

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held at 7:00pm on Tuesday 21 July 2020, on-line via Zoom.

PRESENT:

Councillors:	Mark Purvis (Chair)	Eleanor Armstrong
	Victor Bridges	Marjorie Chambers
	Nicola Chambers	Avril Chisholm
	Matthew Cuthbert	Lynne Grimshaw
	Lawrence Henderson	Jim Lang
	Ken Parry	Pauline Thompson
	Bob Walkinshaw	Tom Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mike Slaughter – Town Clerk & Responsible Finance Officer
Stephen Humphrey – Funding & Projects Officer
Richard Timson – Horticultural Officer
Sharon Parmley – Senior Administration Officer (minute taking)
Members of the Public – 1

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

The Town Clerk informed the elected members that a member of the public had forwarded written questions asking if there were any plans for the refurbishment of the play area situated in the Hirst Park Playing Field and also if any work was planned regarding the litter and related issues at the Paddock Wood Play Area at North Seaton.

The Chair asked the Town Clerk to update members and to respond to the questions raised by the member of the public. The Town Clerk reminded members that the Hirst Park Playing Field and Hirst Park itself was under the ownership and management responsibility of Northumberland County Council (NCC) although the Town Council sort to influence work through formal working partnerships.

Members were advised that, during the recent major capital works, there had been a general understanding that NCC was to address this facility particularly with the development of a major new play area within Hirst Park itself. It was clearly evident though that the smaller, older play facility within Hirst Park playing field had not been upgraded or removed. The Town Clerk undertook to contact the new NCC Parks and Open Spaces Management to establish what plans there were for that facility. Members asked that as part of that request, if there were no plans for removal, then at the earliest opportunity the facility should be upgraded and enhanced with additional equipment and a proper management and maintenance programme put in place.

In relation to Paddock Wood, the Town Clerk reported that the general area remained an ongoing concern and challenge to all. Members were reminded that previous joint site visits of NCC/Town Council/Community Support Officers had identified wider social issue than litter and broken glass. Members were informed that partnership working with NCC and the Neighbourhood Policing Team had been aimed at trying to address the wider problem and challenge of youth gatherings and wanton vandalism in the area. The Town Clerk reported that the Town Council has tried at best to maintain the original heavy-duty litter bins, installed by NCC, but they had been routinely vandalised and set on fire.

The Town Clerk reported that the Town Council already had on order three new cast iron “vandal proof” bins for the area in an attempt to prevent further damage and to seek as best as possible to keep the area tidy. The bins were of a specialist nature and were on a 12-week manufacturing turnaround, at a price of £700 each, with delivery scheduled for September. Members were informed that advice from the Fire & Rescue Service had also been sought in terms of retardants and best practice to try to safeguard and prevent further damage.

Members were reminded that the play area itself was inspected on a weekly basis and all reports and issues raised were addressed immediately by Town Council staff. Cllr. Lang, as the NCC Seaton Ward Councillor, reported that sadly it was all too common at the moment that damaged play equipment, broken glass and litter of bottles, cans etc were the direct result of older youths and anti-social behaviour. Cllr. Lang commented that these issues were not unique to Paddock Wood or Ashington but that the Town Council remained strong in its resolve to do the best it could to provide good quality and safe play facilities. Cllr. Lang reported that the Town Council had invested in play equipment improvements in recent years and that he was currently arranging to fund further equipment, targeted at younger children, in the play area.

The Town Clerk undertook to update the member of the public as and when he heard from NCC with any planned improvement or remedial works.

C20/893 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Stephen Fenwick, Brian Gallacher, Kris Lavery and Liam Lavery.

C20/894 2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS.

There were no disclosures of interest from members present.

C20/895 3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING.

The minutes of the last meeting held on the Tuesday 3 March 2020, were agreed and signed as a true record.

C20/896 4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST MINUTES.

There were no matters arising from the last minutes.

C20/897 5. INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2019/20.

The Town Clerk referred members to the full 2019/20 report of the Internal Auditor and Internal Control Assessment previously circulated for consideration and review. Members welcomed the detail and coverage of the report, carried out in accordance with the Audit Commission Act 1998 and the Code of Audit Practice issued by the Audit Commission and noted the Internal Auditor was satisfied that a robust system of financial and administrative management continued to operate effectively and efficiently and provided a sound audit trail.

The Town Clerk reported that the Internal Auditor had also concluded his verification work in relation to the review of the Asset Register as at 31 March 2020 and had signed off the full Internal Audit report as part of the Accounting and Governance Return.

Members noted that the Internal Auditor had also completed the 2019/20 audit of the annual accounts and associated notes prepared by the Town Clerk in his role as the Responsible Financial Officer. Members formally noted the opinion of the Internal Auditor that further to examination of the evidence and working documents, in his view the summary accounts and notes were free from material misstatement.

That:

- (i) The Internal Audit Report for the Financial Year 2019/20 be formally accepted and approved,**
- (ii) It be noted that the Town Council's robust systems of financial and administrative management continued to operate effectively and efficiently,**
- (iii) It be noted that there were no matters that the Internal Auditor wished to draw to the attention of the Town Council; and that**
- (iv) The services of Mr Peter Basnett as the Town Council's Internal Auditor be retained for the Financial Year 2020/21.**

C20/898 6. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN 2019/20.

The Town Clerk presented in detail the Final Accounts and Governance Statement for the Financial Year ended 31 March 2020.

Members thanked the Town Clerk for the presentation and information provided and for the clarity of the regular financial reporting throughout the year. The Town Clerk outlined to members the proposed and planned use of the General Reserve balance as at 31 March 2020 and stressed the importance of recognising the need for the retention of an adequate working balance for major forthcoming projects in 2021.

That:

(v) The Annual Governance Statement for 2019/20 (Section 1 of the Annual Return) be formally approved,

(vi) The Accounting Statements for the year ended 31 March 2020 (Section 2 of the Annual Return) be formally approved; and that

(vii) The use of the Town Council's General Reserve Balance as at 31 March 2020, be agreed as follows:

- Elections Provision (Main Elections 2021)	5,000
- Provision for Replacement of Christmas Features	5,000
- Office IT Replacement Programme	3,000
- Town Hall Service Charge – Provision	5,000
- Environmental Enhancement Schemes	48,000
- Climate Change Projects & Initiatives	20,000
- Allotment Sites – Capital Provision	20,000
- General Reserve Provision*	<u>275,348</u>
<u>Reserves Balance as at 31 March 2020</u>	<u>381,348</u>

C20/899 7. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL.

The Leader of the Council reported that due to the impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on the work of the Council, it had been some time since he had delivered a report and he hoped that everyone was in good health.

The Leader informed members that the following work that had been carried out since the last meeting;

- The Tree Planting Scheme for VE Day had been completed at Ashington Cricket Club and Peoples Park and had received positive media coverage,
- The Garden Competition was launched as a “virtual competition” with a closing date of Friday 24 July 2020,
- The Northumberland Miners’ Picnic had been cancelled. However, Woodhorn Museum had held online celebrations and the Leader reported that, together with Mr Ian Lavery MP, he had laid a wreath at the Mining Wheel Feature, on Booths Road, on the day of the Picnic.
- The Leader reported that the £10,000 funding for the Miners’ Picnic had now been earmarked for COVID-19 work and that a grant of £2,000 had been issued to the local group “Being Woman” to help BAME families through the pandemic,
- All annual funding contributions to external bodies have been distributed,
- The Town Council’s Horticultural Officer was now working within the Hirst Park Growing Zone and had operated there since mid-April. Negotiations were underway with NCC for a permanent presence through a formal tenancy agreement. The Leader highlighted that despite challenges and delays (with plants arriving from Yorkshire, Edinburgh, Holland and Wansbeck Garden Centre) work had commenced on planting the north side of Station Road and that many of the existing plants have been recycled and used in the Ashington Memorial Garden, The Mining Wheel feature and the Workers Memorial Garden,
- Cllr. Cuthbert thanked ATC staff for being on standby to work on COVID-19 schemes. In particular, staff had carried out a number of food runs from Newcastle Airport, in partnership with “Ponteland Community”, with most of the food going directly to Real Deal Plus and other agencies supporting Ashington residents through the pandemic,
- On behalf of the Town Council, the Leader paid tribute to the outstanding life of Jack Charlton OBE who had recently passed away. The residents of Ashington were commended for the huge turn out and show of respect for the funeral procession through the town.

C20/900 8. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING.

The next meeting of the Full Council was provisionally scheduled for 7:00pm, Tuesday 15 September 2020, in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX.

The meeting closed at 8:15pm