

Droitwich Spa Town Council

MINUTES of the meeting of Droitwich Spa Town Council held in the Council Chamber, St. Richard's House, Victoria Square, Droitwich Spa on Monday 10 December 2018 at 6.30pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs C Bowden (Mayor)
Councillor R G Beale
Councillor G R Brookes
Councillor GA Duffy
Councillor Mrs A Hawkins
Councillor A Humphries
Councillor A H Laird
Councillor RJ Morris
Councillor W T Moy
Councillor R E Murphy
Councillor T J Noyes
Councillor A Roberts
Councillor A M Sinton
Councillor Mrs K Tomalin

APOLOGIES for absence: Councillors Ms J Bolton, Mrs S Harris and L Evans.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS SESSION

No questions were submitted for consideration.

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172 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor WT Moy Declared a non- prejudicial interest for Agenda Item 4 – The Brine Heritage Projects as Chairman of the SOBB'S (Save Our Brine Baths Group).

Councillor RJ Morris declared a non- prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 4-The Brine Heritage Projects as Wychavon District Council Executive Board Member and Economic Portfolio Holder.

173 TO CONSIDER THE EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS BY PASSING THE FOLLOWING MOTION

That the press and public be now excluded from the meeting under the provision of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) act 1960 by virtue of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted which involves financial and legal matters

RESOLVED That the press and public be now excluded from the meeting under the provision of Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 by virtue of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted which involves financial and legal matters.

174. THE BRINE HERITAGE PROJECT

Pursuant to Minute reference 142 of the Extra- Ordinary meeting of the Town Council which took place on 23 October 2018, Councillor AM Sinton updated about the Brine Heritage Meeting chaired by Nigel Huddleston – MP on 30 November 2018 at St Richards House. Councillor Sinton read out the following statement and proposal.

“Madam Mayor and Councillors

- 1. Nigel Huddleston- MP outlined the aims and purpose of the meeting which were to consider expressions of interest regarding Brine Heritage and resurrection of a Brine Baths facility for Droitwich Spa.*
- 2. Councillor Moy and Councillor Brookes explained the SOBBS project for Lido Park including confirming outline planning permission granted in MAY 2018. Their report covered the SOBB’S design vision through architect drawings for the Lido Park building and updates on the public support and fund raising activities. Councillor Brookes explained background information about the closure of the BMI Brine baths in 2009 which covered many of the logistical issues and constraints which had been encountered from handling the corrosive and concentrated brine. These important factors help to determine the complexity of handling the brine and the necessity to ensure a suitable site is found for such operations in the future. To this effect SOBB’S have already commissioned a specialist consultant who can professionally advise on such matters as well as an Architect for the Lido Park build designs. Councillor Moy emphasised that he was happy to consider collaborative working options further with Optispine / Mr Davinder Chatha for the Lido site. Suggestions included a phased development scheme involving a brine experience pool in the proposed foyer to the new build as a precursor to a more established and fully resurrected community brine bathing facility in due course and also the sub- letting of some of the first floor space of the existing art- deco building for treatment rooms.*
- 3. Jack Hegarty- MD Wychavon District Council outlined the WDC position – see accompanying paper. It was stated that WDC could not maintain operations of a Brine Facility themselves and this would need to be outsourced. Wychavon Leisure and/or other commercial operators may be interested subject to full interpretation. Any proposals from SOBB’S on the Lido site can be considered further but must be supported by a business plan. Wychavon maintain the brine extraction licence rights for the Town.*
- 4. Optispine – Mr Davinder Chatha arrived later and explained his background and interest. He currently operates two practices commercially in Wolverhampton and Birmingham and he has an estimated patient base of up to 300 people in the Droitwich Spa location catchment. Originally he had looked at the Lido site himself with WDC although a new build was considered to be cost prohibitive. Thereafter he had been shown other sites in the town by WDC and finally had been introduced to consider options for St Richards House in August. WDC have partially completed a buildings survey of St Richards House, which would be necessary to enable designs and a business plan to be produced. Mr Chatha explained that he is interested in operating a smaller sized brine component as part of a wellness and treatment business offering various functions including – hydrotherapy, physio- therapy, chiropractor etc . The provisional proposal is for the entire ground floor of the St Richards House building, installing a personnel lift with access to the second floor and conversion of storage space into treatment rooms and car parking spaces in the existing front gardens area. This arrangement is proposed to be on a leasehold basis from the Town Council. Mr Chatha was supported by Mrs Ann Pugh- Cook.*

5. *The Town Council through Councillor Sinton thanked Mr Chatha for his interest in St Richards House. The request to grant permission for WDC to complete the buildings survey was acknowledged and due consideration promised at an early opportunity. In the same way should the full proposal details from Mr Chatha need to be relayed and considered further by the Town Council this would necessitate a formal presentation and supporting business plan. Important considerations for the Town Council also mentioned were,*

** The future and longevity of the Tourist Information Centre and Museum include volunteer staff and x2 employed Heritage Managers as well as annual income).*

** The current Community Legacy Funding application and project to, expand, refurbish and improve the above to support the June 2020 May Flower 400 Celebrations.*

** Existing Income streams through Tenancies (RBK Engineering and Speak Easy Charity) which would be impacted by the proposals and any future expansion plans.*

** Precept levels 2019/2020. Full estimates due early January 2019 for sign off 28.1.19 latest. Any existing income streams put into jeopardy would need to be replaced by precept consideration.*

** Civic Pride – Key Town Council asset and status building. Mayoral status and history. Existing contractual arrangements for Christmas Lights and Ornamental planting would be impacted and diminished –potentially requiring amendment and down scaling.*

** Sale proceeds for Cockshute Hill land holdings due 16.1.2019. This represents a valuable cash injection to DSTC financial reserves and the opportunity to consider options for – SRH roof improvements , attention to heating pipework and reconfiguration of the second floor for towards possible further office space letting (with related rental income opportunities).*

** Risk of rumour and uncertainty with regard to the WDC handling of the Optispine introduction. This could be detrimental to the existing Town Council operations and also reputation – tenants, staff & volunteers and also in the wider community -Sobbs's group and membership, public, local residents, press etc.*

** The opportunity remains to complete a buildings survey of St Richards House as the building is of 1930,s origin and has no practical plans in place. This would be better placed in the control of, instructed and paid for by DSTC so that the survey is fully owned, compatible and transferrable with other Town Council lead projects (the Museum refurbishment and the Land Sale proceeds options). Should the proposals from Optispine be considered unsuitable for the SRH building, then the interest and involvement of WDC would also no longer be relevant.*

** Financial security for the Town Council and safe guarding of assets and income streams are of critical importance.*

It is therefore proposed that,

1. Agenda Item 4- Brine Heritage Matters

That following the Brine Heritage meeting on 30.11.18 the initial proposals outlined by Mr Davinder Chatha of Optispine (and supported by Mrs Ann Pugh- Cook) are considered to be unsuitable for St Richards House for a variety of reasons. The Town Council therefore resolves that St Richards House is not available and should not be considered any further. An expression of thanks is conveyed to Mr Chatha & Mrs Pugh – Cook for their interest. The Town Council continues to support SOBB's with their project to resurrect a Community Brine Bathing facility. This outlook also encourages Mr Chatha & Mrs Pugh Cook to consider alternative sites in the Town including collaborative working opportunities with the SOBB'S project at Lido Park.

2. Agenda Item 5- WDC Survey for St Richards House

That no further work is required from Wychavon District Council to complete any surveyors plans of St Richards House. The Town Council reserves the option to instruct and fund separate, private surveyors support as and when required & in order to progress other DSTC lead projects during 2019/20.

Various opinions were expressed and debated by individual Councillors in general discussion. Councillor WT Moy stated that the SOBB'S group remained committed to resurrecting a Community Brine Bathing facility for the Town but this cannot be at the expense of losing St Richards House. Councillor RJ Morris expressed an opinion that it was important to think wider scope with options for the future which may impact on changes to the St Richards House arrangements, as well maintaining careful scrutiny when allocating public money. Councillor GR Brookes added that St Richards House already worked well for a variety of functions and had potential in other ways from a Brine experience, which would not represent a community facility. He also added that there were more suitable sites to research elsewhere in the Town as well as reaffirming the SOBB'S invitation to welcome collaborative working options for the Lido Park project.

RESOLVED- That,

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Councillor RJ Morris abstained from voting on both decisions.

Councillor A Humphries read out the following statement and proposal in consideration of connected Brine Heritage matters arising from the Brine Heritage Meeting of 30.11.2018. Councillor RJ Morris expressed the opinion that the statement should not be included as an agenda item. The Town Clerk explained that this was a connected matter directly relevant to the aforementioned two resolution decisions made and as such should be considered.

Councillor Humphries readout

"I've been provided with the attached document which I understand was circulated at the meeting on 30 November 2018; I have some concerns about it not least that isn't dated or signed. In the interests of the Town, I would like to propose the following motion:-

"In light of the receipt of this document, the Town Council requests that the Town Clerk write to Wychavon District Council clarifying the following:-

*Who was the author of this document and on what date was the report written?
Does this report represent an Officer's Opinion and, if so, which Officer's and is it written as
and to be accepted as fact?
If not the above, is the report the debated position of Wychavon District Council and, if it is,
could this Town Council be provided with the minutes of the meeting where it was debated,
approved and the policy agreed".*

*I would suggest this letter/correspondence be sent to Jack Hegarty (MD - WDC) and the
following be copied into it - Nigel Huddleston MP (Chair of the Meeting), Bradley
Thomas (Leader - WDC) and Alastair Adams (Chair of Overview and Scrutiny at WDC)."*

Councillor AM Sinton requested that an amendment be considered whereby the points were to be clarified with Wychavon Officers on an informal basis as an enquiry rather than formal letters at this stage by the Town Clerk. Any response could then be included as part of the next scheduled full meeting of the Town Council on 28 January 2019.

RESOLVED- That the Town Clerk emails WDC Officers to clarify the following points.

In light of the receipt of this document entitled "Droitwich Spa- Wychavon District Council's on-going commitment to the Brine Heritage of the Town ". The Town Council requests that the Town Clerk contacts Wychavon District Council officers clarifying the following:-

Who was the author of this document and on what date was the report written?
Does this report represent an Officer's Opinion and, if so, which Officer's and is it written as
and to be accepted as fact? If not the above, is the report the debated position of Wychavon
District Council and, if it is, could this Town Council be provided with the minutes of the
meeting where it was debated, approved and the policy agreed

The meeting ended at 7.20 pm.

Chairman of Council -----
28 January 2019

