

Minutes of the Harworth & Bircotes Town Council Zoom meeting held on Monday 25th January 2021, at 7pm

Present: Cllr Evans (Chair), Cllr Smith, Cllr Barns, Cllr Schuller, Cllr James, Cllr Fear, Cllr Flynn, Cllr Jones and Cllr Dobson

Others: W Davies (Officer) K Tarburton, County Cllr Sheila Place and one member of the public

16979 To receive and approve any apologies for absence

Apologies received from Cllr Wratten and Cllr Dean. Cllr Flynn proposed to approve the apologies; this was seconded by Cllr Barns and resolved by the Council.

16980 To receive Declaration of Interests on any item on the agenda

Declaration of Interest from Cllr Schuller for agenda item 16985.

At this point Cllr Schuller lost contact with the Zoom meeting

16981 To suspend the meeting to hold a public session and receive Police reports, County and District Councillor reports

Apologies received from District Cllr Challinor and PC Martin.

The Chair suspended the meeting to hold the public session.

County Cllr Sheila Place reported:

- The potholes have been dealt with on Tickhill Road; tomorrow they will be repairing the worst ones and the rest within a few days
- A request for an 'Elderly people crossing' sign for Gibbet Lane
- The current maintenance programme which includes Scrooby Road, Norfolk Road, Norfolk Ave and Norfolk Grove.

District Cllr Schuller's report had been previously circulated – no questions asked.

District Cllr Evans gave a report as follows:

The recent threat of floods that resulted with the District Council working in partnership with many other organisations; successfully implemented a plan of action.

Cllr Evans attended a virtual presentation by the Citizens Advice (CAB) at their Annual General Meeting. An annual review of their services was made which demonstrated that the CAB in Bassetlaw has made amazing progress.

Progress in being made with the vaccination programme which is being delivered from three centres in Bassetlaw. The District Council working in partnership with the local NHS, has contributed funds to a health bus, which is to be used to deliver health services in rural areas. I understand this is also being used to deliver vaccine programme to the most distant communities.

It is the time of year again when the District Council produces numerous finance reports for the Cabinet that contribute to the budget for the next financial year.

This means I have a lot of time in preparing these papers and presenting those papers, verbally in cabinet and then incorporating them into the budget speech that I have to write and present in March. You can all guess how I spend my time weekends and apologies in advance for becoming a bit of a hermit.

Cllr Schuller re-joined the meeting during this item; however, struggled with the sound.

K Tarburton left the meeting at this point.

16982 To approve the minutes of the meeting held 21st December 2020

Cllr Flynn proposed to accept the minutes of the meeting held 21st December 2020 as a true record; this was seconded by Cllr Barns and resolved by the Council.

16983 To receive Chair's report

The Chair previously circulated the following report:

Setting a Balanced Budget for 21/22

All councils must set a balanced budget, this is a responsibility placed on all levels of local government. Due to the pandemic, this Council, like many others, has suffered a loss in 20/21 for hire charges compared with £15K received the previous year. This would have been much worse if we had not received a government grant of £10,000.

Covid-19 continues to impact financially. The Council's budget proposals for 21/22, when comparing predicted expenditure of **£360,973** against predicted income of **£351,276**, shows a budget shortfall of **£9,697...this must be addressed.**

Achieving a Balanced Budget

There are several means of achieving a balanced budget where a shortfall is forecast:

- Reduce expenditure – the budget plan shows decreases in expenditure have been made for; grounds maintenance, computer/IT and capital equipment
- Conversely, expenditure will necessarily rise in some areas, and inflation and pay awards must be factored in.
- Cut services – this is not recommended unless all other means fail to achieve a balanced budget
- Use reserves – this action requires capacity to replace in the near future the reserves used; it is poor practice to use reserves to prop up the budget. Reserves are best kept for unpredicted expenditure e. g. during one exceptional winter Council spent £16,000 on gritting.

The other option is to increase income; this is not possible under the current pandemic restrictions. Council should therefore consider income generated from the Precept.

Setting the Precept for 21/22

There are a number of facts to consider before setting the precept, one of which is the obligation to set a **balanced budget**. The proposed 21/22 budget shows a shortfall of £9,697.

Considerations

- First and foremost, under the pandemic-related financial difficulties currently affecting residents, it is important not to add to the financial burden of households.
- The Council has also suffered financially, due to a loss of income normally generated from hire of the Town Hall; the total loss is *£15,000 so far this year*; compared with last year
- Councillors should be aware that:
 1. This is a loss that cannot be recovered
 2. A similar loss of income is predicted for 21/22 due to the continuation of the pandemic and the uncertainty of groups resuming their activities, post-pandemic.

It therefore makes sense to consider the Precept as a means of addressing the financial shortfall.

Precept Options

The table provided by the Officer shows various options, and for each you can see:

- the percentage potential increase
- the impact on the taxpayer
- the revenue released to Council

The Tax Base.

The consistent figure across all percentages is the tax base, which is the growth of new houses in Harworth and Bircotes; compared to last year this reflects growth of 144.53. This places Council in the fortunate position of raising the precept without causing increased financial hardship to local residents.

Where Council chooses to set the precept is a matter for discussion; I would remind colleagues that it is good practice to recognise/financially accommodate annual inflation, plus we have to address the current shortfall, along with an expected further loss of income in the next financial year.

16984 To receive the cemetery health & safety inspections

Cllr Barns reported that no H&S actions required from his cemetery inspections.

The Officer reported:

- Two extra salt bins are to be put in the old cemetery
- A request to donate a new bench in the new cemetery; the Officer will visit the cemetery and make sure the location is appropriate to the future requirements.

- Enforcement Officers will also monitor the cemeteries for littering, fly tipping, dog fouling etc.

CLlr Schuller lost her internet connection during this agenda item.

16985 To consider any planning applications listed and note any appeals and planning correspondence

Application: 20/01593/HSE

Location: 38 Tickhill Road, Harworth

Proposal: Proposed single storey rear extension with first floor rear extension, erect front porch and summer house to rear garden. Widen driveway, reduce garage and convert to a store

Application: 20/01661/FUL

Location: Plot B2, Lords Wood Road, Harworth

Proposal: Erect commercial units with associated car parking and service yard and construct new access

Application: 20/01698/HSE

Location: 31 Styrrup Road, Harworth

Proposal: Proposed single storey rear extension

Application: 20/01713/FUL

Proposal: Two storey extension on commercial unit

Location: IHUS, Plumtree Farm Industrial Estate, Plumtree Road, Harworth

Following consideration, Cllr James proposed not to make any objections to the above applications; this was seconded by Cllr Flynn and resolved by the Council.

The Officer reported on the following correspondence:

- Notification regarding the application to stop-up part of the highway- Whitby Road, Harworth under section 116, Highways Act 1980
- Notification that the planning application 18/01210/OUT – Land south of Scrooby Road and north of Snape Lane, Harworth is to be discussed by the District Council Planning Committee on the 6th January 2021. The Town Council has previously commented on this application but sent in comments supporting the application as following:

Harworth & Bircotes Town Council supports the development of Simpson Park, Phase 2. We understand that there has been a change to the level of contributions to be made, and as a consequence the objection from N.C.C has been withdrawn.

16986 To review the Internal Control Testing document for 2020/21

Following the Councillors review on the above document, Cllr James proposed to approve the Internal Control Testing document; this was seconded by Cllr Fear and resolved by the Council.

16987 To approve payments and receive the financial reports as of 31st December 2020

Following circulation of the payments, Cllr Flynn proposed to approve the payments as listed; this was seconded by Cllr Barns.

The Officer circulated copies of the finances as of 31st December 2020, budget figures, variances and bank statement totals for the Councillors to view.

Cllr James proposed to accept the finances as of 31st December 2020, this was seconded by Cllr Flynn and resolved by the Council.

The Officer reported on the outcome of the Npower complaint.

A letter has been received from Npower which has also been sent in to Ofgem regarding the Officer's complaint over the inaccurate invoicing for the street Christmas lights. The Officer read through the requirements put in place to resolve the complaint; these have now been carried out by Npower; which leaves a total of £141.16 balance to pay. The original balance they required was around £4,500.

£150 was deducted off the final balance as compensation and a written apology was given.

At this point the Officer informed the Council that it should consider additional bank accounts to accommodate further project funding monies; taking into account the financial Service Compensation Scheme (FSCS) which is the UK Government deposit guarantee scheme protection of £85k per banking licence. The Council was happy for the Officer to investigate banking options

16988 To consider any virements on the current accounts

This item was discussed after the setting of the budget but minuted here.

The Officer went through the current budget variances for virements; consisting of repairs, van repairs, pest control and waste removal.

During this item the Chair lost connection briefly and returned using her phone to continue during this item.

Cllr Fear proposed to the use the unused grounds maintenance budget for the variances as above; this was seconded by Cllr Jones and resolved by the Council.

16989 To consider the budget for 2021/22

During this Item Cllr Smith left the meeting unwell.

The Officer circulated copies of the draft budget for 2021/22 plus a draft budget up to 2024/25.

The Officer went through items on the agenda and after discussion, Cllr Jones proposed to approve the draft budget; this was seconded by Cllr Flynn and resolved by the Council.

The proposed expenditure of £360,973, income £351,276 which leaves a shortfall of £9,697 to cover.

16990 To consider the 2021/22 precept

The Officer circulated figures showing the various percentage increases on the current precept amount for 2021/22. It was noted that the tax base rate set by the District Council has increased by £144.53 which automatically provides additional funds without any financial impact to the residents.

Cllr Schuller re-joined the meeting during this item at (44.50mins)

The Chair lost connection at 48.20mins and then used her phone on speaker to continue the conversation until the internet connection returned at 53.03min.

After consideration, Cllr James proposed to raise the precept by 6% to £263,798; with the impact to the taxpayer of a reduction of 70p (rounded figure) for a Band D property. This will give additional funds of £14,932 to cover the precept shortfall and a contribution to the reserves following the loss of income 2020/21.

16991 To consider the Fire Risk Assessment for the buildings

The Officer reported that independent fire risk assessments have been carried out on the 6th January 2021. The assessment report for the Town Hall has no actions required. The assessment on the Information Centre; recommended further dorguards to be fitted to the kitchen door and some of the police station doors which are constantly being wedged open; plus a recommendation for a water type extinguisher fitted in the lobby area outside the locker rooms in the police station.

The Officer will arrange for a dorguard fitted on the kitchen as a shared area and the additional fire extinguisher; the police will be asked if they wish to purchase further dorguards for their areas.

Cllr James proposed to approve the purchase of dorguards and extinguisher as required and accept the fire risk assessments as above, this was seconded by Cllr Fear and resolved by the Council.

16992 To approve the meeting dates for 2021

Cllr Flynn proposed to approve the following meeting dates; this was seconded by Cllr Barns and resolved by the Council

22nd February (if required)
 8th March
 19th April
 17th May
 21st June (if required for EOY)
 12th July
 13th September
 25th October
 6th December
 16th January 2022

16993 To receive items for information or the next agenda

- Approval of additional bank account for project funds
- HR discussion

16994 Time and date of the next Town Council meeting

The next Town Council meeting will be held on the Monday 22nd February 2021 at 7pm via Zoom

FINALLY,

The Town Council would like to say a big thank you to Howard Martin.

During the Christmas Period, the District Council's recycling centre at the Town Hall bottle banks, were very well used. There were large amounts of bottles, jars etc piled around the bins, however, the bins were almost empty. Apparently, the lorry emptying the bottle banks, do not take excess bottles, which leads people in to thinking the bins are full once they are emptied.

Howard Martin one of our publicly minded residents went along to the bins and picked up all the overflow and put it into the bins. It is great to know that as a community we continue to have people who are willing to help and are publicly minded.