

Melksham Town Council

Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on Monday 25th January 2021

PRESENT: Councillor P Aves (Town Mayor)
Councillor G Mitcham (Deputy Town Mayor)
Councillor S Brown
Councillor V Fiorelli
Councillor J Hubbard
Councillor K Iles
Councillor C Jeffries
Councillor M Pain
Councillor M Sankey
Councillor T Watts
Councillor T Welch
Councillor A Westbrook
Councillor R Wiltshire

**ALSO IN
ATTENDANCE** Councillor P Alford

OFFICERS:	Jeff Mills	Locum Admin Assistant
	David McKnight	Economic Development Manager
	Patsy Clover	Assistant to the Town Clerk
	Hugh Davies	Amenities Manager
	Christine Hunter	Committee Clerk

Public Participation: Six members of the press and one member of the public were present

Councillor Fiorelli asked questions received from members of the public.

- 1) Union Street – a resident asked about the bollards on the Chicken Hut forecourt. Approximately a year ago Council agreed to provide bollards to stop parking in that area. The resident asked when this would be actioned?
- 2) A resident asked about the SIDS devices particularly relating to the Manor School area. The SIDS were installed and then disappeared. What has happened to the SIDS?

Response from Locum Assistant - the Council has had operational issues with the SIDS devices and are currently in negotiations with the supplier to resolve the situation.

- 3) A resident near to Shurnhold Fields read a published article relating to Shurnhold Fields, regarding the Town Council's equal 50/50 split for admin support with Melksham Without Parish Council. Clarification is required why the Town Council were not upholding their end of the agreement. Is this the case and, if not, will the Town Council be seeking an apology from the chair of Melksham Without Parish Council for comments in the Melksham News?

Response from Assistant Town Clerk – The Town Council had a shortage of staff last year being understaffed and two members of staff suspended. The admin team did not have the admin capacity. Since the start of 2021 the Council has been doing more than their share of admin work for Shurnhold Fields and will seek to maintain at least 50%.

- 4) King George V Park – a bench in the park only has one plank on it. The resident wanted to know if the Town Council would be replacing this shortly or is the bench going to be removed? Councillor Fiorelli to forward photos to the Assistant Town Clerk.

Response from Assistant Town Clerk - once photos had been received the Amenities Manager will organise either a repair or replacement.

A member of the public thanked the Clerk for providing costs regarding Locum workers covering suspended staff. The expenditure was £26,067 including VAT on locum costs. Questions were:

- a) How much would Council have saved if the two members of staff had not been suspended?
- b) This amount does not include additional H.R. advice costs. Could the Council provide the people of Melksham details of this cost?

It is noted that the Locum Assistant is still providing services to the Council. Could the Mayor advise:

- 1) how long will this be for?
- 2) what the projected cost is and tell the people of Melksham why his work cannot be undertaken by current staff?
- 3) Are all admin staff currently employed? There must be administrative capacity available for example within the Assembly Hall team as the hall has been closed for most of the year.

Response: Councillor Westbrook referred to an email dated 19 September 2020, when the Locum Assistant left the employment of Melksham Town Council for at least 10 days. At this time protracted discussions took place between the Town Clerk and the Economic Development Manager to ascertain whether he could return because of the amazing work done. At that time Council had suspended staff, had put 3,000 hours into Covid community response, were falling behind on many projects and nearly lost the ability to pull the East of Melksham Community Centre back. Three members of staff had not been appointed for over a year, and there were two members of staff short. The Locum Assistant staying was not because of suspension it was because there were a myriad of reasons why the Town Clerk decided that extra support was needed. The work carried out by the Locum Assistant

was very technical and specialist work. On 19 September 2020 it was always his intention to leave and he was persuaded to stay by the Clerk and the Economic Development Officer in order to support all the projects needing to be done in Melksham. The Locum Assistant has done a remarkable job and we are still well within the staffing budget. There was a cut-off date for the suspensions from 19 September 2020. Councillor Westbrook stated Council knew staff were exhausted in July there were lots of factors as to why a Locum Assistant was needed since September. Councillor Westbrook asked the member of public to take this on board.

Councillor Fiorelli responded to the question regarding additional HR costs, confirming the Council have spent approximately £12,000 this year on HR costs which is comparable to last year, and considerably less than employing a H.R. business partner at approximately £50,000 per year.

Councillor Hubbard made a correction to the 3,000 hours Councillor Westbrook reported being carried out by council staff. The majority of the work was carried out in their own time as volunteers. This needs to be recognised and Council needs to be grateful to them.

Councillor Fiorelli stated with regard to the issues last year the staff are trying very desperately to come together, move forward and to heal. It is almost like an open wound at the moment and if we keep on picking at this wound it will never heal. It is really important that our staff are given the opportunity to allow themselves as a group to move forward. Councillor Fiorelli asked what Council needs to do to give the message to the public to allow the staff to heal and not consistently bring up the same issue.

Councillor Aves confirmed the questions will formally be answered in full.

27/21 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Illman.

28/21 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

29/21 Budget Update from Wiltshire Council

Councillor Alford provided an update on Wiltshire Council's 2021-2022 budget which proposes a 2% increase on a band D property and a 3% increase on the Social Care levy.

30/21 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2021 having previously been circulated, were agreed as a correct record, subject to councillor Hubbard's request to include the friendly amendment with the original resolution under

agenda item 18/21. It was agreed that the minutes would be signed by the Town Mayor, Councillor Aves at a later date.

31/21 Budget Proposal

Councillors Reviewed the budget proposal for 2021-2022.

The following options to reduce budget expenditure further and so reduce the precept increase were proposed:

- The sports roadshow – remove at a saving of £3,000
- Market Place toilets – reduce expenditure by £3,000 to £17,000
- Arts Project – reduce expenditure by £2,000 to £1,000
- Equipment – reduce expenditure by £3,200 to £21,000
- Use of the £21,000 projected budget surplus for the current financial year to offset the proposed expenditure on equipment for the Amenities Team

A staffing review of the Assembly Hall Team and the Amenities Team was proposed by Councillor Hubbard and the viability of some staff roles within the council questioned. The possibility of redundancies through staffing rationalisation was also raised. However, Councillor Welch was anxious to emphasise that staff were the Council's most important resource.

Concerns over the viability of the Assembly Hall as a venue in the long-term were also raised in view of the impact of Covid 19 and the subsidies being provided by the Council already.

Councillor Hubbard highlighted the dangers of using the major projects reserve, general reserve and the precept support fund to prop up the budget for the coming year.

Councillor Wiltshire expressed his preference for a budget with zero increase to the precept. It was pointed out that the percentage increases being proposed resulted in very small annual monetary increases.

The creation of a separate Business Review Working Group to review all staffing costs through a series of exercises, with an aim of making a saving of £100,000 in 2021-2022, was considered.

It was proposed by Councillor Aves and seconded by Councillor Pain to accept the current 2021-2022 budget proposal. However, Councillor Hubbard proposed an amendment to Councillor Aves proposal.

It was proposed by Councillor Hubbard, seconded by Councillor Wiltshire, with a request for the vote to be recorded, that Melksham Town Council amalgamate the Facilities and Amenities Teams and look to find a rationalisation saving of £100,000 on the 2021-2022 budget. The vote was as follows:

Councillor	For	Against	Abstain
Pat Aves		X	
Sue Brown	X		
Vanessa Fiorelli		X	
Jon Hubbard	X		
Kathy Iles		X	
Clive Jeffries		X	
Geoff Mitcham		X	
Martin Pain		X	
Mike Sankey	X		
Tony Watts		X	
Terri Welch		X	
Adrienne Westbrook		X	
Richard Wiltshire	X		
TOTALS	4	9	

The Assistant to the Town Clerk confirmed the motion had fallen.

32/21 **2021-2022 Budget**

It was proposed by Councillor Westbrook, seconded by Councillor Pain with a request for a recorded.

RESOLVED to use the combined total of Solar Farm monies and CIL funding (£57,000) to contribute towards the cost of the new play area in KGV and to delay the planned improvements to Primrose/Dorset and Riverside play areas.

Councillor	For	Against	Abstain
Pat Aves	X		
Sue Brown		X	
Vanessa Fiorelli	X		
Jon Hubbard		X	
Kathy Iles	X		
Clive Jeffries	X		
Geoff Mitcham	X		
Martin Pain	X		
Mike Sankey		X	
Tony Watts	X		
Terri Welch	X		
Adrienne Westbrook	X		
Richard Wiltshire		X	
TOTALS	9	4	

RESOLVED to approve the use of the General Reserve up to £38,000 to support the budget.

Councillor	For	Against	Abstain
Pat Aves	X		
Sue Brown		X	
Vanessa Fiorelli	X		
Jon Hubbard	X		
Kathy Iles	X		
Clive Jeffries	X		
Geoff Mitcham	X		
Martin Pain	X		
Mike Sankey		X	
Tony Watts	X		
Terri Welch	X		
Adrienne Westbrook	X		
Richard Wiltshire		X	
TOTALS	10	3	

RESOLVED to approve the use of the major projects reserve up to £42,000 to support the budget

Councillor	For	Against	Abstain
Pat Aves	X		
Sue Brown		X	
Vanessa Fiorelli	X		
Jon Hubbard		X	
Kathy Iles	X		
Clive Jeffries	X		
Geoff Mitcham	X		
Martin Pain	X		
Mike Sankey		X	
Tony Watts	X		
Terri Welch	X		
Adrienne Westbrook	X		
Richard Wiltshire		X	
TOTALS	9	4	

RESOLVED to approve the budget for 2021/2022 and resolve to set a precept of £918,750

Councillor	For	Against	Abstain
Pat Aves	X		
Sue Brown		X	
Vanessa Fiorelli	X		
Jon Hubbard		X	

Kathy Iles	X		
Clive Jeffries	X		
Geoff Mitcham	X		
Martin Pain	X		
Mike Sankey		X	
Tony Watts	X		
Terri Welch	X		
Adrienne Westbrook	X		
Richard Wiltshire		X	
TOTALS	9	4	

33/21 Financial Risk Assessment and Reserves Policy

Councillor Pain requested an amendment be made to the Financial Risk Assessment.

It was proposed by Councillor Westbrook, seconded by Councillor Aves and

RESOLVED that consideration of the Financial Risk Assessment and Reserves Policy should be deferred until the return of the RFO in order to obtain a clearer understanding of the legal implications for the Council.

34/21 Payments

It was proposed by Councillor Aves, seconded by Councillor Welch and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to approve the payments schedule.

35/21 Accounts

Council noted the Accounts as at December 2020.

36/21 Detailed Income & Expenditure Report as at 31 December 2020

Councillors noted the detailed income and Expenditure report as at 31 December 2021.

37/21 Monthly Financial Statements

38/21 Asset Management Committee Minutes

The minutes of the Asset Management Committee held on 14 December 2020 were noted.

39/21 Shurnhold Fields Working Party

40/21 Shurnhold Fields Working Party Notes

The notes of the Shurnhold Fields Working Party meeting held on 14 January 2021 were received.

41/21 Shurnhold Fields Working Party Terms of reference

It was proposed by Councillor Westbrook, seconded by Councillor Aves and

RESOLVED to approve the items to be included in the Shurnhold Fields Working Party Terms of Reference.

42/21 Shurnhold Fields Working Party Recommendations

The Assistant to the Town Clerk confirmed that the original spreadsheet was distributed to Councillors before the revised quote for the access works, which reduced the expenditure to approximately £4,500 to be split equally between Melksham Town Council and Melksham Without Parish Council.

However, using approximately £21,000 from the Open Space Maintenance Fund and the consequences for additional expenditure needed to be considered. The Assistant to the Town Clerk stated that the revised spreadsheet would be distributed, once the precise works to be carried out had been established and accurate costs obtained.

It was proposed by Councillor Westbrook, seconded by Councillor Hubbard and:

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to defer consideration of this agenda item until receipt of up to date, accurate information from the Shurnhold Fields Working Party.

43/21 Confidential Session

It was proposed by Councillor Aves, seconded by Councillor Fiorelli and

RESOLVED: that in view of the confidential nature of the information to be discussed, and the implications thereof, that the press and public be instructed to withdraw.

44/21 Job Retention Scheme

Councillors discussed the Job Retention Scheme and reviewed the advice given by the Council's advisers.

It was proposed by Councillor Westbrook, seconded by Councillor Pain, incorporating a 'friendly amendment' by Councillor Hubbard's and:

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED the Job Retention Scheme should be utilised for some of the Assembly Hall Team.

45/21 Neighbourhood Plan Draft Minutes

The draft minutes of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group meetings held on the following dates were received:

- 25 August 2020
- 23 September 2020
- 21 October 2020
- 25 November 2020

46/21 Neighbourhood Plan Recommendations

The recommendations and resolutions from the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group meetings held on 25 August 2020, 23 September 2020, 21 October 2020 and 25 November 2020 were received and noted.

47/21 Date and Time of Next Meeting

1 March 2021 at 7.00 pm via Zoom.

Meeting Closed at: 10.02 pm

Signed:

Dated: