

# **SEDGEFIELD TOWN COUNCIL**

## **POLICY & RESOURCES**

Minutes of the proceedings of the **NOVEMBER POLICY & RESOURCES** of the **Council** held following the Monthly meeting in the **Council Offices**, Advice & Information Centre, Sedgefield, on **Monday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2014**.

**Present**                      **Cllr. Gloria Wills (Chairman)**

Cllrs. Allan Blakemore, Mark Cant, Mel Carr, Tim Jeanes, Ian Sutherland, Alf Walton and Dudley Waters.

**Officer**                      Dr. Jane Ayre (Town Clerk)

**1. Apologies:**

Cllrs. David Brown, Vanessa Carmichael, Lynne Dentith, Rebecca Hagan, Chris Lines, John Robinson and Maxine Robinson.

**2. Declaration of interest**

None

**3. Matters of Information**

**3.1 Community Right To Bid:**

The Estates Working Group are preparing application forms to express interest in the Parish Hall Car Park, Police Station, Fire Station and the Methodist Hall under the Community Right To Bid Scheme. These will be considered at the next Estates Working Group meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2014 and a report brought back to a future P&R Committee meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

**To receive this information.**

**3.2 Recycling Policy:**

No further action has been undertaken with regard to this Policy. This will be progressed by Cllr Allan Blakemore and the Clerk when time allows.

**RESOLVED:**

**To receive this information.**

**3.3 Registered STC Land:**

Work is on-going in this area to draft a report for consideration by the Estates Working Group.

**RESOLVED:**

**To receive this information.**

**3.4 Cemetery Lodge**

Signage has now been prepared and placed in Cemetery Lodge to ensure people are aware that a security alarm is in operation.

**RESOLVED:**

**To receive this information and to close this matter.**

**3.5 Barclays Bank Mandate**

The bank mandate in relation to the Mayor's Account has now been resolved. The Council has been issued with details for on-line banking access, however, we are still awaiting the arrival of a debit card. This is being chased as a matter of urgency with the Council's Barclays Business Account Manager, however, it is causing problems with regard to the Snow Party preparations. The outcome of an official complaint submitted by the Council is still unknown, however, Barclays have acknowledged their investigation into our complaint is taking too long and suggested the Town Council may wish to refer this matter to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

**RESOLVED:**

- i) The Clerk to refer this matter to the Financial Ombudsman Service.**
- ii) The Clerk to keep Cllrs updated on the outcome of the complaint.**

**3.6 PRS**

The Clerk has clarified the current licenses in place for the Parish Hall and met with Cllr Waters. The Estates Working Group have requested additional information regarding PPL. This will be considered at the next Estates Working Group meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

**RESOLVED:**

**To receive this information.**

**3.7 Potential Land For STC To Register**

Work is on-going in this area to draft a report for consideration by the Estates Working Group.

**RESOLVED:**

**To receive this information.**

**3.8 SCA Lease**

The Clerk reported that she has now discovered that Mr Jonathan Sturgeon has left the employment of BHP Law. As a result of this she has contacted Ms Sonia Hunter to request a summary of the feedback from the SCA's solicitor in order that an outline of work required to be undertaken to resolve this issue can be prepared.

**RESOLVED:**

**To receive this information and for the Clerk to update the P&R Committee when information is received from BHP Law.**

**3.9 Recording Meetings**

Work is still underway to purchase appropriate audio recording equipment from the recently awarded grant for improvement works to the Town Council Offices and the Parish Hall.

**RESOLVED:**

**To receive this information and for the Clerk to keep Cllrs updated.**

**3.10 Cemetery Lodge Workshop**

A workshop to discuss the future of Cemetery Lodge was held on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014, 6pm-7pm, in the Council Offices to identify the short-term and long-term options for this property.

**RESOLVED:**

**To receive this information and to close this matter.**

**3.11 DCC Medium Term Financial Planning and 2015/16 Budget Setting**

The Town Council has received from DCC payment of £13,942 for the LCTSG in 2014/15. This amount had been received in two instalments at the same time as the Council's precept payment.

**RESOLVED:**

**To receive this information and to close this matter.**

**3.12 Review of Expenditure Payment and Financial Reporting**

Work is due to commence soon in reviewing and updating the Council's Financial Regulations. Revised Financial Regulations will be presented to a future P&R Committee meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

**To receive this information.**

**4. Public Participation**

The Chairman, Cllr. Gloria Wills closed the meeting whilst the public gave their views and comments.

Mrs Scott expressed her dissatisfaction that the Town Council's October Committee meeting dates had been moved from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Mondays to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday. She had been unaware of this change and was unhappy with the comments reported in the Council's October 2014 Committee meeting minutes regarding Station Road Playing Field. She stated that the current situation with Station Road Playing Field is indefensible and cannot continue. Finally, she is aware of work being undertaken by Mr Norman Holmes to secure this Field as a Village Green and fully supports his proposal as it is an area which must be preserved for the community.

Mr Scott spoke on behalf of the residents of Station Road (numbers 2 ,4 and 4a) and Ivy Row (numbers 1-4)who have formed an Alliance to address the on-going issues of flooding and sewerage discharges in and around the Station Road Playing Field. Their aim is to motivate the Town Council and Durham County Council to pressurise Northumbrian Water (NWL) to resolve this situation once and for all. NWL have not disclosed to the Town Council all the information they have with regard to this site. The Residents Alliance now have a wealth of information dating back to 2002 with includes minutes of meetings, letters, emails, details of compensation paid by NWL, video footage and photographic evidence. Included in this evidence are letters detailing public health concerns relating to a young child becoming ill due to contact with sewage, an ecoli issue and the health risks of being in contact with standing water. Mr Scott believed that the Town Council had not addressed this situation even though the evidence he has collated indicates the Town Council were aware of many of these issues. He also stated the belief that the Town Council instead

preferred to support groups such as Sedgfield In Bloom and SCA rather than tackle difficult issues. Mr Scott stated that his criticism of the Town Council is not aimed at newer Councillors but is aimed at longer serving Councillors who he claimed have known about the dual issues of flooding and sewerage discharges. Mr Scott believes these dual issues stemmed from one and the same problem, i.e. lack of capacity in drainage to the south side of Station Road which has been exacerbated by the connection of Dunelm Court. Residents are concerned about the health implications as young families and children regularly use the Playing Field for recreation purposes. Finally, on behalf of the Residents Alliance, Mr Scott stated that unless urgent action is taken by the Town Council it will go to Mr Phil Wilson MP and Ofwat as well as local and regional press and television in order to get the answers that are needed.

Cllr Gloria Wills replied that the Town Council had brought forward its October Committee meetings in response to the County Durham Examination in Public process to ensure that Cllrs and residents understood what was going on in relation to Sedgfield. The date changes had been publicized on the noticeboards in the Town, however, consideration will be given as to how these revised dates could have been circulated more widely. The Town Council had been aware of the flooding issues in relation to Station Road Playing field and since being made aware of these had been actively looking for a resolution by working with NWL and requesting appropriate testing be undertaken plus involving DCC's Drainage Team. Now that claims have been brought to light regarding sewage discharges it is important the Town Council acts. Cllr Gloria Wills asked if the Residents Alliance would be happy to share its evidence with the Town Council in order that a planned approach can be developed. Mr Scott agreed to discuss this with other members of the Residents Alliance.

The meeting was then re-opened.

In light of the comments made during public participation it was suggested by the Chair, Cllr Gloria Wills, that agenda item 9.2 be discussed next. This was agreed by all Cllrs.

Cllr Alf Walton expressed his concerns that new Councillors had not been made aware of the full extent of the situation with Station Road Playing Field. He believed that NWL have not been open and shared information. He also believed that sewage being pumped each night from Hardwick Park into this drainage system must also be having a significant impact upon capacity.

Cllr Mark Cant expressed his concern that newer Councillors have been in post for 18 months and had never had any pre-existing information given to them regarding this issue.

## **9.2 Consideration of Formal Letter of Complaint from Mrs Scott: Station Road Playing Field**

Cllr Gloria Wills stated that the Station Road Playing Field situation is now a dual issue of both water flooding and raw sewage. It was agreed that the Town Council must collate a report for presentation to NWL, if possible using the evidence collated by the Residents Alliance, showing that Town Council land leased from Durham County Council has been contaminated and requires urgent action to bring about a final resolution. It was agreed that DCC Environmental Health must also be included in this work as well as their Drainage Team to ensure both issues are considered together and not in isolation.

### **RESOLVED:**

- i) Upon receipt of evidence from the Residents Alliance the Clerk will commence the preparing of a definitive position statement report detailing the full history of this site and clearly stating the issues requiring resolution.**
- ii) This report will be shared with Cllrs and the Residents Alliance.**
- iii) A face to face meeting will be scheduled with DCC Environmental Health and Drainage Team to go through the report and prepare and agree an approach to NWL.**

## **5. Reports**

### **5.1 CDALC AGM (8<sup>th</sup> November 2014): Verbal Update by Cllr Ian Sutherland**

Cllr Ian Sutherland reported that he had attended the CDALC AGM on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2014 at County Hall, Durham. He reported the following key items of note:

- Cllr Dudley Waters was re-elected as Honorary Treasurer of CDALC;
- From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 DCC will remove their financial support for the CDALC Secretariat (i.e. Stephen Ragg's role). This removal of funding will now happen one year later than previously anticipated. At the AGM it was agreed that from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 a new post directly employed by CDALC be created for initially 30 hours per week based on the salary of the existing Executive Officer. Subscription fees will be frozen at 10p per elector for 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18. Any shortfall between subscription income and annual revenue costs for 2016/17 and 2017/18 will be funded from reserves. The new post has been offered to Mr Stephen Ragg who has accepted the position.

**RESOLVED:**

**To receive this information.**

**5.2 Revised Standing Orders: Report by Clerk**

Prior to the meeting a report by the Clerk had been circulated to all. This report, based upon the acceptance by Cllrs of an earlier report “Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014” (dated 6<sup>th</sup> October 2014), recommended changes to Section 1(m) of the Town Council’s May 2014 Standing Orders to reflect the requirements of the new Regulations.

**RESOLVED:**

- i) To approve and adopt the proposed amendment to the Standing Orders with immediate effect.**
- ii) The Clerk to amend Section 1(m) of the Standing Orders and to update the Council’s website.**

**5.3 Cemetery Lodge Workshop Findings: Report by Clerk**

The Clerk circulated to all Cllrs a copy of the findings from the Cemetery Lodge Workshop held on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014. The Estates Working Group will now consider these findings in detail focusing upon the highest rated preferences as follows:

1 <sup>st</sup>	To sell the Lodge but undertake necessary work to ‘isolate’ the property first, e.g. resolve access and boundary issues (long-term);
2 <sup>nd</sup>	To paint and re-let the Lodge for 6 months (short-term);
3 <sup>rd</sup> (joint)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- To relocate the Town Council to the Lodge (long-term);</li><li>- To use the Lodge as commercial business units, i.e. for start-up businesses or businesses only requiring single room occupancy (long-term).</li></ul>

**RESOLVED:**

**When appropriate, the Estates Working Group to bring proposals based upon the identified preferences back to a future P&R Committee meeting.**

**6. Financial Matters**

**6.1 Monthly Accounts: Income (as at 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014) / Expenditure (as at 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014 minus unapproved cheques after 6<sup>th</sup> October 2014)**

**RESOLVED**

**The monthly accounts as had been circulated were approved for payment**

**6.2 Cheques for approval after 6<sup>th</sup> October 2014**

In addition to the details of cheques requiring approval for payment since 6<sup>th</sup> October 2014, the Clerk circulated a list of those invoices which had been received in the interim period since the circulation of Committee papers that also required approval for payment.

**RESOLVED:**

**All cheques were approved for payment and duly signed.**

Cllr Ian Sutherland expressed concerns that this new arrangement for authorizing cheques was posing difficulties for the volunteers of Sedgefield In Bloom who were having to wait a considerable period of time in order to be reimbursed for their expenses. Cllr Allan Blakemore suggested that the Bloom Group may wish to consider having their own bank account and hold their own funds. He stated that this suggestion was purely down to the need to have greater transparency of public money hence the new procedure having been put in place and that the Town Council would continue to support the Bloom Group in every way possible. Cllr Gloria Wills suggested that the Bloom Group have two options, to either hold their own money or to continue with the Town Council hosting this money but in this instance the Bloom Group would have to continue with the Town Council's new procedure for authorizing payment of cheques. Cllr Ian Sutherland felt that it was a good suggestion for the Bloom Group to hold its own money and said that he would raise this matter with the Bloom Group at its next meeting on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2014.

**RESOLVED:**

**Cllr Ian Sutherland to report back to the next P&R Committee meeting following discussions at the Sedgefield In Bloom Group meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2014.**

**6.3 Itemised Income Presented To Bank (period 7<sup>th</sup> October – 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014)**



The itemized income presented to the bank as at 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014 had been circulated to all prior to the meeting.

**RESOLVED**

**To receive this information.**

- 6.4 Section 106 Financial Summary as at 17<sup>th</sup> June 2014: Update Report by Clerk**
- At the P&R Committee held on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2014 the Clerk was asked to determine whether the £10,500 listed by DCC in relation to land at Thurlow Grange, Sedgefield. Prior to the November P&R Committee meeting the Clerk had circulated an update report regarding the latest position with regard to this Section 106 money. Mr Stephen Reed (Development Manager at DCC) has confirmed that this money is still available for use with the stipulation of being for provision or improvement of open space and or play facilities off-site. Mr Reed had provided details of how this money can be accessed and provided the necessary paperwork for this to be achieved.

**RESOLVED:**

- i) To receive this information.**
- ii) For this matter to be referred to the Community Development & Engagement Committee for consideration, identification of an appropriate project, liaison with local County Councillors and then submission to DCC.**

- 6.5 Twinning Visit 2015: Request for Budget Allocation 2015/16: Report by Cllr Allan Blakemore**

Prior to the meeting a report by Cllr Allan Blakemore had been circulated to all explaining that Twinning friends from Hamminkeln in Germany will be visiting Sedgefield in 2015 and in-light of this a recommendation was given that the Town Council make a budget allocation in its 2015/16 budget to assist with the cost of hosting this visit.

**RESOLVED:**

- i) A budget allocation of £200 be set in the Town Council's 2015/16 budget for this event.**
- ii) The Twinning Association be advised that if further financial assistance is provided then a request can be made to the Community Chest.**

**6.6 Sedgefield 700+ Event 2015: Request for Budget Allocation 2015/16: Report by Cllr Allan Blakemore**

Prior to the meeting a report by Cllr Allan Blakemore had been circulated to all with regard to the Sedgefield 700+ Day in 2015. Cllr Blakemore explained that Groups who are represented on the Sedgefield 700+ Committee have expressed the very strong opinion that they want to continue to run an annual event each year. While the Town Council will seek to obtain grant funding in relation to this event this income cannot be guaranteed. Each individual Group which participates in the day funds their own activities, however, there are some costs associated with this event which require funding centrally and if grant funding cannot be secured then the Sedgefield 700+ need to have access to a relatively small pot of money in order to cover these costs, e.g. room hire etc. Cllr Allan Blakemore requested that the Town Council made a budget allocation of £200 in its 2015/16 budget to assist with the delivery of this event. All Cllrs agreed that the Sedgefield Day was a very good event and were supportive of its continuation.

Cllr Gloria Wills questioned the £590 remaining in the Town Council accounts following the July 2014 Sedgefield Weekend. Cllr Allan Blakemore replied that this money was surplus from the grant funding received in this financial year and would need to be returned to the County Durham Foundation.

**RESOLVED:**

- i) Mrs Angela Simpson to provide to the next P&R Committee Meeting an income and expenditure balance sheet for the 2014 Sedgefield Weekend.**
- ii) Sedgefield 700+ be advised to submit a request for £200 to the Community Chest to assist with the delivery of the Sedgefield Day 2015.**

Cllr Dudley Waters left the meeting at this point.

**6.7 Proposal For Finance Working Party: Report by Clerk**

Prior to the meeting the Clerk had circulated to all Cllrs a proposal to establish a Finance Working Group which will review the way in which the Council displays its budget information, to consider the Council's precept setting requirements for 2015/16, to review the Council's Financial Regulations and begin to refine its Medium Term Financial Planning. It was agreed to establish such a Working Group and all Cllrs were given the opportunity to participate in this Group.

**RESOLVED:**

- i) **To establish a Finance Working Group which will meet during December/January to prepare recommendations for presentation to future P&R Committee meetings.**
- ii) **Cllrs Gloria Wills, Ian Sutherland, Allan Blakemore, Tim Jeanes and Mel Carr to form the Finance Working Group's membership.**

Cllr Allan Blakemore left the meeting at this point.

**7. Training**

The Clerk reported that Ms Jane Young had attended the "Policies, Social Media & the Press, Health & Safety and Risk Assessments" earlier that day at Shildon Town Council run by the County Durham and Cleveland County Training Partnership. Ms Jane Young will prepare a report for a future P&R Committee about this training.

**RESOLVED:**

**To receive this information.**

**8. Correspondence**

**8.1 Bulletin from Larger Councils' Committee Meeting 14<sup>th</sup> October 2014**

Prior to the meeting copies of an email from Mr Stephen Ragg dated 21<sup>st</sup> October 2014 containing a bulletin from the Larger Councils' Committee meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2014 had been circulated to all Cllrs.

**RESOLVED:**

**To receive this information.**

**8.2 Promotion of Parish Councils at County Durham Partnership Event**

Prior to the meeting the Clerk had circulated to all Cllrs an email from Mr Stephen Ragg dated 28<sup>th</sup> October 2014 detailing a County Durham Partnership Event taking place on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2014 offering an opportunity to promote CDALC and the work of Town/Parish Councils to a broader network.

**RESOLVED:**

**To receive this information.**

**8.3 Durham Association News October 2014**

Prior to the meeting the Clerk had circulated copies of the latest Durham Association News (Issue 49) dated October 2014. All Cllrs agreed this publication was extremely useful and informative. Cllr Mel Carr requested that all Cllrs made themselves familiar with the "Blogging/Social Networking and the Code of Conduct" article on pages 1-2. All Cllrs present agreed with this suggestion.

**RESOLVED:**

- i) To receive this information.**
- ii) All Cllrs to make themselves familiar with the information contained in this Issue with regard to Blogging/Social Networking and the Code of Conduct.**

**9. Station Road Playing Field**

**9.1 Consideration of Village Green Proposal by Mr Norman Holmes**

Previously the Clerk had circulated to all Cllrs information supplied by Mr Norman Holmes who is proposing Station Road Playing Field could be registered as a Village Green.

Cllr Mark Cant recommended that the Clerk write to DCC informing them that the Town Council is considering cancelling its lease for Station Road Playing Field.

Cllr Mel Carr questioned whether there is a financial cost to the Town Council if the Playing Field becomes a Village Green.

It was agreed that whatever option is finally decided upon with regard to Station Road Playing Field that the Town Council had a duty to continue to support the Residents Alliance which has been formed at Station Road and Ivy Row with regard to on-going flooding and sewage issues.

**RESOLVED:**

- i) The Clerk to seek advice from CDALC to determine if the field became Village Green would it become the responsibility of the Town Council or DCC.**
- ii) The Clerk to prepare a report in conjunction with the Estates Working Group detailing the advantages and disadvantages of retaining Station Road Playing Field via its current lease arrangement with DCC. This report will be presented to a future P&R Committee meeting.**

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 9.40p.m.