

Minutes of the meeting of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE of Bridport Town Council held at Mountfield, Bridport on Monday 13 January 2025 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 7:40pm), Dave Rickard, and Bev Thornton (until 8:00pm), three members of the public, Paul Fuszard (Finance & Office Manager), Claire Peters-Way (Property Manager) and Will Austin (Town Clerk).

PUBLIC FORUM

Anne Disson, a resident of Borough Gardens, spoke about the wish of the residents, with some support from Dorset Police and Magna Housing, for the gardens to be locked using a PIN-controlled lock from 7pm to 7am daily, to reduce anti-social behaviour, vandalism, drug dealing, and drunken behaviour. She advised that the Police were routinely called, but lacked resources to address these issues, which affected all nearby residents. Miss Disson decorated her house for occasions such as Christmas and Remembrance, but her displays were vandalised. Community use of the gardens was disrupted by drug needles and other hazardous waste, and the situation had become dangerous.

Gill Massey also spoke about the Borough Gardens outlining issues encountered by the volunteer friends group that tends the area, confirming that all residents had been canvassed as regards security and were in favour of the proposal to lock the gates. Previous similar proposals, including in 2010, had not been taken forward due to tenant issues. Ms Massey compared the arrangements to those in the Borough Gardens in Dorchester, where the gates were locked at night, and added that originally the gates were locked in Bridport. Adding to Ms Disson's request, Ms Massey suggested a motion sensor light, and training for residents who would volunteer to carry out the locking and unlocking. Problems included drug use, broken glass which was difficult to remove from grassed areas, an attempted fire, and noise. Young people were involved but the perpetrators also included those leaving pubs at night. The area was also sometimes used as a toilet. As a rights respecting town, Ms Massey considered that users should show respect for the area.

Members asked Miss Disson about:

- The locking and unlocking arrangements. Miss Disson advised that her partner and another couple had volunteered to ensure that the gates could always be locked and unlocked, including in an emergency.
- Whether the damage was uniquely after dark. Miss Disson advised that it was.
- Whether locking hours could be shortened in the summer when evenings were lighter. Miss Disson agreed this could be considered.
- How the emergency services would be provided with access. Miss Disson suggested they be provided with the access code.

Josef Davies-Coates, of United Diversity Bridport (UDB), outlined plans for a pilot shuttle bus service between Bridport town centre and West Bay, for which UDB had fundraised approximately £1,750 and acquired in principle grant funding of £20,000. He had also

looked into a Dorset Council fund that might provide an additional £5,000. He was looking for the support of the Town Council, as the accountable body, with no additional financial commitment. He outlined challenges to moving forward with the project, which included reaching agreement with Dorset Community Transport over the contract for operation, further fundraising, and a deadline of March for the grant to be spent.

Members discussed the request with Mr Davies-Coates for clarification, including the need to establish detailed costs, the role of a proposed Project Manager, whether the project might draw the Town Council into financial and/or resource commitments, the status of the Dorset Council funding, and deadlines for reaching a decision. Members indicated that further investigation would be required into all of these matters.

The Chairman thank all three members of the public for their input. Ms Massey and Mr Davies-Coates left at this point.

56. APOLOGIES

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

57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

58. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 11 November 2024 be confirmed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

59. BEST VALUE AND SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Sub Committee held on 3 December 2024 be received and adopted and the following recommendations approved:

Minute 22: that the report of the internal auditor be approved, and

Minute 24: that the draft reserves policy be approved as tabled.

It was also noted that for Minute 27, draft estimates 2025/26, the work of the Budget Working Group had been summarised by Cllr Andy Holdridge and not Cllr Ann Langridge, as stated.

Minute 23: RECOMMENDED that the draft Councillor/Officer Protocol be approved.

60. ENVIRONMENT & SOCIAL WELLBEING COMMITTEE

The following recommendations arising from the Environment & Social Wellbeing Committee meeting on 8 January 2025 were considered by the Committee:

Community Bus Service – Bridport & West Bay. To agree to act as accountable body for this initiative.

The Town Clerk outlined the proposal, which had been discussed during the Public Forum, and the requirement that the Town Council would need to confirm itself as the fully liable accountable body for the bus service, in order to hold the funding without breaching

regulations and audit requirements. In addition to the matters discussed during the Public Forum, he asked members to consider the as yet undetermined conditions of the £20,000 grant from the Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body, the potential for financial implications for the Town Council, the clarification needed regarding project management, and an indication from Dorset Community Transport (DCT) that their preference as operator, would be to work direct with the Town Council rather than via United Diversity Bridport. DCT had also advised that they did not have drivers for weekend working, and that the costing information previously provided would need to be reviewed. The Town Clerk advised that Environment & Social Wellbeing Committee had resolved that the project was a worthwhile one, but that the request to act as accountable body was a matter for the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

Welcoming the proposal in principle, members considered:

- The as yet unestablished viability of, and demand for the service;
- A lack of clarity over the funding arrangements;
- A need for clarity over the duration of the pilot scheme;
- Concerns about the role and employment status of any Project Manager engaged;
- Further information required to give certainty over the cost of the pilot;
- A requirement for a detailed business plan for the project; and
- A need for clarification of the timing and deadlines involved.

RESOLVED: that the proposal to act as accountable body for a pilot bus service between Bridport and West Bay be approved in principle, subject to financial implications being limited to the already approved grant and other established fundraising.

RESOLVED that formal approval be considered at the next meeting of the committee, following provision by United Diversity Bridport of further detailed information addressing the points raised at the meeting.

Asker Meadows Cider & Music Festival. To approve the use of Asker Meadows for this event.

The Town Clerk reported that Environment & Social Wellbeing Committee had recommended the use of Asker Meadows for this event, following a presentation by Ben Pimbley. A summary had been circulated to members prior to the meeting, but further detail in the form of an event management plan and associated documents would be required. He suggested that any approval be subject to detailed clarification of the event, including a full event plan, to be signed off by the Town Council.

RESOLVED: that the use of Asker Meadows for a Cider & Music Festival be approved subject to detailed arrangements, and that approval or otherwise of these details be delegated to the Town Clerk, in conjunction with other council officers.

Right to Grow. To approve the property and insurance provisions required to enable this right to be delivered by the council.

The Town Clerk reported that as part of its approval of an action plan associated with the council's Food Security Plan, Environment & Social Wellbeing Committee had included provision for the 'Right to Grow', an arrangement that identified council land suitable for community cultivation and facilitated its use for that purpose. A motion, which had been promoted by the organisation Incredible Edible passed by Hull City Council, set out the actions required and had been circulated prior to the meeting. The particular issues for Finance & General Purposes Committee related to the identification of suitable land, licensing of land to community groups, provision of supporting infrastructure, a right to bid

where land was sold, and the provision of public liability insurance for community groups working the land.

Members considered the issues involved, and whilst the initiative was welcomed, concerns were expressed about the legal, resource, and financial liabilities arising from it.

Recognising that some progress could be made, it was

RESOLVED: that land suitable for inclusion in a 'right to grow' initiative be identified.

Cllr Sarah Williams asked that her abstention be noted in the minutes.

61. FINANCIAL ESTIMATES 2024/2025

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3960. The Town Clerk summarised the report, and following member discussion it was

RECOMMENDED: that the 3rd revision of the estimates for the year 2024/2025 be approved.

62. BUDGETS AND ESTIMATES 2025/2026

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3961. The Budget Working Group, Town Clerk, and other officers involved were thanked for their work.

The Town Clerk summarised the report, setting out background to the budget and precept setting process, issues considered, future financial planning, and options for consideration.

It was noted that the contributions to reserves figure in para. 5.4 should be £75,088 as also listed in para. 1.2 of the report and the final page of Appendix A.

Members considered the report, and

RECOMMENDED to Full Council:

- (a) that the draft estimates for 2025/26 be approved as set out in Appendix A.
- (b) that the proposed fees and charges for 2025/26 be approved as set out in Appendix B.
- (c) that the Medium Term Financial Plan be approved as a guide for future years as in Appendix C, noting that each year's budget will be subject to separate approval.
- (d) that the draft capital programme and proposed use of reserves for 2025/26 and future years, as set out in section 4 of the report and at Appendix D, be approved, noting again that further approval is required.
- (e) that in terms of the precept, Option 2 be approved, as set out above and in section 12 of the report, which would increase the precept to £1,191,075 with a consequent annual Band 'D' charge of £204.44.

63. INCOME GENERATION TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Consideration was given to a report of the Committee Chairman, ENCL: 3967.

RESOLVED: that an Income Generation Task and Finish Group be established, with a remit to investigate suggestions for increasing income generation within the town council's budget.

RESOLVED: that the membership of the Income Generation Task and Finish Group be Cllrs Ian Bark, Jonathan Bourbon, Anna Killick, Ann Langridge, Paddy Mooney, and Sarah Williams.

64. CCLA INVESTMENT

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk and the Finance and Office Manager, ENCL: 3962. Following discussion of the report, it was

RESOLVED: that the Town Council's investment with CCLA be withdrawn in full and returned to general funds for alternative investment options to then be considered.

65. SERVICES ADMINISTERED BY THE TOWN SURVEYOR AND PROPERTY MANAGER

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk and Property Manager, ENCL: 3963, about the following projects:

Borough Gardens

A request had been received from Dorset Police and a resident of the Gardens, to install locks to the existing gates and to facilitate locking of the gardens in the evenings, following an extended period of incidents of vandalism and antisocial behaviour. The request had the support of the volunteer group Friends of Borough Gardens and 13 residences managed by Magna Housing, whose access was solely via the Gardens. Magna Housing, whose right of way was set out in a legal agreement with the Council, had not given support to the proposal and had raised reservations. Magna had also not responded positively to a request to consider a funding contribution.

Members were asked to consider agreeing to the proposal in principle, with detailed arrangements to be delegated to officers, if approved. The cost of locks and associated signage was estimated at £350, although this excluded any provision for motion-sensitive lighting which had been discussed during the Public Forum.

RESOLVED: that the request be approved, subject to detailed arrangements and resolution of issues relating to a Magna Housing right of way.

West Bay Discovery Centre

Works to windows at the Centre were needed, and the Council had agreed with this assessment prior to the handover of the building and service. Four sash windows were to be replaced, and with associated scaffold, fencing, and painting costs, the total estimated cost is £6,200. This would be funded from a specific reserve fund transferred to the Town Council, when the building was acquired.

Members were asked to approve expenditure estimated at £6,200 (excluding VAT).

RESOLVED: that the works and funding be approved.

Market Parking

Following concerns expressed by Bridport Business Chamber and others, Dorset Council has agreed to a request for town centre laybys to be made available for general parking on wet days, when not occupied by market traders. This would be achieved by covering the signs with a separate sign, with detailed wording and design to be agreed. Another issue raised by businesses and visitors, of market traders causing traffic issues when loading and unloading, was to be addressed by changes to parking in South Street, from Gundry Lane to St Mary's Church on market days only; the west side would be restricted to residents' use, and the east side would be for market traders.

No decision was required, as this item was for information only.

Bridport WI Hall

A Dorset Council grant fund had opened for applications that would provide up to 20% of the cost of improvements previously proposed to, and agreed in principle by the committee, at an estimated cost of £75,000. An application had been submitted and if successful, members would need to consider how the remaining funds can be provided.

No decision was required, as this item was for information only.

Bridport FC Car Park

Works to improve the surface and drainage on the east side of the car park commenced in October 2024 and were progressing. Whilst the original target completion date of the end of December 2024 had passed, works were expected to be completed in January 2025. The projected cost of £170,000 was to be met by a £100,000 Shared Prosperity Fund grant funded by central government and approved by Dorset Council. The remaining costs would be met from Town Council funds, as previously approved by this committee.

No decision was required, as this item was for information only.

Events – VE / VJ Day

2025 marked the 80th anniversary of VE Day (8 May) and VJ Day (15 August). The Council had been asked whether any civic events and/or public realm activity would be considered. No specific budget was available for such provision.

Members were asked to consider what provision the council might make.

RESOLVED: that street decorations be provided to commemorate the 80th anniversary of VE Day and VJ Day, and that the Council should organise a proclamation for both.

Events – Melplash Show

With members' approval, the Town Council pitch and marquee would shortly be booked for this year's show, at a total estimated cost of £3,500. This cost was offset by fees totalling an estimated £900, paid by community stallholders in the marquee.

Members were asked to approve the Council's continued presence at the Melplash Show.

RESOLVED: that the Council maintain its presence at the Melplash Show, in line with previous years, and that the Income Generation Task and Finish Group look at possible increases in contributions by stallholders in the Town Council's marquee.

Events – other

The Council was preparing its events calendar for 2025 and this was expected to be available by the end of January 2025, albeit that some dates would be subject to confirmation. Officers were preparing for the first significant Town Council events: Commonwealth Day in March, and the Community Charter Fair in May. Officers were also supporting others' event preparations. Members had agreed to continue with Commonwealth Day in 2024, despite modest attendance. With a newly elected council, members had the opportunity to reaffirm this decision.

Members were asked to consider the continued staging of the Commonwealth Day event.

RESOLVED: that the Council should no longer organise or stage the annual Commonwealth Day event.

RESOLVED: that the report of the Town Clerk and Property manager be noted.

66. BRIDPORT TOWN COUNCIL FIVE-YEAR PLAN

Members considered the draft five-year plan, ENCL: 3964, for onward approval to the Full Council meeting on 21 January 2025.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED: that the draft five-year plan be recommended for approval by Full Council.

67. RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT: ANNUAL REVIEW

Members considered a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3965 setting out the corporate risks faced by the council, mitigations, and residual risk level. A risk register had been reviewed by the Town Clerk and was now presented for approval.

RECOMMENDED: that the Corporate Risk Assessment be approved as tabled.

68. PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Town Clerk presented List 4 of the 2024/25 accounts, ENCL: 3966, in the sum of £559,637.74, which had been authorised for payment since the last meeting.

RESOLVED: that Payment List 4 of 2024/25 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

69. COMMUNICATIONS

There were none.

70. 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.

71. PROPERTY MATTERS

The Property Manager reported on a tenant request at The Grove. Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED: that this matter be deferred to the next meeting of the committee, when other comparative options should be presented.

The Property Manager further reported on changes to one existing tenancy at Mountfield, and consideration of alternative uses of available space vacated.

RESOLVED: that alternative uses be agreed in principle, and that further detailed discussion should be tabled for the next meeting.

RESOLVED: that the reports of the Property Manager be noted.

The meeting closed at 9:37pm.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 10 March 2025