

Minutes of the meeting of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE of Bridport Town Council held at Mountfield, Bridport on Monday 11 November 2024 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT: Cllr: Paddy Mooney

Cllrs: Nigel Amor Ann Langridge
 Rob Casey Anne Rickard
 Andrew Holdridge Sarah Williams
 Anna Killick

Also in attendance: Cllrs Ian Bark (from 7:14pm, minute 42) and Dave Rickard, Giles Smith, Candida Dunford-Wood (Bridport Food Matters), Sarah Wilberforce (Bridport Food Matters), one representative of the press, Claire Peters-Way (Property Manager), Paul Fuszard (Finance and Office Manager), Daryl Chambers (Town Surveyor via Zoom) and Will Austin (Town Clerk).

PUBLIC FORUM

No members of the public spoke at the Public Forum.

39. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Ian Bark (for lateness) and Nigel Rawlings.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

41. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 9 September 2024 be confirmed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Members noted that subsequent to the previous meeting, a payment of £7,500 had been made to Bridport Youth & Community Centre Trust under the service level agreement arrangements, such that a total of £15,000 had been paid in the current financial year. Any further payment would be dependent on provision of a robust business plan.

Members further noted that Full Council had agreed the addition of Cllr Anna Killick to the membership of the Budget Working Group.

RESOLVED: that item 6 on the agenda (Pump Track and Community Hub Proposals) be brought forward as the next business.

42. PUMP TRACK AND COMMUNITY HUB PROPOSALS

Outline proposals for a Community Food Hub, as tabled with the agenda and subsequent circulation of revised plans, were presented to councillors by Mr Giles Smith, Candida Dunford-Wood and Sarah Wilberforce.

Cllr Ian Bark joined the meeting at this point (7.14pm)

Giles Smith set out his business background as a caterer and co-founder of Kings Cross Market. He described the proposal for a food hub within up to five shipping containers on the Old Dairy site, incorporating a tap house, café, storage, meeting rooms, and a hub for food groups. It would be privately and council-funded and would use local contractors in the build. Mr Smith advised that he also had some relevant building skills. He had operated the Alembic Café at the LSi for a year, before his tenure was terminated. Similar hub facilities existed elsewhere; Bridport needed one too, and success was dependent on funding.

Candida Dunford-Wood said that a food hub had been talked about for years and had been operating virtually for four years. Activities included a newsletter and the Food Festival. A physical space was now wanted, to bring groups together. The proposal set out the skills needed and an objective of nutritious food for all. Other venues had been considered, but affordability was a concern. The proposal would involve a long lease from the Town Council, and partnership working with the council, private sector and the community. Bridport was now a sustainable food place, with strong links. This built on work with the Town Council on a Food Security Plan which envisaged a food hub. The hub would assist with climate resilience, the economy, diets, and health and wellbeing. A hub and spoke model already existed, along with outreach work.

Sarah Wilberforce added that the estimated cost of the containers was £6,650, excluding conversion costs.

The request to the Town Council was for a peppercorn rent and an estimated £15,000 to support building works, and advice.

Members discussed:

- The business model, said to be a mix of private and community, with a charitable structure.
- The LSi as an alternative location. Mr Smith said he did not know it was available, but that steps were a problem, and he had previously found it difficult to work in. He had spoken to Crowdfunder and understood they were turning away potential occupants. Ms Dunford-Wood added that a location closer to Skilling was preferred, in order to reach excluded communities.
- The current use of the Old Dairy site for parking.
- Previous collaboration with the Museum Trust in developing plans for the site, and the existing planning permission that had been granted.
- Whether a food hub could be piloted at a temporary location, such as the Youth and Community Centre.
- Existing similar facilities in Manchester, London, Bristol, Cambridge and Brisbane. The nearest to an equivalent market town facility was a long table in Frome.
- Previous Bridport Food Matters engagement with vulnerable communities, such as the glut stall and work with schools.
- A need for more detailed plans and costings.
- The Town Council's financial capacity to support a hub.
- Planning issues, including the location in a conservation area.
- Dorset Council's restrictions on the lease of the Old Dairy site to the Town Council.
- The impact of a Jurassic Fibre junction box located on the site.

The Chair summarised discussions, and it was

RESOLVED: that, subject to provision of a more detailed feasibility study, and further information addressing the issues raised at this meeting, the proposal be referred to Environment & Social Wellbeing Committee for further consideration.

Mr Smith went on to summarise a second proposal, for a pump track, which had been circulated with the agenda. He advised that a site was needed and suggested Happy Island or Asker Meadows.

Members discussed:

- The existing designation of part of Happy Island as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.
- Plottingham Field as an alternative and possibly preferable location alongside the skatepark.
- The complexities of the wider plan for refurbishment of Plottingham Field.
- The requirements of a pump track.
- The challenge of achieving the required funding of £40,000 to £150,000.
- The need to incorporate any proposal into the five-year plan and the plans for Plottingham Field.

RESOLVED: that Mr Smith be asked to work with the Town Surveyor to develop the proposal, in accordance with the current development schedule for Plottingham Field.

43. ENVIRONMENT & SOCIAL WELLBEING COMMITTEE

The Town Clerk reported that there were no recommendations to the Finance & General Purposes Committee arising from the Environment & Social Wellbeing Committee meeting held on 6 November 2024.

44. MARKET AND BUSINESS LIAISON WORKING GROUP

The notes of the Market & Business Liaison Working Group held on 15 October 2024 were presented. There were no recommendations arising from the notes.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Market & Business Liaison Working Group held on 15 October 2024 be received and noted.

45. FINANCIAL ESTIMATES 2024/25 – 2nd REVISION

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3937.

The Town Clerk and the Finance & Office Manager summarised the report, which set out the financial position after seven months of 2024/25, including any significant deviations from the profile budget as a percentage of the annual totals.

Following discussion of the costs of The Grove in preparing for incoming tenants and updated safety requirements, future spending and the maintenance of an appropriate level of reserves, it was

RECOMMENDED: that the 2nd revision of the estimates for the year 2024/25 be approved.

46. BUDGET PLANNING 2024/25

The Committee considered a verbal report by the Town Clerk, summarising an initial discussion by the Budget Working Group. The meeting had considered financial pressures including inflation, adding to reserve funding, and funding for the council's five-year plan.

There had also been a request to add Cllr Jonathan Bourbon to the membership, so that the West Bridport & Allington ward was represented.

Members discussed the council's investment with CCLA and the Town Clerk agreed to bring forward a report outlining the merits or otherwise of withdrawing the investment.

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

RESOLVED: that Cllr Jonathan Bourbon be elected to the Budget Working Group.

47. SERVICES ADMINISTERED BY THE TOWN SURVEYOR AND PROPERTY MANAGER

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3922. The Town Surveyor and Property Manager reported updates on Plottingham Skate Park replacement, Sitting Out Licences and associated fees, Bridport FC Car Park improvements, A35 Eype Amenity Area, Remembrance Sunday, Bucky Doo Square improvements and Christmas Cheer.

Members discussed:

- A decision due to urgency, taken under delegation by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Finance & General Purposes and the Council Leader, to allocate additional funding for the skate park.
- Progress with processing 25 Sitting Out Licence applications, and the possibility for changes to the fee structure in future. Members also considered a proposal that the fee be set at £350 for a two-year licence, in line with Dorset Council's fee, and with government guidance.
- The positive impact of improvements to Bucky Doo Square.
- Arrangements for Christmas Cheer.

Following this discussion, it was

RESOLVED: that the decision taken under delegation to allocate additional funding for the skate park be supported.

The vote was seven in favour and two against, with no abstentions. Cllrs Andrew Holdridge and Ann Langridge requested that their votes against be recorded in the minutes.

RESOLVED: that the uplift in Sitting Out Licence fees, from £100 per annum to £350 for a two-year licence, be agreed.

RESOLVED: that the report of the Town Surveyor and Property Manager be noted.

48. BRIDPORT TOWN COUNCIL FIVE-YEAR PLAN

The Committee considered the draft five-year plan tabled with the agenda, ENCL: 3939. The Town Clerk summarised the report and asked members to consider any changes within the committee's remit. The ensuing discussion focused on reprioritising the draft plan, and it was

RESOLVED: that any suggestions for revised priorities in the five-year plan be submitted to the Project Manager by 14 November 2024.

RESOLVED: that the Project Manager be thanked for his work on the draft plan.

49. REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE BODIES

The Chairman reported that due to other changes in representatives to outside bodies, a vacancy had arisen on Pymore Village Management Company (PVMC). He advised that he was happy to take up this position and had engaged in initial discussions with PVMC.

The Town Clerk reported that Cllr Steve Williams had resigned his positions on Bridport Local Food Group and Bridport Millennium Green Trust, and replacements were sought.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED: that Cllr Paddy Mooney be elected as representative to Pymore Village Management Company.

RECOMMENDED: that Full Council be asked to elect representatives to Bridport Local Food Group and Bridport Millennium Green Trust.

50. INTERNAL AUDIT ENGAGEMENT 2024/25

The Committee considered the terms of engagement of the independent internal auditor for 2024/25, ENCL: 3943. Members considered proposed terms of engagement for Lightatouch as the internal auditor for 2024/25, and the requirement for the auditor to be clearly independent of the council. These matters have been satisfactorily addressed, and it was

RECOMMENDED: that Lightatouch be appointed as the council's independent internal auditor for 2024/25.

51. PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Town Clerk presented List 3 of the 2024/25 accounts, in the sum of £384,600.07, which had been authorised for payment since the last meeting.

RESOLVED: that Payment List 3 of 2024/25 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

52. COMMUNICATIONS

There were none.

53. PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSION TO MEETINGS) ACT 1960

RESOLVED: that in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the public be temporarily excluded and they are instructed to withdraw.

54. STAFFING MATTERS

The Town Clerk updated members on matters arising from the recent review of staffing, and the need to ensure that decisions made were in accordance with the current year budgetary position, and the budget setting process for 2025/26.

RESOLVED: that recruitment of an Apprentice Clerk and Administrative Officer, and a Works Manager, not be progressed at this time and that the issue be reconsidered after the budget for 2025/26 has been set.

RESOLVED: that the update be noted.

55. PROPERTY MATTERS

The Town Surveyor reported on one recently agreed five-year lease of Town Council premises, and agreement on heads of terms for a nine-year lease with another tenant.

RESOLVED: that the update be noted.

The meeting closed at 9:23pm.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 13 January 2025