

OLNEY TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the virtual meeting of Olney Town Council held via MS Teams Monday 1st March 2021 at 7.00pm

Present: Cllrs Stephen Clark, Paul Collins, Desmond Eley, Joanne Eley, Peter Geary, Graham Harrison, Jeremy Rawlings, Colin Rodden, Chris Tennant.

In attendance: Andrea Vincent (Town Clerk), Sarah Kennedy (Deputy Town Clerk)

Public Forum: There were 2 public statements/questions.

- 1) February 12th A resident shared his concerns over the ongoing rubbish issue at the Goosey island. Photos showed how the rubbish had become dislodged in the recent floods causing it to wash up elsewhere. The resident requested the Council contact the landowner and try to get this resolved.

Action: Olney Town Clerk has contacted the landowner's representatives and requested this is cleared up immediately

- 2) A resident expressed concern over the 'public trial by social media' that Olney Town Council has been subject to since August 2020.

Action: The full statement and questions the resident raised, along with responses from Olney Town Council, have now been published on Olney Town Council's Facebook page.

OTC21/24: Apologies for absence

No apologies for absence were received.

OTC21/25: Declarations of interests on items on the agenda

Cllr Tennant declared a personal interest in the ODG report at item OTC21/35 as he lives close to the Yardley Road/Aspreys development.

OTC21/26: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 1st February 2021

Resolved: to agree the minutes of Full Council Meeting on 1st February 2021 as a true and correct record once a change had been made in the working on Item OTC21/17 from 'Administration Income' to 'Administration Expenditure'.

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OTC21/27: To receive information regarding the Public Art Process with Louise Izod, Public Art Officer, MKC

Louise Izod presented an overview of public art in Milton Keynes, the Public Art Process, Section 106 money and how it can be used.

Cllr Tennant said it would be advantageous to work with Louise, her team and engage with the community of Olney to put a public art plan into place. Cllr Tennant will share the S106 tracker details with Louise for further discussions.

Resolved: noted

OTC21/28: To receive information regarding the Demand Responsive Transport Proposals with Cllr Jennifer Wilson-Marklew, MKC

One of Cllr Wilson-Marklew's area of responsibility is transport (including buses), and public transport. Cllr Wilson-Marklew presented some slides and explained the coming changes on 31st March to some (but not all) bus services in Olney. The new service is called MK Connect, a new demand-responsive transport (DRT) service. Leaflets and literature will be made available where fixed route buses are due to be stopped. Cllr Wilson-Marklew requested Parishes and Councillors share information with residents, what is happening and what the changes are. More information will be made accessible on Olney Town Councils website and social media sites and posters will be displayed in bus stops. Cllr Geary highlighted the importance of informing surrounding villages also via various means. Cllr D Eley requested this item go on OTC's next Newsletter.

Resolved: noted

OTC21/29: To review the MKC new Councillor Code of Conduct and to consider it is adopted in place of the current OTC Councillor Code of conduct

OTC21/30: To agree amendments to the OTC Standing Orders

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Resolved: Cllr Rawlings proposed to amend point II to also include the Planning Committee. 'Regular intervals' was defined as 'annually'. The Standing Orders will be amended to reflect these changes. The proposal was agreed by all.

OTC21/31: To consider a request from Olney Rugby Club for the use of OTC land at the Recreation Ground for the Olney 7's festival on Saturday 17th July 2021

Resolved: permission to be granted subject to Covid restrictions at the time and approval to be given based on the same terms and conditions that OTC presented to Olney Rugby Club in 2018. Olney Town Clerk to inform the Rugby Club of the decision.

OTC21/32: To consider tenders for the re painting of the Olney Centre

Resolved: Given the urgency of the work and the need for redecoration before the reopening of The Olney Centre Cllr Rawlings proposed to authorise the Town Clerk and Cllr D Eley to approve quotes up to the sum of £11,790 subject to further information being received within 7 days from 'Quote B' or any additional quotes submitted.

OTC21/33: To receive the Town Clerks report

Resolved: noted

OTC21/34: To receive an expenditure report

Resolved: noted

OTC21/35: To receive reports from Chairs of Committees and Councillors who represent OTC at external meetings

HR Report – Cllr J Eley congratulated the Deputy Town Clerk on gaining her ILCA qualification. The Town Clerk is part way through her CILCA. Both are professional qualifications specific to Town Clerks.

Cllr J Eley referred to serious allegations recently made on Facebook implying that HR documents may have been shredded by current staff or councillors. Cllr J Eley vehemently

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denied this statement (made by an anonymous source). Cllr J Eley stated that The Council is duty bound to report fact as a regulated and monitored organisation that is accountable, and that OTC are working within the legislation and rules to correct the past failures that have been many years in the making. We have established Good governance and Transparency 'Cronyism' which undermines democracy and is a moral hazard no longer exists. At no time in the history of Olney Town Council has there been a more transparency around council working.

Cllr J Eley, on behalf of the staff team and HR team, thanked all those residents who have taken the time to call, personal message and email in their support throughout the wake of the protracted media attack.

Finance Committee – Cllr Collins wished to correct a couple of statements made in the recent edition of the Phonebox magazine.

- 1) with reference to The Community Support fund whereby £5000 p/a over a period of 3 years has been allocated to support the AG250 celebrations planned for 2022/23. The magazine stated that the money had been granted to C&N Museum. Cllr Collins stated this is incorrect and that the funds are specifically designed to encourage small community groups to come forward with proposals for small scale celebrations specifically for AG250. The C&N Museum is engaged in a different project whereby applications will be made to external funders for approximately £350k.
- 2) a columnist in the Phonebox magazine whose column is headed up 'Council matters' had stated '*mistakes made in the AGAR are in black and white and can be rectified by correct accounting next year.*' Cllr Collins stated that this statement is false and that no challenge had been made to the accounts submitted in terms of the actual numbers submitted and that the Annual Governance statement report was signed off by both the external and internal auditors.

Recs & Services Committee – Cllr D Eley

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Cemetery – Town clerks have completed specific cemetery training and are in the process of getting the records and management in line with current legislation. Some soft landscape maintenance in the old churchyard and necessary repair of the dilapidated stone walls has taken place.

Landscape – Grounds staff continue with the full scope of all maintenance on open spaces throughout the pandemic. The only exception was watering of the hanging baskets. It should be noted that there was a protracted grass mowing season.

The introduction of management controls by the Office and Head grounds man including adding a padlock to the tank after a sudden significant drop in diesel stored in the middle of May 2020 has achieved circa 57% decrease in diesel purchases, a saving of 3200 Litres of diesel per year.

Further management control has led to a significant reduction in bedding plant expenditure.

Fertiliser - The playing fields soils were tested in Sept 2019 for P,K,Ph & mg, and results prove the soils have high levels of nutrients. It was strongly recommended by the soil scientist not to apply any more general fertilizer on the pitches for at least another 5 years. A rogue order was delivered in September 2019 this was promptly taken back without charge by the supplier's agent. We have not made any purchases since.

There may be a need to apply some nitrogen in the spring after a close inspection to some or parts of the sports pitches only. The approximate saving from the evidence-based management of the recreation grounds is £3000 per year. This is in accordance with the environment management plan of last year both seeking to reduce the use age of artificial fertilisers but also lower the nutrient status of ground so that a wider biodiversity can be encouraged.

An audit of machinery was conducted in line the annual accounts asset register. It was established that two pieces of plant were being held outside of town and out of our direct control and these have subsequently been relocated to our compound.

Public Toilets – we have resisted following many other authorities and kept public toilets open during most of 2020. The Office has now established a professional cleaning regime and resident feedback regarding maintaining cleanliness has been very positive.

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Olney Centre - The old Victorian underground pipework failure established that the long-term dampness in the Playschool area originated underground rather than from roof / chimney leak as previously reported. Significant works have been required to remedy and future proof the remainder of the heating system from similar catastrophic failures.

We continue to support the Pre-school and Library.

Markets – Unlike some authorities, we have successfully continued to run our markets throughout the whole of 2020 complying with all contemporary Covid-19 restrictions. The market traders both Thursday and the Farmers market have been fantastic providing us with a variety of supplies throughout the year.

Dog waste Bins – Increased numbers of these bins equate to one bin per 27 households in Olney. Additional signage is being considered to encourage dog owners who appear to be reluctant or resistant to clearing pick up after their pet.

Open space signage and Bathing Place – The new installation of open space signage enables the authorities to act on non-compliance. The Police needed these signs to be insitu so they could act.

Further actions are under consideration as part of the effort to manage the expected influx of visitors again in 2021. Keeping all safe and the environment pleasant for all.

Climate change advisory group – A recent collegiate approach from the group has been welcomed and a meeting is being set up to progress the drafting of a joint action plan for Olney.

Planning Committee – Cllr Clark wanted to make Councillors aware of a recent application for demolition of The Apple Store on East Street in Olney. The Planning Committee have had an informal presentation from the developers/landowners. Cllr Clark highlighted that this type of application is not determined by OTC and because of the state of the Apple Store building the likelihood is that the building will be demolished at some point in the near future without further public consultation. This is a legitimate process. This does not form any part of the additional application that may come in eventually on the rest of the site known as The Orchard.

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Olney Development Group – Chris Tennant updated OTC about the steering committee that meets monthly and chaired by MKC planning officers. Attendees include Taylor Wimpey, Bovis Homes and MKC Ward Cllrs, OTC, and local residents. The latest meeting took place on 26th February.

Cllr Tennant said that there has been a lot of concern regarding the lack of drainage on site. The full drainage scheme will be completed by April and there has been no further surface water run off affecting properties since the floods in December.

Also, to note that controls have been put in place to improve construction traffic routing. Construction access points, at the advice of the MKC planning officers, have allowed the development consortium to build a road that will be in place for 4 years that does not require planning permission. There is still concern raised by local residents with regards to construction traffic in and around the site. The steering Committee have asked MKC to review the decision.

Further road closures will occur on Yardley Road as water supplies to the development site are established.

There are some significant planning reforms taking place. A current consultation is causing concern in the industry about the effect for permitted change of use for retail/commercial property to residential use (Class E consultation).

Finally, Cllr Tennant highlighted changes to the National Planning Policy framework and a new model design code for development that will be rolled out across the country that will put in place standardisation of design across the new development, this is causing concern in the architectural and planning world.

Cllr Clark and Tennant advised that due to the residential interest in the development currently taking place in Olney, particularly on the Aspreys site, that they would like to submit an article in the next edition of the OTC Newsletter. The Town Clerk said that all councillors will be advised when the next cut off date for articles to be submitted is and any articles will be welcomed.

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FOLIO – Cllr Rodden thanked all of the volunteers for their hard work in supporting Olney Library. There is currently a click and collect service, and all involved are trying to get the library open as soon as it is possible to do so.

Cowper & Newton museum – Cllr Collins said that an online booking system is now in place and they have recently instigated an online shop. The museum gardens are hoping to open mid-April and then the museum building mid to late May all subject to government restrictions.

Cllr Rawlings closed the meeting at 9.17pm.

The next Olney Town Council meeting is on Monday 12th April @ 7.00pm