



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF VENTNOR TOWN COUNCIL

ST LAWRENCE VILLAGE HALL

7PM

8 OCTOBER 2012

MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillors: Steve Stubbings (Mayor), David George, Debby Robinson, Harry Rees, Leigh Geddes, Jim Toogood.

NO. SUBJECT

PUBLIC FORUM

- a) The Mayor opened the Public Forum with 6 members of the public present. County Councillors Susan Scoccia and Chris Welsford were also present.
- b) A member of the public asked whether the Town Council will have a role in working with the Botanic Gardens and whether, in particular, there are commercial developments that could offset the costs to residents of their regular visits to it. Councillor Leigh Geddes responded that she would discuss the issues with the Botanic Gardens' management and the Mayor added that a meeting was being sought with the Community Interest Company's Director John Curtis.
- c) Councillor Susan Scoccia raised her objection to a statement in the Coastal Centre report for this meeting at section 6d) which she asserted stated that she had failed to secure substantive negotiations on the future of the Centre with the Isle of Wight Council. The Town Clerk responded by reading the relevant phrase: *When informal discussions with IoWC Officers and through Councillors Susan Scoccia and Chris Welsford failed to establish a basis for substantive negotiations the Mayor emailed Council Leader David Pugh and Deputy Leader George Brown* and went on to make it clear that individual responsibility for the failure to enter substantive negotiations was not being attributed to either of the town's County Councillors.
- d) Councillor Susan Scoccia that asserted both that a meeting with Council Leader David Pugh had in fact been offered to the Town Council and that she had played no part in the negotiations about the future of the Coastal Centre. The Mayor made it clear that no meeting with the Town Council had ever been offered by David Pugh. The Town Clerk reminded Councillor Susan Scoccia that she had been specifically requested to make the initial approach to the relevant Council's Portfolio Holder Councillor George Brown who had responded to her by email stating that the building was not available for purchase. She had forwarded that email to the Mayor with the comment that *I will continue to press this matter on your behalf at every opportunity.*

134/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carol Jones, Jason Mack, Jim Morgan, Mark Robertson-Walker and Simon Haytack.

135/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Harry Rees declared a personal interest as Chair of Ventnor Social Club.

136/12 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

- a) The minutes of the Town Council meeting of 19 September 2012, having been previously circulated to Members, were taken as read.
- b) The Minutes of the Planning Committee Meeting of 17 September 2012 were received.

137/12 ANNUAL RETURN

-
- a) The Town Clerk reported that the Town Council's Annual Return for the financial year ending 31 March 2012 – circulated with the papers for this meeting - has been signed off by the Audit Commission as external auditor without qualification.
 - b) The document is available on the Town Council's website and the 14-day notice of its availability for public inspection has been posted on the Central Car Park noticeboard.
-

138/12 FINANCE REPORT

- a) The Finance report for this meeting had been previously circulated to Members and included information on Bank Balances at 30 September 2012 and a list of payments made during September 2012.
 - b) An accompanying paper set out expenditure in relation to the Budget lines for the year to 30 September 2012 with variances from year-to-date budget provision.
 - c) The report also included a monthly listing of receipts and payments for the now completed first half of the current financial year.
-

138/12 COASTAL CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

- a) The Town Clerk's paper on the outcome and consequences of the discussions with the Isle of Wight Council about the future development of the Coastal Centre had been previously circulated to Members.
- b) Councillor Harry Rees stated that this represents an opportunity lost for the Town and expressed more general concern that the disposal of assets was under the sole authority of the Isle of Wight Council's leadership without consultation with Town and Parish Councils and in contravention of the Localism Act.
- c) Councillor David George said that he agreed with Councillor Harry Rees on this matter and proposed that it be referred to the Communities Secretary Eric Pickles. He stated that the refusal of the leaders of the Isle of Wight Council to meet with the Mayor was both discourteous and disgraceful. Councillor Debby Robinson added that it was also disrespectful of the people of Ventnor.
- d) The Mayor argued that the building belonged to the Town and pointed out that the argument that the funds from its sale would be used to support services was disingenuous as capital receipts cannot be recycled to revenue expenditure.
- e) Councillor Jim Toogood stated that the building was in really good condition but was not suitable for conversion to flats. He further stated, on the basis of his considerable experience of building and planning matters, that it also had architectural merit.
- f) Councillor Leigh Geddes stressed that the decision was completely contradictory to the provisions of the Localism Act.
- g) Councillor Harry Rees suggested that there may be a case for referring the way the matter has been handled by the Isle of Wight Council to the Local Government Ombudsman.

It was unanimously resolved that:

- i) concerns about this matter be addressed formally to the Chief Executive of the Isle of Wight Council with a clear statement of the need for much closer contact with and respect for Town & Parish Councils in the disposal of local assets;
 - ii) the Communities Secretary Eric Pickles be asked in writing for his advice on how the actions of the Isle of Wight Council in this matter comply with the spirit and legal provisions of the Localism Act, with a copy to the Isle of Wight Council; and
 - iii) a complaint covering these concerns be registered with the Local Government Ombudsman if other outcomes are unsatisfactory.
-

139/12 WAR MEMORIAL RESTORATION

- a) A report recording the submission of the funding application to the War Memorials Trust had been previously circulated to Members.
-

-
- b) The professional advice on the Town Council's right to reclaim VAT on the works had also been circulated.
-

140/12 TESCO LAYBY

The Town Clerk's paper on developments since the last meeting, including copies of correspondence with the Highways Head of Service, had been previously circulated to Members.

It was unanimously resolved that:

a Working Group of the Town Clerk, Councillors Jim Toogood, Debby Robinson and Harry Rees and local Architect Neill Geddes, subject to his agreement, be established to investigate this matter in more detail and report back to the next meeting of the Town Council.

141/12 MARKET STREET TOILETS

- a) The Mayor introduced this item and asked permission to move the discussion forward to the next meeting while some new suggestions are being investigated.
- b) With the Mayor's permission, Councillor Chris Welsford stated that he was already engaged in discussions with the Isle of Wight Council's Head of Planning and Regulatory Services on this matter.
-

142/12 COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT CHANGES

The Town Clerk's summary of the proposed changes to Council Tax Benefit following the government's decision to cut support to it by 10% had been previously circulated and he introduced it by summarising the reasons for and the likely consequences of the proposed changes.

It was unanimously resolved that:

following further consideration and discussion the Town Council's response to the formal consultation on the proposals be considered at the November meeting.

143/12 TIME BANK

Councillor Leigh Geddes asked the Town Council to formally thank everyone who had contributed to the outstanding launch event on 2 September 2012. She outlined for the meeting the principles of the Time Bank.

With the agreement of the Mayor, Councillor Debby Robinson proposed a similar statement of appreciation to Jack Whitewood and his team for their delivery of the Fringe Festival.

144/12 BEACH SAFETY PROJECT REPORT

- a) The Town Clerk reported that the Beach Safety Project had completed its second successful year on 30 September.
- b) The report of its work, included in the papers for this meeting, would now be forwarded to the Isle of Wight Council as part of the funding agreement.
-

145/12 TOWN CLERKS' REPORT

- a) The Town Clerks' report for this meeting had been previously circulated to Members.
- b) The detail referred to the gaining of Quality Council status subject to endorsement by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), the planned Christmas in Ventnor event on 15 December, arrangements for next year's management of the Putting Green and the proposed provision of a Christmas Tree in Spring Gardens.
-

PUBLIC FORUM

The Mayor re-opened the Public Forum. There were no comments or questions from members of the public or press.

The Meeting closed at 8pm

SIGNED BY THE MAYOR	DATE