

Melksham Town Council

Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on Monday 30th October 2023

PRESENT:

Councillor S Crundell (Town Mayor)
Councillor T Price (Deputy Town Mayor)
Councillor P Alford
Councillor P Aves
Councillor J Crundell
Councillor G Ellis
Councillor C Forgacs
Councillor J Hubbard
Councillor J Oatley
Councillor S Mortimer
Councillor Stokes
Councillor J Westbrook

IN ATTENDANCE: One member of the public was present and one member of the public was present virtually. One member of the press was present.

OFFICERS:	Linda Roberts	Town Clerk
	Hugh Davies	Head of Operations
	Andrew Meacham	Committee Clerk
	Heather Parks	Locum

Public Participation

Ian Cardy

Questions regarding the decision to install lighting in KGV.

Is the Procurement Policy shown on the website correct and has it been altered since 2021? The Town Clerk confirmed the policy on the website was correct and the tender limit had changed from 25k to 30k.

Was paragraph 13.2 followed and under what policy was the decision to proceed with the quote from Paul Weymouth made? The Town Mayor confirmed there were not three quotes.

Joe McCann

How much did the Assembly Hall report cost? Head of Operations advised he had not yet received the invoice, but unlikely to be very much.

Any update on the Bike Pump in KGV and Five Bike Ramps? Head of Operations said should be installed with the next two weeks.

Asked a question at the last meeting about the Dog Park and was told would receive a statement. When will he receive this? The Town Clerk advised she hoped to work on it this week but could not say when he would receive it.

Is the Council looking to open an investigation into the deletion of the facebook video from full council and the fact that it was not saved correctly to the council servers. If not does this mean the Council does not take seriously the security of the data that it holds? The Town Clerk confirmed that the only legal record of a meeting is the approved minutes and once approved recordings should be deleted.

Can the Council update on its Strategic Plan 2021-2025? The Town Mayor Councillor S Crundell confirmed it came to council about 18 months ago and it did not receive support.

Does the Council accept the concerns raised in Councillor Goodhind's resignation letter are legitimate and need addressing? The Town Mayor advised that work is ongoing.

Pamela Wiltshire

Could the Council inform the public how much an election costs the Council? The Town Mayor confirmed that the last election cost approximately £9000.

So there is a possibility that during the period of this council £27000 of tax-payers money could be spent on re-elections? The Town Mayor confirmed that was correct.

602/23 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Cooke and Councillor Rabey.

603/23 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

604/23 Questions from Councillors

Questions from Councillor Ellis for full council 30 October 2023

The Town Clerk answered the following questions.

1. Progress on Electronic Communications and Social Media Policy

1.1 Will this policy which was lost from council business on 17th July be brought back?

It will when officers have had a chance to review the suggestions received and adapt the model policy which was included in that council agenda.

1.2 Will any suggested updates be applied prior to re-tabling?

1.3 What policy are our staff working to at present?

None, there is no capacity to work on reviewing policies at the present.

Councillor Ellis repeated his question referencing a comment of his on a Town Council Facebook post and its removal. The Town Clerk advised officers work within lawful boundaries. Her explanation was cut short by a further question from Councillor Ellis. The Town Clerk advised that there is a social media moderating policy. Councillor Ellis

requested details of this policy. The Town Clerk was unable to assist, having not had sufficient notice and this not being understood to be the aim of the original question.

2. Freedom of Information

2.1 Does the Town Council keep a register of Freedom of Information requests it receives?

Not a register but they are all stored on the network drive.

The Locum Clerk answered the following questions.

2.2 Does it publish the requests and the responses, and if so, where?

No.

2.3 How many requests have been received in the past 12 months?

Two.

2.4 How much officer's time has gone into handling FOI requests in the last 12 months?

Twenty Three hours.

The Head of Operations answered the following questions.

3. Blue Pool and Assembly Hall report

3.1 When will the structural survey and options reports be available to councillors and public?

Its on tonight's agenda.

Councillor Ellis acknowledged the reply and appreciated that some of his questions had been overtaken by the subsequent publication of the agenda.

3.2 Have quotations been received for fixing leaks in the AH roof and when will this be done?

Yes, supplementary agenda item for this evenings meeting, Councillors are requested to decide tonight which contractor to use.

The following questions were answered by the Locum Clerk

4.1 Are we making an offer on the Cooper Tires site?

That will have to be a decision of council not an answer for the Clerk, to date no motion to that effect has been received.

4.2 How are Melksham Town Council providing local support to potential bidders for the Cooper Tires factory site and other land holdings for sale?

It would be inappropriate for the town council to work with bidders this is very much Wiltshire Council' Economic Regeneration officers domain. That said the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group will be working closely with the team at Wiltshire on a masterplan for the site.

4.3 Is Melksham Town Council taking any active role in the sales of these sites - for example forming part of a bid group of developers or ecological interests looking to obtain the flood plain?

This would not be appropriate for the town council.

4.4 At what point of involvement would/do individual councillors need to declare an interest and have any done so?

Officers cannot advise councillors when they must declare an interest.

5. Locum Coverage

A locum is by definition a temporary stand in role

5.1 Our current locum is excellent, but when will a permanent setup be provided?

Once the staffing review is completed.

5.2 How is cover arranged for leave - do we as a Town Council ensure that at least one of Town Clerk, Deputy Clerk, and Locum Clerk can deal with urgent matters each normal working day?

Yes in normal circumstances. This year has been unusual in so much as when holidays were booked there was a full staffing complement. On occasion the locum and Town Clerk have had leave booked together, that said, the Town Clerk has always been available whilst on leave and has invariably been contacted whilst on leave to deal with matters that have arisen. Please note the Locum Clerk is not engaged full time.

The following questions were answered by the Head of Operations

6. Allotments

I note an audit being undertaken.

6.1 What are the parameters for the audit?

An assessment of the number and topography of plots and position of water points, whether they are troughs or taps

6.2 Are we gathering information from allotment holder and those who want to inform the audit?

The Allotments officer speaks to tenants on her regular rounds and any comments will be logged as part of the audit

6.3 When will outcomes be addressed?

As soon as is reasonably practicable.

7. KGV Park

7.1 When will the inner gate to the dog park be moved to open onto the hard surface?
End of November / beginning of December.

If the surface deteriorates before then, we will compact some Type 1 MOT to stabilise the ground in the meantime.

7.2 When will the derelict maintenance shed be removed?

November

Questions from Councillor Hubbard

The following questions were answered by the Locum Clerk

At the council meeting held on Tuesday 10th October you replied to a question from a member of the public that you have received confirmation from some organisation that the Dog Agility Equipment was fully safe. I apologise I did not catch the name of the organisation that you said but I would greatly like to go back to constituents who have contacted me with their concerns about the equipment and give them suitable reassurance. Could you please let me have copies of the correspondence with the organisation and details of who they were?

The Clerk will forward the advice to all councillors this week and will work on a statement for social media. Capacity has held this up.

Councillor Hubbard asked if he was going to get an answer to that question tonight. The Locum Clerk confirmed he would not.

I have asked for, on numerous occasions since April, the corrected financial reports from 2022/23 that show a proper and accurate breakdown of our spend. To date I have not received copies of these and am very concerned that at the single finance committee meeting at which accounts have been brought in the current financial year we had to postpone agreeing to as they also contained numerous coding errors. **The clerk has confirmed on numerous occasions that the financial reports for 2022/2023 are accurate the Rialtas problem occurred at the beginning of the new financial year which did delay income and expenditure reports for the first quarter.**

Can you please advise me when we will receive the corrected accounts for 2022/23 and the up-to-date corrected accounts for the current financial Year?

The year end figures for 2022-2023 have been signed off by the internal auditor and council. There are no new figures to present.

Councillor Hubbard asked a supplementary question. When would council receive accounts for 2022/2023 that accurately represent how the money was spent.

The Council has signed off the internal and external audit reports and they contained those figures for 2022/2023.

Councillor Hubbard re-iterated that the figures had not been supplied. The Locum Clerk advised the question had been answered.

Can you confirm if the Internal or External Auditors have been informed of the issues the council has experienced when attempting to produce financial reports that accurately demonstrate its spend?

The problem with producing the financial reports is an internal matter for Melksham Town Council. The internal auditor does not need to be informed and he has not started his reviews for 2023-2024 yet. As the figures are now up to date, this is not likely to be an issue. The external auditor does not request reports only bottom-line figures. They will also request additional information, such as variances in spend from last year, bank statements and reconciliations. This forms the basis of their inspection.

Councillor Hubbard asked a supplemental question. Were accounts presented to the internal auditor with a statement that we were confident that those figures accurately reflected the spend of this council. We did not make the internal auditor aware that council had said it had concerns and had refused to accept the final figures at the year end from the RFO and had asked for the matter to be referred to the Finance Committee.

The internal auditor inspects all of our minutes for the year that they are reported on, so they would have found that information in the minutes.

What steps have been taken to produce a quarterly detailed variance report as agreed at the Finance and Performance meeting and the subsequent Full Council?

This has been prepared and included at agenda number 9 tonight.

605/23 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 17 July 2023 and 25 September 2023 and the extraordinary meeting held on 10 October 2023, having previously been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by The Town Mayor Councillor S Crundell.

606/23 EV Charging Points

This item, number 14 on the agenda, was brought forward to allow Rob Dickin on Joju Charging to speak.

The Town Clerk introduced the item and gave an overview.

Rob Dickinson gave further clarification.

There was discussion on lease agreement with Wiltshire Council, income from chargers and the car parking review.

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

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to ask the Economic Development and Planning Committee to bring forward a costed planned deployment of EV Charging points with reference to the emerging Town Centre Masterplan and the car park survey.

The Town Mayor Councillor S Crundell thanked Rob Dickinson for joining the meeting.

607/23 Police Report

This item was brought forward.

Sgt Rutter talked through the report. Theft, violence against the person, public order offences and drug offences have gone down. Burglary and criminal damage have gone up. Culprits have been identified and the investigation is on-going.

A social media campaign has been launched to make people aware of distraction burglaries.

PC Holdsworth has joined the team. PCSO Vicky Rolph has left the team and in training to be a police officer. A replacement is expected to be recruited in the near future.

The first Wiltshire Police Violence Against Women and Girls Listening Circle was held in Melksham at the Town Hall. Councillor Alford asked how the force reacted to information obtained. Sgt Rutter advised that positive points were re-inforced and negative points dealt with by training and other methods. Councillor Westbrook felt that the issue needed more promotion by the Council.

608/23 Conclusion of audit year ended 31 March 2023

Councillor Mortimer was concerned that statements from Cambridge Building Society were only received once a year. The Town Clerk advised that this was savings account and the only items on statements would be added interest. No other transactions were made or could be made without two councillor's being aware.

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

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to approve the final External Auditor Report and Certificate for the 2022/2023 financial year and approve for publication.

609/23 Town Mayor's Announcements

The Town Mayor Councillor S Crundell noted the resignation of Councillor Goodhind and thanked him for his service to the Council.

610/23 Reports from Unitary Councillors

Councillor Hubbard, Councillor Alford and Councillor Oatley advised they had nothing to report that affected Melksham.

611/23 Accounts

612/23 Performance Against Budget Report

Councillor Hubbard expressed his gratitude and noted that the report showed variances only. Explanations of variances in excess of 15% were not always clear or full enough. It would be helpful to be able to identify if overspends and underspends are down to over or under allowance in the budget or other factors.

The Locum Clerk confirmed full figures should and would be provided, not just variances. The Locum Clerk noted that the report was a work in progress and fuller information will be obtained. In as much as she was able at the time, the Locum Clerk responded to some of the specific items highlighted by Councillor Hubbard.

Councillor Hubbard re-iterated that we are still not accurately recording our spends against budget codes.

Councillor Westbrook and Councillor Mortimer raised some queries and concerns. The Locum Clerk confirmed work was still being carried out and noted that overall the council was operating within its budget.

Councillor Ellis pointed out a typing error on code 4310.

Councillor Hubbard, Councillor Mortimer and Councillor Westbrook raised concerns on budget process and re-assessment of amounts allocated. The Locum Clerk suggested this could be looked at with the next report.

The Town Mayor Councillor S Crundell thanked councillors for their input and the report was received.

613/23 Bank Reconciliations

This item was noted.

614/23 Appointment of Councillors to Committees

Councillor Stokes consented to joining the committee.

It was proposed by The Town Mayor Councillor S Crundell, seconded by Councillor J Crundell and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Stokes to Community Development Committee and Economic Development and Planning Committee.

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

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Westbrook to the Finance, Administration and Performance Committee.

The Town Mayor Councillor S Crundell asked Councillors to inform the Town Clerk if they felt able to fill open positions.

615/23 Motion for CCTV in KGV Playing Fields

Councillor Hubbard spoke to the motion and the opportunity to save money by linking this to the lighting installation.

Sgt Rutter was asked to express an opinion. She said that there were historical issues in the park and CCTV would assist police in any enquiries, as well as acting as a deterrent.

Councillors discussed the siting and direction of the cameras, the need for and effectiveness of CCTV, the monitoring of footage and the cost of installation.

It was confirmed that there would not be any live monitoring and a formal request would have to be made to the Town Clerk for access to footage.

A concern was raised about a camera aimed at the Splashpad. Councillor Hubbard felt it would be of help should a child snatching incident occur and footage would not be available for live viewing.

It was queried whether this motion would negate the CCTV review. Councillor Hubbard confirmed that was not the intent of the motion.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor S Crundell, seconded by Councillor Alford that the motion be amended so that that cabling be installed in preparation for the CCTV review.

The motion was defeated.

Councillor Hubbard summed up and answered some of the questions that had been asked.

It was proposed by Councillor Hubbard, seconded by Councillor Price and

RESOLVED to approve the installation of 12 additional cameras in King George V Playing Fields. The council instructs the Clerk, and/or her appointed deputies, to arrange the installation of the cameras and associated works at the agreed cost of £4,750 from Kan Connections a known and approved supplier of the council. The capital costs for this project to be funded from the Major Projects earmarked reserve.

Meeting was adjourned for 10 minutes.

616/23 Motion for WiFi in KGV Playing Fields

Councillor Hubbard spoke to the motion.

There was discussion on the motion.

Benefits were said to be

- More people using the park and the Cricketers Cafe
- Providing coverage where mobile data coverage is patchy
- Providing a service for people who do not have or cannot afford a mobile contract
- Can include a sign in page with option to opt in to marketing from Melksham Town Council
- Provide a signal for events such as the Food & River Festival where payments by phone has sometimes been an issue because of patchy signal.
- System could be extended to Town Hall to provide a signal in the Market Place

Concerns raised:

- The park should be a tranquil area and an “escape from stress”
- The park should be a space for family time
- There were plenty of places in town offering free wi-fi
- Would prefer to concentrate on Town Hall and Market Place and Cricketers Cafe first
- Leakage of signal outside park area.
- Bandwidth

Councillor Hubbard advised he had spoken to Craig at the Café. He was planning to install a customer only system and it was not for the Council to interfere in how he ran his business.

There may be some leakage of signal but there would be restrictions on usage and inappropriate sites.

Councillor Hubbard summarised the motion and the discussion.

It was proposed by Councillor Hubbard, seconded by Councillor Price and

RESOLVED to approve the installation of 4 Internet Access Points in King George V Playing Fields and an additional Broadband connection to the Pavilion. The council instructs the Clerk, and/or her appointed deputies, to arrange the installation of the Access Points and associated works at the agreed cost of £2,910 from Kan Connections, a known and approved supplier of the council, and to make the necessary arrangements for the installation on a new phoneline.

The capital costs for this project to be funded from the Major Projects earmarked reserve.

The restriction of websites and activities to be determined by the Town Clerk but responsibility would sit with the Community Development Committee

Councillor J Crundell left the meeting at 9:45.

617/23 Local Plan Consultation

Councillor Aves and Councillor Ellis expressed their confidence in Vaughan Thompson.

Councillor Mortimer left the meeting during this item.

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

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to allocate no more than £1000 to pay for technical support from Vaughan Thompson of Place Studios and to delegate responsibility to Economic Development and Planning to submit Melksham Town Council's response to the Local Plan Review Consultation.

618/23 Bowman Court Lighting

The Town Mayor Councillor S Crundell advised that one response had been received to the consultation.

Councillor Price declared an non-pecuniary interest as a resident of Bowmans Court.

Councillor Hubbard requested clarification on the height of lights and shielding. It was confirmed that professional advice was that low-level lights would not get enough sun. The committee clerk said he would check and confirm the situation with shielding.

The question of permission from Wiltshire Council was raised. It was suggested that an application LHFIG would be the appropriate pathway.

Councillor Hubbard suggested that Councillor Oatley continue his efforts but suspected that he would be advised to refer to LHFIG.

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

RESOLVED to extend the meeting to finish this motion and consider item 16.1.

It was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** to refer the matter to LHFIG with an offer to fully fund any scheme.

Councillor Price left the meeting at 10:05.

619/23 Reports from Head of Operations

620/23 Blue Pool

Councillor Ellis suggested an Assembly Hall Working Group meeting be called. There was discussion on a date. Officers advised they would struggle to find capacity to prepare due to Neighbourhood Plan Consultation and other commitments

Councillor Hubbard felt that the Council should first decide on what they want from the Assembly Hall/Blue Pool site and this would then feed into a decision at a later date on how to achieve.

Other councillors agreed that proceeding on this basis would allow a meeting to take place next week.

It was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** to hold an Assembly Hall Working Group meeting next Monday to discuss what the Council want from the Assembly Hall of the future.

621/23 Repair of Assembly Hall Roof

It was noted that the quotes were similar and that it was more important to get the work done as soon as possible.

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

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to delegate authority to the Town Clerk to appoint either of the contractors with the priority being their ability to deliver the work in a timely fashion.

The remaining agenda items were deferred to the next meeting.

Meeting Closed at: 10.20 pm

Signed:

Dated: