

CARTERTON TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD AT THE TOWN HALL
ON TUESDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2022 COMMENCING AT 7.00 PM

Present: Cllr N Leverton Chairman
Cllr J Bull - Vice-Chairman

Cllr K Baldwin (from Item 143) Cllr L Little
Cllr S Baylis (until Item 145) Cllr M McBride
Cllr R Crapper Cllr M Mead
Cllr M Crossland Cllr L Sanders
Cllr P Handley (until Item 161) Cllr D Wesson
Cllr F Harold Cllr K Wood
Cllr N King

Apologies: Cllr J Sangster

In attendance: Members of the public x 17

Officers: Ron Spurs – Town Clerk
Kay Linnington – Deputy Clerk

140 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Crossland Item 153 – Tree Planting Project (proximity interest)
Cllr Little Item 145 – ARRG Pavilion (member of original working group)
Cllr Sanders Item 158 - Accounts for Payment (Allotments Secretary)
Cllr Wood Item 158 - Accounts for Payment (Allotments Committee member)

141 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 18 January 2022, previously circulated to Members, were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman. Cllr Little abstained.

142 PLANNING COMMITTEE

Council received the Minutes of the Meeting of the Planning Committee held on 18 January 2022, which were Noted.

143 AMENITIES AND ECONOMIC REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Council received the Minutes of the Meeting of the Amenities and Economic Regeneration Committee held on 1 February 2022, which were noted.

Cllr Handley clarified the cost for repair of the large pothole in the car park between Lloyds Chemist and Costa at Item 25(a) – OCC Highways had quoted in the region of £1,100 to properly cut out and tarmac the hole, with a less permanent repair costing around £800.

Under Item 27, Tree Planting Project, he asked for clarification of the cost for the tree planting in Brize Norton Road. The Clerk said that the invoice from McCracken & Son, detailed on the Payments List, was for £37,875.

Under Item 28, Work for Authorisation, he had asked the Clerk for a copy of the lease for the Family Centre to clarify that £1,300 needed to be paid when the lease expired.

The Committee had recommended the following items for approval:

- (a) Black Bourton Cemetery. Consecration of the remaining section, leaving three spaces for those who wished to be buried in non-consecrated ground, thereby increasing the longevity of the cemetery by 12-18 months.
- (b) Allandale Centre. Repair of the drains following a flood at the Centre.

Council RESOLVED to APPROVE the above items.

144 ADJOURNMENT FOR MEMBERS OF PUBLIC TO RAISE MATTERS

Nigel Rawlins spoke on Item 145, Alvescot Road Recreation Ground. He is a committee member of the Alvescot Road Recreation Ground Residents Group. The group welcomed the new plans for a smaller pavilion but still had reservations about a building of this size on the recreation ground. Considering the size of the agenda today, he suggested this matter be discussed at a future meeting to allow more time. Because of the changes that have taken place in the town over recent years, not least the pandemic, peoples' values for open spaces have changed and the group ask for a further public consultation. The Council were urged to consider all options available to fulfil their duty to the Charter and in finding the most cost-effective way forward. They recommend a further working party is set up to specifically look at all the options before spending more public money on architect fees or planning applications. They also recommend that a referendum is held to secure approval of the townspeople. They respectfully asked that Council not approve any motion to take this matter forward until further work is undertaken. Copies of his report were available for Council members.

Katherine Godwin, spoke on the same item. She reiterated what Nigel Rawlins said and encouraged the Council to listen to what the public want so as not let future generations down.

Sue James spoke on Item 154, Grant application for the May Day Fair. The organisers have asked the Council for a Grant of £1,000 towards the cost of this year's event, which would cover the essentials, such as the PA system, First Aid and bins. The total cost of the event is around £3,000 and they are also seeking sponsorship from elsewhere towards this. It is a very popular event in the town and the Council's support would be much appreciated.

Harry Watts wished to speak on an item that was not on the agenda and also expressed his support for the work of the Save the Rec group.

145 ALVESCOT ROAD RECREATION GROUND

This item was moved up the Agenda as the majority of the members of the public in attendance had an interest in this item.

The Town Council had initiated a project to build a new Pavilion on the Recreation Ground to replace the existing building. The Council's architects produced a design as per specifications set at the Town Council meeting held on 19 November 2019 and residents were invited to view the plans and, with supportive feedback at the time, Planning Permission was sought and approved by West Oxfordshire District Council on 17 August 2021. At this point a number of residents expressed concerns about the design of the proposed building and a Working Party made up of Councillors and local residents was formed to examine alternative designs.

The design agreed by the Working Party was circulated with the Agenda for this meeting. The proposed building would be much smaller than the previous design and located nearer to the car park. There would be public toilets, including a fully compliant disabled toilet with baby and adult changing table, changing rooms that meet FA regulations and a small cafe area. The roof line has been lowered and the cathedral-style front removed.

Council was asked to consider the proposed plan and decide whether to instruct the architects to submit a revised Planning Application to West Oxfordshire District Council. The Chairman suggested going round the table for each Councillor to comment, as follows:

Cllr Crapper: The existing building is old and needs replacing. Its current location is not easily served by vehicles. The proposed Pavilion would not take up any pitch space and would be an asset to the town.

Cllr Wesson: The new building would be up to the standard required by the FA, including separate changing facilities for referees and teams.

Cllr Harold: The new building would provide much needed facilities, particularly for families using the Recreation Ground.

Cllr McBride: The new plans were progress toward a building that is fit for purpose, moving the location would address the complaints received from residents over the years about antisocial behaviour and, when comparing the footprint of the old and new buildings, the amount of new ground used would be quite small. Public consultations have taken place, but only the views of those who, for example, have come to the meeting here today or are part of the Working Group have been heard - the silent majority of residents have not come forward. He suggested deferring a decision for a period of four months to give adequate time to hear all possible options.

Cllr King: She was glad that the item had been put on the Agenda and that an improved design had been put forward. The Save the Rec group have made a valid point that other options should be explored before a final decision is made as there may be better and cheaper solutions. She would like to see another working group set up to look at other options, with a public consultation and referendum. She expressed concern that a Radar Key would be required to access the disabled toilet for families to use the baby changing facilities.

Cllr Baylis: The existing building should have been better maintained over the years and she saw no reason to change the location.

Cllr Crossland: The existing Pavilion was built in response to the need for more football pitches, which required changing facilities that met the standards of the English Football League. The reason for locating the new Pavilion on the other side of the Recreation Ground was out of consideration to the residents, to provide ease of access to the toilets without having to walk across the Recreation Ground and to deter the antisocial behaviour that the existing location attracts. The new location would be better lit and able to be monitored by CCTV. Representatives from the town's football clubs should be involved in any future discussions.

Cllr Sanders: As a long-term resident, she had been delighted to hear about a new Pavilion. The existing building is no longer fit for purpose and is in the wrong place. As a Councillor, she believed that the process had been carried out in the right way and she agreed with the comments made by Cllr Crossland and Cllr McBride. It is a challenge to get the views the silent majority.

Cllr Baldwin: He was pleased to see the Council and the public engaging to deliver the new building and agreed with the new location, particularly having toilets nearer to the play area.

Cllr Handley: The new smaller design is better. He suggested that another option could be to update the facilities at Brownes Hall to include the necessary changing facilities and toilets. He suggested the item be deferred to a future meeting to give time to look at other options.

Cllr Little: She agreed with Cllr Handley that the possibility of updating Brownes Hall be investigated. In 2014 she had obtained £3,000 funding to update the kitchen in the existing Pavilion, which was then being used for a food bank. At that time, Phil Shaw from WODC Planning had advised renovating the existing building would not require planning permission. She agreed that the Council should not spend money renovating the existing building, but that all options be considered to get the best value for money and that a much wider consultation should take place before making a final decision. She wished to be part of any future working group.

Cllr Mead: She referred to the comments regarding Brownes Hall. During the pandemic the hall had been totally refurbished and is a valuable community asset, providing facilities for large events, exercise classes etc and it would not be viable to change that. She would prefer the new Pavilion to be in the same position as the existing one. She had attended every consultation and it was a shame that not everyone engaged in it at the time but agreed that deferring a decision was worthwhile. She explained that holding a Referendum would cost the Council in the region of £20,000 or more, so that was not a viable option.

Cllr Wood: Whether the existing building could be renovated had been discussed at length. The houses in Arkell Gardens were not there when the Pavilion was first built. The public had been consulted in a variety of ways and many in depth discussions had taken place since. Brownes Hall and the Social Club are private property and not owned by the Council. The Pavilion should be in its existing location near to the football pitch.

Cllr Bull: She was part of the Working Group that included members of the public and representatives from the Save the Rec group. She had attended the public meeting held by the Save the Rec group at St John's Church. Maureen Dean was the spokesperson at the meeting and, as the Chair of the group at that time, had been invited to be part of the Working Group, together with Sheelagh Sizeland and Roy Stephens. These group members led the discussions and brought their concerns about the size, orientation etc and the plans were amended accordingly. She stressed that Council members have listened to the public using a variety of consultations to try to reach as many residents as possible. The Working Group have produced good plans and she would be happy to see it proceed.

Cllr Leverton: The Councillors on the Working Group were very pleased with the participation of the members of the public at the meetings and look forward to seeing a new modern building for the future.

A named vote took place, with the following results:

Approve: Cllr Baldwin, Cllr Bull, Cllr Crapper, Cllr Crossland, Cllr Harold,
Cllr Leverton, Cllr McBride, Cllr Sanders, Cllr Wesson, Cllr Wood

Not Approve: Cllr Baylis, Cllr Handley, Cllr King, Cllr Little, Cllr Mead

Council RESOLVED to APPROVE the proposed plan and to instruct the architects to submit a revised Planning Application to West Oxfordshire District Council, subject to the following amendment: that the matter is deferred until the July meeting of the Town Council to give sufficient time for any other options to be considered.

146 ADJOURNMENT FOR COUNTY COUNCILLORS TO RAISE MATTERS

- (a) Cllr Field-Johnson – Burford and North Carterton. No report at this time.
- (b) Cllr Leverton – South and West Carterton, Armed Forces Champion

Cllr Leverton had attended several Zoom meetings covering aspects of SEN, safeguarding, finance and transport. He had arranged a meeting, to which Councillors were invited, to discuss proposals for traffic management at Carterton Crossroads. Seven options were offered, but only one was proposed by the County due to budget constraints. Councillors were not content with their proposals and he would contact the officers to revisit their decision.

147 ADJOURNMENT FOR DISTRICT COUNCILLORS TO RAISE MATTERS

- (a) Cllr Bull - Carterton North West, Inclusion Champion and member of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Bull had attended the usual round of meetings, including the Economic & Social Overview Committee. Both herself and Cllr Crossland continue to work with the County and District councils to get the piece of footpath joined up on the junction of Price Way and Shilton Road, to ensure that David Wilson Homes carries out this work that they had agreed to do. A date for the work to commence needs to be agreed between David Wilson Homes and OCC Highways.

- (b) Cllr Crossland – Carterton North West

Cllr Crossland was pleased to report that the 30mph speed limit on Shilton Road has been extended to Shilton village, which should improve road safety at the junction with Price Way. She had attended the full Council and Planning meetings at the District, together with the Economic & Social Overview Committee meeting where plans were being looked at as far ahead as 2050. The Committee covered local issues including flytipping and replacement of bins.

- (c) Cllr Leverton - Carterton South and Armed Forces Champion

Cllr Leverton, together with Cllr Bull and Cllr Crossland, were involved in the Draft Local Plan 2050. It is aspirational and driven by environmental improvements that WODC are fully committed to.

The Veterans Hub will open again on 24 February 2022 and will be held on the fourth Thursday each month at the Carterton WI Hall.

- (d) Cllr McBride – Carterton North East, Chairman of WODC and Vice-Chairman of the WODC Environmental Committee

Cllr McBride had met with the Biodiversity Officer regarding options for the area of land outside St John’s School. He would be meeting with the officer responsible for public waste bins tomorrow. He had referred a housing issue that had been brought to his attention to the relevant Cabinet member for investigation. He had visited Witney on four separate occasions in his capacity as Chairman to sign legal documents.

- (e) Cllr Mead – Carterton South, Leader of WODC

Cllr Mead said that an updated list of S106 funding was now available on the WODC website. An Ice Skating rink would be coming to the Market Square in Carterton during the school half term break from 19-23 February 2022. This is free of charge to the public and is fully funded

by the Welcome Back Fund, which is a Grant that the government gave to all district councils to get people back onto the high street. There would also be one in Witney at the same time.

Fuel Poverty Grants are being administered by the Citizens Advice Bureau on behalf of the District Council.

The District Council budget would be going through Cabinet tomorrow and to full Council next week. It has been a challenge to manage the budget, with 17,000 businesses being supported with £48 million in grant funding in West Oxfordshire alone, but the books are balancing thanks to the hard work of the staff. Some councils have struggled with waste collections and she expressed her thanks to all the staff in West Oxfordshire who have maintained this service so well throughout the pandemic.

Cllr Little expressed her thanks to WODC for their support for Carterton Community Food Bank, Lunch Club and Drop-In Coffee Morning at Carterton Methodist Church.

148 TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor expressed his thanks to Cllr Bull who chaired last month's Town Council meeting in his absence.

He was pleased to have placed a plaque to mark the trees planted recently along Brize Norton Road as part of The Queen's Green Canopy project for the Platinum Jubilee. He encouraged Councillors to fully engage with the programme of events being set up to celebrate the Jubilee this year.

On Friday 4 February, together with Cllr Bull and Cllr Crapper, he had attended a Tree Planting to celebrate the 50th birthday of Carterton Community College.

On Saturday 5 February, he attended the 50th birthday Pantomime production by the RAF Brize Norton Theatre Club. On behalf of the Council, the Mayor presented a certificate of acknowledgement to the Club for their 50 years, which was received by Cllr Baldwin as the officer in charge.

On Sunday 13 February, together with his wife Sue, he attended the High Sheriff's Tree Planting and Community Lunch at Florence Park in Oxford.

149 TOWN CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Clerk had no announcements to make at this time.

150 FIDELITY INSURANCE

The Internal Auditor suggested that the level of Fidelity insurance cover contained in the main insurance policy should be increased from £800,000 to £950,000. A copy of the relevant insurance schedule was circulated to members with the Agenda.

Council RESOLVED to APPROVE the increase in cover as described above.

151 FINGER POST SIGNAGE

West Oxfordshire District Council has agreed to install a new (replacement) Finger Post in the town centre, to be located on the same site as the original one that was removed some years ago, near The Shake Shop and David Richings Estate Agent. The project is being managed by

Emma Phillips, the Market Town Officer at WODC. After a discussion, it was decided that the Post should highlight the following:

- Town Hall / Market Square
- Alvescot Road Recreation Ground
- Churches
- RAF Brize Norton / WI Hall

Council RESOLVED to APPROVE the installation of the Finger Post with signage as detailed above.

152 CEMETERY

At the meeting of the Amenities & Economic Regeneration Committee held on 1 February 2022, the Committee recommended that Council approve the consecration of a further section at the Cemetery to provide additional grave spaces, which was approved at Item 143(a) earlier in this meeting. Work continues to find other ways to increase the longevity of the Cemetery and one area identified is to reduce the width of the path adjacent to the graves in the New Extension to allow one more row of 28 graves. The path would need to be reduced by 10 inches along 50% of its length. This would leave sufficient space for wheelchair access.

Council RESOLVED to APPROVE that the width of the path is reduced as described above.

153 TREE PLANTING PROJECT – PHASE 2

An in-depth report had been circulated with the Agenda that gave details of the first phase of the project to plant 33 trees along Brize Norton Road. The report details of the consultation process with residents, the variety of trees chosen and the benefits of the scheme for the future. Council was asked to approve funding for the second phase, which has been included in the Budget for 2022/2023. It is proposed that 40 trees are planted along either Burford Road, Alvescot Road or Black Bourton Road at a cost of £1,145 per tree, totalling between £43,000 and £48,000.

A discussion took place with concerns expressed over the cost of the project and whether sponsorship could be obtained or the number of trees reduced. It was noted that the project was fully costed in the budget and would be of great benefit to the environment for future generations.

Council RESOLVED to APPROVE that the second phase of the project should be to plant 40 trees along Burford Road. Cllr Handley, Cllr King and Cllr Little explained that they voted against because of the cost of the project.

154 GRANT APPLICATION – MAY DAY FAIR

A Grant Application had been received from the Carterton & Witney Branch of Save the Children, who seek the sum of £1,000 towards the cost of delivering the annual May Day Fair on Alvescot Recreation Ground on Monday 2 May 2022. This would cover essential costs, including First Aid provision, bin hire, venue hire, PA system, security, TEN and Small Lottery Licence. The total cost for the whole event is approximately £3,000.

Cllr Harold had looked at the application in depth. The Fair is hugely popular and well attended each year and is very well organised by Save the Children. The sum asked for this year is less than in previous years and she recommended that the Grant is approved.

Council RESOLVED to APPROVE a Grant of £1,000 to Save the Children for the May Day Fair.

155 MOTION

The following Motion was brought by Cllr Handley, Cllr Little and Cllr King:

“In order to allay residents’ fears, it is requested that an independent investigation is carried out to determine if Carterton Town Council is obtaining Value for Money for goods and services provided on behalf of the residents of Carterton”.

Cllr Handley, who proposed the Motion, explained that this did not in any way reflect on Council staff. He listed the following items where he believed there were issues with value for money and transparency:

- Playground inspections – over £4,000 spent in the last 12 months
- Kitchen shutter – call out of £1,247.50 and another of £1,746.50
- Willow Meadows – grass cutting of £500 in November and £500 in December
- Town Hall – toilet rolls £143 in December
- Trees – the tree surgeon had come out of three occasions to Heather Close (16 February £960, 29 July £900, 21 November £1,680). Total expenditure on tree works in the last 12 months was £21,210, of which £8,190 had not be specifically identified as to which trees it related to.
- Flag Pole - £1,836 for maintenance
- Allotment toilets – four payments in three months

He said that Invoices should be made available for Councillors to view at the Town Council meeting, particularly as Councillors do not often have the time to come to the Town Hall to look at them in advance. He had concerns about the limited information available to residents on the Town Council website, including archive payments that do not appear on the new website. The Minutes of the Amenities Committee meeting held in May 2021 are also not on the website. He urged the Council to look into these matters to ensure the finances of the Council are transparent and represent good value for money.

Cllr Little, who had seconded the Motion, said that it was important for Councillors to look at the Invoices that are presented for payment each month and would like to see more information on what the payments are for. She also was concerned about the lack of information and detail on the new website.

Cllr King said that having read the report given to her of Cllr Handley’s research into the matter, she would like clarification of the items highlighted.

Cllr Bull said that the invoices for payment are available at the Town Hall for Councillors to see. Every Monday morning, the Mayor, Cllr McBride and herself meet at the Town Hall to look through any paperwork and ask for clarification if necessary. She said she always looks at the invoices before approving them. Regarding the kitchen shutter, it had to comply with Fire & Safety regulations. Three quotes had been obtained and the correct process followed. She wished to assure the public that Council looks very carefully at the money spent on behalf of the town.

Cllr McBride said that an independent investigation would require the Council to employ the services of a professional, such as an accountant, which would cost the Council thousands of pounds. Both the Internal and External Auditors, together with an extra in-depth Audit carried out this year, had not found any problems with the way the Council conducted its business.

Cllr Crossland said that there are a robust set of procedures that regulate and oversee all Council processes. All items that require funding are debated and voted on, the Council is provided with a detailed breakdown of all financial transactions and every Councillor has the opportunity to ask questions about any item on the financial statement. Every year the Council's finances are inspected by an outside independent auditor, who had found no problems. This year the Council was randomly selected for an additional spot-check audit, again with no problems reported. She said that there were some Councillors that regularly abstained from voting to approve the accounts for payment and she had urged them to share their concerns so that they could be addressed.

Cllr Sanders said that she had only been a Councillor for a short time, but there was complete openness and transparency in all financial matters. As a member of the Administration Committee, she had looked at the accounts in detail and could see no problems. If she had a list of concerns such as Cllr Handley's, she would have queried them at the Town Hall before bringing a Motion like this.

Cllr Mead said there were no parameters set on the Motion so it was unclear how far back it related to. She had been a Councillor for almost 10 years and the invoices had always been available to look at if needed. Over the years she had asked for clarification on many occasions and had always had a robust answer to her questions. If Councillors would like the procedures changed there would be an opportunity to do so when the Standing Orders are reviewed each year.

Other comments made were that Councillors had trust in Council staff and colleagues; the Audit process was robust; and details of payments made using the Clerk's Authority were circulated to Councillors. It was generally felt that the Council's financial procedures were open and transparent and were independently scrutinised each year by the Auditors. Councillors were confident that the processes in place ensured that the Council carried out its business in the right manner and that further information or clarification was available if they needed it.

The Clerk agreed that more detail could be included on the financial statement, but this is due to limitations of the RBS accounting system. He addressed Cllr Handley's particular concerns:

- Playground inspections – RoSPA carry out an annual inspection of all playgrounds and, in addition, WODC carry out weekly inspections.
- Kitchen shutter – three quotes were presented to Council.
- Toilet rolls – these were purchased in bulk.
- Willow Meadows – when residents and Councillors report problems these are assessed and acted on as necessary.
- Heather Close – repeated complaints from residents were received regarding tree issues, which is why the tree surgeon has been there on several occasions.
- Flag Pole – this required a specialist company to repair and service it, which had not been done since its installation 5-6 years ago.
- Allotment toilets – The Clerk had sent an email to Cllr Handley following the concern he had raised about the duplicate payments, explaining that it was due to the flow of invoices coming in for payment.

Cllr Handley summed up that he believed the way the figures were presented left the Council open to transparency problems and pointed out that Auditors do not check for value for money.

A vote was taken with the majority against the Motion.

Council RESOLVED that the Motion had failed.

156 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The Financial Statement to 31 January 2022, previously circulated and set out at Annex A, were noted.

157 RECEIPTS

Receipts between 19 January 2022 and 15 February 2022, previously circulated, were noted.

158 ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT

Council RESOLVED that the Accounts for Payment for February 2022, set out at Annex B, be APPROVED for payment.

Cllr Little abstained and Cllr Handley wished his vote against be recorded. Cllr King had some queries that she would bring up at the Mayors Monday meeting.

159 PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSION TO MEETINGS) ACT 1960

RESOLVED that as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, the Press and Public be excluded from the Meeting. Confidential items follow.

160

Confidential Item.

161

Confidential Item.

162

Confidential Item.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm

15 March 2022

Town Mayor