

LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL EXTRAORDINARY FULL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2020

Present

Chairman: The Mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe, MBE

Councillors: Cllr B. Bawden, Cllr J. Broom, Cllr K. Ellis, Cllr M. Ellis, Cllr C. Reynolds, Cllr D. Ruffle, Cllr D. Sarson, Cllr R. Smith, Cllr G. Stammers, Cllr G. Turner, Cllr S. Williams

Officers: M. Adamson-Drage (operations manager), M. Green (deputy town clerk), A. Mullins (support services manager), M. Russell (finance manager), J. Wright (town clerk)

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe, read out the protocol for virtual meetings and ensured all participants could hear each other.

19/249/C Public Forum

N. Ball

N. Ball said he was thankful the gardens were looking good. He had also attended a funeral recently and the cemetery was also looking spotless, so he thanked the staff responsible. He also thanked the council for allowing Axminster and Lyme Regis Cancer Support to have a beach hut on the seafront. He said the group had won a national competition for the best use of a beach hut, which put Lyme Regis on the map as being a caring community. N. Ball said he was disappointed about the shelters' roof as there were already puddles of water even after a vast amount of money had been spent on it. He hoped this was being looked into and would be rectified. N. Ball also spoke in relation to agenda item 12, Expenses for Homeworking, and said he believed there may be some backlash from the outside team if office staff were paid expenses. He said the outside staff needed some recognition for keeping things going so he advised caution.

B. Milner Simonds

B. Milner Simonds spoke in relation to agenda item 21, Eat Festival. She said the organisation, eat:Festivals, ran food and drink festivals and they were seeking permission to work with the town council to bring an event to Lyme Regis in 2021. She said they wanted to create a safe, welcoming event that celebrated Lyme Regis, working with local food and drink producers on an event out of the main season, with a proposed date of 22 May 2021. B. Milner Simonds said they would work with council officers and accountable bodies to ensure their event management plan addressed everything around waste, access and egress and safety measures, with an ethos that encompasses all the residents and visitors to Lyme Regis and local businesses. She said this event should benefit local

businesses by bringing in new visitors and existing visitors to explore the town, so they get to know Lyme Regis, celebrate great producers and start a new tradition.

S. Milner Simonds

S. Milner Simonds also spoke in relation to agenda item 21. She said their festivals had been held as one-day community events since they set up their social enterprise in their home town to bring together three groups: local families, food and drink producers based on the land around them, and businesses based in the town who had a way to engage with a different visitor group. She said retailers in Lyme Regis were constantly trying to promote themselves and they wanted to do what they could to help. S. Milner Simonds said food and drink was a level playing field that people could associate themselves with. She said they knew the year had been tough but they had learnt a great deal about organising events in a very safe and secure way. She said they hoped to bring some of these skills to Lyme Regis.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe asked if they had sounded out Lyme Regis businesses.

S. Milner Simonds said they had started their research and they were interested in grass roots' food and drink producers and possible links with the foodbank.

J. Sheppard (read out by an officer)

As organiser of Jazz Jurassica, J. Sheppard also spoke in relation to agenda item 21. She said the council may wish to take into account that the annual jazz festival is scheduled in the Marine Parade Shelters on the Bank Holiday weekend of 28 to 31 May 2021. She said as usual they intended, with permission, to accommodate food and drinks' traders to help defray the costs of staging the free festival. J. Sheppard said if the Eat Festival went ahead on their preferred date next year, this would mean two significant events on consecutive weekends. She said it may also affect their ability to attract traders with such stiff competition the weekend before and the same would apply in subsequent years. She asked the council to look at alternative dates for this proposal.

19/250/C Dorset Council Matters

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said Cllr D. Turner has sent his apologies but he would take questions by email.

19/251/C Apologies for Absence

Cllr R. Doney
Cllr L. Howe

19/252/C Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Cllr M. Ellis declared a pecuniary interest in agenda item 22, List of Payments as it included a payment to the Woodmead Halls, of which she was an employee.

19/253/C Dispensations

There were none.

19/254/C To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the extraordinary Full Council meeting held on 23 September 2020

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, the minutes of the extraordinary Full Council meeting held on 23 September 2020 were **ADOPTED**.

19/255/C To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the extraordinary Full Council meeting held on 7 October 2020

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, the minutes of the extraordinary Full Council meeting held on 7 October 2020 were **ADOPTED**.

19/256/C Matters arising from the minutes of the extraordinary Full Council meetings held on 26 August and 7 October 2020

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe asked if the bowling club lease had been signed.

The town clerk said the lease had not yet been signed but discussions were about to take place with the club about the practicalities of the lease and the handover of the site. He said officers would make every effort to get it signed before the next meeting.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe asked if any progress had been made on arranging members' IT equipment.

The town clerk said the deputy town clerk was struggling to get a response from DC and this might be an issue to raise with the ward member when he and the mayor next met with him.

19/257/C Planning Committee

Proposed by Cllr G. Turner and seconded by Cllr C. Reynolds, it was **RESOLVED** to receive the minutes of the Planning Committee held on 30 September 2020.

19/258/C Calendar of Meetings

Several members felt normal committee meetings should resume, in addition to Full Council meetings. Cllr M. Ellis suggested accepting the proposed calendar of meetings to allow meetings to continue, but to slot committee meetings into the schedule as and when required.

The town clerk said the meetings needed to be formally scheduled in as it was a requirement for the Full Council to set a calendar of meetings.

It was proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr G. Turner to adopt the proposed calendar of meetings for the remainder of the 2021/21 council year on

the basis that when potential dates for future committee meetings have been agreed, the agreed dates may need to be moved.

Cllr J. Broom suggested a friendly amendment to continue with only Full Council meetings until 16 December 2020 and to re-introduce a full committee structure in January 2021.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, members **RESOLVED** to continue with only Full Council meetings until 16 December 2020 as per the proposed calendar and to re-introduce a full committee structure in January 2021.

The town clerk said a proposed calendar of meetings from January 2021 until the end of the council year in May 2021 would be brought to the meeting on 18 November 2020.

19/259/C Financial Resilience

The town clerk said DC was not prepared to provide the council with a loan, but officers had had discussions with the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), which could offer a loan with an interest rate of 2.34%.

The finance manager said this would represent an annual re-payment of £41,000, and the loan offer would remain on the table for one year, to be taken up if or when required. He said the council wouldn't be allowed to re-pay the loan in the first or last year, but PWLB had been silent on penalty clauses as it would depend on the rates at the time and the amount still re-payable.

The finance manager said the quote was based on a loan of £650,000 over 20 years. He said the loan period could be varied if members wished.

The town clerk said officers could obtain further information on loan duration but further details couldn't be obtained on early re-payment penalties because of future variables. As the loan offer would stand for a year, he said if the council got through that year and decided it didn't need the loan, there was no obligation to take it out. However, it provided the council with an assurance that funding was available if needed.

The town clerk said it would be helpful if an in-principle decision could be made at this meeting to allow officers to have more discussions with PWLB.

Cllr M. Ellis asked if the council decided it needed less than £650,000, whether a lower amount could be borrowed.

The finance manager said he could discuss this with PWLB but he assumed some of the quoted figures would change.

Cllr S. Williams believed the council shouldn't be borrowing money but should concentrate on drawing in outstanding debts from boat storage at Monmouth Beach and chalet and caravan site fees.

Cllr M. Ellis said the council should act immediately to buy and then sell two beach huts but she wasn't in favour of selling two of the council's existing beach huts in the future as the rental income would be lost. She said there were also some private beach huts in a poor condition so the council needed to be firm about owners either renewing huts or relinquishing the lease, which would give the council the opportunity to buy and sell huts on those sites.

The town clerk urged members to make a decision on the loan as it was better to be ahead of the curve and not be forced to react because the council had run out of money. He said the interest rate on the current loan from DC was 3% and he asked the council to consider why it would borrow at this rate, when it could borrow at a lower rate of 2.34% from PWLB. He added there was no penalty for early repayment on the DC loan.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said members needed to know the month-by-month comparisons between last year and this year to gauge the state of the council's finances.

The town clerk said this was an interesting but skewed comparison because for the same period last year, the council had £650,000 in its reserve for the roof project and it hadn't been impacted by Covid-19. He said the most important factor was the forecast income and expenditure, which provided a year-end figure of £450,000. He added that income reduced in the latter part of the year but expenditure broadly remained the same throughout the year.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members **RESOLVED** to buy two additional beach huts to sell.

It was agreed officers would bring further information about the PWLB loan to the next meeting, as per the discussions at this meeting.

19/260/C Expenses for Homeworking

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said the council should not pay expenses and staff should claim directly from HMRC, given the council's financial position.

Cllr M. Ellis felt the council should pay staff expenses for homeworking as they had been forced to work from home and as utility costs for the office would decrease as a result, it would balance itself out.

Cllr C. Reynolds asked if the council could claim back the expenses from HMRC.

The finance manager said the expenses could not be claimed back as it was classed as a taxable benefit of working from home.

The support services manager said asking employees to claim directly from HMRC put the onus on staff and meant they would have to provide evidence of the costs incurred.

Cllr R. Smith said he understood it was an easy process for employees to be able to claim the expenses directly from HMRC.

Cllr B. Bawden said although the council should support the staff, she believed it also needed to be mindful of how it would look to people in the town if the council paid its staff expenses.

Cllr M. Ellis requested a recorded vote on the following motion:

It was proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson to pay employees' expenses to cover the additional costs of homeworking, at a flat rate of £26 a month.

Voted for – Cllr D. Ruffle, Cllr C. Reynolds, Cllr M. Ellis, Cllr K. Ellis, Cllr D. Sarson
Voted against – Cllr S. Williams, Cllr B. Larcombe, Cllr G. Turner, Cllr B. Bawden, Cllr R. Smith, Cllr J. Broom
Abstentions – Cllr G. Stammers

This motion was not carried.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr S. Williams, members **RESOLVED** not to pay employees' expenses to cover the additional costs of homeworking.

19/261/C LymeForward CIC Grant Review

As the council rep on both LymeForward and Lyme Regis Development Trust (LRDT), Cllr B. Bawden said there was confusion about the remit of each of these organisations and this needed to be reviewed.

Cllr B. Bawden also wanted to put on record that she felt LymeForward had done a fantastic job with the foodbank during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, she was concerned the council reps had not been invited to meetings of LymeForward or the Coastal Communities Team (CCT) for some time, which meant the council had had no engagement in the CCT's grant application for a health walk.

The town clerk agreed it wasn't clear what the respective roles of LymeForward and LRDT were and suggested he and the mayor met with the chairmen of both organisations to understand this. Regarding the CCT grant bid, he said it was being driven by LymeForward without the involvement of the council, or indeed any of the representatives from Uplyme and Charmouth Parish Councils who were also members of the CCT.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members **RESOLVED** to approve future grant payments to LymeForward CIC, to ask the mayor and town clerk to meet with LymeForward and Lyme Regis Development Trust to determine their respective roles and responsibilities, and to report back to the council.

19/261/C The Hub Grant Review

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr R. Smith, members **RESOLVED** to approve future grant payments to The Hub.

19/262/C Axe Valley and West Dorset Ring and Ride Service Ltd Grant Review

Proposed by Cllr S. Williams and seconded by Cllr B. Bawden, members **RESOLVED** to approve future grant payments Axe Valley and West Dorset Ring and Ride.

19/263/C Tourism Website

Cllr C. Reynolds said as the town council website was still relatively new, the information from the tourism website could be incorporated into it, which would also save the cost of running three different websites. She said there was no reason someone else couldn't take on the tourism website and run it themselves.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe agreed tourism businesses could maintain a website but there didn't seem to be an appetite for this.

In response to a member question, the support services manager confirmed the council owned the domain name lymeregis.org.

Cllr B. Bawden suggested the council take a step back and look at where the gaps were in terms of information provision and then decide how this could be addressed.

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, members **RESOLVED** to close down the tourism website, lymeregis.org, and keep the domain name for future use, if required.

The support services manager asked members to be clear about what they wanted to happen when the website contract ended in February 2021 as there would be no alternative provision of tourism information.

Cllr B. Bawden suggested a meeting of the members of the Tourism, Community and Publicity Committee to discuss the requirements and how they could be met. This was agreed.

19/264/C Land at the Rear of Broad Street Car Park

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr C Reynolds, members **RESOLVED** that under Section 1, Paragraph 2 of The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for this item of business as it included confidential matters relating to relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person within the meaning of paragraphs 1 and 8 of schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (see Section 1 and Part 1 of Schedule 1 to the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985), as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

19/265/C Cart Road

Cllr J. Broom said he understood the conflict between pedestrians and cars on Cart Road but it had always been a road and it was highly valued by disabled people who could park on the seafront and look at the sea.

Several members agreed and said it was a lifeline for disabled people. Cllr C. Reynolds reminded members of their responsibilities under the Equality and Diversity Act 2010 and said it was difficult for disabled people to park elsewhere.

However, several members felt it was dangerous for traffic to be driving and turning on the Cart Road where pedestrians walked, especially due to the requirement to socially distance, which had been made easier without traffic and parked cars.

Cllr B. Bawden felt the Cart Road should be pedestrian-only but to counter this, a request should be made to DC to create more disabled parking spaces in Cobb Gate car park.

Cllr G. Turner asked if it was possible to compromise and have an order which allowed traffic on the Cart Road in the winter but not in the summer.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said he would support a summer ban as the number of vehicles parking on the Cart Road was greater now than when the order was originally made. He said the council could also consider the number of disabled spaces at Monmouth Beach car park where people could have a view of the sea and Cobb.

The deputy town clerk said most things were possible with a traffic regulation order (TRO); orders could be made restricting different classes of vehicles, on different days, times and months. He said a seasonal restriction was possible but it would be subject to public consultation.

Cllr D. Ruffle asked if it would be possible to have two extra disabled spaces at Cobb Gate car park and for only local people to be able to park on the Cart Road, although it was pointed out this was discriminatory.

Cllr B. Bawden suggested a request was made to DC to use the whole of Cobb Gate car park for disabled parking.

Cllr C. Reynolds requested a recorded vote on the following motion:

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr M. Ellis, members **RESOLVED** not to submit a request to Dorset Council to issue a Traffic Regulation Order to prevent traffic on Cart Road.

Voted for – Cllr S. Williams, Cllr C. Reynolds, Cllr D. Sarson, Cllr M. Ellis, Cllr J. Broom

Voted against – Cllr G. Stammers, Cllr R. Smith, Cllr G. Turner, Cllr B. Bawden

Abstentions – Cllr B. Larcombe, Cllr D. Ruffle

19/266/C Assets and Services

Cllr M. Ellis said the council had previously been in the position of discussing assets and services with DC and if discussions were re-opened, the previous proposal should be put forward. If this was not accepted, the council shouldn't pursue the discussions.

Several members from the previous council administration were skeptical about re-opening discussions as a lot of time and effort had been expended in the past, only for DC's predecessor, West Dorset District Council, to pull out at the last minute.

The town clerk said if this council was to re-present its 2015 proposal, it would have to be modified slightly because things had moved on since then. He said a proposal could be brought to the November meeting for approval, or members could decide not to pursue it.

Cllr B. Bawden felt it was worth at least looking into this further, perhaps via a working group, as the world had changed significantly in the last couple of years and there were now seven new town council members.

Proposed by Cllr C. Reynolds and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, members **RESOLVED** not to enter into discussions with Dorset Council on the transfer of assets and services to the town council.

19/267/C Road Signage in Haye Lane/Roman Road

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members **RESOLVED** to make a request to Dorset Council Highways for more road signage at the junction of Haye Lane and Roman Road to improve pedestrian safety.

19/268/C Eat Festival

The operations manager said the reserve date of 24 April 2021 had now been offered to Yeovil so the only date requested was now 22 May 2021.

Several members were concerned about two major events being held on consecutive weekends. Cllr C. Reynolds asked if another back-up date in the shoulder season could be suggested by the festival organisers.

Cllr M. Ellis said she was aware a request from a local food retailer to operate on the seafront had been refused by officers and asked why this was any different from the food festival.

The town clerk said members had consistently rejected applications from food vans in the past but they could re-visit this position if they wished.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe felt the two could not be compared as one request was for a regular burger van, while this request was for a major food festival.

Cllr J. Broom was concerned about the potential negative impact on local food and drink retailers, especially as they would have just come through a difficult time due to Covid-19. He questioned whether 2021 was the right year to start the event.

Cllr R. Smith said he hoped any festivals would respect the town's plastic-free status. He said he supported the idea of low food miles that promoted local businesses.

Cllr G. Stammers said she liked the idea of a food festival but she wasn't sure if it could happen due to Covid-19 restrictions and agreed 2021 was perhaps too soon.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said local traders were going through a particularly challenging time and it would make a difference to the council's position if local traders could be part of the event.

Cllr C. Reynolds said it wasn't known if traders wanted to be part of the event and suggested the organisers could do more research with local traders and come back to the council.

It was agreed the organisers would be asked to canvass local traders to determine the level of interest and to suggest an alternative date, to be reported back to a future meeting.

19/269/C List of Payments

Cllr B. Bawden questioned the high level of transaction fees and water charges and asked why there had been photocopying charges as the office was closed.

The finance manager said the council had 19 different accounts with South West Water, all paid by direct debit, and the transaction fees were for receipt of payments across a number of sites. He said the office wasn't closed until late-September so photocopying costs were incurred in August and September, and staff were continuing to go into the office to carry out certain tasks.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe asked how much longer the council was bound to Venn Group for the temporary finance manager post.

The finance manager said the relationship with Venn Group was now finished and there was a clause in the contract that the council would pay 20% of his annual salary as he was taken on as a permanent member of staff.

Cllr G. Stammers said she had raised concerns with officers about the annual lift inspection cost of £1,000 as this was only for the Guildhall lift and seemed excessive.

The operations manager said the council changed supplier last year and the initial contract was £250 plus VAT. He was trying to establish why the cost had increased so much this year, especially as servicing of the seafront lift was no longer required.

Cllr G. Turner was concerned about payments made to the roof contractor due to the large puddles on the surface.

Cllr J. Broom was concerned about the high level of professional fees and also asked why the council was paying employees' Unison contributions.

The finance manager said the contributions were taken out of employees' salaries and then paid to Unison on their behalf, so it had to be included on the list as a payment made.

Cllr S. Williams was concerned there was a lack of control over which employees were buying equipment from Travis Perkins.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe asked for more definition on the list of payments so members knew what they were signing off, including whether the payments were weekly, monthly, quarterly or annual.

The town clerk said officers could include as much detail as members wished but it was likely to cost in officer time.

Proposed by Cllr S. Williams and seconded by Cllr C. Reynolds, members **RESOLVED** to approve the schedule of payments for August and September 2020 for the sums of £247,608.57 and £142,166.32.

Cllr M. Ellis left the meeting at 10.14pm.

19/270/C Debtors' Report

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr C Reynolds, members **RESOLVED** that under Section 1, Paragraph 2 of The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for this item of business as it included confidential matters relating to relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person within the meaning of paragraphs 1 and 8 of schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (see Section 1 and Part 1 of Schedule 1 to the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985), as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

19/271/C Exempt Business

a) Land at the Rear of Broad Street Car Park

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, members **RESOLVED** to no longer pursue a leasehold interest in a section of land that joins Broad Street car park to the Town Mill site.

b) Debtors' Report

The town clerk said officers were meeting every two weeks to review the actions they intended to take to pursue debts. He said he wanted to lay it out properly before the council with timescales for recovering debts.

The town clerk said he wanted to formalise the council's approach with a proper debt management policy that would hold officers and members to account about how debts would be pursued. He said he intended to present the policy to a meeting this calendar year.

The meeting closed at 10.27pm.