Tuesday 23rd February 2021
Remotely via Zoom
7pm

Present

Cllrs Mosson (Chairman), D Allan, Ashley-Higgins, Briggs, Cairns, Cooper, Cummins, Ellis, Griffin, Hodgins, Horrocks, Jolley, 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.

There were nine members of the public present.

Members of the public were invited to ask their questions.

Tony Cannon asked for more detail on the services provided by Arlingclose and how the council evaluates the effectiveness of their service. He also stated that the invoices suggested that payments for Festive Lights had exceeded the budget of £80,000 and asked for an explanation of how and why this overspend had occurred.

The CEO responded that Arlingclose is an independent Treasury Advisory Company that provides unbiased strategic financial and investment advice to public bodies. The Town Council operates within a legislative framework and Arlingclose provides regular credit updates and financial and investment advice in line with the Statutory Guidance. Given the sums invested, the service to helps to protect the Council and its financial assets. The fixed fee reflects the size and nature of the Town Council's investments and the cost of the service is comparable to other providers as a percentage of the sums invested.

In response to the second question, the CEO confirmed that the original budget for the Festive Light Scheme was £80,000 but an additional £25,000 had been added to the budget to support funding for the Town Centre lights. The 2020 Festive Light Scheme was then approved by Full Council from this budget, at a cost of up to £94,937. All payments shown on the Invoice Listings are inclusive of VAT and the actual cost of these two invoices was within budget at £79,344 net.

Richard Parkin stated that the Town Centre Masterplan issued last year is a welcome step forward in helping to address concerns in the decline of high street shopping and store closures. He asked if the Town Council and BID would be urging the City Council to support the Masterplan and be calling on it to support the establishment of independent local businesses in Sutton Coldfield Town Centre.

Cllr S Ward responded that the Town Centre continues to be an important issue to residents. Birmingham City Council (BCC) has now endorsed the Masterplan and have a pivotal role to play as the planning authority and a significant town centre landowner. The Town Centre Regeneration Partnership (TCRP) have been working hard with the BID to be ready for when retail re-opens. Cllr S Ward stated that he has urged BCC to look at town centre parking charges, to encourage more people into the town, and also the need for more relief against business rates, which is a national issue.

Marje Bridle submitted a question asking what the specific plans for future funding of the Sutton Coldfield Town Centre were and also asked when the Town Council's earmarked funds for Town Centre regeneration would be spent.

Cllr S Ward responded that the Town Council built up funds, could give capacity for the Town Council to borrow and allow it to play a long term and strategic part in the future of the Town Centre. The Combined Authority have also committed £20m toward the transport interchange. The TCRP membership contains the town centre key landowners, such as M&G, Aldi and Birmingham City Council, and that these landowners need to be encouraged to spend money to make a real long term difference to the future of the Town Centre. The TCPR is drawing up an Interdependency Plan, which will look at significant funding opportunities for the Town Centre. In the short term, the TCRP have been working closely with the BID, looking at What's On Sutton Coldfield and ways to promote community activities in the town as well as looking at markets and alternative retail uses that is hoped could be delivered in the short to medium term.

Liz Parry asked which projects have been blocked by BCC and what the nature of the blockages were. She also asked if the Sutton Park appraisal report had been sent to key stakeholders and if the exchange of correspondence with BCC could it be made public.

The CEO responded that asset transfer progress has been very slow. BCC has formally approved the transfer of Walmley and a draft Transfer Deed was provided to the Town Council's solicitors. Proposed rewording of the Transfer Deed has been agreed by solicitors on both sides but BCC solicitors are still awaiting agreement from BCC management. The Vesey Gardens asset transfer has also been approved by BCC, but our solicitors are yet to receive the draft transfer document from BCC solicitors. Progress is also slow on the transfer of Allotments. The CEO confirmed that she had met with Officers of BCC in early December to discuss the transfers of assets and had been advised that BCC would be re-invigorating the timetable and prioritising Walmley but no further documentation on these transfers has been received.

In response to the second question, the CEO stated that the final draft of the Executive Summary and Appraisal Report had been sent to BCC and the Town Council has had an exchange of correspondence with BCC on the Appraisal Report. The CEO confirmed that over 70 comments had been received from BCC officers on the draft report and that these were addressed in the final document before publication. The CEO also stated that Cllr Pears had been in correspondence with BCC and other members of the Park Advisory Group on the Report and the Leader of the Town Council provided a copy of the draft report to the Leader of BCC requesting an early discussion at a strategic level. A response from the Leader of Birmingham City Council has been received and a Leaders meeting has been arranged for 4th March to discuss next steps. Routine correspondence is not normally published and as a number of parties and individuals are involved and given GDPR requirements, permission would need to be obtained from each to release the correspondence, some of which might need to be redacted to protect the identify and or personal details of those involved. There will be regular updates to the relevant Committee and or Council as the recommendations in the report are progressed.

Frances Heywood stated that the LUC Report gives the Town Council an idea of the full state and obligations of the park but that views of the general public and users was not included. A member of the Ranger led, Banners Gate Conservation Group has carried out a survey of park users, although this is not yet complete. Frances asked if the Town Council would be willing to accept this survey and consider what it says.

Cllr S Ward responded that public consultation was not included in the brief for appraisal report as it is a technical document. One of the key recommendations of the Report is that all sectors of the community should be engaged in the management of the park. This wider consultation will involve the people of the town and park users and will form a key part of the visioning and master planning process. The Town Council has received the report via the Strategy & Resources Committee and will be seeking the agreement and cooperation of Birmingham City Council for the Town Council to lead on the development of a masterplan for the park and addressing its future governance requirements.

Anthony Whitehead asked if anyone was proactively marketing opportunities for imaginative new uses of empty deep-plan stores in Sutton Centre, specifically the idea of reusing redundant/empty spaces for 'Grub and Hub' indoor market eateries.

Cllr S Ward responded that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 'experiential' retail and leisure concepts, such as food halls or market hubs, were considered to be the future for city and town centres. While operators were forced to pause due to COVID-19 lockdowns, it remains an important part of a resilient, successful town centre. The recently published Sutton Coldfield Town Centre Masterplan highlights this, stating that it will be important to look beyond "traditional retail and onto the experience-based economy with independent businesses, leisure, cafes, restaurants, and workplace hubs". Decisions on how landowners let and market their assets is their decision. However, following Government's recent announcement, discussions can begin with town centre stakeholders, via the Town Centre Regeneration Partnership, on how to successfully re-open Sutton Coldfield town centre and explore ideas to utilise vacant or underused space.

71 Apologies for Absence

The CEO reported apologies from Cllrs L Allen, Mackey and Parmar.

Resolved to accept the apologies.

72 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

73 Mayors Announcements

The Mayor updated Council on the Mayors Challenge, that had been utilised to address the lack of available technology for children's remote learning and digital inclusion needs. 14 Schools have accessed the funding that was used to purchase laptops, headphones, webcams and other IT equipment. The Mayor also talked about the opening of a large scale vaccination site at the Town Hall. The Mayor thanked the Sutton Coldfield Group Practice for delivering vaccines to the most vulnerable residents and also thanked the community and volunteers that worked so hard to achieve this.

74 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council held on 15th December 2020 be signed as a true record.

75 Matters Arising

Cllr Pocock asked for an update on progress made to resolve the issue of members of the public being filmed while attending remote Council meetings and the live streaming of Council meetings. The CEO responded that there has been no agreement that the Council would livestream meetings and confirmed that members of the public and the media can legally film Town Council meetings adding that anyone wishing to film is asked to state they are doing so at the start of the meeting so members of the public have the option of protecting their privacy.

76 Questions from Members

Cllr Wood asked what progress had been made on land transfers from Birmingham City Council (BCC) to the Town Council and if there would be a monitoring scheme for the use of Cycles in the Town and Cycle Hire. The CEO responded that in addition to the update provided in the Public Question Time, that there appears to be a capacity issue within BCC Legal Services and that BCC may need to identify some dedicated legal resources to progress the transfers and asked that this be raised at the next Leaders meeting. In response to the second question, the CEO confirmed that cycle hire is accessed through an app that provides live performance information. The Cycle Hire Scheme is currently in the trial period but over 400 people have already signed up to the app ahead of the launch to the public in March. The CEO also receives weekly performance reports covering; the number of journeys per day, number of journeys per bike, number of journeys per docking station, distance travelled and breakdown of the users.

Cllr Pocock asked for an update on the recruitment of a Communications Officer. The CEO confirmed that most staff had been working remotely during lockdown and now that a road map out of lockdown had been announced, the arrangements that needed to be put in place to progress a recruitment would be looked at over the coming weeks. In response to a second question from Cllr Pocock, the CEO agreed to provide an update on Town Council working groups to the next meeting.

77 Petitions

Cllr Puri presented his petition, supporting proposals to improve the car park at Sutton Park's Boldmere Gate. The Mayor confirmed that the petition would be passed to the Planning and Highways Committee for Committee to note when they consider the full implications of the application.

78 Casual Vacancy

Cllr S Ward extended a thank you to Louise, on behalf of the Town Council, for her service representing the Vesey Ward.

Resolved to note that Louise Passey resigned from the office of Councillor and that a Public Notice of the Casual Vacancy was given on Monday 8th February 2021.

79 Election Date

Resolved to note that ten electors have written to the Returning Officer requesting an election, which has been fixed for Thursday 6th May 2021.

80 Minutes of Committees

a) Planning and Highways held on 12th January 2021
c) Planning and Highways held on 2nd February 2021

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

b) Amenities, Leisure and Community Services held on 14th January 2021

Cllr Pears presented the minutes and proposed the recommendations from the Amenities, Leisure and Community Services Committee.

Resolved to approve the 2021 Floral Display Scheme at a cost of £61,596 from Floral Displays budget.

Resolved to approve a grant of £10,000 to the Salus Fatigue Foundation from the Social Inclusion budget.

Resolved to approve a grant of £19,700 to the Compass Support from the Community Plan budget.

d) Strategy and Resources Committee held on 17th February 2021

Cllr S Ward presented the minutes and informed Council that due to a change in the confirmed Council Tax Database figures, the precept for 2021/22 would be £1,830,335.
Cllr Pocock commented on the LUC Report item, stating that the report showed that the Town Council's Strategic Plan action to take over the management and ownership of the park wasn't practical, affordable or realistic and that the park is not just for residents but a regional asset.
Cllr Cairns stated that it was agreed at the meeting that the Town Council would review an updated vision and what a future partnership might look like.
Cllr S Ward commented that Committee expressed its concerns over the findings of the report, about the future of the park and their desire to work towards an appropriate future governance structure. The report details the financial liabilities and future sustainability of the park and it is too big for any one organisation to look after. Cllr S Ward stated that the responsible thing to do is to think of the long-term future of the park and not use it as a political football.

Resolved to approve up to £20,104 towards the cost of the Transport Impact Study.

Resolved to approve the following policy documents, as reviewed by the Strategy and Resources Committee;

- Investment Strategy 2021/22;
- Risk Management Policy;
- Health and Safety Policy;
- Statement of Internal Control.

81 Use of Chief Executive Officer's Delegated Powers

No use of delegated powers was reported.

82 **Accounts for Payment**

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

Resolved to note the payments made under delegated powers.

83 **Date of the Next Scheduled Meeting**

23rd March 2021.

The meeting ended at 8:11pm.