

FORDINGBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

**Minutes of the General Council meeting held on Wednesday 7th June 2023 at 7.30pm
held at the Town Hall.**

(Minutes subject to approval at the next meeting of the Council)

Present: Cllr White – Chair
Cllrs Bailey, Cameron, Hale, Hinton, Jackson, Lewendon, Paton, Perkins, Shering
and Wilson

In Attendance: Paul Goddard, Town Clerk
Cllr Woods, New Forest District Council
Cllr Heron, Hampshire County Council
Ruth Croker, Footpath Officer and representative of Ringwood &
Fordingbridge Footpath Society (RFFS)
A member of the public

1. To receive any apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Millar.

2. To receive any Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest.

**3. To confirm the minutes of the General Council meeting held on Wednesday 10th May
2023 and to report on any matters arising**

Cllr Wilson proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Hale and therefore RESOLVED: that the minutes of the General Council meeting held on the 10th May 2023 are signed as a true record.

No Matters arising.

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

No matters raised.

11. To consider Highways in Fordingbridge (including the provision of bus stops)

Cllr White proposed moving this item up the agenda to accommodate the attending member of the public. The member of the public spoke to the meeting about accessibility issues around the town, including access to the post office and chemist, narrow pavements, inconsistent dropped kerbs, narrow pavements and barriers on footpaths designed to stop cyclists that prevent mobility scooter access. She had done extensive research and spoken to many residents to identify the issues. She told the meeting that residents do not go into town due to the issues and some would rather get a bus to Ringwood to access shops and facilities.

Cllr Jackson asked Cllr Heron about the Fordingbridge Access Strategy that Hampshire County Council (“HCC”) has been working on. Cllr Heron had followed this up and will see it tomorrow. The next stage would be to consult with the Town Council. He expected the draft strategy to be available within the next few days. There are things that cannot be changed such as the width of pavements, but there are some comparatively easy, quick wins. Some things are more complex but could be programmed in longer term. Cllr Heron suggested developing a list of all the issues that can then be looked at. A number of the things will be legacy issues which could be reviewed.

Cllr Jackson referred to HCC's comments on the proposed development on SS16, which mentioned the Bridge Street roundabout and the danger to pedestrians, particularly as there is a high proportion of older residents.

The member of the public told the meeting that with the current issues, tourists would not stay in town and local businesses would lose revenue.

Cllr Hinton asked rather than circulate the draft access strategy whether HCC could present to the Town Council. He felt that there had been a lack of engagement during the process to date and thought it would be beneficial to understand what sort of document it is and how it is envisaged it could be used. Cllr Heron believed that Graham Wright from HCC had offered to meet with the Town Council and would forward the relevant correspondence. Cllr Heron would send the Access Strategy to the Town Council and then arrange a meeting to discuss how it could be taken forward.

The resident said that things needed to change. She has spoken to at least eighty residents about the issues many of whom cannot get out or attend meetings to set out their issues. Residents have told her of their experiences and the challenges that they encounter. For example, the bridge at Provost Street is impossible to safely use on a mobility scooter as it requires going on to the road exposing people to danger and the frustration of motorists. Cllr Heron said a list of the issues is needed. There are some things that take time such as dropped kerbs but things like removing railings to improve accessibility can be done quickly. Once the list is compiled then a timetable can be agreed. The member of the public has a list, which she will look add to.

Cllr Bailey raised the issue of accessibility on Town Council owned land and highlighted some specific issues at the Recreation Ground. There was discussion about how this might be improved. Cllr Wilson said residents who use mobility scooters and want to get the bus have nowhere to leave their scooters and felt the area in front of the sorting office could be used for this.

Cllr White suggested bringing the issues of accessibility at the recreation Ground in to the Recreation Ground working party. Cllr Wilson suggested opening the memorial gates would improve accessibility and there had been correspondence with HCC about installing a barrier for safety so that the gates can be opened. Cllr Heron asked to be sent the correspondence so he could look into it but noted that there were possible restrictions such as the proximity of railings to road carriageways that might mean it could not be achieved. Cllr White will liaise further with the member of the public. The member of the public left the meeting.

5. To receive a report on any matters under Section 17 of the Crime & Disorder Act

PCSO May had sent his apologies but had provided the appended crime report that was considered by members.

The Clerk advised that the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner had advised that the police were restructuring so that the numbers of police officers in the local policing teams would be increased. Inspector Ord will contact the Town Council to provide further details.

6. To receive a report from the Town Mayor

The Mayor said he was now a month in post. He hoped that the newly elected members were settling in and enjoying being on the council. He said he hoped the Town Council could build good relationships with the new district councillors and continue the one with the town's county councillor. He attended the opening of the community garden the previous week, which was well attended and a success. Later in the month he will be attending Burgate School to judge the signs for the new community orchard. Cllr Wilson confirmed that the community garden was accessible. The Mayor noted the recent demolition of the old toilet block and removal of the shelter. The Annual Town Assembly was a good meeting with the NFDC attending. He and Cllr Jackson

attended the launch event for Whitsbury Green. Cllr Jackson advised that developer was looking at sponsoring the Turks football club.

7. To receive a report from the County Councillor

Cllr Heron said HCC has finished its budget for 2023/2024. HCC also has a medium term plan for the following two years and is in the process of early consultation for this plan. He encouraged the Town Council and residents to respond. In the context of the budget, he would be cautious regarding the available funds to meet the costs of improving accessibility. HCC has a budget of £2.6b pounds a year of which £1.2b goes to schools. Of the remaining £1.4b over £700m goes towards adult social care and this is likely to rise to around £800m. HCC only gets a 2% rise in precept. Children's services accounts for £300m, universal services (footpaths and roads) accounts for £250m, £60m goes on disposing of waste and Highways gets £60m a year. He has given the figure for the cost of children's services. Most of the work the NFDC does is universal, such as the collection of rubbish, and so is universally seen. Most of the work and costs incurred by HCC is never seen by members of the public. There are 1,700 children in the care of HCC, some because they have a high level of needs. It is not unusual for for it to cost £250k for one child. HCC is by almost every measure the leading authority in children's services. HCC as an authority goes into other failing authorities. Cllr Heron felt he should talk about this and will talk about adult services at the next meeting he attends. HCC will always fund the most vulnerable to keep them alive and safe before anything else.

Cllr Jackson raised the 80% of CIL that the NFDC received from the new developments and said the Town Council is struggling to find out what the NFDC has done with it. Cllr Heron advised that the NFDC was in an unusual situation compared to other authorities that are already well into allocating CIL. This is not the case with the NFDC as up to this point all CIL had to be used on habitat mitigation but going forward CIL will be available. Work is being done at district level in that regard. The frustration is though, even if CIL is used to fund a new footpath that connects to an existing footpath, CIL cannot be used to improve the existing path. The Town Council will now be having conversations with the NFDC regarding the use of CIL for projects.

Cllr Wilson asked about the £2m generated at Augustus Park and asked whether it was gone as Augustus Park was not part of the Local Plan. Cllr Heron confirmed that it had all gone on habitat mitigation. Cllr Woods said there was money available from CIL but he had been advised that the Town Council should put in a proposal to access this to the NFDC planning department. Cllr Heron said the Town Council had received quite a lot of s106 funds that it used at the Recreation Ground. He said the NFDC had received some comments from other Hampshire local authorities that were using their CIL and the NFDC had not (because it could not). Now it is in control of what it does with CIL so the Town Council can come up with projects to form part of a list, but he cautioned CIL is a one-off pot, so the cost of maintaining new infrastructure should be considered.

8. To receive a report from the District Councillors

Cllr Woods referred to the written report that he and Cllr Millar had provided in advance of this meeting. There were no questions.

9. To receive the following Committee meeting minutes and any recommendations to General Council contained therein.

- Planning Committee – 17th May 2023 – received Cllr Paton
- Annual Town Assembly – 23rd May 2023 – received Cllr White
- Amenities Committee – 24th May 2023 – received Cllr White

- General Purposes Committee – 24th May 2023– received Cllr Hinton. Cllrs noted the recommendation of the committee to take title to the cemetery and no objections were raised.
- Finance and Policy Committee – 31st May 2023– received Cllr Jackson

10. To consider Footways in Fordingbridge

Cllr Lewendon reported that the footway on Whitsbury Road from Augustus Park to Tinkers Cross is overgrown on both sides. There are multiple landowners responsible for the hedgerow side. Cllr White also reported issues on the footpath from Stephen Martin Gardens up to Marl Lane. Cllr Heron advised the issue of overgrown hedges on landowners boundaries was a legacy one, as in the past if a private hedge encroached on a footway HCC just cut it back. In more recent years HCC has written to landowners asking them to maintain hedges and, if they don't, HCC will cut the hedge but seek to recover the costs from the landowner. Cllr Heron felt in the first instance a letter from the Town Council may be the best option. Cllrs discussed the likely response from residents and the issues of the bird nesting season. Cllr Paton suggested that the Council should encourage residents to report hedge issues to the Town Council and Cllr Wilson suggested that the Council could encourage residents using the Council's website. The representative from RFFS said she understood that HCC were cutting the priority footpaths soon. The Avon Valley Path is an important one. The footpath behind the cemetery is not a priority for cutting. Nothing more has been done with the footpath from Tinkers Cross to the A338. She felt that the Town Council should push for a safe crossing as it is used a lot by school children.

11. To consider Highways in Fordingbridge (including the provision of bus stops)

The Clerk referred to an email from HCC saying it may be possible to move a shelter from elsewhere to site in Fordingbridge at a cost and Cllr Lewendon's thoughts where the shelter could be sited. Cllr Lewendon asked what the costs of installing a shelter might be and Cllr Heron said when he last looked at it was £3,500 to install, so he thought now it might be around £4,000. Cllr Bailey said the Town Council own the shelter outside the post office. He said it needed cleaning and asked about a schedule for cleaning it. Cllr Wilson said the Town Council had looked at re-siting it as it was in the wrong location. She felt the whole area looked poor including the bin and a leaning British Gas box.

Cllr Heron referred to the roads in the High Street and the pedestrian crossing subsiding. He said if the Town Council wanted to replace the brick work on the carriageway with tarmac, the Council should write to him. He could then take it up with the Conservation Officer. Cllr White suggested if new tarmac was laid, the Town Council could ask for double yellow lines at the same time. Cllr Heron said the Council could ask but it would need a TRO and there had been reasons not to do so in the past. Cllr Heron said the current bricks are more challenging to maintain and in the next round of scheduled works it may be possible to put down tarmac. Cllr Bailey cautioned about putting down red tarmac.

12. To review the terms of reference for the Transport Committee

Cllr White said the terms of reference were up for consideration, transport could fall under General Council as Highways is a monthly agenda point as the Council has just discussed. The Council could retain the structure as per the existing terms of reference, or it could be made up of all Cllrs with the option to co-opt external members. Cllr Wilson said everything had to be taken back to General Council, so she did not feel all Cllrs needed to be on the transport committee. She expressed concerns and noted the Clerk would have to attend and this might be onerous if it met every four weeks, rather than on an ad hoc basis. Cllr Lewendon said the

committee was set up to meet if something specific came up. Cllr Wilson felt that transport should sit with General Council. Cllr Jackson said that transport was a big issue for residents. Cllr Paton felt that the transport committee was important with all of the new development but the terms of reference could be amended so that the Clerk did not have to attend. Cllrs discussed having a transport working party that took its own notes. Cllr Hinton felt that the Town Council tried to do too much detailed work at General Council. Cllr Hinton proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Paton and therefore RESOLVED: to change to a transport working party without the need for the Clerk to attend. All in favour. Cllrs agreed that the existing committee should meet to re-work the terms of reference and bring them back to General Council. Cllr Bailey said that when Cllrs were meeting third parties that there should always be at least two Cllrs present.

13. To agree the terms of reference of the Recreation Ground working party

Cllr Bailey raised the reporting of Health and Safety issues at the Recreation Ground. Cllrs discussed the reporting process and the minuting of issues. Cllr Paton proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Bailey and therefore RESOLVED: that the terms of reference should be agreed with the removal of the need for the Clerk to take minutes. All in favour.

14. To consider the future of the Strategic and Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

Cllr Jackson said a lot of work had been undertaken but the Strategic and Neighbourhood Plan had last reported to General Council in December. Members of the public had asked how the work was progressing. He felt that the Council needed to decide on a longer terms view, with projects to undertake over the next five years. Cllr Hinton talked about the distinction between a Neighbourhood Plan and a Strategic Plan. The latter is a corporate document that sets out the visions, objectives and priorities of the Council. A Neighbourhood Plan is a planning document. He questioned whether the Council had an appetite to pursue a Neighbourhood Plan but felt that the Council certainly needed a Strategic Plan. He suggested that the Neighbourhood Plan should be suspended until the Town Council knows the NFDC's views regarding the Local Plan. If the NFDC decides to proceed with the Local Plan, the Town Council could revisit a Neighbourhood Plan. Cllr Bailey raised a concern that the Town Council could miss out on the uplift in CIL that comes with an adopted Neighbourhood Plan. Cllr Hinton felt that the NFDC would take three years to produce a Local Plan and that the Town Council would only need 18 to 24 months to produce and adopt a Neighbourhood Plan. Cllr Woods said that there were new planning staff at the NFDC and they had suggested project proposals should be submitted by the Town Council and that there would be funds available from the NFDC. Cllr Hinton hoped there would be a good chance to forge a good relationship with the new NFDC officers. He thought that the new officers were talking to Cllr Woods in relation to CIL. Cllrs discussed the types of projects and how CIL could be used. Cllr Hinton proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Bailey and therefore RESOLVED: to suspend any further work on preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan pending a decision by NFDC whether to carry out a full Local Plan review or prepare a Part 2 to the existing Part 1 Local Plan and that the Strategic and Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group be retained at the present time as a resource and sounding board to the Town Council's work on its Strategic Plan and priorities. All in favour.

Cllr Jackson agreed to review the terms of reference of the group. Cllr Hinton suggested with regard to the Strategic Plan, that Cllrs review the current document that was adopted and look to amend it as deemed fit and to identify priority projects at the meeting of Cllrs that he had proposed that was likely to take place during July.

15. To report on any Health & Safety issues

Cllr Bailey said that if issues were identified then they needed to be documented, minuted, a risk assessment undertaken and any appropriate actions taken. Cllrs Bailey and Shering had inspected the Recreation Ground to audit signage and had identified issues where the river bank was undermined and this was exacerbated by old trees in the water. Cllrs Bailey and Shering were going to inspect this further to assess what might be done. Cllr Shering noted that the Council is looking at designated bathing status at the Recreation Ground but signs say do not bathe. Cllr Bailey said that the risks of bathing would need to be assessed.

16. To receive reports from representatives on Outside Bodies and meetings attended

Cllr Jackson had met the current president of the Rotary Club, who is willing to help the Council and town. Cllr Wilson mentioned the Fordingbridge and Ringwood Lions, who had contributed £100 to the Community Garden and attended the launch. Cllrs White, Wilson and Shering had attended a wash up meeting with the Events Group following the Coronation.

17. To note any items of correspondence

No correspondence.

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

Cllr Jackson had spoken to Fordingbridge Print regarding signage at the Recreation Ground and producing a leaflet for the town.

Cllr Wilson mentioned convening a meeting to discuss the open spaces on the Tinkers Cross site.

19. To note the date of the next meeting as Wednesday 5th July 2023.

The meeting closed at 9:23 p.m.

