

## **Melksham Town Council**

### **Minutes of the Extraordinary Full Council meeting held on Tuesday 28th March 2023**

#### **PRESENT:**

Councillor S Crundell (Town Mayor)  
Councillor S Mortimer (Deputy Town Mayor)  
Councillor P Alford  
Councillor P Aves  
Councillor G Cooke  
Councillor J Crundell  
Councillor C Forgacs  
Councillor C Goodhind  
Councillor C Houghton  
Councillor J Oatley  
Councillor T Price  
Councillor S Rabey

#### **OFFICERS:**

Linda Roberts

Town Clerk

#### **474/22 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Ellis, Hubbard and Lewis.

#### **475/22 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Alford declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 5, Melksham House as a dual hatted Member of Melksham Town Council and Wiltshire Council.

#### **476/22 Investment Strategy - Revised**

It was proposed by the Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell, seconded by Councillor Oatley and

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** to approve the Financial Risk Assessment and Reserves Policy.

#### **477/22 Financial Risk Assessment & Reserves Policy**

The Deputy Town Mayor, Councillor Mortimer requested that on page 6 of the Financial Risk Assessment it states all monies will be locked in the safe and banked on the next working day.

Subject to the amendment it was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor S Crundell, seconded by Councillor Oatley and

**RESOLVED** to approve the Financial Risk Assessment.

**478/22 Motion from the town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell Melksham House**

Councillor Rabey expressed concern that no information had been circulated in advance and the motion should be taken off the table and members given time to read and digest the motion.

Councillor Alford – as a town councillor and Melksham resident, stated that the building has deeply rooted history in the town with memories of weddings and many other functions and it is an integral part of Melksham's social fabric. Adding that it was an Avon Tyres social facility. Councillor Alford suggested that the town council should be chomping at the bit to purchase the facility, that the size of investment with zero carbon running costs and energy efficiency meant any investment was more than worth its value. We need to approach Wiltshire Council; however, they may by now have found an alternative use for the building. Notwithstanding that, it would be insane not try and make a bid for the building, we have all known for some time about the plight of Melksham House.

The town council should seize this opportunity, it would be crazy not to secure it for the community. There is enough space for our officers and a community hall to accommodate events. We should know shortly where Wiltshire Council are in terms of disposal. The Asset disposal team have gone through the process internally and an organisation has expressed an interest. A business plan will be required which will be assessed by Wiltshire Council. If the town council does not stake a claim the building will be lost.

Councillor Price said that a decision at this meeting would be difficult, we have not had a chance to speak to residents and as the information was only available some twenty minutes ago making such a huge decision on the hoof is not right or fair and not the way the council should run.

Councillor Goodhind reported that he would not have any trouble supporting the motion in conjunction with the survey on the Assembly Hall and discussing it with residents and would have no trouble selling the decision to any resident who wants to discuss it. So no hesitation to support.

Councillor Mortimer referring to Councillor Alford's reminder that the council knew it was going to happen stated that residents are ecstatic at the thought of keeping the facility although it would need a bar and kitchen facilities. In answer to a question from Councillor Mortimer, Councillor Alford stated that it could hold 150 people.

A do nothing option would mean closure of the Assembly Hall which needs some extensive work and maintenance carried out.

Councillor Aves sympathised with how the town might feel, it is a big decision and supported going ahead. At the time of the offer the town council should make requests for elements that are currently missing to make it a great facility.

Councillor Houghton suggested the town council could explore the option of purchasing but not commit to spend £2 million yet. There will have to be further public consultation but we should not miss out on a potential opportunity.

Councillor Cooke asked if the Assembly Hall would be part of the purchase? Going on to state that the lack of information at the meeting is hampering a good debate but Melksham House is paramount to Melksham and it should be kept for the town. It has a lot of potential which the town council could benefit from and it can be utilised by the council and the community. It is likely that the Assembly Hall will require a closure of at least two years whilst it is refurbished. There is space behind Melksham House so it would see a natural place to relocate to an equivalent building as the Assembly Hall.

Councillor J Crundell agreed that the future of Melksham House has been on the cards for some time and asked Council, was this going to be something else the town council does nothing about?

The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell reported that we should make a positive step to secure the community asset that is Melksham House, for the community of Melksham. As had been stated the Assembly Hall will have to close at some point, for possibly two years whilst it is refurbished, Councillor Crundell then reminded members that this council had previously resolved that it would always provide a 'village hall' type venue for the community and the town council now has a golden opportunity and should not let it pass by.

Councillor Rabey advised that she would be abstaining from the vote. Councillor Alford advised there is still some way to go. Councillor Price added that not many residents are interested in Melksham House. The working group should complete a business plan. Councillor Cooke

remarked that it is the best choice, whilst not ideal a small percentage would use Melksham House and everyone should have a choice.

Councillor Alford advised council that some organisations had already expressed an interest and any price offered to Wiltshire Council should be subject to a RICS valuation.

Councillor Price sought clarity on what commitment the town council were making. Are we financially tying ourselves in. Councillor Alford stated not at this stage we would be entering negotiations for the purchase of Melksham House. Those negotiations could be complex and long winded to satisfy the requirements of the town council and Wiltshire Council. The Town council must consult with residents.

Councillor Rabey asked at what point would the town council be fully committed and how would any loan be repaid which might be required for the purchase of Melksham House; would it require an increase in the precept and what is the impact on a Band D?

It was suggested that a public works loan of £2million over 40 years would mean repayments of £100,000 per year. The impact on a Band D increase would be approximately £15.00 per year.

Councillor Houghton suggested that all negotiations up until the exchange of contracts would be without commitment to the purchase.

It was **RESOLVED** to suspend Standing Orders to allow the public to address Council.

Joe McCann (JM), Melksham Independent News - Will the town council still refurbish the Assembly Hall and buy Melksham House?

The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell advised that the town council have uses for the Assembly Hall.

(JM) How advanced are negotiations?

Not advanced at all, the town council has submitted an expression of interest in Melksham House but there have been no further discussions with Wiltshire Council nor negotiations.

Standing Orders were reinstated.

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

**RESOLVED** that the council enters negotiations with Wiltshire Council and makes an offer to Wiltshire Council for the purchase of Melksham House, setting a limit of not less than £2,000,000. The offer to be subject to a full Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) valuation.

#### **479/22 Motion to Council Melksham House (1)**

#### **480/22 Motion from Councillor Houghton - Dog Park - King George V Playing Field**

Councillor Houghton advised there had been no improvements to the Dog Park since it was established in 2021 when the town council pledged to upgrade the dog park with equipment. The dog park left as it is it not a dog run so strictly it is not a good dog park we have an opportunity to improve it from existing funds to make it more dog and family.

The idea of the dog park was to deter people from allowing their dogs off leads in the main park and the motion is seeking a commitment to invest £20K on dog agility equipment.

Councillor Rabey reminded council, in the capacity of Chair of Parks Working Group that a review of all play areas and parks in the town was to be carried out looking at areas for improvement. Councillor Rabey went on to state that some of the towns play parks are in a dire condition and funding has been set aside to improve the play areas

and the dog agility area is not a priority and it is important to improve facilities to make them safer for children.

The dog park does need to be thoroughly cleaned and tidied up and some water stations need to be installed.

Councillor Price suggested that as it was the only dog run in the area any improvements would be beneficial to many residents and it should be a priority.

Councillor J Crundell agreed with the motion adding that we should make provision for dog owners. Councillor Aves stated that any improvements to the dog park will benefit pet owners and looked forward to seeing another part of the park completed.

Councillor Oatley advised that he was torn spending £20K on dog equipment when there is a cost of living crisis but agreed the area required a good tidy up, it was near the entrance to the park and the area should be more welcoming.

Councillor Mortimer was not sure that the dog agility equipment would mean less dogs in the main park. It may mean more dogs and some children will not use the park when there are dogs off lead advising that she could not support the motion.

Concern was raised about any effect the agility area might have on private facilities. It was reported that the nearest comparable facility was in Frome. The town council's facility would be a free facility which was not supervised which would be different to a private chargeable facility.

Councillor Houghton reminded members that the council had made the decision to turn the old play area into a dog park and that it required investment. There is evidence that agility facilities can improve dogs' social skills and help owner's mental health.

Councillor Oatley suggested that the area needed to be landscaped and saw that one of the quotes had imposed some landscaping onto their drawings adding that it would make a great improvement. Councillor Cooke stated that any equipment would need to be able to withstand the flooding which occurs in the area.

The town council should check what progress is being made by the Environment Agency on flood mitigation works on Clackers Brook.

Councillor Houghton made it clear that the motion was not prioritising dogs over children.

Councillor Alford remarked that the council cannot keep using the cost of living crisis to stop projects. Councillor Price acknowledged the debate but reminded members that there was funding in reserves and that the town council should get behind the project which and provide a facility for residents to enjoy with their dogs.

It was proposed by Councillor Houghton, seconded by the Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell and

**RESOLVED** to allocate no more than £20,000 for the installation of a Dog Agility Area.

**481/22 Quote A**

The quote was noted

**482/22 Quote B**

The quote was noted.

**483/22 Quote C**

The quote was noted.

**484/22 Quote D**

The quote was noted.

**485/22 Coronation Events - Budget**

The proposed budget for the Coronation celebrations was approved and it was proposed by Councillor Oatley, seconded by Councillor Aves and

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** to vire the budget set aside for the grant to Party in the Park (due to the cancellation) to the Coronation budget.

**486/22 Confidential Session**

**487/22 Claim against SG Manufacturing (SIDS)**

Members discussed the claim and noted that the town council had been successful in seeking a judgment.

**488/22 Advice from Town Council's Solicitor**

The correspondence and advice from the Town Council's solicitor was noted.

**489/22 Judgment against SG Manufacturing**

**490/22 Correspondence from Town Council's solicitor to SG Manufacturing following the Judgment**

Councillor Rabey advised that she had experience in CCJ's and the proposed course of action was approved.

Meeting Closed at: 9.30 pm

**Signed:** .....

Dated: 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023