

Melksham Town Council

Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on Monday 17th July 2023

PRESENT:

Councillor S Crundell (Town Mayor)
Councillor S Mortimer
Councillor P Alford
Councillor P Aves
Councillor J Crundell
Councillor G Ellis
Councillor C Goodhind
Councillor J Hubbard
Councillor J Oatley
Councillor J Westbrook

IN ATTENDANCE: 7 members of the Public
1 member of the Public virtually
1 Press

OFFICERS: Heather Parks Locum

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Natasha Gardner spoke on item 12.1 Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy.

‘I would like to ask that you consider the sincerity of this proposal, Section 8 states Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct & uphold the Civility & Respect Pledge 2022. I question if this proposal & section 8 applies to officers also?’

Is this proposal to protect you online or is it to silence those of you who keep the lines of communication open to keep the residents informed? If sincere, officers need to conduct themselves properly first before dictating to you, as councillors who do your work voluntarily for the residents of Melksham.’

A Westbrook – online, asked a question about the Parks Working Group. ‘There do not appear to be any minutes available on the website. When did they last meet? Why are there no minutes? The desktop optimization for the website is poor and it does not appear to be accessible.’

J McCann MIN – outlined that he had put a question to Councillor Goodhind about CCTV and so far had not received an answer – Councillor Goodhind did respond that he needed another couple of days to deal with this.

549/23 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Cooke, Forgacs, Price and Rabey

550/23 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Goodhind declared that the quotation in item 10 on the agenda related to his son's company but this was not a pecuniary interest and he would stay in the room and take part in the debate.

551/23 Questions from Councillors

Councillor Hubbard had submitted one question in five parts to the Town Clerk:

1a) Please could the Clerk confirm the total number of staff who have left the employment of the council, for whatever reason, in the last 18 months?

A. 7 with one dismissal.

1b) Of this number could the Clerk please confirm how many of these staff have subsequently raised employment tribunal appeals?

A. 2

1c) Could the Clerk inform me if any settlement offers have been made, should the answer to the above question be in the positive, and if so how many offers and what total value?

A. There have been no settlements agreed

1d) should the answer to 1b be positive could the Clerk confirm If any settlement offer(s) has/have been accepted?

A. N/A

1e) Could the Clerk please provide a detailed breakdown of the costs that made up the legal overspend in the council year 2022-2023 – see table below.

In the nominal ledger, Code Centre 110 Corporate/4050 Legal Costs

Name	£
Budget	500.00
Wellers law Group Methuen	845.50
Henry Aldridge Insurance Valuation	450.00
Wellers Law Group SIDS	708.33
Trade UK Arrears letter	15.00
Legals Cricketers Café	850.00
Legals S G mfg	350.00
Land Registry Search	6.00
Consultation Pavilion n.b. investigate whether this should be in this coding.	3000.00
Legal Spiritualist Garden	637.50
Legals BR Toilets	600.00
Legals SIDS	295.00
East Melksham topography	895.00
Bath BR Toilets	5.00
DPs Xmas Fayre	23.00
Credit – reversed journal	-800.00
Total	7880.33

552/23 Minutes

Councillor Goodhind wanted it to be minuted that he was not able to look at the recording of the meeting held on 26th June 2023 because it had been taken down within 24 hours, from social media. I wanted to be absolutely certain what had taken place.

Councillor Ellis said he would abstain from the vote. I am raising my concerns about the recording not being available. 'I like to check back and it was unusual for it to be taken down.'

Councillor Hubbard 'it is a policy of this council for the meeting to be published live and available. Councillors would like to review as an aide memoir because we can. I'm not going to vote against the minutes but who has made a decision to change the policy without giving an explanation?'

It was proposed by Councillor Aves that the minutes of 26th June 2023, having previously been circulated, were approved as a correct record, seconded Councillor Oatley and to be signed by the Town Mayor, Councillor Simon Crundell.

There was a recorded vote on this item:

Councillor S Crundell – For
Councillor Mortimer – For
Councillor Aves – For
Councillor Alford – For
Councillor Ellis – Abstain
Councillor Goodhind – Abstain
Councillor Hubbard – For
Councillor Oatley – For
Councillor J Crundell – For
Councillor Westbrook – Abstain

Total: For 7 Against Nil Abstain 3

553/23 Town Mayor's Announcements

A warm welcome was extended to newly elected Councillor Jennie Westbrook, who was in attendance at her inaugural meeting.

The Mayor wished to extend a thank you to the Assembly Hall Team who had managed the BBC's Any Questions event on Friday night. The event was a real success and showed Melksham in its best light.

554/23 Police Report

Members received an update report from Sgt Gemma Rutter and she spoke to the detail included in the agenda pack.

Councillors had questions relating to the data which were answered and we were reminded that the figures do include Swindon.

Councillor Alford asked about modern slavery. 30 sites had been visited in the area recently, no problems were identified and what the police did find, was employers displaying clear help and advice particularly on building sites. Information packs for those who did not have relevant material were provided.

Councillor J Crundell thanked the police for their help at the Friends of Melksham Hospital Summer fete.

The junior good Citizens programme has been delivered to year 5 & 6 Pupils which has been very rewarding.

Sgt Rutter outlined their focus for the summer:

Promote a town centre Shop Watch initiative, similar to Pub Watch using radios, to support driving down business crime and theft, using closer and clearer communication.

A spate of shoplifting meant that four juveniles were arrested. 'We don't like to arrest juveniles, but serious situations do mean we have to.'

The police have received complaints about the shopping precinct area which is going to take longer to fix.

It was suggested that the town council make an application for a 'No Alcohol Zone' for this area. A number of males drinking and being loud and intimidating, whilst utilising the benches, is making it difficult for regular users. The police are going to need assistance from multi agencies to remedy this issue.

Members wanted to know how a no alcohol zone would work? Would it create more work? Does it have an impact?

The issues are appearing during the day, there is not a problem at night.

Standing Orders were suspended at 7.40pm to allow a question from the press.

'You have more PCOS's than police, is a no alcohol enforceable by PCSO's? Yes, if the legislation is written properly.

Standing Orders were re-instated at 7.42pm.

Speeding and road safety in Bowerhill.

Sgt Rutter was thanked for her attendance and she left the meeting at 7.43pm.

555/23 Reports from Unitary Councillors

Members received an update from Councillors Alford, Oatley and Hubbard on the following matters affecting Melksham which had been discussed at Wiltshire Council meetings:

Local Plan Review 18th July 2023 WC Full Council

The plan and suggestions for Melksham were highlighted. Three allocations, Melksham East, houses and environmental enhancements. Five hectares of employment land and two schools.

The vote is to support the plan but the next phase is public consultation, before going to the planning inspector.

Large development led plans are the best way to get CIL monies which gives opportunities to put infrastructure in place.

Capital Program – £10M earmarked for housing from the authority, 75% additional money borrowed, which gives a pot of £40M to build 250 homes for people with specific needs. This housing is for those where a need isn't met by present affordable homes.

30 homes acquired for refugees and these are moving through conveyancing.

Councillor Oatley advised that funds are in the budget to complete the path by Melksham Oak which should be completed by 2024.

Councillor Hubbard attended the LGA conference recently. NALC held group discussions on tier three councils and the level of delegation of services to be delivered by Towns and Parishes.

Potential changes to councillor training and clerks maybe having a different role in the future.

Children and Family Services - WC will be adopting a family hub model, delivering children's services through centres. A single provider for ages -9 months – 18. Delivered through community buildings, for Melksham, the Campus, with all information available in one place.

School Contributions – the declining birth-rate is lowering the contributions made from Section 106 monies received with new development. Schools need to demonstrate a need for places before developers will give a contribution. A real challenge for small rural school. Towns were no development taking place can't get investment.

556/23 Melksham Gate - Hydropower System Feasibility Study

The feasibility study report was received by members. The report is finished and its findings are open for discussion.

A general discussion took place on options to move this forward and use the report to establish what might be possible for future delivery in Melksham.

Wiltshire wildlife Trust have a partner organisation who are specialising in Carbon Neutral Energy – would this be something to pass onto them?

What about working with the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust?

It was pointed out that the picture on page 7 shows a car park that is no longer there, could this be fed back to the authors.

Overall it was felt that MTC should not be the lead for this project but keen to share the information.

The report would be discussed at the next Flood Group meeting on 27th July and any comments brought back to council.

It was proposed by Councillor S Crundell, seconded Councillor Hubbard and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to share the report with Wiltshire Wildlife Energy, and any agent who takes on the Avon site.

557/23 Local Plan

Councillor Hubbard reiterated that the Local Plan was expected to be adopted at WC on 18th July and this will be followed by further consultation. Advantages of plan led development are huge and hopefully this will bring in the infrastructure needed.

The frustration on the non-provision of GP surgeries and dentists which did not seem to come with all the proposed development was evident and it was accepted that the lack of practitioners was a factor.

The Local Plan was **NOTED**

558/23 Motion to update CCTV

Councillor Goodhind's motion issued in the agenda and supported by Councillor Mortimer, requested funding of £3,245 to add more equipment to the CCTV provision. Questions were raised about £10k spent on equipment recently which has still not been delivered to the council and protocols have not been followed.

Discussions seemingly had taken place with outside agencies about the provision of mobile cameras which had not been agreed with council. However Councillor Goodhind outlined that he had waited for over a year to purchase these and now had got things moving. The cameras have been on test, being set up in a private area but he would ensure these are back at the council offices within two days.

It was agreed that the council wanted to have the right kit in place but adding more equipment like this is piecemeal and overall this project needs work.
The council needs a vision.

Councillor Goodhind withdrew his motion.

Councillor Hubbard proposed, seconded Councillor Aves

That as a matter of urgency, officers meet with the police and experts to bring a fully costed report back to council with a vision of a CCTV system so that a plan can be considered and the council can decide if we progress the system or not. This should be prepared by 31st December 2023.

A recorded vote was requested:

Councillor S Crundell – Against

Councillor Mortimer – Abstain

Councillor Alford – Against

Councillor Aves – For

Councillor J Crundell – Against

Councillor Ellis – Abstain

Councillor Goodhind – For

Councillor Hubbard – For

Councillor Oatley – For

Councillor Westbrook – For

Totals. For 5, Against 3, Abstain 2.

Councillor J Crundell left the meeting at 8.50pm

559/23 Blue Pool Update

Councillor Ellis gave a presentation on work he had undertaken with the Friends of Melksham Assembly Hall.

Following this Councillor Alford felt that this project was to be considered by the Full Council working group of the Assembly Hall and this has missed out any connection with the town council. It is great to see ideas for the project but as a town council we have not followed the proper process.

Questions were asked about getting the views of an architect, quantity surveyor or structural engineer and which order that should be in. Why was a quantity surveyor chosen?

There was a feeling that officers had not moved quickly enough to set up working group meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Ellis, seconded Councillor Alford and

RESOLVED that a meeting of the Full Council working group be set up immediately which would include the Friends of Melksham Assembly Hall.

Councillor Aves left the meeting at 9.30pm

Standing Orders were suspended at 9.31pm to enable members of Friends of Melksham Assembly Hall to comment.

Q. Can the town council obtain ownership of the Blue Pool? – A. Yes.

Q. MS felt that this is a proposal is very well put together. Councillors haven't got a good track record for getting things done and why can't we get on with it?

A. the original motion put in place by the council was to have a working group meeting take place to discuss options, we can't delegate responsibility to others outside the council.

Overall the 'Friends of' felt that more urgency should be given to the project

Standing Orders were reinstated at 9.45pm

Councillor Alford left the meeting at 9.45pm

560/23 Lease - Cricketers Cafe

IT WAS RESOLVED to bring forward a discussion about the Cricketers Café to enable Craig Froud to present to members.

Standing orders were suspended at 9.46pm

Craig Froud explained that he had been involved with a food service for the café since Easter. The pavilion needs work but it needs to be open all year round, make it busy and with a variety of offerings. It is not a cheap place to run. 'My ideas are to run evening events, open for Parkrun and generally work with the town but run the business with my vision.' 'I'm excited and see this as a long term plan.'

Standing orders were reinstated at 9.50

Councillor S Crundell proposed, seconded Councillor Oatley and

RESOLVED to defer items 12 – 15 and item 17, until a future meeting.

561/23 Confidential Session

Members are requested to discuss the following items in Confidential session pursuant to Section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies Admission to Meetings) Act 1960; the Council, by resolution, may exclude the public from a meeting (whether during the whole or part of the proceedings) whenever publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted or for other special reasons stated in the resolution and arising from the nature of that business or of the proceedings. In view of the sensitive nature of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the public and press be excluded, and they are instructed to withdraw.

The recording of the meeting was stopped at 9.55pm

Councillor Hubbard proposed offering the lease to Craig Froud on the terms outlined for a period of 10 years. Seconded Councillor Oately and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO APPROVE. Until the lease can be prepared and signed, the Clerk is to issue a letter of intent.

Meeting Closed at: 10.08 pm

Signed:

Dated: