

**Present:** The Mayor, Councillor Mrs P Phillips  
The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin  
Councillor M Akehurst  
Councillor S Gawrysiak (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor W Hamilton  
Councillor Miss L Hillier  
Councillor Ms L Meachin  
Councillor D Nimmo-Smith  
Councillor I Reissmann (Chair)

**In attendance:** Mr M W Kennedy – Town Clerk  
Mrs H King – Committee Administrator  
7 members of the public  
1 member of the press

85. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies.

86. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor D Nimmo-Smith:

- Min 89 – Progress Report (Northfield End) – personal (OCC Councillor)
- Min 98 – Northfield End Amenity Land– personal – (OCC Councillor)

87. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION**

*Tim Foxall* (Associate Director – Glanville Consultants) read a prepared statement in connection with the Stopping-Up Application at Bell Street, which he said would “correct some of the misinformation and misconceptions which appear to surround the proposal and to rebut the serious and unfounded allegations made by the Town Council and individual Councillors in their correspondence with the National Transport Casework Team.” Mr Foxall was asked to send an electronic copy of his statement to the Town Clerk so that it could be circulated to all Councillors and attached to the office copy of the Minutes. Mr Foxall was happy so to do.

*Amanda Chumas* (Bell St)

Amanda Chumas also read out a prepared statement which concerned the Stopping-Up Application. The statement covered 4 main points:

- a) She hoped that the Henley Standard would publicise Mr Foxall’s explanation of the situation (as outlined in his statement).

- b) She pointed out that a resident of New Street was monopolising the parking space which Ms Chumas had purchased in good faith. Photos were provided in support of this point.
- c) Ms Chumas speculated that HRG's opposition to the Application was primarily based on the fact that it was one of HRG's Key Members who was occupying her parking space.
- d) Would the people of Henley support the objection to the Stopping-Up Application if it was realised that the cost to the public purse to create resident parking bays would be in the region of £500,000.

The Chairman recognised that Ms Chumas (and others) were unwitting victims under the current situation and although there was disagreement as to how the matter should be resolved, he hoped that an acceptable solution could be found.

*Ken Arlett (Elizabeth Road)*

Mr Arlett raised a number of queries on the payment listings. He noted that the Council still seemed to be using the same two plumbing firms (Action Plumbing & BP Heating). Action Plumbing had been paid to fit a new boiler in the Barn not long after they carried out a repair on the old one. The Town Clerk confirmed that it had become apparent after the repair that a replacement was required. He also confirmed that a third plumber had been added to the Council's list of plumbing firms. Action Plumbing had also replaced a pipe at the pavilion for £432 which Mr Arlett considered costly.

Mr Arlett queried the amount of money spend on fuel for the Park's vehicles (£445 in December and £551 in January). There was also a cost of £712 on agricultural diesel in January. All these costs seemed high and he asked how many vehicles the Council owned. The Town Clerk replied that the Council operated a tractor, Landrover, utility vehicle and quad bike. The vehicles were in constant use around the town, not just at Mill Meadows. The agricultural diesel is stored at the Tesco site and replenished every 3-4 months.

*Clerk's post meeting note: Fuel is also used to operate the Council's tools: hedge cutter, leaf blower, strimmers, chain saw and generator.*

88. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Strategy and Management Committee held on 20 December 2011 were received, approved and adopted and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

89. **PROGRESS REPORT**

Councillors received and considered the Progress Report and made the following comments:

Stopping-Up of Bell Street

A few of the Members were unhappy that the response to the Department for Transport (DfT) was not circulated to FS&M (as specified in the minutes of the 20 Dec meeting) before being submitted. The Chairman said that he had overlooked the requirement for circulation but believed this was not necessary under the delegated powers granted. He did confirm that both Councillors Akehurst and Gawrysiak had input into the response.

It was noted that a further response to the DfT was required as to whether or not the Council intended to withdraw its objection in the light of the response from Glanville Consultants.

As this was an important subject it was agreed that the response should not be constructed at this meeting but should involve all Councillors.

**It was RESOLVED that**

**the response to the Stopping-Up of Bell Street should be decided by Full Council on 28 February.**

It was also agreed that any further correspondence on the subject should be circulated to all councillors. The Town Clerk was asked to write to Glanville and DfT to advise them that a response would be forthcoming and the intended timescale.

#### Estate Inspections

Three of the inspections remained outstanding. The Mayor was asked to speak to the Councillors involved to ensure the inspections were completed.

### 90. **FINANCE**

#### i) Budget Monitoring

There was no debate concerning the content of the Management Accounts or the Dashboard.

**It was RESOLVED that the reports be received and noted.**

#### ii) Investment Performance

A member asked when the Investment Managers (IM) were due to attend a meeting at the Council. The Town Clerk confirmed that they were invited to attend every six months. In answer to a question as to whether the level of IM fees were to be discussed, it was confirmed that this was a point already covered and members were satisfied that the fees charged were reasonable.

**It was RESOLVED that the update be received and noted.**

#### iii) List of payments

A member suggested that there may be more scope for attracting sponsorship for some of the Council's activities e.g. Over 65s Christmas party and therefore not incur so much Council expenditure. It was explained that although the initial expenditure was met by HTC this was reimbursed in full by sponsors. It was also suggested there may also be occasions where buying items (instead of hiring) could save money in the longrun especially when these items are used regularly (e.g. crockery). It was confirmed that all options are considered for events. It was accepted that some of the descriptions on the payments listing did not give the full story/comprehensive breakdown of the service provided. Officers did their best to accurately record the description but the field on the system was the limiting factor. The HTC Accountant would be happy to provide further details if Members had specific queries.

The question of (vehicle) fuel costs was raised. The Town Clerk undertook to discuss the matter with the Parks Manager.

**It was RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.**

91. **INTERNAL AUDITOR'S REPORT ON FINANCIAL SYSTEMS & CONTROLS**

The Chairman confirmed that the auditor's report was very positive. The issues raised in the previous year's report had all been addressed, which was pleasing. He congratulated the Town Clerk, the HTC Accountant and the team in general for their work.

**It was RESOLVED that**

**the report and the Accountant's comments be noted coupled with the Committee's expressions of thanks and praise to the Accountant, and**

**the Accountant will submit a report at the FS&M committee meeting on 20 March 2012 regarding quotes for a valuation of the Council's assets (excluding property and vehicles).**

92. **EXTERNAL AUDIT ARRANGEMENTS**

The Town Clerk gave the background to this item. The Audit Commission used to appoint the external auditor but this was no longer the case as the Commission had now been abolished. It was not clear at this stage the timescale for the new auditor's appointment. The Department for Communities and Local Government had initiated a consultation exercise to examine the various options available.

The feeling of the meeting was that a National Body overseeing Town and Parish Councils would be the best option as this may produce a reduced cost (in terms of economy of scale) and also consistency of approach i.e. a level playing field. The Town Clerk was requested to circulate any correspondence, to Councillors, on the subject (if there was sufficient time).

**It was RESOLVED that**

**the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, be delegated to respond to further consultation on the future of local public audit for smaller bodies (being mindful of cost and the fact that the Committee favoured the option of a National Body making the appointment).**

93. **STRATEGIC RISK ASSESSMENT**

The meeting examined all the entries on the schedule. A number of observations were made:

Item 14 recorded the absence of an agreed 4 year plan which may pose an adverse risk to the Council's efficiency. It was stated, by the Chairman, that a strategic plan for specific occasions would be put in place as and when needed.

Item 18 referred to toxic loans. The Town Clerk explained that provision had been made in the accounts to reflect that fact that some of the Council loans may not be repaid. A watching brief is maintained with regard to these cases and this issue is now considered less of a risk now than it had been in the past.

Item 20 refers to the Ellis Whitham contract and whether it provided value for money. The Town Clerk confirmed that they provided a service covering HR, Employment Law and Health & Safety (H&S) and their dedicated client manager had provided an invaluable service. The company produces an annual

report on H&S and the Town Clerk discusses the content with the two staff managers concerned.

Item 26 – emergency plan for the Town. The plan had not yet been completed but work was in progress. Inspector Harling (TVP) had been consulted with regard to the appropriate contacts that could be used in the event of any emergency. The recent snow in the Town and the difficulty accessing the Town hall during the weekend had highlighted the need for a plan to be put in place. The schedule showed the risk as 4D Green and in view of the above the assessment may have to be reconsidered.

The overall risk detailed in the schedule showed a positive improvement from a few years ago when the majority of the items were red but are now in the green category. The Town Clerk was thanked for producing the report and up to date schedule and for his efforts in lowering the level of risk.

**It was RESOLVED that**

**the Committee note the report.**

94. **JUBILEE BENCH**

Councillor Gawrysiak explained the background to this item which had been discussed in detail by the Recreation and Amenities Committee (R&A). R&A had made the decision to purchase the bench and this had been approved by Full Council. The report for the Finance Committee was to seek approval to fund the purchase from the capital budget. (The 2012-13 budget had already made provision for this cost.) The meeting did not have an exact breakdown of the cost of the bench and associated hard landscaping and additional quotes were being sought to ensure a competitive price was obtained. A member suggested that it would be preferable if a local tradesman could be used.

**It was RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND that**

**the spend of up to £3,000 from the capital budget (2012-2013) be made for the purchase of a curved bench to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and associated landscaping works (and that the bench be placed at Mill Meadows).**

*Clerk's post meeting note: The capital cost of the scheme includes c£2,000 for the bench and c£1,000 for hard landscaping work.*

95. **WEBSITE GROUP**

It was acknowledged that a Mission Statement for the website still needed to be agreed. The tabs (and their contents) were examined. It was felt that there should be obvious direct links to the OCC, SODC, TVP and SOHA websites.

*Action: HTC Accountant to ensure this is the case.*

In answer to a question on the events diary, it was confirmed that this would cover events throughout the Town. However, officer time would not be spent seeking out this information but if outside parties wished to inform the Council, the appropriate details could be included on the website.

**It was RESOLVED that**

**the notes of the 16 January meeting be noted, and**

delegated power is given to the Town Clerk for all further matters relating to the new website, being mindful of the budget allocated, so allowing the new website to be implemented prior to 31 March 2012.

*Councillor Miss L Hillier left the meeting at 9pm.*

96. **ELECTORAL REVIEW OF OXFORDSHIRE**

The meeting noted the information provided by the Boundary Commission but there was no discussion on the subject.

**It was RESOLVED that**

**the final recommendations from the Boundary Commission be noted.**

97. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

**It was moved by the Chairman and RESOLVED**

**that the public and the press be excluded from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 as matters which were about to be discussed were considered to be confidential.**

**MINUTES OF THE CONFIDENTIAL SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE STRATEGY & MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 7 FEBRUARY 2012.**

98. **CONFIDENTIAL**

**i) LEGAL UPDATE**

The meeting reviewed the report and made the following comments:

Mill Meadows Nursery

The Town Clerk confirmed that the nursery had received Ofsted accreditation and was now able to care for a greater number of children.

Sports Centre

Although the documentation was ready to be signed at Full Council, there were still a number of areas (legal expenses, level of management fee) that were the subject of discussion. The Town Clerk would need these resolved before signature in case the documentation needed to be changed.

West Street Store

This subject produced a great deal of debate. The building is unique and not entirely suitable for any purpose and finding the existing tenant had taken a considerable time. An expression of interest, to take on the lease when the current tenant leaves at the end of March, had been received from within the Council. Although it was preferable to maintain the continuity of the income stream, it was felt that for the sake of democratic transparency and accountability, the property should be offered for rent in the Henley Standard.

Maintenance work was due to take place in 2012-13 which may cause disruption to any new tenant. There may be the possibility of delaying the work for another 3 years (the term of the tenancy) but advice would need to be

sought from the surveyor to ensure that any delay would not be unduly detrimental to the fabric of the building. The surveyor's advice will be reported to Full Council on 28 February.

*Action: HTC Accountant to speak to Keith Douglas (surveyor) and ask his advice on the impact of delaying repairs and maintenance.*

**It was RESOLVED that**

**an advert is put in the Henley Standard asking for expressions of interest in renting the Stores (but not quoting a monthly rent),**

**delegated powers are given to the Town Clerk to make the decision on the preferred tenant, and**

**the surveyor's advice is sought concerning the effect of potential delays to the maintenance/repairs previously suggested.**

#### Makins – QEII Field

A member believed there was funding available for this initiative and if so, could the Council apply for funding for a pelican crossing adjacent to the field. The Town Clerk believed that funding availability was restricted to the field itself and not associated projects. The Chairman encouraged Councillor W Hamilton to investigate further.

#### **ii) LEAVER ROAD**

The letters to residents had been agreed and the packs to go with the letters were being finalised. The meeting considered the degree of flexibility conferred to the Town Clerk when negotiating with any interested residents.

**It was RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that**

**the Council confers to the Town Clerk the authority to negotiate with any interested residents as discussed at the meeting as set out in the private and confidential annex to the minutes.**

#### **iii) NORTHFIELD END – AMENITY LAND**

The Chairman recognised that this was a sensitive issue but was pleased that the site visit had produced such a constructive meeting with OCC and they should be thanked for their input. The Town Clerk confirmed that the Parks Service would maintain the area but not until further consultation had taken place and as a result no action would be taken in the next few weeks. It was confirmed that OCC retained responsibility for resolving the issues with this area of land.

**It was RESOLVED that**

**the report be noted but that no further action be taken until the outcome of OCC's further review of the options is made known.**

The meeting closed at 9.40pm.

Chairman  
8.2.12

**PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL ANNEX TO THE MINUTES OF THE  
FINANCE STRATEGY & MANAGEMENT MEETING ON 7 FEBRUARY 2012.**

**LEAVER ROAD**

Recommended powers to be conferred to the Town Clerk

- No discounted offer on the value either made or accepted
- The cost of the property valuation could be met by the Council (subject to completion)
- all reasonable legal fees involved in the buy-back could be met by the Council (subject to completion),
- the buy-back could take place over an agreed period of time (5-25 years)

Chairman  
8.2.12