

LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 17 DECEMBER 2019

Present

Chairman: Cllr B. Larcombe MBE

Councillors: Cllr Ms B. Bawden, Cllr J. Broom, Cllr R. Doney, Cllr Miss K. Ellis, Cllr Mrs M. Ellis, Cllr D. Ruffle, Cllr D. Sarson, Cllr R. Smith, Cllr Ms G. Stammers, Cllr G. Turner, Cllr S. Williams

Officers: Mrs A. Mullins (administrative officer), Mr J. Wright (town clerk)

Absent: Cllr L. Howe

Guests: Dr K. Buchan (Dorset Council head of environment and wellbeing), Mr J. Radcliffe (harbourmaster)

19/52/SF Public Forum

There were no members of the public who wished to speak.

Cllr R. Smith arrived at 7.01pm.

19/53/SF Apologies for Absence

There were none.

19/54/SF Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Cllr D. Sarson declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 12, Lyme Regis Bowling Club Counter-Proposal as he was a member of the bowling club.

19/55/SF Dispensations

There were none.

19/56/SF Minutes of the Dorset Council working group meeting held on 19 November 2019

The minutes were **RECEIVED**.

19/57/SF Dorset Council and Lyme Regis Town Council Assets on-and-around Monmouth Beach

The town clerk said Dorset Council (DC) had accepted responsibility for the structures and encroachment onto the accreted land so this was no longer an issue; it was now a matter of the town council deciding what it wanted to do about it.

The town clerk said he had invited Dr K. Buchan and Mr J. Radcliffe to the meeting to help members understand the implications of any actions the town council may take.

The chairman invited Dr K. Buchan to speak.

Dr K. Buchan said if the town council allowed the current arrangement to prevail, either with or without a formal agreement and rent payment, DC would have to formalise permissions retrospectively with the town council, Natural England and Historic England. He said these options would allow DC to continue using the land, which was an important resource for the harbour, sailing club, sea school and boat users, as well as generating an income from boat storage.

Dr K. Buchan said if the council instructed DC to remove the structures, only, this would be possible as they were not secured to the ground. However, the structures acted as a barrier to prevent beach material flowing onto the Cobb, as hundreds of tonnes of shingle were often deposited there, creating a hazard and costing money to remove. Dr K. Buchan said the structures also prevented trailers backing onto the raised level of the Cobb. He said it also provided a storage area for fishing gear, rather than at the end of the Cobb, where it was a potential hazard.

Dr K. Buchan said instructing DC to remove the structures and reinstating the area to the previous level raised the question of what the previous level was. He said the level was generally dictated by natural coastal processes and he didn't see the benefit of scraping it away.

Cllr B. Larcombe said his main concerns were: the height of the built-up beach was higher than the main wall; a fishing boat was on top of the built-up area; Monmouth Beach could no longer be seen unless you were on the high wall; Monmouth Beach could no longer be accessed from the Cobb; and the fishing gear was causing a bad smell.

Several members were concerned about how the structures and raised levels changed the natural coastal processes and impacted on the Cobb, as the sea couldn't wash over and an arrowhead had been created. Cllr J. Broom said the harbour was designed to be self-cleansing by the shingle going in and out.

Dr K. Buchan said the structures didn't prevent water flowing through completely and there was still a drainage effect.

Cllr Mrs M. Ellis asked if the town council had spoken directly to Natural England to be certain of its position on this matter.

The town clerk said the council had been approached by Natural England, who had intended on approaching West Dorset District Council about the structures. If no action was taken, Natural England had indicated it would approach the town council, as landowner, to intervene.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to instruct the clerk to inform Dorset Council to restore the beach profile lower than the artificially made-up level, re-open access to Monmouth Beach and remove the wooden structure.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to instruct Dorset Council to remove fishing tackle from the accreted land at Monmouth Beach.

The town clerk asked for clarification on whether the council would allow DC to use the accreted land for boat storage after it had carried out the re-profiling.

Members discussed whether this decision needed to be taken at this point as boat storage was a much bigger issue which needed further consideration.

The town clerk said the boats would have to be removed during the re-profiling and it would be helpful to give DC an indication of whether they could be put back.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to defer any future discussions about storage of boats or any other fishing tackle on the accreted land until the town council considers the issue in its entirety, including all adjacent land at Monmouth Beach.

Members discussed the timescale for DC carrying out the work and it was generally agreed it needed to be completed by the peak holiday season.

Mr J. Radcliffe said boats were booked to go back there in April, including a big section of the sailing club, so DC needed to know as soon as possible if boats would be allowed to go back on the accreted land.

19/58/SF Appointment of the Internal Auditor

Proposed by Cllr Mrs M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr S. Williams, 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.

19/59/SF Proposed Amendments to the Recording of Council Minutes

Members agreed the use of female specific references in the minutes was out-dated and should be removed.

Members also agreed individual councillors' names should continue to be used, rather than 'a member', but acknowledged the term 'members' would continue to be used if two or more members agreed on a certain point.

Cllr B. Larcombe said he would also like to see an action column in the minutes, clarifying who, what and when something would be done, which he felt would give both members and officers clarity and an idea of timescales.

The town clerk said this wasn't practical as actions were not created until Full Council had approved them and he was not aware of any other council which did this. However, he said officers went through the minutes to allocate actions and identify

timescales, and members were informed about progress through the matters arising and update reports.

The town clerk said he would welcome undertaking a review of the actions with the mayor and committee chairmen as this was a good control mechanism for both officers and members, and a way of ensuring chairmen were accountable.

Cllr B. Larcombe said a list of actions should be provided to all members, not just chairmen, and this could be provided with the agendas.

19/60/SF Filming Money – Expressions of Interest

Several members felt some of the applications would fall within the council's normal grants' process and only several applications were suitably qualified for this funding.

The three most popular applications were from the Mary Anning Scholarship Legacy Fund, Axminster and Lyme Regis Cancer Support, and Mary Anning Rocks as members felt these were 'legacy' projects with strong links to Mary Anning.

Cllr R. Smith suggested splitting the money equally between these three organisations as they represented the past, present and future and focused on Mary Anning in different ways. Several members supported this idea.

There was some concern the Mary Anning Scholarship Legacy Fund would only benefit females, but it was clarified the fund would support minorities in the field and it varied by subject. Cllr Ms B. Bawden said it would be up to schools to nominate someone, but overall, the aim of the fund was to get women into science because they were under-represented.

Cllr Mrs M. Ellis was concerned splitting the money three ways would dilute it and the council could look to provide a beach hut to local charities outside of this process. As Mary Anning Rocks had requested only £5,000, this would potentially leave the remaining £10,000 for the scholarship fund.

The town clerk advised members to give proper consideration to donating a hut to a specific charity as there were many other local charities that might be interested.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that the £15,000 donation from Fossil Films is split equally between Axminster and Lyme Regis Cancer Support, Mary Anning Rocks, and the Mary Anning Scholarship Legacy Fund.

19/61/SF Motion from Cllr Ms B. Bawden on Planning Regulations for Heritage Buildings

Members agreed there was a need to change planning regulations to take into account the impact of climate change on the built environment, specifically listed buildings and those within the conservation area.

However, it was acknowledged DC was bound by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which made local variations difficult to manage. As DC was bound by national regulations, there was some doubt as to whether a request from the town council would have any impact and whether DC had the appetite to lobby the Government.

Cllr Ms B. Bawden said the process had to start somewhere and this request was aimed at doing that.

Cllr J. Broom said planning authorities had the power to vary national regulations.

Cllr R. Doney suggested if this was the case, town and parish councils could be brought together under the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils (DAPTC) to put pressure collectively on DC.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that through DAPTC, the council encourages Dorset Council to exercise the full scope of its authority where there are local variations within the application of the planning regulations.

19/62/SF Grants

Members supported the proposal to re-categorise the grants so the main fund would support organisations that help and support the town and to provide them with a funding commitment for the life of this council. It was acknowledged this type of grant didn't have to be for a large sum, but the organisations would benefit from the security of a funding commitment.

It was agreed this would be called a 'term grant'.

Members also supported the proposal for a community fund, which would be for one-off capital projects up to £1,000 and agreed there should be an essential requirement for match funding for grants between £500 and £1,000.

Members discussed the split between the two grant funds, which had been suggested in the report as £60,000 for the term grants and £10,000 for community grants.

Cllr Mrs M. Ellis said as the term grants would be committed for five years, she suggested the community grant fund was set at £20,000. She was concerned that if the community grant was capped at £1,000 and an organisation needed more for a big project, there would be no opportunity to provide extra funding as the term grants would already be allocated. She added that organisations needed to be aware the council couldn't give such big sums and they should only apply if it was really needed.

Cllr R. Doney said he had suggested a £1,000 cap to prevent habitual grant applicants applying for such high sums.

Members were concerned they might set an amount for each fund and find it was unworkable when the level of funding requests was known. It was agreed there needed to be some flexibility to stress test and potentially change the amounts if the level of demand required it.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** approve the introduction of term grants and community grants.

Proposed by Cllr Mrs M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve in principle a term grants' budget of £60,000 and a community grants' fund of £20,000, subject to stress testing.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the processes and timetables for inviting grant applications and making decisions on their allocation.

19/63/SF Lyme Regis Bowling Club Counter-Proposal

Cllr R. Doney said he couldn't understand why this matter had come back to the council after all the effort that was made by the previous council to reach a decision, and it had taken six months for the bowling club to respond to the council.

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to agree to the bowling club's counter-proposals for a 15-year lease and four unreserved winter car parking passes for Monmouth Beach.

19/64/SF Sea Sports and Adventure Centre Proposal

Members generally supported the idea of a sea sport and adventure centre and debated whether the council should agree to create a joint working party with Lyme Regis Gig Club to develop the idea.

Cllr B. Larcombe said although he felt the proposal had merit, he wasn't sure the timing was right because of the uncertainty around other assets at Monmouth Beach and he felt caution was needed until the council had that clarity.

Several members felt it would be beneficial to form a joint working party to explore the idea further and involve other clubs in the Monmouth Beach area.

The town clerk advised against forming a joint working party and said as the gig club wanted this facility, it should come back to the council with developed proposals and to present a business case. He said if the council was party to the project, the greater the expectation it would have to contribute financially.

Cllr Mrs M. Ellis left the meeting at 9.23pm.

The town clerk said the council was just about to agree its objectives and this project did not appear anywhere. Although the council wasn't being asked to financially commit to the proposal at this stage, it would be another project which would require time and commitment.

Cllr Mrs M. Ellis returned to the meeting at 9.25pm.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to inform Lyme Regis Gig Club the council likes the idea of a sea sport and adventure centre and believes it has merit, but more work needed to be done on the proposal in order for the council to consider it alongside other proposals for the Monmouth Beach area.

19/65/SF Land Stability

Members noted the report.

19/66/SF Exempt Business

a) Appointment of the Internal Auditor

Cllr R. Doney asked if there were any rules or advice for local authorities about how long it should have the same auditor.

The town clerk said there were no formal rules but he would suggest the council needed to carefully consider whether to extend the contract beyond three years.

He said he had recommended Darkin Miller – Chartered Accountants because they were the cheapest, continuity was needed due to the ongoing issues in the finance team, and because Darkin Miller was used by other councils in the area it was a valuable source of comparable information.

Proposed by Cllr R. Doney and seconded by Cllr Mrs M. Ellis, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to appoint Darkin Miller – Chartered Accountants as the council's internal auditors for the financial years 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23 and review the appointment in 2022-23 to consider whether the contract should be extended further.

The meeting closed at 9.39pm.