

HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL
COUNCIL MEETING 21ST SEPTEMBER 2021

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: The Right Worshipful the Mayor Councillor Paul Stevens and Councillors Andrews, Boulter, Carwardine, Dykes, Foxton, Hey, Hornsey, Milln, Oliver (from 6.10 pm) Owens, Powell, Stevens, Tillett, Tyler, Wilcox, and Williams.

Attending: Steve Kerry Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer and Ben Corbet Tourism and Information Manager (part)

Before the meeting the Council Chaplain Revd Andy Morgan led a period of silent reflection for those lost during the Covid pandemic and then said prayers.

C2021/22.40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were noted from Councillors Kenyon and Toynbee.

C2021/22.41 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

C2021/22.42 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Cllr Williams explained that he had asked the Clerk if he could raise a matter following his experience of administering emergency first aid and CPR to a person in Hereford recently. As the agenda had gone out, the only place for this was public participation, which is available to councillors who are also, of course, members of the public. Cllr Williams recounted the incident which had been extremely serious and it was not known whether the person would survive, they had been taken to hospital critically ill. He asked if there was a central register or listing of the location of defibrillators, which might have been helpful in the early stages of the incident, by the time one was brought to site the person had gone into a complete shutdown of heartbeat and so only CPR and emergency hospital treatment might have worked. The Clerk replied that he would be able to work with colleagues in Herefordshire Council and the BID to see if a comprehensive list and map of defibrillator locations could be produced and to see if there are gaps where one could usefully be provided.

The Mayor thanked Cllr Williams for his prompt action to help the citizen and for raising the matter tonight.

C2021/22.43 MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Dykes, seconded by Councillor Hornsey and unanimously

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Council Meeting of 22nd June 2021 were agreed as an accurate record and be signed accordingly by the Mayor.

C2021/22.44 TOURIST INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS UPDATES

The Mayor welcomed Ben Corbet who presented firstly the Communications Update. He reminded members that the purpose of the working group had been to align the Council's communications effort with the wider marketing of both Hereford as a destination and the

working of the City Council. This had been largely reactive to people posting items, it was now more planned and proactive with specific campaigns around such things as new Love Exploring trails, May Fair 900 and vaccination awareness. Statistics are shown in the report which illustrates a steadily growing use of the website which is fed in part by links from other social media which draw people to the site. The content management system is much better and three officers are able to use it which reduces dependence on the external supplier DM Labs and makes the Council's response quicker and more agile. The Grants section is proving a popular one, and more will be done to show pictures of equipment we have purchased being used etc to highlight the community impact of the Council.

Councillor Tillett asked for prompt attention to be given to some gaps in the Councillors' pages, noting that the two relatively newly elected councillors were still not showing email addresses after four months and that if they had sent any biographical information that was not being shown either.

Councillor Milln asked about more traditional publicity and suggested notice boards in the niches under the Town Hall archways. In answer to a further question he explained that in this context a niche is a side wall embrasure. It was noted that this is actually a matter for the landlords, and might require listed building consent so it is not likely to be easy to proceed with. There is a noticeboard on the front of the Town Hall and one in High Town which we use for traditional publicity. In the section on staffing Councillor Boulter asked if we had considered offering work experience opportunities. Ben replied that this hadn't been possible during the Covid restriction on schools but would be looked at again.

On the Tourist Information Centre report, Ben showed the rising levels of activity within the Centre. The Centre is covered in the main by two staff, with support from the third member of the Communications Team and also from other staff especially on Saturdays. This had worked well. Sales of souvenirs had exceeded costs and the latest figure is that sales are now at £900.

In answer to questions from members it was added that about 100 businesses have signed up for the Gift Card, and that there are notices about this in Maylords and on the BID Board in High Town. The old direction signs have been corrected in the City now to show the true location of the TIC since the move from the Butter Market. Books are mainly from Logaston Press who have them on sale or return and cover a lot of local interest topics such as walking guides. OS Maps are also popular. Works by local authors are welcome as long as they accept a sale or return arrangement. There are currently three local authors on sale. Apprenticeships should be able to get under way in January, unless there are further disruptions from Covid.

Members noted the reports.

C2021/22.45 EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

The Clerk and RFO reported that the External Auditors had issued an unqualified report ie they had found no grounds for concern in the Council's annual governance and accounting report.

The report of the External Auditors was noted.

C2021/22.46 POINT OF ORDER

Councillor Tillet raised a point of order to say that the presentations by the Tourism and Communications Manager had been unduly long because he had read much of the printed material already circulated. The Clerk said he would give some feedback on presentations to Council stressing that we expect members to have read material circulated a week in advance so it is not necessary to repeat it.

C2021/22.47 LARGE GRANT AYLESTONE PARK ASSOCIATION

As Chair of Community Development Committee, Cllr Boulter introduced the report and recommendation of her committee. She added this had been discussed in considerable detail and it had been noted that the machine the Association had borrowed had been used at Tupsley Quarry as well to spread the benefit. The Mayor added that this had been a unanimous recommendation and he continued to endorse it.

Cllr Foxton spoke of her support for the Association as many of her ward constituents use the park and her respect for all that they had done over many years. Without their efforts cuts in Herefordshire Council's budgets would have meant the park would have fallen into a very poor state and she hoped members would support the grant application, as it was a good example of true community development.

Several members spoke in support of the application in similar terms. It was particularly noted that use and enjoyment of the park is widespread, certainly across the north of the City.

Councillor Oliver queried whether there should be a rule that large grant applications must show a history of applying to other sources. He was concerned that this application had been directed to the City Council without any thought being given to other possible sources. The Clerk explained that although Council could impose that as a rule on Community Development Committee, one council meeting could not bid another, so a rule would not necessarily have any force. Other members suggested that a hard and fast rule was not necessary, but noted that the Committee and Council could bear in mind the history of fund raising by a group and look for evidence that we were not being seen as the only source of funds too often. In this case it was noted that by negotiating a trade in on old equipment, and putting in £2,000 of their own resources, the Association had reduced the cost of the tractor/mower by some £4,500 which was a very useful contribution. They had also been successful in raising funds locally for much of their ongoing work. It had been suggested at Committee that if the grant is agreed for the purchase, then they seek to raise other funds for any add ons. Councillor Oliver made it clear that notwithstanding his general point, he fully supported this particular application.

After discussion it was proposed by Councillor Wilcox, seconded by Councillor Foxton and unanimously

RESOLVED

To award the Aylestone Park Association a large grant of £9,340 for the purchase of a tractor/mower as set out in their application.

C2021/22.48 MOTION TO COUNCIL ON RIVER BATHING

As proposer of the motion on the agenda Cllr Owens introduced his proposal. He referred to the high levels of phosphates and nitrates in the River Wye which made it unhealthy for swimming and other sports such as kayaking and canoeing. This was detrimental to the use of the river as a community asset and was unlawful, but the enforcement agencies were not sufficiently active to prevent large scale pollution. This was largely due to woefully inadequate funding. A bathing designation of a river requires action to be taken to protect water quality and removes the discretion of the enforcement bodies to ignore the problem. It is not just about swimming as an activity, it is about raising the quality of the water for mixed use and for the benefit of the natural habitats in and along the river, all of which suffered from an excess of phosphates causing algae to bloom and smother other plants. Ross Town Council have passed a similar motion and Cllr Owens hoped that if this was passed tonight, we could persuade other riparian parishes to support the concept and pass similar motions, to make sure the community voice would be heard.

Several members spoke in support of the resolution recalling their own enjoyment of river swimming in their youth and their worry about swimming now, some had become ill as a result of doing so which they blamed on ecoli in the water. It had been a very popular and valuable community asset which was going to waste through neglect. It was also noted that real action would have to be joined up including regulation of chicken farms in Powys which are believed to be a significant source of phosphate and nitrate pollution.

Councillor Wilcox suggested the motion had merit in terms of wanting better to raise water quality but that calling for bathing designation was a step too far in his view. The river was not a safe bathing area throughout its course through the City and encouraging river bathing could be seen as irresponsible.

Other members countered this argument referring to the danger from contaminants as the main deterrent and reminded the meeting that this is not about saying the whole river is safe for bathing, clearly there are parts that are not. But in the summer, when water levels are low and the beaches are exposed by the Diamond Jubilee Bridge, it was important that the water quality was good enough to allow paddling and bathing without a health hazard.

Councillor Tyler reported that she is aware from her cabinet role at Herefordshire Council that this point has been noted already, and the other Councillors are challenging the two MPs to raise, and keep raising, this issue with the Environment Agency, Welsh Water and DEFRA, all of whom need to be committed to a programme if this is going to work.

Councillor Hornsey as seconder of the motion confirmed she had nothing to add to the debate.

It was then proposed by Councillor Owens, seconded by Councillor Hornsey and, with two abstentions and no votes against

RESOLVED

The City Council calls on Herefordshire Council urgently to investigate seeking the designation of the River Wye to be officially identified as bathing sites.

That the City Council urges concerned residents in Hereford to support the River Action petition, which asks the English and Welsh governments to double the Environment

Agency and Natural Resources Wales regulatory budgets, so that they can more effectively enforce the existing legal protections for the River Wye.

To forward this resolution to the Members of Parliament for Herefordshire, to ask them to support the campaign by River Action, for increased funding for the Environment Agency.

To forward this resolution to other parish councils in England, and community councils in Wales, along the course of the River Wye to ask them to support the campaigns for bathing water status and for increases in regulatory budgets.

C2021/22.49 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

The Clerk introduced the calendar prepared by the Events and Administration Manager. It was noted that one line referred to a meeting from earlier in the year otherwise it was noted by members. It was also noted that the Youth Council might move to Mondays, but no decision had been made on that yet.

C2021/22.50 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor acknowledged Cllr Tillett's excellent performance in "Jeffrey Barnard is Unwell" at the Courtyard which he had seen. He also read a letter of appreciation from the Royal British Legion for our funding to support their 100th anniversary celebration which had combined with Battle of Britain Day. It had been a very moving and impressive occasion.

The Mayor presented "Further Beyond Words" the book produced by the Men's Mental Health Group which is an anthology of poetry by men who have suffered mental ill-health with illustrations from the Hereford College of Art. It would be available in the TIC and other local outlets.

Up to September it had been a very quiet time but now mayoral engagements were coming in thick and fast. Worcester Three Choirs had been very low key with no civic turnout at the level we usually see and a rather perfunctory ceremony. Things were better at the closure concert which was also the launch of Three Choirs in Hereford in 2022.

C2021/22.51 MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF COMMITTEES

- a) Climate and Biodiversity Committee – notes of an informal working group to consider future plans were introduced. It was noted that there was a wide divergence of opinion about street weeds and how to deal with them. Where weeds are causing blocked gullies and floods this ought to over-ride a view that they were "nature breaking through".
- b) Community Development Committee 6th July and 14th September, noted with no questions.
- c) Planning Committee 8th July noted – it was requested that the minutes give some more information than just the application number ie a brief description. Noted.
- d) Policy and Resources Committee 15th June and 27th July noted with no questions.
- e) Youth Council 20th May, 17th June and 15th July noted with no questions.

C2021/22.52 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

- a) Municipal Charities – Cllr Boulter reported a meeting last week and all is going well, with prospective tenants being interviewed for empty properties and plans to install a lift at the two storey Bricknell Close building to meet the need of tenants who cannot cope with stairs.

- b) Enterprise Zone, nothing to report.
- c) Three Choirs Hereford (noted that the representatives are Cllrs Foxtan and Hornsey) Members had attended their first meeting to begin work on next year's festival. There were some good ideas for external fund raising and some feedback from Worcester. Sadly it appears that the Worcester festival has made a substantial loss. The Mayor offered to contact Lucy Wilcox, the Participation Manager for Three Choirs who is working with youth groups on music projects who is keen to ensure all stakeholders are contacted.
- d) Twinning Association, nothing to report. Cllr Dykes was asked to contact the Association for updates now that communications were easier and visits might again be possible.
- e) Hereford in Bloom, a written report was on the table. It was noted that the City had again gained a Gold Award from Britain in Bloom which was a fine achievement. Discussion between HiB and the BID are continuing about co-operation and mutual support.
- f) Close House, nothing to report from the main organisation, but Cllr Tillet asked for his appreciation of the help given every week at the Kindle Centre with preparing meals for disadvantaged families from the youngsters at Close House. It was extremely valuable.
- g) Hereford BID, the latest newsletter was placed on the table. The Mayor added that the BID were working with those trying to organise the Herefordshire Destination BID but they were having a somewhat difficult task trying to keep that project focussed on what might actually be acceptable in a ballot.
- h) Stronger Towns Board – Cllr Hey reported on the wider issues, the Clerk would deal with the electric bus project in his correspondence. The City got £22.4 against a bid for £24m which had meant some difficult decisions around trimming costs. The Soil in the City project was rejected by the government which had been a considerable surprise. Rose Regeneration had worked up to 31st August and a Board decision would be made on whether to re-engage them. Three projects were considered for cost cutting, Greening the City, Riverside Pontoons and the Electric Buses. After a robust defence of the project the bus scheme had been reduced to £1.7m which was viable. There was now ten months to develop full business cases for all projects. A consultancy firm Chamberlain Walker have been employed to advise the Board and it may be that the Board will be configured as a Special Purchase Vehicle to organise procurement.
- i) Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School Charity – a grant of £1,000 had been made for audio equipment.
- j) Youth Council – covered in minutes published on the agenda.
- k) Community Land Trust – Proceeding on all sites but only one can be publicly identified, Andrews Close. Unfortunately public consultation had rejected the proposed affordable housing scheme there and a new scheme, probably an orchard, would be developed.
- l) Hereford Allotments and Leisure Gardeners – in Cllr Kenyon's absence the Clerk confirmed the final draft of the service level agreement as resolved by Community Development Committee had been delivered to HALGS and they had a committee meeting tonight to discuss it.

C2021/22.53 TOWN CLERK'S CORRESPONDENCE

The Clerk reported that he had arranged a technical meeting with officers of Herefordshire Council involved in transport planning to see what useful assistance might be available and to confirm the need for a resolution of the transport hub and access to Widemarsh issues to enable coherent business planning to continue. He would be supported at the meeting by the volunteers from the Rail and Bus Forum and the consultant Alan Lewis who had drafted an expression of interest to be sent to local bus providers.

He reported that Herefordshire Councillor Harvey had invited members to a budget consultation on Wednesday 22nd September - notice having been received today for that meeting. Members who had not been to a consultation on this budget round were specifically asked to contribute now if they wished to be involved.

The Clerk also asked that two cheque signatories remain after the meeting and that members either take their papers with them or leave them in one place to enable rapid clearance of the Chamber at the end of the meeting. In answer to a question, the Clerk confirmed that only two members had emailed to accept the suggestion of emailing agendas and papers for meetings, which meant the saving would be negligible.

C2021/22.54 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 16th November 2021 at 6 pm

There being no further business the Mayor closed the meeting at 7.43 pm

Signed

Date