVED** to offer £200 on condition that other funding was obtained elsewhere and to invite a further application for a Park Hall scheme. Cllr Riordan abstained from the vote.

An application had been submitted by Solihull MBC for £630 to continue funding a Homework Club at Castle Bromwich Library. **ON THE PROPOSITION** of Cllr Mrs. Wilkins, **SECONDED** by the Chairman, **IT WAS UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** to grant £500.

13. Staff Committee.

Members considered the formation of a staff committee and the Chairman explained that the Clerk was the line manager to all of the staff and that the Finance and General Purposes Committee chairman was the line manager to the Clerk. Cllr Riordan disagreed with that

statement. Cllr Mrs. Wilkins confirmed the need for a committee to be responsible for staffing areas and suggested extending powers of the existing Discipline Committee to have a wider remit. Cllr Riordan knew that the existing Discipline and Grievance policy did not meet the needs of a staff committee as recommended by legal experts. Members agreed that there would not be a conflict of interest between discipline and staffing issues. **ON THE PROPOSITION** of the Chairman, **SECONDED** by Cllr Mrs. Wilkins, **IT WAS RESOLVED** that the existing and well written Discipline and Grievance policy be revised with the minimum necessary extension to extend the remit as necessary. Cllr Riordan asked who should undertake this task and the Chairman thought the original author should be responsible. The Clerk advised that a distant council in Warwickshire could not be expected to undertake this task. Cllr Mrs. Wilkins suggested the existing Staff Discipline/Grievance Committee should meet to re-draft it with the support of the Clerk and the Chairman felt there was no need to rush. Cllr Knibb requested a copy of the Policy and asked if Cllr Riordan was satisfied with the resolution. Cllr Riordan was relieved this Committee had finally made a recommendation, knowing the urgency reflected in the legal advice, which should have been done more than a month ago instead of being delegated to the Clerk. Cllr Mrs. Wilkins knew this would give protection for the future but could be too late to help in the current situation. The Chairman questioned the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of an existing committee being on the Staff Committee as procedurally they may not be allowed to be elected as Chairman of a second committee. Cllr Mrs. Wilkins pointed out that she was Chairman of the Council so membership may need to change in order to have a different Chairman for the new Committee. The Clerk undertook to verify this. As it was after 22.00 hours, **ON THE PROPOSITION** of the Chairman, **IT WAS UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** to suspend Standing Orders for 5 minutes to allow the conclusion of business.

14. Accounts.

ON THE PROPOSITION of the Chairman, **SECONDED** by Cllr Mrs Wilkins, **IT WAS UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that the accounts, as circulated, should be approved.

15. Clerk's Report.

The Clerk quickly reported the office was running low on headed paper but in the absence of a Hall Manager work had not commenced on redesigning and splitting the stationary (as it used to be) so that Arden Hall could be marketed separately. She could manage for a while but she wished members to be aware. Due to the pressure of work and excessive backlog she had not made any progress with preparing for a temporary Deputy Clerk but with support from the new Staff Committee this may be achieved. It could help to review existing staffing levels for the whole Parish Council, evaluate and examine new/innovative ways of working in the future. Leave applications had been submitted by the Duty Managers and she was concerned about how their absence could be covered with the existing situation. She would prioritise the audit requirements for the Annual Return and Clement Keys on her return from leave (next week) and then concentrate on the financial backlog before attempting to catch up with outstanding correspondence/action requested by Committees. Prioritising was difficult as daily demands frequently disrupted the tentative plans made, for example Friday 2 hours with alarm problems at the pavilion, Monday broken lock at the pavilion requiring locksmith, Monday evening alarm problem caused by broken lock, Tuesday re-issuing keys to staff and then attending Hob Farm problems which had increased drastically since Friday. After requiring 999 assistance at Hob Farm due to abuse, she had closed the field at 5.45 p.m. but had received complaints about this closure. Feedback had been given to Sgt. O'Reilly who had been able to help identify some youths involved. Padlock problem remained but at least the buildings were secure again. The Chairman instructed Cllr Gibbins to summarise the

Clerks record of the incident at Hob Farm and to speak to the Birmingham Mail reporter about this serious problem. The Clerk said the Junior School had asked for views on the wording on the memorial to Cllr Mrs. Pauline Gray and it was suggested to simply say "Cllr Pauline Gray Memorial Award". As the family had confirmed they were content to let the school and council jointly decide this matter, Cllr Knibb was asked to liaise with the school once ratified. However, the family would still like some permanent way to mark the award for each child and if not a book token then perhaps a quality printed certificate. Due to the Clerks absence on leave, the council office would need to close on Monday as Mrs. Haycock was also on leave. Cllr Knibb and Cllr Gibbins had met to consider the hire/insurance situation and Village Hall Information Sheets would be ordered at a cost of £60 to assist.