

Droitwich Spa Town Council

MINUTES of the **RESOURCES COMMITTEE** held at St Richard's House, Victoria Square, Droitwich Spa on Monday 6 March at 6.32pm.

PRESENT: Councillor A Humphries (Chairman)
Councillor R Murphy (Ex-officio),
Councillor R G Beale
Councillor S Best
Councillor L Evans
Councillor T J Noyes
Councillor A M Sinton

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Ms J Bolton, Mrs C Bowden, G R Brookes, G A Duffy, Mrs S Harris, Mrs A Hawkins, A Laird, A Roberts, A M Sinton and Mrs K Tomalin.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – Councillor L Evans (committee member) and Councillors Mrs M A Lawley and R J Morris.

259 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were none.

260 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 13 FEBRUARY 2017

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Resources Committee held 13 February 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

261 NEW HOMES BONUS

The Committee noted the revised Years 2 to 5 New Homes Bonus figures published by Wychavon District Council. For Year 2 there was a deficit of £8,544 in the remaining balance for future years' column, owing to all Year 2 New Homes Bonus monies being paid up-front. Now that Year 2 had been reduced from six to five years, there was a deficit and as the government would not be paying the sixth year of Year 2 monies, this was unable to be passed on. A deduction of £8,544 from the remaining Year 5 balance would therefore be made by Wychavon District Council after 1 April 2017 so that it did not affect the amount currently available to draw down.

Wychavon District Council's Statement of New Homes Bonus - Updated on: 10 February 2017

New Homes Bonus grant	Paid for increases in housing stock between October	Payable from 1 April	Annual allocation	Total over four or five years**	Amount paid to date	Interest deducted	Currently available to draw down	Potential maximum balance for future years
Year 2	2010 and 2011	2012	£8,544	£42,720	£48,271	£2,993	£0	-£8,544
Year 3	2011 and 2012	2013	£7,702	£38,510	£31,729	£0	£0	£6,781
Year 4	2012 and 2013*	2014	£21,619	£86,476	£64,857	£0	£0	£21,619
Year 5	2013 and 2014*	2015	£26,468	£105,870	£12,143	£0	£40,792	£52,935
Total			£64,333	£273,576	£157,000	£2,993	£40,792	£72,791

*Disregards any change in the number of empty properties

**The Government has reduced New Homes Bonus payments for Years 2 and 3 from six to five years and for Year 4 onwards from six to four years. We have updated your statement to reflect these changes.

The Town Clerk advised that the remaining monies available had been earmarked for the St Peter's Fields Community Pavilion Project and that she would advise the Applicant accordingly.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

262 ASSET OF COMMUNITY VALUE NOMINATION – (THE OLD COCK INN) 77 FRIAR STREET WR9 8EQ – INCLUSION ON LIST OF ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE UNDER THE COMMUNITY RIGHT TO BID (LOCALISM ACT 2011)

Pursuant to Minute No 184, Resources Committee meeting 12 December 2016, it was noted that the Old Cock Inn had now been included on the List of Assets of Community Value.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

Councillor R J Morris had advised that the Neighbourhood Planning Group was now applying grants and has been awarded the first grant from the Community Rights Programme as follows:

“On behalf of the Community Rights Programme, funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government, we are pleased to inform you that your application on behalf of Droitwich Town Council has been successful.

Grant you applied for: £7,000.00

Grant amount offered: £4,160.00

The grant awarded is less than the grant that you applied for because the grant is for the following items:

1.2 newsletters printing and postage £3,000

1.3 website £1,160

The grant is subject to your organisation’s acceptance of the Grant Offer Terms & Conditions as well as the successful completion of a due diligence process. As this is a conditional offer of grant, you should not spend any funds or commit any money until you have successfully completed this process and have received written confirmation from Groundwork UK that you may start your project.

Once confirmation has been received, the grant must be spent within six months. Any amount unspent at the grant finish date (specified in your grant offer letter) must be returned to Groundwork UK as part of the monitoring procedures. Extensions to the grant finish date will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.”

The Neighbourhood Planning Group wished to access this grant for promotional purposes, the aim being to attract more funds which will then enable appointment of a consultant. Mrs S Griffiths, Vice-Chairman of the Group, had confirmed that the £4,160 needs to be spent by 31 March 2017.

Minute No 126 of the meeting of Council on 26 September 2016 had stipulated the procedures to be followed when the decision was made for the Town Council to lead and support the development of a Neighbourhood Plan. Council had yet to see the proposed constitution and financial agreements for approval and at present no funding had been lodged. However given that the grant needed to be accessed and spent by 31 March 2017 and that there will not be any draw-down on the Council’s funds the Committee considered approval of this request subject to the relevant paperwork for this grant and all others being lodged and the requested constitution and financial agreements being presented in due course.

Councillor G R Brookes advised that he had been successful in obtaining a copy of the Application Form for the Grant. A copy was circulated at the meeting.

He asked the Town Clerk to clarify certain matters including:

1. Had the full disclosure information for those involved in the Neighbourhood Plan Group been provided to the Town Clerk?
2. Was the Town Clerk aware that on 23 January 2017 a funding application was being made directly by ‘rca regeneration’ in the name of the Town Council?

3. Was the Town Clerk aware that Sian Griffiths was listed as the main contact for the application and that no direct Town Council contact details were included?
4. Has the Town Clerk been provided with a copy of the application?
5. Has the Town Clerk received any minutes of meetings or update reports from the Neighbourhood Plan Group?

The Town Clerk confirmed that:

1. No disclosure information had been received to date.
2. She was aware that a grant application was being made but was unaware as to the originator of the application. Councillor Morris had asked if she wished to see a draft but that she had confirmed that a copy of the finalised application would be sufficient.
3. She was not aware of the contact details until that morning.
4. She had not seen a copy of the grant application until that morning, when Councillor Brookes had provided her with a copy.
5. She had attended the two initial public meetings in St Andrew's Church on 7 and 21 November 2016 but had not attended any meeting of the Neighbourhood Planning Group (or meetings of its Steering Group or Management Group). The only update report she had received was that presented to the Town Council's meeting on 30 January 2017. *[No Minutes had been received. A copy of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group's agenda for the meeting held on 17 January 2017 was sent to the Town Clerk on 15 January and circulated to all Councillors on 16 January.]*

Councillor Brookes advised of his observations and concerns upon the grant application as follows:

- *“Application gives siangriffits@rcaregeneration.co.uk as the only contact address.*
- *Not VAT registered.*
- *Q22 Is it your intention to allocate sites? Yes. If so, how many? 10*
- *Q23 Are you seeking to allocate more homes than the most up to date Local Plan? Yes. How many? 1200 in SWDP we are looking at a further 500 dwellings.*
- *Q30 Target date for completion? Dec 2017*
- *Q31 Please attach a document that contains an outline of your Neighbourhood Plan. What does this Say?*
- *Q42 What are you applying to fund? Professional Fees. Facilitator Costs 4 days at £500 per day = £2000. 10,000 newsletters @ 30p = £3000. Website graphics and domain purchase = £2000*
- *Q48 Please indicate what category applies to your organisation. “I am a parish Council/ Town Council.*

We need to know what is going on here before we can make any decisions. It is quite clear that this has already deviated from what was agreed. We are being asked to agree the printing of 3000 letters where we have no idea what they will say, although they will be issued in the name of the Town Council, since we are the lead organisation. We are being asked to agree the setting up of a separate website, in our name, but presumably without editorial control. We already have the official town

website and any funding should be to cover the creation of additional pages with access under direct control of the Town Clerk. All this needs to be considered and discussed, and the 19 working days left in this month mean that even if it is achieved, it will be a rushed and botched job, using public funds and put out in the name of the Town Council. It was made very clear at the time we approved this activity that no additional houses would form part of the plan, although advice has been given by Wychavon District Council that this is not guaranteed. I agreed this to support local residents. I would not have agreed any plan to add an additional 500 houses. I am quite clear this is not what residents want, and I cannot agree for this to proceed on the basis of more houses. I am concerned that even without the formal disclosure this council requested, it has become apparent that the group Vice Chairman is actively engaged as a planning consultant. It is a matter in the public domain that Mrs Griffiths often appears on behalf of developers wishing to overturn refusal decisions of the Planning Committee, or support applications against the wishes of Councillors. To be clear, this is legitimate business and I am perfectly happy that Mrs Griffiths is entitled to sell her skills in this way. However I do have concerns that involvement as Vice Chair, with our Neighbourhood Plan, may lead to a conflict of interest. Her obvious close working arrangement with developers is in conflict with the wishes of many residents including myself. Councillor Morris championed the setting up of this group, and he is to be commended for this. Unfortunately Councillor Morris is not here tonight, and able to answer these points. I am being increasingly drawn to the conclusion that either there has been a serious misunderstanding as to the procedures to be followed, or that, in his absence, Councillor Morris's trust is not being respected. To be clear, I want to give every opportunity for this matter to be resolved so that the work of the Neighbourhood Planning Group can continue once they have formed a properly-constituted body. I believe that the grant monies allocated have not yet been issued, so although the horse appears to be trying to bolt, out of our control, the stable door is still closed. We, as a Town Council, have a moral and legal duty to safeguard public money and see it is used wisely. I believe we need to have more information and fully understand the situation before reaching any decision. I recommend that we hit the pause button until such time as Councillor Morris can be here. I would like him to have the opportunity to investigate the situation, and be in a position to provide the full facts to this committee, so that we can properly consider the matter.”

Councillor Brookes therefore proposed the Motion set out below, which was seconded by Councillor T J Noyes, this to include reference to the requirements of the Town Council as set out in Minute No 126 of Council meeting 26 September 2015.

The Chairman advised of the fiduciary responsibilities of the Council in this matter.

Upon being put to the vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED

1. That the Town Clerk be asked to immediately write to the grant agencies, Locality, and Groundworks, and explain that the Town Council has not yet formally approved the present grant application. This application is withdrawn, and will need to be resubmitted in due course. The only contact point for any future correspondence is to be the Town Clerk, and not Sian Griffiths and 'rca regeneration'.
2. That Councillor R J Morris is asked to investigate and report back to a future meeting to explain what has happened. Councillor Morris is asked to ensure that all participants are fully aware of the operating requirements and procedures agreed with this council. (Details are available from the Council web site and also from the Town Clerk.)

The report should include answers to the following questions:

- a. What is the location of the 10 sites to be allocated?
 - b. Who are the owners?
 - c. Where are the proposed 500 dwellings to be located?
 - d. Has there been any contact or arrangement made between Mrs Griffiths and the landowners involved?
 - e. Who was intended to receive the professional fees?
 - f. Why have matters clearly deviated from the agreed procedures?
3. A full disclosure of interests by those taking part is to be provided and placed in the public domain. (Reason: to ensure that this activity is open and transparent and in the best interests of the Town as a whole).
 4. That no further action is taken until a satisfactory report has been received and reviewed by this Council.
 5. That the attention of the Neighbourhood Planning Group is drawn to the requirements of the Town Council as set out in Minute No 126, Council meeting 26 September 2016.

The Town Clerk advised that she would send a copy of the relevant correspondence to Mr A Ford, Senior Planning Officer, Wychavon District Council, for his information.

264 ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT

Creditor accounts in the sum of £2,335.81 were considered for payment, together with supplementary creditor accounts in the sum of £25,067.68.

It was noted that the purchase of the plot of land at Cockshute Hill from Wychavon District Council had been progressed.

RESOLVED That the statement of accounts appended be received and the expenditure totalling £27,403.49 (£2,335.81 + £25,067.68) be approved and duly passed for payment.

The meeting closed at 6.51pm.

Chairman of Committee
10 April 2017

Chairman of Council
24 April 2017

RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 6 MARCH 2017 – MINUTE NO 264 REFERS**CREDITOR PAYMENTS**

10981	British Gas Services (Commercial) Limited Call out - No heating/hot water at Community Hall	£114.00
10982	Merlin Office Supplies Limited Office Desk and Posture Chair - Heritage Centre	£456.00
10983	Mint Electrical Services Limited Emergency light testing October 2016 to January 2017 Electrical work carried out in TIC and Council Chamber	£510.00
10984	Wychavon District Council Annual charge for weekly collection from 2 x litter bins located in Copcut Park and twice yearly cleanse	£160.26
10985	N Hunt TIC Purchases	£38.50
10986	A J Manton Hillhampton Honey TIC Purchases	£165.00
10987	M Johns TIC Purchases	£15.05
10988	R T Harrison Lengthsman Duties - February 2017 - £442.00 Tree work at Copcut Allotment, Handyman duties including VAS work - £435.00	£877.00

Cheques already signed 2 March 2017 (pertaining to the purchase of Land at Cockshute Hill)

10989	Parkinson Wright Solicitors Transfer of land North side of 74 Cockshute Hill and Land Registry fee for registration of Transfer	£640.00
10990	Parkinson Wright Solicitors Purchase of Wychavon owned plot at Cockshute Hill - Land North of 74 Cockshute Hill	£12,500.00

Supplementary Creditor Payments

10991	Zurich Management Services Limited P Craney & M Keld - Seminar 25 January 2017	£36.00
10992	Bourne Decorators Limited Works to Copcut Park Compound, including supply and siting of shipping containers - £8727.00 + VAT Dredging of pond at Copcut Park - £738.00 + VAT Facilitation of installation and removal of Christmas trees for Christmas Switch On Event - £308.07 + VAT	£11,727.68
10993	British Gas Services (Commercial) Limited Call out to check boiler St Richard's House	£114.00
10994	Regional Digital Marketing Guided Town Walks - Flyer changes and printing of 200 copies	£50.00

TOTAL £27,403.49