HAYWARDS HEATH TOWN COUNCIL

## POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

**Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 21 June 2021**

 J Knight *(Chairman)* **\*\***

 C Ash-Edwards *(Vice Chairman)*

 R Bates

 Mrs R Cromie

 C Evans

 C Laband **\*\***

 R A Nicholson

 M J Pulfer **\*\***

 **\*** Absent

 **\*\*** Apologies

Also present: Councillor Mrs S Ellis

 Councillor M Jeffers

 Regarding agenda item number 12 – applications for Definitive Map Modification Orders (land off Old Wickham Lane):

Mr Nigel Currah, who had registered to speak in order to reiterate the request that the Town Council make two applications for Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMOs) in respect of land off Old Wickham Lane *(this matter was initially considered at the meeting of the Full Council held on 22 March 2021(minute 93 refers))*;

one other member of the public.

**1. Apologies**

The following apologies were received:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Member** | **Reason for Absence** |
| Cllr J Knight | Holiday |
| Cllr C Laband | Personal matter |
| Cllr M Pulfer | Holiday |

**2. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 8 March 2021 were taken as read, confirmed as a true record and duly signed by the Chairman.

**3. Substitutes**

Councillor Mrs Ellis substituted for Councillor Knight. Councillor Jeffers substituted for Councillor Pulfer. With Councillor Ash-Edwards acting as Chairman in the absence of Councillor Knight, he nominated Councillor Jeffers to act as Vice Chairman for the meeting. This was **AGREED** unanimously by the Committee.

**4. Members' Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

**5. Lists of Payments and Receipts, and Income and Expenditure Report for the Period 1st February 2021 – 31st March 2021**

Members **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council to approve the lists of payments and receipts, and the income and expenditure report for the period 1st February 2021 – 31st March 2021.

**6. Bank Balances and Bank Reconciliation Statement as at 31st March 2021**

The Responsible Financial Officer advised that this was a new item on the agenda and that a bank reconciliation would form a constituent part of all future agendas.

Members **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council to approve the bank balances and the reconciliation statement as at 31st March 2021.

**7. Income and Expenditure Account, and Balance Sheet for the Year Ended**

**31st March 2021**

Members **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council to approve the income and expenditure account and the balance sheet for the year ended 31st March 2021.

**8. Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) Part 3 for the Year Ended**

**31st March 2021 – Annual Internal Audit Report 2020/21**

The report from the Internal Auditor stated that a number of authorities were now running down and closing their Petty Cash accounts and using debit/credit cards for ad hoc purchases. Councillor Bates asked if this was the case for the Town Council. The Responsible Financial Officer advised that whilst the Town Council *did* have a credit card account that was used for the majority of incidental expenditure, a Petty Cash float of £150 was still retained in order to meet cash expenditure that was, on the whole, incurred by the grounds maintenance staff.

Members **RESOLVED** to note the Annual Internal Audit Report 2020/21.

**9. Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) Part 3 for the Year Ended**

**31st March 2021: Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2020/21**

Members **RESOLVED** to approve the Annual Governance Statement 2020/21.

**10. Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) Part 3 for the year Ended**

**31st March 2021: Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2020/21**

Members **RESOLVED** to approve the Accounting Statements 2020/21.

**11. Asset Register for the Year Ended 31st March 2021**

Councillor Jeffers remarked on the level of detail and number of low value items recorded in the asset register and questioned whether this was, perhaps, unnecessary and made the task of maintaining the register more onerous than it needed to be. The Responsible Financial Officer advised that when time permitted, the register would benefit from a review and that this would provide the opportunity to look at the procedure and the parameters for recording assets. It was suggested that going

***cont.***

**11. Asset Register for the Year Ended 31st March 2021 (cont.)**

forward, only individual assets with a value of £500 and above need be recorded in the register. Members felt that this was an acceptable cut-off limit and **AGREED** to recommend to Full Council that this approach be adopted with immediate effect.

Members **RESOLVED** to approve the asset register as at 31st March 2021.

**12. Applications for Definitive Map Modification Orders – Land off Old Wickham Lane**

During the course of his representation, Mr Currah stated that the major reason for asking the Town Council to front the applications was to ensure that correct procedures would be followed, whereas if local residents were to front the applications themselves, they would possibly flounder due to a lack of expertise. The Chairman asked Mr Currah whether residents would bring in the applications themselves should the Town Council decide not to proceed. Mr Currah replied that he hoped they would but because of the restrictions imposed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, it had not been possible to hold a meeting amongst residents to discuss the matter and possibly form a representative body that could take things forward.

Members then discussed the merits and potential pitfalls of taking on the applications on behalf of residents and the main points raised are summarised as follows:

* generally very supportive;
* whilst the land is purported to be well used by a lot of people, is there any evidence as to how many, where they come from and what they use it for? Could this be established by means of a consultation exercise?
* the Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMOs) would ***not*** prevent the land from being granted planning permission;
* this is a greenfield site where the objective of the owners is to change its usage to residential. The local rural areas around Haywards Heath should be protected. Too much has already been lost and a stand needs to be taken now;
* where does the Town Council stand legally and how secure is it in the knowledge that there would not be any comeback?
* what might the risks be to the Town Council? How might they be quantified and better understood before moving forward? Members need to be sure that the consequences of taking this on have been adequately investigated and can be handled by the Town Council;
* the Town Council is not making a decision on the applications, it would simply be submitting them to West Sussex County Council for determination;
* neither the Town Council nor the Town Clerk have the expertise to front the applications;

***cont.***

**12. Applications for Definitive Map Modification Orders – Land off Old Wickham Lane (cont.)**

* in the event of the DMMOs being made, the owners of the land would clearly object and the Town Council may have to employ a barrister to represent it before a Planning Inspector or at a Public Inquiry and that could prove quite expensive;
* in order to try to get an idea of what it would cost to employ a barrister, a decision on the matter would have to be deferred once again;
* the Town Council does not have the finances or resources to face this potential level of risk and should therefore restrict its role to that of facilitator;
* would it be possible to find another town or parish that has already gone through this process and would be able to share its experience of what was involved and what the outcome was;
* the Town Council would be abdicating its responsibilities if it does not lead on this.

With all Members having had the opportunity to express their views and concerns, Councillor Nicholson proposed that the decision on whether to apply to West Sussex County Council for two Definitive Map Modification Orders be deferred until the next meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee on 13th September 2021. The reason for this would be to allow the Town Clerk to collect further information, to be specified by Members, on the process and potential cost implications – notably the costs for a barrister – if the applications were to go to appeal. A final decision would be based on a review of that information.

Councillor Bates seconded this proposal, after which the Chairman initiated a vote and the motion was carried.

**13. Grant**

Members **RESOLVED** to award a grant of £485.00 to IMPACT Foundation to assist with the resumption of face-to-face sessions as COVID-19 restrictions begin to ease.

**14. Items Agreed as Urgent by the Chairman**

There were none.

**15. Exclusion of Public and Press**

Members **RESOLVED** to enter into exempt business in order to consider a change to the contractual arrangements of the Town Clerk.

**16. Contractual Arrangements for Town Clerk**

The change to the contractual arrangements of the Town Clerk was **AGREED**.

The meeting closed at 8:20pm.