

Minutes of a Meeting of Middleham Town Council held as a virtual meeting through Zoom on Wednesday, 30 September 2020 at 7.00 pm. (SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AT NEXT COUNCIL MEETING)

Present

Chairman Mrs S Fairhurst, Cllr Mrs H Byford, Cllr Mr M Cade, Cllr Mr G Fortune, and Cllr Mrs L Skelton

County Cllr Mrs K Sedgwick, Clerk Mr D Keep,

Members of public: Present for public forum and item 6.4.4 only: Mrs C Strickland.

Action

1. Introduction and Apologies.

Having checked that all present could hear and be heard, the Chairman welcomed everyone and declared the meeting open. Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Wheeler and Hopper. All other Councillors were present.

2. Open Forum.

Cllr Sedgwick apologised that she was unable to attend the full meeting and highlighted those items in which she was interested, requesting feedback on the outcome of the discussions on 5G and proposals for local government devolution.

Cllr Sedgwick would inform Area 1 Highways of a damaged road surface between Coverdale to West Grafton, raised by Mrs Strickland.

**Cllr
Sedgwick**

3. Declarations of interest regarding items on the agenda.

No interests other than those previously notified were declared in matters on the agenda.

4. Minutes.

4.1 Minutes of the previous council meetings

IT WAS RESOLVED to accept the minutes of the Council meetings held on 29 July 2020 and 26 August 2020 as a true and accurate record to be signed by the Chairman.

4.2 The schedule of agreed actions. Noted.

5. Confidential and Urgent Items. There were no urgent or confidential matters for consideration at the current meeting that required recording in the confidential minute.

6. Town Council - Information/Decision Required

6.1 Councillors' report of meetings attended, and actions undertaken (standing item). Some Councillors had attended NYCC's briefings on the possible devolution of local government. Other meetings are reported elsewhere in these minutes.

6.2 Matters of local interest and concern as reported to Councillors or on Residents' Facebook page. A car had caught fire in the Springs. No other matters were reported.

6.3 Coronavirus Update

6.3.1 Coordination of volunteers and support to the vulnerable. Feedback from Rev Moody, one of the volunteer coordinators, was noted. Take up of assistance and from the food bank had been very limited. As it was likely that some lockdown restrictions might

be reapplied and create difficulties over winter months, it was agreed to email all volunteers informing them that they may be required and to remain available.

Action

Clerk

6.4 Land Management Issues (standing item)

6.4.1 Dog Fouling. The Clerk reported that RDC could not place its bins at the suggested locations and dialogue was ongoing to seek alternative locations. He was arranging a sign close to the start of Canaan's Lane indicating where the current bin was.

6.4.2 Ragwort on Local Fields. Council was not satisfied with the land agent's report of actions being undertaken by the tenant farmer to remove ragwort. The Clerk would liaise with the agent outlining what was expected.

Clerk

6.4.3 Plantations: Cllr Fortune had replied to a resident raising concerns about future maintenance plans and he would involve them with polling residents' views. It was agreed to only seek views in the vicinity, and he would leaflet drop information regarding options for the Plantations and promote formation of a friends' group. Cllr Fortune would draft an article for the Middleham Herald.

**Cllr
Fortune**

6.4.4 Resident's Proposal to Plant Trees on the Town Wastes. Mrs Strickland spoke in support of the outline scheme she had submitted, aimed at 'greening up' the otherwise predominantly grey street scene and the predominance of parked cars. Comments received from RDC's Conservation Officer referring to the existing distinctive character of the town and certain practical considerations was read out by the Clerk. Councillors also summarised potential problems with the unknown routing of service cables and pipes was beneath the cobbles; the expense of purchase and upkeep of trees against a background of current budgetary pressures; lack of volunteers willing to tend to the existing planters; reduction in car parking spaces. Mrs Strickland noted these and commented that her suggested location map was an outline to prompt discussion and that the desired effect may be obtained by carefully selected smaller trees and shrubs or planters. It was agreed that the matter be considered again in the Spring and that a residents' questionnaire could be undertaken. After Mrs Strickland had left the meeting there was further discussion on the proposal and considerations for the maintenance of planters.

6.5 Consultations

6.5.1 Devolution and unitary council for York and North Yorkshire. Appreciation was expressed for Ms Lucy Moss-Blundell from NYCC, Stronger Communities Delivery Manager (Richmondshire) from NYCC who had attended the previous week's Town meeting. There was a consensus in Council that the reorganisation was being rushed and that the NYCC proposal would be detrimental to smaller, rural communities in terms of service provision and democratic accountability as a consequence of regional centralisation and significantly fewer councillors across a large unitary authority. Cllr Byford agreed to summarise this outlook. It was understood from Cllr Sedgwick that the closing date for comments was the end of November; at present the process for consultation was vague. The Clerk would seek confirmation.

Clerk

6.5.2 Central Government Consultation on Planning. Concern was expressed at a further central government consultation when councils were preoccupied with Covid. Cllr Byford would review the potential implications.

**Cllr
Byford**

6.5.3 RDC Council Tax Reduction Scheme consultation. The changes proposed to the scheme appeared to be uncontentious so no response would be submitted.

6.6 Police Report (standing item). The reports for August and September were noted.

6.7 Middleham Herald. Potential content of an edition to be published at the end of October was discussed. Cllr Byford would prepare an initial draft.

**Cllr
Byford /
All**

6.8 Middleham Online website. The current webmaster was planning to stand down and Council wanted to ensure that the site's content was not lost. A proposal for the Council to temporarily take the site over was considered and it was agreed to set aside £225, if required, to operate the site in the interim to avoid closure and find a new webmaster. The Clerk would ask Mrs Whitwham whether the site still received funding from hospitality businesses before deciding as the website might have greater benefit for businesses rather than the community.

Clerk

6.9 North Yorkshire Rural Housing Enabler Network. The annual report was received. Press coverage indicating that further conversion of former chapels was unlikely to go ahead was disappointing and the Clerk would request an update from Mrs Madden and the Methodist Circuit representative who had previously attended a Council meeting. Council wished to support a proposal for Middleham's chapel.

Action

Clerk

7. Review of Health & Safety and Environmental Matters (standing item).

7.1 Play Area inspection reports. The annual RoSPA inspection reports were received. Following review it was concluded that they did not add anything beyond the content of RDC's fortnightly reports and would be cancelled for future years to save costs. Cllr Byford would speak to MSCWA regarding the proximity of children's play equipment to the skate park and suggest erecting a trellis fence to demarcate the area. The manufacturer's costs for a replacement wooden ramp on climbing equipment in the open space was considered excessive (£1518, inclusive of VAT); Cllr Wheeler would provide a costing to replace on a like-for-like basis. Council had previously approved £300 plus VAT to purchase replacement cradle swing components and it was agreed to increase this to £400 plus VAT as better value was obtained from buying a complete unit rather than parts.

Clerk

Cllr
Wheeler

7.2 Emergency plan: Ongoing; requiring revision to anticipate future epidemics.

7.3 G5 Network installation.

7.3.1 Risks to health: Discussions at the Town Meeting held the previous week were reviewed. There was some uncertainty whether what was proposed for installation in Coverdale constituted a full 5G network as it appeared to be the existing G4 system with faster central processing. Council had undertaken its own research, individually and collectively, and apart from hypersensitivity experienced amongst a very small number of individuals, verifiable scientific research revealed no evidence of danger to human and animal life or to plants. Going forward, Council would continue monitoring of new research brought to its attention but would not consider any unattributed research or research that had not been subjected to peer review and acceptable standards of scientific scrutiny.

7.3.2 Mobile Access North Yorkshire (MANY). As there was no conclusive proof that 5G was harmful, the earlier conclusion to engage with the scheme was reaffirmed as it was clearly beneficial to residents and local business. Cllr Fortune would summarise Council's position for inclusion in the next Herald.

Cllr
Fortune

7.4 One Way traffic between the Springs and St Alkelda's Road. The frequency of reported incidents had reduced. A resident's suggestion for improved signs would be taken up with NYCC, although it was unsure whether there was scope for this within the regulations. The effectiveness of painted signs on the road itself was questioned; they were also considered to be a potential slip hazard.

Clerk

7.5 Parking in Grove Terrace. Polite notices to placed on cars carelessly parked and blocking access had been provided to a resident. To date there was no indication that they had led to an improvement and the situation would be kept under review. One recipient of a notice had called the Clerk to complain and had accepted the rationale.

8. Project Updates:

8.1 Burial Ground. No matters were reported.

8.1.1 MSCWA. Cllr Byford reported upon recent activity focussing upon preparation of the football pitch for the coming season. Cllr and Mrs Wheeler had spoken to parents of youngsters who occasionally congregated in the play areas. Recent incidents of youths from outside Middleham driving and then drinking in the skate park were discussed but no action was agreed. The Clerk would request costings to replace both the old and damaged waste bins, possibly with a combined recycling bin, as litter was easily blown out of the existing bins. MSCWA was considered to be sound financially and reviewed funding bulletins.

Clerk

8.2 Key Centre. A brief written report from the Trustees was received, informing that

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additional new tenants would occupy available office space, providing additional income.

8.3 Option agreement. A final draft of the Option Agreement had been received. This was recommended for approval by the Council's solicitors whose responses to the Clerk's supplementary enquiries was noted. Having been proposed by Cllr Fairhurst and seconded by Cllr Byford **IT WAS RESOLVED to approve the terms of the Option Agreement set before the meeting and to authorise its signature.**

Clerk

8.4 Safer Roads Project. It was noted that Cllr Sedgwick would raise Middleham's road issues at a forthcoming Highways meeting on 14 October. Cllr Byford would provide an update to the next meeting.

8.5 Play area improvements committee: No Matters to report.

8.6 Tree Planting. A revised proposal from Lower Wensleydale Biodiversity Action Group (LWBAG) was noted to be on a far smaller scale than before. LWBAG had received confirmation from its funders that the smaller scheme would be supported. Council gave its consent and, as it would be on a less intrusive scale, residents' views would not be sought. LWBAG was asked to contribute details to the forthcoming Herald and to seek volunteers locally to work on the scheme.

Clerk

9. Events in Middleham (standing item). Resident participation in the Great British September Clean on 19 September 2020 was limited, however good work had been undertaken by a group of mostly older residents. It was agreed to repeat the exercise the following Spring.

10. Planning

10.1 Planning decision notices received since the last meeting: None received

10.2 Planning Applications.

10.2.1 Full Planning Permission for Side Extension to Create an Additional Bedroom and Small Porch Area at Ulshaw View, East Witton Road, Middleham, DL8 4SG ref 20/00644. No comments.

10.2.2 Full Planning Permission for Two Storey Gable and Loft Extension at 19 Park Lane, Middleham, DL8 4QX ref 20/00442. No comments.

10.3 Potential Planning Enforcement Issues. None raised.

10.4 Other Planning Matters: The Clerk was querying whether a formal application was required when windows were being replaced within the conservation area using original materials to a like for like design. A recent replacement had been approved under permitted development rules although similar replacements on the same basis has been subject to consent. A reply was awaited from RDC.

Clerk**11. Finance – Information/Decision required**

11.1 The cash book with a full bank reconciliation as at the end of July and August 2020 was received.

IT WAS RESOLVED to approve the schedule of direct debits and internet bank transfers to approve and ratify all payments since the last Meeting as set out on the payments schedule.

11.2 Budget. A review of the 20-21 budget to anticipate potential reductions in income was discussed. It was noted that the impact of Covid upon land rental income could not be foreseen and there was very little scope to reduce total expenditure by Council and IH. The Christmas lights were a significant expenditure due to annual work required switching on and making repairs, despite the new string supplied under warranty, as repairs were usually required each year. However, the lights were much appreciated within the Town, especially at the current time. Similarly, after discussion, it was agreed not to reduce the frequency and extent of grass cutting, the largest single item of expenditure, as the current appearance, particularly along the Buses, presented a good

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image for the town. The budget for 21/22 would be presented to the November meeting.

11.3 National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) new pay scales for 2020 – 2021 payable from 1 April 2020 (i.e. backdated). As the Clerk was employed under NJC terms and conditions, he was automatically entitled to receive the recently announced increment (2.7%). The new monthly rate and back pay calculation would be reviewed and checked by a Councillor.

All

12. Central & Local Government Communications: Documents that have been emailed or circulated to Cllrs since the last meeting.

12.1.1 Between meetings a wide range of documents principally giving advice regarding Covid19 and local government reorganisation had been circulated.

13. Shared information and suggested items for the next agenda

13.1 Annual planner for agenda items; to note forthcoming business.

13.2 Items for next agenda:

13.2.1 Tender for burial ground works

13.2.2 Review of interest rates on deposit accounts

13.2.3 Tender for grounds maintenance

13.2.4 Amendments to Clerk’s contract of employment (private session)

14. Future Meetings

The following Council meeting will be held on Wednesday 30 September 2020.

There being no further business the Chairman thanked everyone for attending the Council’s first virtual meeting and declared the meeting closed at 9pm

Signed.....Date.....