

Minutes of the ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL WELLBEING COMMITTEE of
Bridport Town Council held at Mountfield, Bridport on Wednesday 9 November
2022 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT: Cllrs: Kelvin Clayton (Chairman)

Ian Bark	Anne Rickard
Sarah Carney	Dave Rickard
Karen Hunt	Steve Williams
Ros Kayes	

ALSO PRESENT: Sheri Ahmet (Friends of Wellfields), Jan Thorne
(Friends of Wellfields), Dr Jocelyn Bailey, two further
members of the public, and Will Austin (Town Clerk).

PUBLIC FORUM

A member of the public addressed councillors about a campaign alerting the community to the dangers of a cashless society, including a stall that had been held in Bucky Doo Square and a petition that had attracted over 500 signatures. He referred to a Mail on Sunday campaign to keep cash, and the risks posed by a digital-only society and any failure of ATMs. He advised that he had been approached by the Town Clerk about the use of Bucky Doo Square and a concern that the campaign was overtly political. He made clear that the campaign was not political and his aim was to highlight the effect on people. He advised that the Daily Express had reported people moving back to cash from digital transactions, and circulated a card directing councillors to more information at www.solari.com.

A second member of the public, accompanying the first, spoke in support of the campaign. She had trained her children in the use of cash and pointed out difficulties with online access to doctors. She had also been unable to attend an online speed awareness course and paid a fine as a result. She said that cash was a much simpler method of payment.

The Town Clerk reported that he had received four complaints about the alleged political nature of the stall, and on visiting had seen a placard referring to state control, and during a conversation with the organiser had heard reference to global elites, the involvement of China, and a conspiracy among central banks and governments. He had advised that as no booking form had been completed for the stall, he would allow it to continue on this specific occasion, but given the complaints and what he had seen, he was not inclined to approve further stalls. He had advised the stallholder to attend a Council meeting, if he wished to raise the matter with councillors.

Members discussed the campaign, the social exclusion created by a digital-only society, and the dangers posed by loss of power that had on occasion prevented the use of digital payments and forced shops to close. As a result of the support expressed by councillors, the Town Clerk apologised to the organiser of the campaign and advised that bookings may continue, subject to the completion of a booking form.

29. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Sarah Carney, and Cllr Ian Bark who attended virtually. Due to legislation, this could not be regarded as official attendance.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Ian Bark declared an interest in item 7 (Designing the Green Transition) as a close friend of the applicant for Town Council support. Cllr Bark neither participated nor voted on this item.

31. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7 September 2022 be confirmed as a true and correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

32. COMMITTEE BUDGET 2023-24

The Town Clerk reported that the development of a Council budget for 2023-24 was under way. There had been no committee budget in 2022-23, and a reserve of £100,000 for the Climate Emergency Action Plan had been largely exhausted. It was likely that no new provision would be made in the first draft of the budget, which would be considered by Budget Working Group, Best Value & Scrutiny Sub-Committee, Finance & General Purposes Committee, and Full Council.

Members noted the current funding challenges and considered:

- A need to review priorities on an ongoing basis;
- A need for an understanding of the financial challenge presented by the impact of Covid-19, a subsequent surge in project expenditure once Covid restrictions were lifted, and the effect of the cost-of-living crisis; and
- The successful delivery of projects in the current financial year.

RESOLVED: that the update be noted.

33. PROJECT UPDATES

Streetscape & Heritage Study – this had been completed and published.

Homes for Ukraine – support for Ukrainian guests and their hosts was ongoing, with input from the Project Manager & Community Initiatives Officer.

Warm Hubs – a local network had been launched with Town Council support, and organisation by the Project Manager & Community Initiatives Officer.

Beach Wheelchairs – community fundraising continued and was expected to be successful. Further discussions on the administration and management of a beach wheelchair facility were needed.

RESOLVED: that the report of the Town Clerk be noted.

34. FRIENDS OF WELLFIELDS

Consideration was given to a proposal from the Friends of Wellfields community group, ENCL: 3757. The Town Clerk introduced the report, containing a proposal from the group Friends of Wellfields for a planting scheme at Fishweir Fields. The report reminded members of previous discussion of proposals from the group, and the need for community support for any changes.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Sheri Ahmet spoke on behalf of the Friends of Wellfields, and advised that:

- Four consultation events had been held on Wellfields, since the lifting of Covid restrictions;
- Regular community newsletters had been issued;
- There had been two years of bulb planting on the green at Wellfields Drive/Acer Avenue;
- There had been networking, including with Bridport Gardening Club;
- The latest project proposal had been discussed with the eight neighbouring properties, and ideas had been included in drawings to establish a consensus. This had been followed by an anonymous survey, with four responses as shown in the report;
- The Friends of Wellfields would fund the project, and volunteers would dig and plant in the Spring; and
- There remained some uncertainty over land ownership, but the proposals were easily reversible.

Members considered the request, and discussed:

- The issue of land ownership;
- A responsible and thoughtful approach by the group;
- The need for Town Council support, if this was Dorset Council public highway, and to accord with maintenance carried out by the Town Council; and
- Local community tensions, and a public meeting being arranged by Cllr Kelvin Clayton to achieve a consensus. Cllr Clayton advised he would report back.

RESOLVED that the proposal from the group Friends of Wellfields for a planting scheme at Fishweir Fields be supported, subject to there being no objection from Dorset Council.

35. DESIGNING THE GREEN TRANSITION

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3758. The Town Clerk introduced the report, containing a proposal from Dr Jocelyn Bailey to develop a blueprint for a virtual College of Sustainable Technologies as envisaged by the draft Bridport Investment Plan, and other skills/training provision in Bridport, that support the green transition. The total cost of the research was estimated at £40,000, and the Town Council as a community partner was asked to contribute £2,000 in funding and an equivalent value of 'in kind' support. The remaining funding would be by way of a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, subject to a successful application.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Dr Bailey introduced herself as a Bridport resident working in research at the University of the Arts London. She had a background in designing methods for service provision and policies. Dr Bailey then described the research proposal in more detail.

Members considered:

- Historical initiatives of a similar nature, including the Skills for Self-Reliance project that ran from 2010 to 2014, and a skills training project as part of the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative;
- The extent to which the proposal linked to Town Council priorities including the Bridport Investment Plan and the Climate Emergency Action Plan;
- The justification for the requested funding;
- The need for approval of any funding to be agreed by the Finance & General Purposes Committee; and
- The proposed project outputs including a blueprint for a 'virtual college'.

RESOLVED: that the Finance & General Purposes Committee be recommended to approve funding support to a maximum of £2,000.

36. REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE BODIES

Cllr Dave Rickard reported that Transition Town Bridport would be holding their AGM in the following week.

37. FUTURE REPORTS

RESOLVED: that a future agenda include discussion of shops closing doors in winter, with Totally Locally and Bridport Business Chamber to be invited, and beach wheelchairs.

38. CORRESPONDENCE AND UPDATES

No correspondence or updates were reported.

The meeting closed at **8.29pm**.

The next meeting of this committee will be held on 11 January 2023