



Tuesday 22nd September 2020

Remotely via Zoom

7pm

Present

Cllrs Mosson (Chairman), D Allan, L Allen, Ashley-Higgins, Briggs, Cairns, Cooper, Ellis, Griffin, Jolley, Mackey, Parmar, Pears, Pocock, Puri, Raut, Simper, K Ward, S Ward and Wood.

In Attendance

Olive O'Sullivan –Chief Executive Officer, Mary Watkins-Finance Manager and Natalia Gorman – Senior Administrator & Projects Officer.

Trevor Askew – Consultant was present for the discussion of the agenda item 44.

There were eight members of the public present.

Members of the public were invited to ask questions.

Question from John Heywood – Eco Sutton

“Twelve months ago, we welcomed the revised Strategic Plan for the Royal Town. This contained an aspiration to hold the response to the climate crisis as an over-arching policy. How does the council think it has done in the past year and what achievements would it point to in meeting this aspiration?”

Cllr S Ward responded.

The Sutton Coldfield Town Centre masterplan was adopted in August and sustainability is central to this for balancing the space given to people, bicycles and cars to create safer, more appealing and environmentally-friendly streets.

We passed a motion around the Local Electricity Bill, which is currently progressing through Parliament and supported by the Town Council, if this passes into Law, the Town Council, through the Town Centre Regeneration Partnership, could consider exploring suitable opportunities for community energy schemes as part of the future developments for the town centre.

In July, the Town Council invested almost £12,000 in a Cycle Network Plan for the town as part of a longer-term initiative to make cycling to work, to shops, services, or for leisure and fitness purposes, a more appealing and safer choice for residents.

The soon-to-be-launched Sutton Coldfield Town Ranger service has sustainability at the heart of it, one of the key criteria underpinning the contractor's requirements is using electric vehicles, comprehensive recycling plans and battery-powered and/or electrical hand-held machinery.

Although the COVID-19 lockdown prevented this year's wildflower planting, in 2021 we are planning to plant over 8,000m² of roadside verges, central reservations and other open spaces, these will be home to wildflowers and the pollinators that feed on them.

The new trim trail at Harvest Fields Park, funded by Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council, has now been completed and is in use. The supplier of the timber equipment was selected partly due to their environmental credentials, by using more locally-grown wood from Welsh forests to minimise their carbon footprint.

The Festive Light scheme for Sutton Coldfield uses low-energy LEDs.



We'll continue to recycle bedding scheme plants to residents wherever possible.

At a daily practical level, the Town Council offices recycles any waste paper, glass and plastic.

The Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield is home to over half a million trees; more than 5 for each person living here, we are planning to plant even more trees, in the projects we deliver, for example in the Walmley War Memorial Square improvements and this year's Mayor's Challenge.

Question from Liz Parry

"I believe that, while the town council meetings are being held via Zoom, they are being recorded. I am aware that the existing standing orders state that once the minutes of a meeting have been approved, the draft minutes or recordings of the meeting shall be destroyed.

Could the town council consider revising the standing orders so that recordings of meetings can be retained and published on the town council's website? This would give residents who were unable to attend the meetings the opportunity to watch them at a later date."

The CEO responded.

Full Council meetings have been recorded to aid the production of minutes given the numbers of attendees. When administering Full Council on Zoom, the number of attendees to Full Council means we have to continually rotate between several screens in order to view all Councillors and count their votes, making it harder to take notes for the production of minutes. The minutes are the legal record of the meeting and that is why the model NALC Standing Orders suggest that recordings and draft minutes are deleted once the minutes are approved.

The Council is pleased that residents are continuing to engage with the virtual meetings of Council. However, not everybody is comfortable with virtual meetings.

There is also the possibility that the publication of recordings may deter some people from attending and or speaking as members of the public.

Members of the public who wish to attend meetings have the right not to be filmed or for their contribution to be posted on the internet. We have already received such a request.

Therefore this needs to be considered in the context of GDPR and other legislation.

What we could do is provide an audio recording of Full Council meetings on request for those who cannot attend meetings. Contributions from residents who did not wish to be filmed could be edited and a written account provided instead.

Question from Claire Bennett

"According to the draft minutes of the Amenities, Leisure and Community Services meeting in September six Conservative members of the committee declared non-pecuniary interests relating to the application by Wylde Green Bowling Club. The club were awarded nearly eight and a half thousand pounds for work on premises they had recently relocated to. In their application for the grant they advised that they had moved to a new site that had no electricity, poor drainage, health and safety issues, did not comply with accessibility requirements and was unfit for purpose. The bowling club is now located within the Royal Sutton Coldfield Club which is the trading name of Sutton Coldfield Conservative Club Ltd. Effectively the committee awarded £8,484 to be spent improving a building owned by the Conservatives. Additionally, in order to join the bowling club one must first join the Conservative Club.

At the same meeting an application for financial help was denied when made by Sutton Coldfield Community Kitchen whose premises are planned to be in our dying town centre and who hoped to feed,



teach and nurture people of Sutton who are in need whilst creating employment and tackling the obscenity of food waste. No membership was required to access the kitchen.

Similarly, The Square Peg Foundation – a Community Interest Company - was denied help as the committee doubted the sustainability of the project despite the CIC having been in operation in Sutton Coldfield since 2014. The Square Peg physically takes a sensory, therapeutic environment to a range of people with additional needs. Scores of people who benefit are in Sutton where the charitable organisation has been based since 2014. The point of the grant was to free up the directors to promote the charity and acquire funding to continue work they have been doing for six years.

So, my questions are – is the council happy with these decisions and if so will they undertake to ensure that membership of the bowling club is open to all, including those who may not wish to join a Conservative organisation and those who require wheelchair access, and will they find a way to engage more fully with organisations who are aiming to hugely improve the quality of life of citizens of the town who might benefit from some additional support?”

Cllr D Pears responded.

Firstly, there is no financial relationship between the bowling club and the conservative party and the host club is not owned by the conservative party.

Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council provides grants to local voluntary and community organisations to support a range of projects to benefit the people of the town. Since the establishment of the community grant scheme the Town Council has awarded 132 community grants, totalling over £700,000.

Wylde Green Bowling Club (WGBC) is one of the largest bowling clubs in Sutton Coldfield. It was established in 1903 and was located on the site of the Wylde Green pub until the site was sold to Developers and the club were evicted.

Following an intensive search, the Club identified another crown bowling green, this was The Royal Sutton Coldfield Club (RSCC) which was under used and had a small number of bowlers. The RSCC would accommodate all of the club’s 70+ members and various teams which require access to the green every day of the week. It was agreed that the two clubs would form an arrangement whereby the WGBC would retain its identity and take the lead on all bowling activities at the RSCC, in addition to keeping its own Management Committee and Constitution.

Wylde Green Bowling Club members must pay a Royal Sutton Coldfield Club membership fee which anyone regularly using the club facilities is expected to pay. This is to become a member of the Royal Sutton Coldfield Club and access its facilities and is not a fee to join the Sutton Coldfield Conservative Association. Since moving to the RSCC, Wylde Green Bowling Club has reduced their subscription as their members are required to join RSCC in order to use the bowling green.

Cllrs declared a non-pecuniary interest in this application given the name link only.

The Town Council has approved grants to two other bowling clubs for capital works and improvements to the facilities. Neither of these clubs are the building or landowners of the premises receiving the works but are the main users who will benefit the most from them. Boldmere St Michaels Bowling Club - £6,496.86 and Royal Sutton Coldfield British Legion Bowling Club - £9,870.

The works outlined in the application form will enable disability access to the green which will be suitable for those who require wheelchair access.

The Wylde Green Bowling Club constitution states ‘all members shall have equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities’. The Club also has an Equality Policy.

More than 600 bowlers in the West Midlands from 60 clubs engage in social and league fixtures with the WGBC yearly. Over 200 of these bowlers are based in 13 other Sutton Coldfield Clubs, so there is a significant benefit to other Sutton Coldfield residents and their families and friends. The Community Kitchen grant application was declined due to insufficient evidence of sustainability of the project following the initial 6 month period.

The application was only for the first 6 months of the project, the application did not include a plan or projection of income aside from the Town Council Community Grant funding applied for.

There are many existing groups tackling food waste in Sutton Coldfield and most supermarkets have existing agreements to donate leftover food to these groups. The Community Kitchen showed no evidence of working with these existing organisations and no evidence of partnerships or established relationships with supermarkets or organisations which would donate food to them.

A number of companies have been opened by the same directors as the Community Kitchen, all of which have a similar nature of business. None have yet submitted their accounts or existed for longer than 15 months. This raised concerns around and sustainability of the organisation.

The town council has previously supported The Square Peg Foundation CIC, granting £1,580 in June 2019 for a "Sensory Santa" Christmas event and supports the work that the organisation does with children and families in the town. This particular application was for staff costs.

The Town Council's community grant guidance clearly states: Staffing and running costs will be considered if satisfactory sustainability plans have been provided, identifying how you plan to continue once the grant has ended. Unfortunately, this grant was declined as a satisfactory sustainability plan was not provided.

Question from Frances Heywood

"Very glad to see the Town Council is going ahead with a Town Ranger Service.

As this is the sort of work that self-employed local people might undertake, what proportion of the money being paid out will go on paying the workers a good salary, and how much to an employing company? Was the option to apply to do this work made known widely in Sutton? Was the option of hiring out vans and tools to the project offered to local firms? Was the option of direct employment also given serious consideration?

This is not an airy-fairy question. The residents' group of which I was once chair in Aston was one of about 15 inner city groups who employed very similar 'Area caretakers' for many years. They got a good wage and we employed them directly. Our input as employers was unpaid. Would this not be a better value-for-money approach? Surely Sutton Town Councillors can match a group of volunteer residents?"

Cllr S Ward responded.

It's pleasing to hear the support for the Town Ranger service, it's an opportunity for the Town Council to make a difference to improve the look and feel of the town in an incremental way.

The Strategy and Resources Committee considered the options and approach to establishing the Town Ranger Service in February. The relationship with Birmingham City Council had to be considered. As the principle authority, the work of the town rangers needs to live within the boundaries that they set in regards to method statements, risk assessments and meeting all necessary legislative health and safety requirements when working on the public highway. The pros and cons of directly employing staff and letting a contract were discussed in full. Given the limited staffing resource and relevant experience within the town council to establish and manage a complex in house service and the Council's wish to establish the service at the earliest opportunity it was decided a contracted service was the most appropriate way



forward. This was to reduce the risk to the Town Council and enable experience to be gained on the client side within the Town Council, if it is subsequently desired to directly employ staff to deliver the service.

The estimated cost of running the service exceeded European procurement financial thresholds (£189,330) and therefore had to be tendered.

An update was provided at the July Strategy and Resources Committee Meeting when Committee were advised the service would be procured via YPO a public sector procurement body.

The service specification was for the total service, i.e. operatives, vans and equipment so hiring out of vans or tools could not be offered to local firms.

The cost breakdown of the tenders is commercial in confidence but the total value of the successful tender will be published for transparency on our website.

34 Apologies for Absence

The CEO reported apologies from Cllrs Cummins, Hodgins, Horrocks and Passey.

Resolved to accept the apologies.

35 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

36 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved that due to the confidential nature of the business of item 44 under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 s3, it is likely a motion will be proposed to exclude members of the public and press during discussion of this item.

37 Mayors Announcements

The Mayor reported that she had recorded a video message for the promotion of Holy Trinity Church open day as part of National Heritage week.

38 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council held on Tuesday 21st July 2020 be signed as a true record.

Cllr Pocock asked for an amendment to be made on the minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on Wednesday 19 August in relation to the response to a resident's question on Sutton Coldfield Police Station. Cllr Pocock stated that to minute that the Police and Crime Commissioner had announced that he wants to close Sutton Coldfield Police station was an inaccurate statement and to announce it as a fact, dishonest. He asked that the minutes be edited to clearly state that this is the opinion of the Leader. This was disputed by Cllr S Ward and several other Councillors.

A request was made for officers to review the recording of the extraordinary meeting held on Wednesday 19th August 2020 and to bring this matter back to the next Full Council meeting.



39 **Matters Arising**

The CEO advised Council of a change of membership to the Sutton Coldfield Police Estate Working Group. Given her civic role, Cllr Mosson has stepped down and Cllr Cooper would be joining the working group.

Cllr Pocock asked for clarification on whether Councillors can submit petitions to Council. The CEO advised that there would be a proposal to the next Strategy and Resources Committee on a procedure for the receipt of petitions.

40 **Minutes of Committees**

a) **Planning and Highways** held on 4th August 2020

b) **Planning and Highways** held on 1st September 2020

Resolved to note the minutes of the Planning and Highways Committee.

c) **Amenities, Leisure and Community Services** held on 10th September 2020

Cllr David Pears presented the minutes of the Amenities, Leisure and Community Services Committee.

Resolved to approve a 2020 festive light scheme at a total cost of £94,937.

d) **Strategy and Resources** held on 16th September 2020

Cllr Pocock raised concerns about the accumulating size of the earmarked reserves that was discussed but not minuted under agenda item 28. Cllr Pocock stated that he believed it was agreed at Committee that the precise detail of what the amounts are earmarked for would be discussed by Committee over the next few months, as part of the budgeting process. Cllr Ward disputed this and stated that Committee had received advice that the CIPFA guidance around the treatment of reserves was in line with best practice. It was confirmed that the normal annual budgeting process would take place over the next few months to look at how money could be spent to improve the town. Cllr Ward also pointed out that substantial delays and constraints by Birmingham City Council had led to projects not being delivered and appealed to Cllr Pocock to help lift those blockages.

Cllr Mackey spoke to confirm that minutes do not fully document all discussions within a meeting but provide a summary of discussions against each agenda item for the official record of the meeting.

Resolved to note the minutes of Strategy and Resources Committee.

41 **Use of Chief Executive Officer's Delegated Powers**

None reported.

42 Accounts for Payment

Resolved to approve the accounts for payments and that Cllrs Pears and Pocock and be appointed to complete authorisation.

Resolved to approve payment of the outstanding commitments.

Resolved to note the payments made under delegated powers.

43 Date of the Next Scheduled Meeting

20th October 2020.

7:56pm - The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and concluded that this was the end of the public part of the meeting. Councillors took a short comfort break.

Cllr Ashley-Higgins left the meeting.

8:05pm - The meeting resumed.

44 Exclusion of the Press and Public

a) Town Rangers Procurement

The Chairman welcomed Trevor Askew a Consultant for the Town Council to the meeting.

Cllrs were presented with a confidential report detailing tender prices for establishing two x two person teams to carry out environmental improvements. Three tenders were submitted.

Cllrs were informed that given a significant difference in price submitted between contractors, Idverde Ltd were invited to meet with the CEO and Mr Askew to outline their contracted price submissions and operational model and answer any questions and concerns.

Mr Askew confirmed that the responses provided by Idverde Ltd support that their bid is robust and they answered all the questions put to them with good supporting information.

Resolved that Idverde Ltd be appointed to deliver a Town Ranger service for 12 months at a cost of £139,899, with a proposed start date of 2nd November 2020.

Resolved to approve that Idverde Ltd provide a second electric vehicle at an additional cost of £10,000.

The meeting ended at 8:31pm.