

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON TOWN COUNCIL

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

28 JANUARY, 2020

TOWN CLERK'S OPEN REPORT

1) Calendar of Meetings 2019/2020

- **To approve the Calendar of Meetings 2020/2021**

The proposed calendar of meetings for 2020/2021 is attached as **Appendix 'A'**.

As members are aware, in order for the Planning Consultative Committee Meetings to remain synchronised with the District Council's Planning Meetings, it proves necessary to treat these meetings as the starting point when determining the Calendar of Meetings for the Town Council. There are occasions, particularly after a prolonged holiday period or a bank holiday, that planning applications need to be determined by SDC before the Town Council's PCC or Chairman's Actions has had the opportunity to meet. A blanket dispensation by SDC to allow for a delay in STC's response is against their constitution but the authority has advised that a holding objection is perfectly acceptable in these circumstances, which appears to be the 'stock' response by other parishes who do not meet as regularly as, for example, the Town Council.

Only Council can approve the Accounts and Annual Return, and in order to comply with accounting deadlines, it continues to prove necessary to include a Town Council Meeting in June. Please note the Town Council Meeting to approve the Annual Accounts and Return is on 16 June, 2020. Ideally, no other business should be transacted at this meeting but this often proves impracticable. According to the urgency of the information to be put to Council, the Mayor may decree that it will be 'business as usual' at this particular Council Meeting.

Although there is no formal summons to the Annual Town Meeting, leaving members at liberty to attend or otherwise, it should be looked upon as a duty to attend in order to stand accountable to the electorate collectively. It is always appreciated by the Mayor incumbent if members would make every effort to attend the Town Meeting. This year the Meeting will be held on 5 March, 2020.

2) Council tax referendum principles

- **To note the report**

Positive news has been confirmed by the National Association of Local Councils that the government is proposing to continue with no council tax referendum principles for local councils in the next financial year, in response to continued lobbying on this important issue.

The Secretary of State replied to NALC's tweet welcoming the announcement but stated *"Town and parish councils play a crucial role in our communities."* Nevertheless, I do want to draw to your attention that the consultation document also says *"The government remains concerned about the pressure placed on taxpayers by parish and town councils across England and continues to expect them to exercise restraint in 2020-2021"* and that *"The government will keep this matter under active review for future years."*

3) 2019/2020 Income & Expenditure Budget and Precept

- **To agree the proposed 2020/21 Draft Budget;**
- **To set the Precept**

At the Town Council Meeting on 28 January, 2020, the Council needs to determine its precept requirement for the fiscal year beginning 1 April, 2020.

The budget for 2020/21 has been prepared on the basis of continuing to limit any potential increases by comparison of the current year's budget to previous years, and careful review of expenditure to date.

The Fourth Draft Budget for the Financial Year 2020-21 was presented to the Finance & Scrutiny Committee on 14 January 2020, together with a summary of additional information.

It is noteworthy that this shows Gross Expenditure could exceed £1 million for the first time but is in line with the Council's Aims & Objectives and much is being financed from reserves.

Since the Finance & Scrutiny Committee meeting on 19 November 2019, a number of revisions and changes were made, including confirmation of the Tax Base by the District Council.

Members are advised of a number of items which required further explanation when the Draft Budget for the current financial year was reviewed:

- Christmas Festival – as the expenditure on the latest event is still to be finalised, it is too early to factor in any revised estimates of potential increases in costs going forward, and no additional provision has been made. However, the current Designated Reserve is expected to cover any shortfall for the next financial year at least;
- Operational & Administration – General Repairs, Maintenance & Sundry – the significant increase in this Budget can only be a very broad estimate, based on quotations, estimates and ballpark figures for a number of significant items of expenditure identified by the Buildings Consultant as part of the Condition Survey undertaken on the Town Hall in 2018. Members are reminded that other related matters are being reviewed by the Town Hall Income, Facilities and Wellbeing Panel. This budget figure will need to be closely monitored, along with the Designated Building Maintenance Reserve.
- Operational & Administration – Election Expenses – “all out” Council elections every four years incur a considerable cost to the Town Council when the expenditure is recharged by the District Council. Members have previously agreed the approach to

budget for Election Expenses should be changed going forward. Rather than a single large value being taken in one year, an averaged regular annual amount could be included in the Budget, to be transferred to a Designated Election Expenses Reserve and used for funding future election expenses as and when required;

- Hatton Rock – Rent – as a significant proportion of the total cost is recharged to the Shakespeare Birthday Celebrations ‘pot’ because of the use of this facility for storage of equipment for this event, a surplus is currently created each year because the full cost of the contracted rent is included in the Budget. This has historically been done on the basis that the Town Council would still be liable to cover the full costs of the facility, even if the responsibility for managing the event changed.

Members are also advised of the following:

- Operational & Administration – Salaries, Wages and Related Costs – the triannual revaluation of the Local Government Pension Scheme is still to be completed so the employer contribution percentage may change. If information is received from the administrators, Warwickshire County Council, before the Draft Budget is approved by Council, it is recommended the figures should be adjusted.

At the Finance & Scrutiny Committee Meeting on 14 January, 2020 members were requested to undertake a detailed review of the Draft Budget so that decisions could be made on any further amendments in order to finalise the proposed budget for recommendation to Council.

Council must sign off or amend the budget at the meeting on 28 January, 2020 in order to submit the precept requirement to the District Council by their deadline of the end of January (although in law, the deadline is March), and the District Council has been notified that the Town Council’s precept requirement will be

confirmed shortly after the Town Council meeting on 28 January, 2020.

By proposing to fund the revised estimated deficit of £293,664 from reserves, these changes enabled a precept requirement to be calculated of £506,813, which equated to an Annual Rate Charge of £38.32 per Household in the Tax Base, the same as the rate for 2019-20 and unchanged for the seventh year in a row.

However, after prolonged debate and a review of the Council's Reserves Policy, the Finance & Scrutiny Committee finally resolved to recommend a very slight increase of £0.57 per household, representing a 1.5% increase on the precept in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI). It was hoped that small increases, year on year, would gradually and painlessly replenish the Council's Building Maintenance Reserve which were considerably reduced in 2019 and will continue in 2020 due to the significant maintenance and enhancement work on the Town Hall.

It is RECOMMENDED by the Finance & Scrutiny Committee that Council approves a precept request of £514,351, which equates to an Annual Rate Charge per Household of £38.89.

Following the meeting of the Finance & Scrutiny Committee, a Final Draft Budget for 2020-21 has been prepared. This includes the revised total Precept amount based on the proposed increase to the Annual Rate Charge, along with a number of further changes to expenditure including:

- Civic Expenditure – the recommendation by the Mayoral, Civic Ceremonial and Events Committee at their meeting on 7 January, 2020 to add £3,364 to replenish the supply of past Mayors' and Mayoress'/ Consorts' badges;
- Christmas Festival – an increase of £6,010 in the expenditure on the Christmas Festival, based on the actual costs for the event in 2019 which were confirmed at a review meeting on 17 January, 2020 plus a contingency for a further increase in costs in 2020;
- Initiatives, Projects and Grants – a small increase of £200 to cover estimated setup costs for public liability

insurance (PLI) and food hygiene training for volunteers working with the Town Council on the Lunch Club project relating to loneliness and dementia friendly initiatives.

Members are advised that these changes do not affect the level of precept request but do increase the total estimated expenditure, and the estimated deficit to be funded from reserves has increased slightly to £295,704.

4) To Appoint a Conservation Architect to oversee ongoing work to the Town Hall

- **To appoint the Conservation Architect**

The Town Council has long been well served by its appointed Building Consultant and Architect, Roger Abbott RIBA, who works in conjunction with the Council's Quantity Surveyor, Dawn Lodge MRICS.

As members are aware, the Council is embarking on a significant maintenance regime for the Town Hall both internally and externally, which also includes upgrades to ensure H&S procedures are in place and fit for purpose. The work is being funded from reserves and the Town Hall Income, Facilities and Wellbeing Panel are carefully overseeing the process, with requests for virements of funds being considered and approved by the Finance & Scrutiny Committee as and when the need arises.

At an internal meeting in late December with the Architect and Building Surveyor, officers together with the Chairman of the Town Hall Income, Facilities & Wellbeing Panel, Councillor Jackson, were made aware that owing to the complexity of the work to be undertaken in accordance with the rules and regulations associated with a Grade 2* building, they recommend that Council appoints a Conservation Architect with really specialist knowledge to oversee the project going forward.

The timing is fortuitous as Roger Abbott intends to retire within the next few months but would like a little leeway to complete his work and hand-over to his successor.

The meeting was introduced to Stephen Oliver MA (Cantab) DipArch RIBA AABC whose practice, Oliver Architecture, specialises in historic, ecclesiastical and listed buildings. He came at the recommendation of Dawn Lodge, who has worked with him on a number of projects locally, including, most notably, the south wing of Holy Trinity Church.

Both Roger and Dawn recommend that the Town Council appoints Stephen to act as the Council's architect/project manager for the external work, and potentially for him to be retained as Roger's replacement. There will be no duplication of fees as Roger will not be involved during this phase.

At the Town Hall Income, Facilities & Wellbeing Panel Meeting on 9 January, the Panel considered Oliver Architecture's competitive fee structure and the reasons why Dawn Lodge considers Stephen Oliver to be most appropriate.

Having considered the information submitted, the Income, Facilities & Wellbeing Panel unanimously RECOMMENDS that Mr Oliver is formally appointed to replace Mr Abbott as both the project overseer for the maintenance programme on the Town Hall and as Architect in Residence to the Town Council when Mr Abbott formally retires from the post in approximately May, 2020. Such an appointment is in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders F11.

However, this recommendation was on the proviso of satisfactory references being obtained. Three excellent references have been received from:

- Building Surveyor National Trust (Hereford) – Coughton Court, Packwood House, Baddesley Clinton;
- Clerk of Works – Peterborough Cathedral;
- Churchwarden & Extension Clerk of Works – Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon.

5) Proposed New Byelaw to replace those currently existing at the Bancroft Gardens, the Tramway and the Recreation Ground

- **To respond to the District Council's Consultation on the Proposed New Byelaw**

The December meeting of the General Purposes Committee Meeting was cancelled. As the next meeting is not until April 2020, this issue therefore requires the consideration of the Town Council as the consultation period ends on 31 January, 2020.

The Town Council is in receipt of the following notice:

Notice is hereby given that Stratford-on-Avon District Council is to commence a consultation process in respect of a new byelaw (based on model byelaws provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for showgrounds, open space and public walks) to replace those currently existing at The Bancroft Gardens, The Tramway and The Recreation Ground.

It is noteworthy that the Council received a complaint late last year regarding cyclists on the Tramway Bridge, which was deferred to the Town Transport Group for consideration.

Clause 16 (2) prevents cycling on the Tramway Bridge, but perhaps the Town Council should be asking the same question as the Town Transport Group - 'how will these byelaws be enforced?'

The consultation documents are attached as **Appendix 'B'**.

6) Dementia Friendly Stratford-upon-Avon

- **To note the update**
- **To seek volunteers for the Dementia Awareness Event**

The Mayor, Councillor J Fradgley and the Town Clerk attended another meeting hosted by Marie Darwen at the District Council on Friday 10 January, to work towards the accreditation of Stratford-upon-Avon as a dementia friendly town.

It was noteworthy:

- That Stratforward will be staging Dementia Awareness training for businesses and retailers in the coming months;
- That Stratford-on-Avon District Council will be staging a specifically more advanced dementia training event for the Town Council, most probably in March 2020 at the Town Hall;
- On 2 March, 2020 the Dementia Awareness event which is open to the public will be staged in the Town Hall in the morning. It is requested that members assist with serving tea and coffee during the event and **volunteers are sought**;
- It was noted that schools had not been invited to participate in the event, neither had the scout or guide movement. It was agreed that they should be invited to participate – suggested participants list attached as **Appendix ‘C’**. Members are requested to review the list and advise the Town Clerk of any omissions;
- The proposed questionnaire, attached as **Appendix ‘D’**, which will be distributed to notable locations in the town such as the library, GP surgeries, churches, local authorities, care homes, and delivered to the retail/business community by the Town Hosts, will be amended to include a return date by the end of March, 2020. It is anticipated that there will be someone on hand at the Awareness event at the Town Hall on 2 March to ensure that as many people as possible are given a copy and helped to complete it, if necessary.
- On behalf of ‘Accessible’ Elizabeth Dixon and the Town Council’s Health & Safety Consultant, Richard Lees viewed the Town Hall to ensure that the environment is as dementia friendly as possible. This may necessitate additional signage at the even – report attached as **Appendix ‘E’**;
- There is a lot of planning and organisation still to be done, and a small working party was instigated comprising Marie Darwen - SDC, Amanda Wilson-Patterson - WCC and Sarah Summers/Lisa Cowley - STC in order to support Marie in staging a successful and beneficial event on behalf of all involved;
- The Town Council’s Open Spaces team will assist in placing event notices around the town;
- Costs will be sought for additional railing banners and road notices;

- The Town Council will arrange with Christmas Lights for a street banner across Wood Street or Union Street to be displayed in the run up to the event;
- It was suggested that when the Police & Crime Commissioner attends the Town Council Meeting on 28 January, 2020 that he is asked if the Police receive specific Dementia Awareness training;
- That all the partner organisations, including Town Council members start 'spreading the word' either in person, on the website or via Facebook and Twitter and any other appropriate social media channels;
- The Town Clerk will take the opportunity, if possible, of raising this issue at the forthcoming National Association of British Markets Conference in January;
- The Dementia Lunches at the Town Hall, staged by Sam McNaught-Barrow on behalf of the Town Council, commence on 5 February, 2020. Sam has been working with the Town Clerk and the Council's Health & Safety Consultant to ensure that they can be held in accordance with the Town Hall Terms of Letting and wider legislation. There are incidental costs in setting up the lunches on an ongoing basis, including PLI, some necessary equipment and hygiene certificates for all Sam's volunteers but it is anticipated that these will equate to less than £200.00.

7) Appointment to Outside Bodies – Christmas Lights

- **To approve the appointment of Councillor Alcock and seek a replacement representative for Alveston Relief in Need Charity**

In June, 2020 Councillor Wall was formally appointed as the Town Council's representative to the Christmas Lights Co Ltd, replacing long standing representative, Councillor Alcock.

Whilst Councillor Wall was temporarily incapacitated, Councillor Alcock attended the meetings as his substitute, but in an unofficial capacity.

In order for Councillor Alcock to fully represent the Town Council on the Christmas Lights Committee, Council is requested to sanction Councillor Alcock's appointment as the Town Council's

temporary representative until such time as Councillor Wall is able to resume his duties or when the Council re-considers its appointments to outside bodies.

In July 2019, Councillor Mackenzie agreed to become the Town Council's representative to Alveston Relief in Need Charity. However, having recently received correspondence from the Charity, she would reluctantly like to step away from this responsibility. The representative automatically becomes a Trustee of the Charity, and Councillor Mackenzie is concerned that she does not have the time to engage and give as much energy and commitment that will be required. Consequently, a replacement representative is required.

Town Clerk
28 January, 2020