

FORDINGBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

**Minutes of a meeting of the General Purposes Committee held at 7.30pm on
Wednesday 18th March 2020 in the Town Hall.**

(Minutes draft until approved at the following meeting of the Committee)

Present: Cllr Wilson – Chairman
Cllrs Adams, Anstey, Earth, Goldsmith, Hale and Jackson

In Attendance: Mr P Goddard, Town Clerk
Mrs R Edwards, Asst Town Clerk
Cllrs Lewendon, Mouland, Paton, Perkins & White (Public Gallery)
A representative from the Men's Shed

1. To receive any apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Bellows (NFDC) and Ruth Crocker (Ringwood and Fordingbridge Footpath Society).

2. To receive any declarations of interest

No declarations were made.

3. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd January 2020 and report on any matters arising.

Cllr Jackson proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Adams and therefore **RESOLVED:** to sign the minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd January 2020 as a true record. All in favour.

No matters arising

4. To receive any matters raised by members of the public.

The representative from the Men's Shed reported that the group had been turned down on two potential sites. He expressed an interest in the old toilet block on the Recreation Ground which he'd like the Council to consider making available for a Men's Shed. He asked for this matter to be considered at the next General Council meeting on 1st April.

The Men's Shed representative left the meeting.

5. To report on any matters concerning St Marys Closed Churchyard and Stuckton Road Cemetery

Nothing to report

6. Matters relating to the Town Hall

The architects are looking to progress the Town Hall renovation project fairly quickly. Requirements were communicated to them following a meeting in February.

7. To report on any matters relating to the Information Office

The Clerk hoped that the Information Office will remain open to the public during the Coronavirus pandemic, with the additional support of one member of staff working in the back office.

Cllr Wilson reported that there are groups within the community offering help to those who need it. She asked if the Council could support the Fordingbridge In Need group, for example by printing flyers to be delivered door to door and by advertising details of the group in the Information Office. Cllr Wilson also mentioned the possibility of a new local magazine to give a sense of community during this time.

Cllr Jackson raised the wider issue of whether the Council should continue to meet and whether it might be possible to hold remote meetings over Microsoft Teams for example. The Clerk advised that by law, all Council meetings need to be held in person. This may however be subject to a change in law.

Cllr Wilson asked that the website and Facebook pages are kept up to date during this rapidly changing time.

8. To report any matters concerning footpaths

a. Jobs for Lengthsman - 3rd April 2020

Members asked that the twigs under Parsonage Park bridge be cleared again. Also if time allows, to weed around the benches in between the Co-Op and the library.

Cllr Wilson asked that the path between Falconwood and Marl Lane / Avon Meade be recognised as an official right of way. She reported that NFDC has no budget for resurfacing, however resurfacing needs to be a high priority for this path. Cllr Bellows has raised this with HCC and NFDC as something to do in the future.

Action: Asst Clerk to apply to HCC for path to be recognised as a ROW

Ruth Crocker (Ringwood and Fordingbridge Footpath Society) sent a report in her absence:

- Progress is being made on the Avon Valley Path Information Board. The design has been agreed and the content is being finalised.
- The Footpath Society and Ramblers Association groups have now suspended all walks until at least 31st May.
- Many rights of way are difficult to use because of the recent weather. The water table is high and there is plenty of mud and puddles and some flooding.

Cllr Anstey reported from the North West Quadrant meeting that countryside access volunteers, in conjunction with the rangers, would be targeting certain paths to clear.

9. Matters concerning Highways

An email from Cllr Edward Heron (HCC) has been received in response to an enquiry about the state of the roads:

Regrettably due to the continued adverse weather the Council's resources are having to be primarily focussed on flood prevention measures, with any limited remaining resource being targeted at high priority safety defects. The County Council almost never seeks to carryout works while road space is booked by utilities. Trying to have multiple contractors working in an area both presents a health and safety risk and also risks obstructing each others works. One of the reasons utility companies have to book road space for non-emergency works is to ensure they are the only operators within the area at the time.

I am unable to give a timetable for repairs but it is highly probable that only priority safety defects will be repaired for some considerable time. The prolonged wet weather has caused significant damage to the highway network and areas in Hampshire remain at significant risk of domestic properties flooding, particularly from groundwater where levels are still rising. While the Council has allocated over £5million towards additional repairs in 20/21, even with this additional funding it will take considerable time to repair the damage caused.

Information on how Hampshire County Council prioritises maintenance works can be found at <https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/roadmaintenance/highwaysassets>. However, the highways team are receiving many thousands of reports above that which would usually be expected during a bad winter and therefore the priorities are having to be prioritised! In usual circumstances a defect in the running line of the wheels of a vehicle (and this includes bicycles) is a higher priority than those elsewhere in the surface. Roads are also assigned a priority based on classification and traffic volumes. Top priority are 'strategic routes', these are the most important routes that aren't the responsibility of Highways England, so the A338 and A354 in my area for example, the A, B, C & U roads generally. Main community roads, such as the High Street and Salisbury Street are assigned a higher priority than their classification or traffic volume might require due to their importance to the local community and economic wellbeing role.

Potholes can be reported at

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/roadmaintenance/roadproblems/potholes>

10. Matters concerning Allotments

Cllr Wilson reported on a meeting with Penny Farthing Homes regarding the new allotments. The Council asked for hedging, that the plots be marked and that water be supplied. Cllr Wilson is hopeful that a borehole will be provided. Cllr Wilson reported that Penny Farthing Homes are keen to be involved in other planting projects on Whitsbury Road too.

11. To agree the fees for the summer playscheme 2020

The Clerk reported that the Playscheme Leader has been trying to obtain sponsorship funding for the summer playscheme but has been turned down. Based on previous years' numbers, the RFO calculated that the price needs to increase to £19 per day to cover costs. However, as the price increases so the numbers of children attending could potentially decrease. The RFO recommends that parents be charged £20 per day / £10 per half day for early bookings, rising to £25 per day / £12.50 per half day thereafter.

Cllr Adams asked whether the Sarah Kinsley fund might cover the cost of providing one-to-one support for children with additional needs.

Cllr Hale proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Wilson and therefore **RESOLVED**: to charge £18 per day for early bookings, £19 per day thereafter. All in favour.

The Playscheme Leader has noted that due to the Covid-19 pandemic the playscheme may not run at all this year.

12. To note any items of correspondence

The owner of The George had written to offer the services of their kitchen to help feed the elderly and vulnerable during the Coronavirus pandemic. She proposed that the George could cook and deliver food and the Council/Government could pay for the food at a reduced rate. This would keep staff employed at least in a part time basis and the vulnerable and older people safe.

Members discussed the George's proposal. There is no money within the Council's budget to pay for this service. Even if funds were available, the Council didn't feel they could support one business over another at a time when all local catering establishments were struggling.

Cllr Wilson reported that other organisations already offer a meals on wheels service to the elderly and there's a lot involved in ensuring the correct levels of vitamins and calories. Cllr Paton suggested that The George may be trying to reach those who need to stay indoors to be shielded from the virus instead, in which case a meal parcel with ingredients may suit them better. Cllr Wilson reported that many people have volunteered to buy shopping for neighbours, both in an informal capacity and through the Fordingbridge In Need group.

13. To receive a report from the Clerk or any other relevant business

The Clerk reported that a formal decision would need to be made on how to proceed with meetings during the Coronavirus pandemic. This will be an agenda item at the Finance and Policy meeting on 25th March 2020. The Clerk suggested holding just one monthly Council meeting and limiting the number of attendees. He reported that under current law, members need to physically attend Council meetings, rather than use technology to dial in remotely.

Cllr Anstey raised concern about voting and how decisions would be made without meeting to discuss matters. Cllr Hale thought that Planning Applications could be added onto a monthly General Council meeting rather than holding a separate Planning Committee meeting. Cllr Jackson advised that the Council is not setting a good example by continuing to meet and recommended that the Council make better use of technology available. He thought that next week's Finance and Policy meeting should be cancelled.

Cllr Wilson raised the subject of the Men's Shed. Cllr Anstey reported that the lease option for the toilet block still lay with the rugby club and this is ongoing due to the situation with the pavilion refurbishment. Cllr Wilson asked whether the Council might be able to lease a piece of land to the Men's Shed so they could apply for planning permission as had happened at Wilton. Cllr Jackson thought that the Council is not in a position to lease land until the neighbourhood plan is agreed. Members agreed that the Men's Shed need to make a business case to show how they plan to raise the funds to refurbish and maintain the old toilet block building, before a decision could be made.

14. To note the date of the next meeting as 20th May 2020

The meeting finished at 8.22pm