

PONTELAND TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD VIA ZOOM ON 10 MARCH 2021

Present: Councillor A Varley (in the Chair)

Councillors S Ahmed, Mrs C Caisley, L Darwin, R Dodd, Mrs C Greenwell, A Hall, Mrs S Johnson, Mrs K Overbury, A Shanley and Mrs K Woodrow.

71. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies received.

72. MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD 10 FEBRUARY

The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 10 February 2021 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – The minutes be approved

73. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

74. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

75. PLANNING

Minutes of meetings of the Planning Committee held on 19th January and 2nd February 2021 had been circulated for information.

76. REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS AND FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

A report by the Clerk relating to the above had been circulated. Councillors were reminded that a review of the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations had to be carried out on an annual basis.

A Working Party had been established to carry out this review comprising the Mayor, and Councillors Hall, Mrs Overbury and Shanley.

Various amendments had been suggested which were outlined within the report. These related to the inclusion of a temporary Standing Order re the ability to hold remote meetings; an amendment to Standing Order 25 relating to rules of debate and a replacement of the current Standing Order 25 with wording relating to the General Power of Competence.

A comment had been made about possible changes to Financial Regulation 30 to remove references to the EU due to Brexit. Guidance had been received from

76. REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS AND FINANCIAL REGULATIONS
(Continued)

NALC who confirmed that these should stay. NALC did however mention some new information regarding 'find a tender' which would need to be included in the Financial Regulations. The local NALC officer recommended waiting for guidance from the National Association of Local Councils and/or the production of new draft model Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

A suggestion had been made to the Working Party that the Town Council should wait to see what guidance is received from NALC and perhaps set up a meeting earlier in 2021-22 to go through any new model documents in detail to see if anything had been missed and make appropriate amendments then.

In relation to the situation regarding remote meetings, a query was raised regarding the statement that there is no requirement to hold an annual meeting.

This had been included in the legislation which was in operation until 7th May. The difficulties of holding this meeting remotely were pointed out. Councillor Dodd stated that NCC had been advised that there would be no physical meetings until after 30th June.

RESOLVED –

(i) The Council approved the suggested amendments to the Standing Orders as set out in the report and on the pages that had been circulated and that they note the situation relating to Financial Regulations.

(ii) The Council agreed that an earlier review of both Standing Orders and Financial Regulations be carried out in 2021-22 when further guidance on several issues is received from NALC and/or new model Standing Orders and Financial Regulations are received.

77. ESTABLISHMENT OF STAFFING COMMITTEE

A report by the Clerk relating to the establishment of a Staffing Committee had been circulated together with suggested Terms of Reference.

A suggested amendment was made to item 5(ii) in the Terms of Reference as follows:

“The recruitment and shortlisting of applications for the post of the Clerk. The successful short-listed applicants to be interviewed by the Staffing Committee A selection grip to be used with criteria set at recruitment stage, to include criteria for the presentation. Short listed applicants will then be required to give a presentation to the Council on a topic relevant to current issues. The successful candidate will be the one with the highest score on the selection grid”.

The other amendment related to item 5(iv) for the Disciplinary and Grievance procedure. It was suggested that this item be amended to:

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77. ESTABLISHMENT OF STAFFING COMMITTEE (Continued)

“To administer the Discipline and Grievance procedure. If agreement cannot be reached by both parties then the matter would be referred to the Council meeting”.

The discipline and grievance procedures were currently included within staff contracts and it may be necessary to formulate a separate policy.

Finally, a suggestion was made under item 1(i) membership to change the word ‘members’ to ‘Councillors’.

RESOLVED –

(i) The establishment of a Staffing Committee be confirmed, and the Council agreed to appoint members at the Annual Meeting to be held after the elections.

(ii) That the Terms of Reference be approved subject to the three amendments outlined above being made.

78. INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM NCC RE BEECHES BRIDGE, FOX COVERT LANE, PONTELAND

A report by the Clerk had been circulated for information.

The report related to information that had been received from NCC regarding works to be carried out at the above locations.

Survey works were likely to be carried out in March 2021 with the main works expected to take up to 12 weeks and both sets of work would require a road closure and a temporary diversion.

The Clerk reported that for works such as this the Town Council did publicise the information as widely as possible via their website and Facebook. PNV was also used if the timing was relevant.

The Darras Hall Estate Committee had also been informed.

Queries regarding the continued access to the Park and whether parking would still be allowed on Fox Covert Lane had also been raised with the senior engineer at NCC who had advised that a temporary walkway would be erected across the River Pont just downstream of the bridge. Pedestrians would then be able to get onto the land north of the bridge and access Ponteland Park from the entrance close to the A696. Fox Covert Lane would be closed to traffic during the work.

RESOLVED – The information be noted.

79. HIGHWAYS WORKING PARTY

Minutes of a meeting of the Highways Working Party had been circulated. There were no recommendations.

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79. HIGHWAYS WORKING PARTY (Continued)

In relation to item 10 re the A696, the Chairman reported that NCC were going to examine the A696/A68 roads in terms of safety and it was possible that some measures would be identified for this route.

The Clerk had reported the issue as a routine maintenance matter to NCC.

The Chairman mentioned item 13 which related to overhanging trees blocking streetlights. She stated that an item had been placed in the March edition of PNV and asked any Councillors to report back if they saw any issues that required attention.

There was currently no update on the North Road and Thornhill Road new layout (item 3). It was hoped that some information would be available for the next Highways meeting which would be held in April.

RESOLVED – The minutes be approved.

80. ENVIRONMENT WORKING PARTY

Minutes of a meeting of the above Working Party held on 15th February had been circulated. There were no recommendations.

The Chairman of the Working Party referred to item 3(i) (c) relating to a new access into the Park. She stated that the Working Party had agreed to drop this project and not revisit it although a future project would be brought forward to tidy this area at some point.

In relation to item 3(i)(i), the Easter Treasure Trail, a question was raised whether it was planned to offer appointment slots for participants in order to ensure Covid-19 guidance was adhered to. The Chairman of the Working Party stated that the event would take place over a week and a reminder regarding social distancing had been included with the promotional material and on the entry form. It would be difficult to manage an appointment system for a week.

Councillor Hall as the Rotary Club representative was asked about the participation levels for a similar event they held in the Park in December. He advised that there had not been a high level of entrants and no problems were reported relating to social distancing.

RESOLVED – The minutes be approved.

81. NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

Councillor Dodd stated that Covid-19 still dominated the situation at NCC. He mentioned that the figures at Ponteland North and West wards had increased slightly. He stressed how important it was for everyone to still follow the guidelines and regulations.

He advised Councillors that ‘Purdah’ would start on 26th March for the elections.

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81. NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT (Continued)

Councillor Dodd also stated that people were being urged to get tested for the virus. He was asked if an appointment was needed or did people just turn up. Councillor Dodd said he would report back on this.

Councillor Mrs Johnson asked if it was possible to set up a testing facility in Ponteland. Councillor Dodd said he would investigate that and report back.

82. MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor had circulated details of his limited diary engagements for March and April 2021 for the information of Councillors.

83. REPORTS BY TOWN COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

(i) PCP meeting

A summary of the PCP meeting held on 17th February 2021 had been circulated for information.

84. ACCOUNTS/ BANK RECONCILIATION/ BUDGET REPORTS

Details of payments approved by the Accounts Committee in February in the sum of £36,262.93 had been circulated. A copy of monthly budget reports for February were also circulated, as well as the Bank reconciliation document for the same month.

RESOLVED – The reports be accepted.

85 STREET TRADING APPLICATION, MAIN STREET, PONTELAND

Information had been received from NCC regarding the above. The information had been circulated to Councillors and comments had to be sent back to NCC within 21 days of the 4th March.

The application related to a coffee vendor who would be operating outside of Rialtos on Main Street on certain days and times. This was private land however, a street trading licence was still necessary.

A query was raised about the other food and drink vendors who were operating in Ponteland and whether they also needed a licence. They also asked if their comments had any weight with NCC who were the final decision makers. The Clerk and Councillor Dodd agreed to raise the questions with NCC officers.

Concern was expressed about the impact on other local businesses who were providing the same services. It was noted that the application was for a year and that it covered all of Northumberland.

85 STREET TRADING APPLICATION, MAIN STREET, PONTELAND
(Continued)

Councillors were also concerned about the potential risks involved, especially in the current crisis. Although items were supposed to be pre-ordered, there had been reports of queues forming at these vans.

RESOLVED – The Council agreed to await further information from the Clerk and Councillor Dodd relating to the queries outlined above and then decide by email whether they would object or comment on the application within the 21 day timescale.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – IT WAS AGREED THAT MONTHLY REMOTE MEETINGS WOULD NOW BE HELD VIA ZOOM. THE NEXT MEETING WOULD BE ON WEDNESDAY 14TH APRIL AT 3.00 P.M. (2.45p.m. for public questions)

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