

**Minutes of a meeting of Okehampton Town Council held on
Monday 20th December 2021 at 7pm in the Charter Hall, Market Street, Okehampton**

Members Present: Councillor B Tolley (Mayor)
Councillor M Ireland (Chairman, Planning Committee)
Councillor D Sanger (Chairman, P&R Committee)
Councillor D Travers (Chairman, Parks Committee)
Councillor T Abbots
Councillor J Goffey
Councillor C Holt
Councillor T Leech
Councillor C Marsh
Councillor B Matravers
Councillor J Yelland

In Attendance: Mrs E James (Town Clerk)

Action

582 **Declarations of Interest** – None

583 **Apologies for Absence** – On the proposition of Cllr Ireland, seconded Cllr Matravers, apologies tendered by Cllr Wood who was away, Cllr Button who was attending a family event and Cllr Jessop who was not well were **approved**.

584 **Deferment of Business** – None

585 **Members Questions** – None

586 **West Devon Borough Council** – Cllr Yelland reported on two planning applications; 3501/21/FUL the construction of two dwellings at Mount Prospect in High Street had been approved, and although located outside the town boundary, advised that the removal of the hedge in conjunction with the development on land off Exeter Road was in accordance with the planning consent issued by WDBC.

Cllr Leech reported it was likely the Government would approve a one-year funding agreement for local authorities and would further review future funding of local authorities.

587 **Devon County Council** – None

588 **Questions Arising from Members Reports** – None

589 **Adoption of Minutes of Committees and Members' Questions arising Thereon** –

589.1 **Property Committee** meetings held on 8th and 15th November 2021 - adoption proposed by Cllr Ireland, seconded Cllr Holt and **approved**.

589.2 **Policy & Resources Committee** meeting held on 15th November 2021 - adoption proposed by Cllr Sanger, seconded Cllr Travers and **approved**.

589.3 **Parks Committee** meetings held on 18th October and 15th November 2021 - adoption proposed by Cllr Travers, seconded Cllr Abbots and **approved**.

589.4 **Personnel Sub-Committee** meeting held on 23rd November 2020 - adoption proposed by Cllr Tolley, seconded Cllr Ireland and **approved**.

- 590 **Full Council Meeting Minutes** – The minutes of the Town Council meetings held on 1st and 29th November 2021 were **approved** on the proposition of Cllr Goffey, seconded by Cllr Yelland and signed by Cllr Tolley.
- 591 **Pedestrian Crossings** – A response from DCC Highways in relation to a request from a member of the public for improved crossings for visually impaired persons was noted. It was commented that the lights on Fore Street were not an official crossing and changes to the junction could further create congestion problems.
- On the proposition of Cllr Tolley, seconded Cllr Goffey, it was **RESOLVED** to request that DCC investigate improved provision at Mill Road and the Exeter Road/Barton Road junction. Clerk
- 592.1 **2022/23 Budget and Precept** – The Clerk reported that the Council Tax Base had been received from WDBC on 17th December and further budget and precept papers and options had been prepared for consideration. Historically this had been resolved in January but due to the likelihood that the Council may not be able to legally meet in early 2022 due to increasing pandemic infection rates it was recommended that it was resolved as early as possible.
- Concern was raised about the impact any increase would have on residents however it was noted that the precept would have to increase to enable costs to be met. It was noted that the majority of development was outside of the town boundary and within that of Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council which severely limited the increase of the Council Tax Base within the town.
- On the proposition of Cllr Tolley, seconded Cllr Ireland (1 abstention), it was **RESOLVED** to approve budget option 2 which included an additional £4,000 for tree planting in Clapps Wood and/or towards the replacement of the Town Hall windows. The precept amount to be requested from WDBC being £313,086 which amounted to an increase of 4.73% or £0.12 p/week on a Band D property. Clerk
- 592.2 On the proposition of Cllr Leech, seconded Cllr Goffey, it was **RESOLVED** to roll forward funds remaining at the end of the 2021/22 financial year as listed on the previously circulated report, in order to prevent that amount being requested again through the precept for work that it was hoped would be complete in 2021/22, some of which had been delayed due to the Covid19 pandemic. Clerk
- 593 **CCTV** – The Clerk reported that the Okehampton end of fibre cable link to Torbay was due to be completed later in the week with the exception of the line test.
- 594 **Market Street Public Toilet Lease** – Cllrs Leech and Yelland declared interests being members of WDBC.
- It was noted that the number of visitors to the town had grown following the reinstatement of the rail service between Okehampton and Exeter, which in turn increased the need for the facility.
- On the proposition of Cllr Tolley, seconded Cllr Leech (1 abstention), it was **RESOLVED** to request further details of the potential outgoings and any changes to the lease before decisions would be made, including the necessity for an appointment of a Solicitor to review the draft documentation. To be reviewed at the next meeting. Clerk

595	<u>Welcome Back Fund</u> – The Clerk reported that WDBC had confirmed the oak and granite benches in the town belonged to them. The seating area in West Street was owned by DCC who had verbally agreed that the Council could remove the wooden seating planks and it be retained as a stone surface to minimise future maintenance costs. DCC had also verbally agreed to planting improvements by the Council in the adjacent raised bed.	Clerk
596	<u>Okehampton & Hamlets Neighbourhood Plan Group</u> - On the proposition of Cllr Goffey, seconded Cllr Ireland (1 abstention), it was RESOLVED to appoint Cllr Sanger to the group.	Clerk
597	<u>Local Council Meeting Legislation</u> – Concern was raised that virtual meetings could remove the physical connection that Councillors had and reduce networking opportunities. It was commented that virtual meetings would allow councils to continue to run in the event of further pandemic lockdown or other events, and that they should have the option to decide how they met and made decisions.	
	On the proposition of Cllr Tolley, seconded Cllr Travers (1 abstention), it was RESOLVED to lobby MP's and the Government for the legalisation of virtual and hybrid council meetings.	Clerk
598	<u>Correspondence</u> – Correspondence received requesting that the Council did not allow the Boxing Day Hunt to take place was considered. It was noted that the emails appeared to be from persons outside of the area, the Boxing Day Hunt hadn't met in the town centre for several years but had met on privately owned land. The Town Council had no authority to prevent them from meeting in either location.	
	On the proposition of Cllr Yelland, seconded Cllr Marsh, it was RESOLVED to respond that the police should be contacted if it was felt the law had been broken, that the hunt did not meet on town council land and hunting was not necessarily an illegal activity.	Clerk
599	<u>Cricket Field, Simmons Park</u> – Cllr Yelland, being chairman of Trustees and author of the letter declared a personal interest.	
	It was noted that signage advising that the area was open to the public out of school hours would be requested.	
600	<u>Finances</u> – On the proposition of Cllr Marsh, seconded Cllr Travers it was RESOLVED to approve the schedule of payments.	
601	<u>Civic Diary Report</u> – The events attended by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor during November and December were noted, and Cllr Tolley added two events to the previously circulated list.	
602	<u>Reports of Council Working/Task & Finish Groups -</u>	
602.1	<u>Climate Change</u> – Cllr Goffey reported that the meeting had been postponed until January.	
602.2	<u>Charter Hall Roof Replacement</u> – No recent update to report.	
602.3	<u>Placemaking Working Group</u> – An informal visit to several local business had been undertaken by WDBC Officers and it was envisaged they would report to the Council in January.	

602.4 Memorandum of Understanding Task & Finish Group – No meeting had been held, the first was being scheduled to take place in January.

603 Reports on Current Activities by Community Groups with Town Council Representation -

603.1 Neighbourhood Plan Group – Cllr Sanger was thanked for joining the group.

604 Members' Reports and Requests for Agenda Items -

604.1 Okehampton Matters – Cllrs Goffey and Wood had attended a meeting where several matters were raised and there had been an opportunity to meet the new Inspector.

604.2 Okehampton COVID19 Support Group – No report.

604.3 Okehampton & Hamlets Combined Archive Project – The Clerk reported on a meeting held by members of the group and reported that the Community Archive Group documentation had been brought to the Town Hall for storage.

Clerk

604.4 Okehampton Primary School – Cllr Travers had no update to report on this item but did advise that the Covid support group was short of volunteers.

It was **RESOLVED** that under section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item as it involves the likely disclosure of sensitive and confidential information. Proposed by Cllr Goffey, seconded by Cllr Ireland.

Cllr Yelland declared a pecuniary interest and left the meeting for the following item of business.

605 Welcome Back Fund – The tabled report was considered. It was commented that Wildflower areas could look untidy out of the flowering season and could be expensive with regards to time and ongoing maintenance costs.

On the proposition of Cllr Goffey, seconded Cllr Abbots, it was **RESOLVED** to ratify the repair and maintenance of the benches donated to the Council by Okehampton United Charity.

On the proposition of Cllr Goffey, seconded Cllr Ireland (1 abstention), it was **RESOLVED** to undertake repairs to the seating area in West Street by way of removal of the wooden seating planks and to plant insect friendly shrubs or bulbs in the adjoining raised bed.

On the proposition of Cllr Goffey, seconded by Cllr Travers (1 abstention) it was **RESOLVED** to accept the quotation from WJ Avery to undertake the decoration of the Simmons Park gates, arches and railings on the basis that this was a local Okehampton based company and as such this would minimise the carbon footprint associated with the work. The deadline of 31st March 2022 for completion of the work to be stipulated advising that the Council would not be able to pay for the work after that date due to restrictions imposed by the Welcome Back Fund. Acceptance of the quotation was to be agreed with WDBC as the work would be funded through them.

On the proposition of Cllr Goffey, seconded Cllr Ireland it was **RESOLVED** to move out of Part 2 and ratify decisions made therein. The meeting was closed at 8.35pm

Councillor Tolley
Mayor