

## **Melksham Town Council**

### **Minutes of the Extra-Ordinary Full Council meeting held on Monday 9th August 2021**

**PRESENT:** Councillor J Hubbard (Town Mayor)  
Councillor C Goodhind (Deputy Town Mayor)  
Councillor P Alford  
Councillor P Aves  
Councillor G Cooke  
Councillor J Crundell  
Councillor S Crundell  
Councillor G Ellis  
Councillor C Forgacs  
Councillor C Houghton  
Councillor L Lewis  
Councillor S Mortimer  
Councillor J Oatley  
Councillor T Price  
Councillor S Rabey

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillor M Sankey, Wiltshire Councillor

<b>OFFICERS:</b>	Patsy Clover	Assistant to the Town Clerk
	Jeff Mills	Head of Communications
	Christine Hunter	Committee Clerk

**Public Participation:** Thirty-Seven members of the public and two members of the press were present

#### **174/21 Apologies**

No apologies were received.

#### **175/21 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **176/21 Minutes**

Councillor Price requested that the recording of the meeting held on 19 July 2021 be checked for accuracy. Minute item 173/21, recorded the vote as being proposed by the Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard, and seconded by the Deputy Town Mayor, Councillor Goodhind. However, Councillor Price believed that

Councillor Aves had proposed the motion and it had been seconded Councillor Price.

Following the possible amendment to Minute item 173/21, the minutes of 19 July 2021 were approved as a correct record and were signed by the Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard.

## **177/21 Assembly Hall**

At 7.10 pm the Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard suspended the meeting due to Zoom issues.

At 7.16 pm the Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard re-instated the meeting.

Adrienne Westbrook reported that a petition to save the Assembly Hall had been started by Chris Holden.

Robin Henderson stated that an informed decision could not be made regarding the figures in the report because of the way they were presented. He suggested that a series of tables be produced to provide a detailed analysis indicating which events made a profit.

Ben Fenlon from the Melksham Independent News commented:

1. how can this council make an open, honest and transparent decision about the future of the Assembly Hall when it has already chosen to make the role of Facilities Manager redundant?
2. the decision to make the Facilities Manager redundant, prior to the discussions tonight, gives members of the public the impression that councillors have already agreed the future of the Assembly Hall behind closed doors - and that the discussions tonight are an empty gesture.
3. would it have not made more sense to do things the other way around i.e. decide the future of the Assembly Hall and then discuss its staffing needs?
4. by removing the Assembly Hall's Manager, you're already limiting the options you have for the hall.
5. why has there been no consultation with the public? This Council talks about wanting to be responsible with how it spends taxpayers' money, but does not allow them a say in how the money is spent.

The Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard, replied that:

- the decision regarding the Facilities Manager's role was made by the Business Review Working Group and approved by Council.
- the condition of the Assembly Hall presented challenges and it may be necessary for all of the options to go to the community for a decision. Last

year the community contributed £48 per household towards the Assembly Hall running costs as part of the precept.

- members of the public need the opportunity to have their say in the Assembly Hall's future.
- the closure of the Blue Pool may affect the future of the Assembly Hall.

Pauline Baker suggested that the marketing and range of events at the Assembly Hall needed to be improved. Currently, she believed that it was not fit for purpose. However, she felt that there may be ways to raise funds to help pay for improvements. She believed that there are few events in the town for older people.

Joe McCann asked if the Council thought they had “jumped the gun” in letting staff go before deciding on the future of the Assembly Hall or is the Council happy with the decision made?

The Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard, felt that it was inappropriate to discuss individual staffing roles at a Council meeting, and that factors including the financial situation inherited, substantial losses because of Covid, and opportunities in the immediate future had been considered.

Paul Seemayer referred to a report he had prepared recommending the retention of the Assembly Hall. He agreed to his report being included in the agenda of the Full Council meeting in September.

William Richards of West Wiltshire Model Car Club spoke on behalf of the Club. The Club had used the hall for 16 years, raised money for local charities and had connections to the local community. If the Assembly Hall was mothballed or closed, their racing club would have to close.

Jason Reeves asked the Council to consider the real value of the Assembly Hall, not just the financial value; the Assembly Hall is the heart of the town.

Rosie Berry stated that the Arts Society had been using the Assembly Hall for 30 years and that it brought added value and business to the town.

Councillor Ellis stated that the Assembly Hall brought people to the town and boosted the economy. However, he recognised it had not been profitable for some time and people outside Melksham were benefiting from the support provided by the Town Council. Councillor Ellis believed that he had a list of volunteers who would be willing to help run the Assembly Hall.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard, and seconded by Councillor Ellis:

to defer further discussion on the future of Melksham Assembly Hall to the Full Council meeting to be held on 27 September 2021; it is not and will not be the

intention of this Council to mothball/close the Assembly Hall. After the September Full Council meeting the decision not to close the Assembly Hall will remain.

Councillor Aves requested a recorded vote which was as follows:

Councillor	Absent	For	Against	Abstain
Alford		X		
Aves		X		
Cooke		X		
Crundell J		X		
Crundell S		X		
Ellis		X		
Forgacs		X		
Goodhind		X		
Houghton		X		
Hubbard		X		
Lewis		X		
Mortimer		X		
Oatley		X		
Price		X		
Rabey		X		
Totals	0	15	0	0

The Assistant to the Town Clerk confirmed that the vote was **UNANIMOUSLY** carried.

At 8.12 pm the Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard, suspended the meeting due to Zoom issues.

At 8.17 pm the Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard, re-convened the meeting.

## **178/21 Questions from Councillors**

Councillor Alford asked the following:

‘During August, many members and residents are on leave having booked time away with their family. Traditionally, councils scale back their meetings to accommodate this. In the past three weeks two Extra-Ordinary Full Council meetings have been called with little notice. This does not allow time for members to reschedule or plan to be available. This in turn means that the voice of the residents they represent is not being adequately heard. The most recent meeting regarding the Assembly Hall is not time sensitive and could have waited until September so why was it felt that residents and councillors should have been inconvenienced and potentially excluded at such short notice?’

The Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard, confirmed that the Council had made the decision not to scale back summer meetings several years ago. This evening’s Extra-Ordinary meeting was called because of the response deadline for the Melksham By-pass consultation.

The Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard, explained that the Assembly Hall agenda item had been moved from the Asset Management and Amenities Committee meeting agenda on 2 August 2021, as that had been a very full agenda.

#### **179/21 Melksham Bypass Consultation Response**

The Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard, suggested that the discussion be split into two sections:

- a) a general discussion of the perceived pros and cons of the by-pass including the level of support from Councillors and
- b) the Council’s proposed mitigations and community benefit should the proposed bypass route “10c” proceed.

Opportunities:

- traffic congestion in the town centre and to the north of the town by McDonalds would be reduced.
- HGV traffic to the North and South of Melksham would be diverted out of the town to the by-pass.
- shorter journeys from the north of Melksham (A350) and east of Melksham moving traffic onto new routes.
- reduced use of Woodrow and Lacock Roads as ‘shortcuts’ to Lacock.
- the speed of local traffic flow would improve.
- decreased traffic noise and pollution for the residents of Beanacre Road.
- a positive impact for residents.
- the town would continue to grow and improve and infrastructure would be required.
- improved access to Melksham Oak School.
- the Primary Transport objectives set out in the consultation document supported housing on the A350 corridor.
- there would be an additional crossing over the River Avon.

- the proposed bridge at Lower Woodrow would support cycle routes and aid access to existing bridleways and footpaths.

#### Challenges:

- the by-pass needed to be sustainable in the longer term – would it be required in 20/30 years' time?
- would the by-pass be used as approximately 50% of journeys are less than five miles in distance?
- the effect of the by-pass on some rural businesses.
- Sandridge Road traffic would increase.
- there may not be as much traffic post Covid. Evidence of future traffic volume and flow should be obtained.
- destruction of habitats and agricultural land would affect climate change
- destruction of environment and green spaces – Environmental/Agricultural Impact Assessments should be carried out before the proposal progresses further.
- there is not enough information available to prove it would make an improvement.
- public perception is that other route options have not been taken into account as only one route has been made available for consultation.
- the canal would be cut off from the town by the by-pass.
- how would re-routing the by-ways work?
- local residents would take the shorter route through town if the existing A350 isn't de-restricted.
- the detrimental effect on wildlife, habitats and the destruction of hedgerows.
- changes are being made to the Highway Code to support cycling and walking, and proposed changes to public transport have not been taken into account.
- the effect of the by-pass on Melksham town needs to be investigated further.
- options should continue to be explored regarding mitigation of the route.
- Fossil fuel burning will be in place longer than 2025.
- if the bypass is built on the proposed route it will affect SHELAA sites in the Joint Neighbourhood Plan making them less attractive to developers.
- could the route be amended to make it shorter?

The Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard, called for a straw poll of all those who supported moving route "10c" forward as the proposed by-pass route. The results were: 8 votes for, 7 votes against.

#### Mitigations and Community Benefits

The following were proposed in mitigation of the proposed route and as community benefits:

- an appropriate bund along the length of the by-pass to screen the bypass and to reduce noise.
- significant tree planting along the length with a variety of native species and enhancements for hedgerows etc.
- installation of a green bridge from Bowerhill to Giles Wood
- the bridge over Clackers Brook is to be built wide enough to cope with flooding.
- areas of land for tree planting to be purchased instead of housing development (where the by-pass is closer to Bowerhill).
- improvement of pedestrian and cycling access into the town, the train station, improved access near the underpass, improved pedestrian access for residents near Clackers Brook.
- future-proofing the road by incorporating a clear segmented cycle route alongside the length of the by-pass to encourage greener transport and become a part of the cycle route network.
- installation of wildlife crossings and deer fencing in areas with a high wildlife population.
- installation of a cycle way near the A350 near Asda.
- provision of access from the back of the station car park behind Spencer Sports and Social Club and across the A350 to Scotland Road.
- installation of two bridges over the bypass to maintain the circular walk from Locking Close to the Canal and back to Brabazon Way.
- installation of nature reserves near the by-pass.
- planting of trees and creation of banks either side of the by-pass near Redstock to mitigate noise and reduce the impact of light pollution.
- installation of a car park near Sandridge Hill to replace the one being removed.

#### **180/21 Shurnhold Fields Working Group**

It was proposed by the Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard, seconded by Councillor Aves and

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** to appoint the following members to the Shurnhold Fields Working Group: Councillors Alford, Houghton and Rabey.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard, seconded by Councillor Alford and

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** to appoint Councillor Rabey as the Town Council representative on the Friends of Shurnhold Fields Group.

#### **181/21 Redecoration of the Town Hall**

The following items needed to be budgeted for as part of the project:

- redecoration

- sash windows
- carpet
- electrical works

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor Hubbard, seconded by Councillor Rabey and

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk be delegated authority to arrange for the redecoration of the Main Hall with a budget of up to £10,000 funded from the unplanned maintenance budget. Should the inclusion of redecoration of the sash windows bring the cost in at more than £10,000, the project must be brought back to Full Council.

**182/21 Garden Sharing Scheme**

The report of the Community Development Officer was noted.

The Town Mayor, Councillor Hubbard, explained that the Town Council are being asked to promote the scheme by Lend and Tend, an external organisation who run the scheme, and so no decision is required by Council.

Meeting Closed at: 9.57 pm

**Signed:** .....

**Dated:**