



Minutes of a meeting of the full council.

Held on 16th March 2023 at the Council Offices, Bansons Way, Ongar.

42/23 Those present and apologies for absence.

Chair Cllr Birch
Councillors Barrell, Feetham, Gunn, Mendoza, Pigott, Reynolds, Vaz.
Also present Locum Clerk, Four members of the public.

Resolved. The council accepts apologies for absence from Cllrs Griffin and Shami. Proposed Cllr Mendoza seconded Cllr Piggott and carried unanimously.

43/23 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

Cllr Reynolds Declared an interest in 56/23 and 57/23 as a trustee of the Sporting Trust.

44/23 Public participation.

An allotment tenant spoke of their concerns about the standard of tree maintenance and queried the competence and abilities of the contractor appointed to maintain the trees on Council Property. The authority of the Council as landlord, to undertake the work on an allotment plot without the permission of the tenant was questioned, as was the tendering process under which the contractor was secured. The Council was asked to provide evidence of their procurement process and to give their justification for undertaking the work. The Council was asked to give evidence of their procurement process and establish that value for money had been secured, and to explain why a tree on the Castle Street allotment site was trimmed against the wishes of the tenant.

Mr Gadd spoke on behalf of the Tennis Club, asking for the Council to consider reducing their rent to a peppercorn. The Council were reminded that the Club's membership declined when new tennis courts were opened as part of the Ongar Academy's sporting facilities and reduced still further following Covid lockdowns. The Chairman pointed out that the Club was a Limited Company and might not be eligible for support from the Council as they cannot support businesses.

The Council were advised that the company only exists to hold the lease and apply for financial support from the Lawn Tennis Association. The Club wants to apply for a loan, but this will require having a financial surplus to make running repairs. There is currently £20,000 in the bank, which is not enough. Hence the Club is asking for a rent reduction so the money can be added to the reserves.

Mr Bacon spoke on behalf of the Sporting Trust to remind the council that expenses have been going-up and supported the Tennis Club in their request to reduce the rent to a peppercorn. It was confirmed that the money had previously been paid to the Trust, not as a rent, but as payment for use of facilities. If the council demands the rent, this income to the trust would be lost. The Councillors were reminded that neither the Trust

or the Tennis Club expected the rent to be demanded and neither organisation had made provision for paying it in their calculations.

Although the Councillors were sympathetic to the request for a reduction, they wanted to see more information about how the money was being managed, and clarification on the reason money was being paid to the Trust rather than the Council. It was noted that a saving of £1,000 a year could help the Club but would not be a significant contribution. It was suggested that the Tennis Club and the Trust could make a more effective change by applying for a significant grant with the applications being funded by the Council.

Item 56/23 was considered here.

Item 48/23 was considered here.

45/23 Project update.

- a. Love Lane footway. Work to be managed by Ongar Community Sports Ltd. Work expected to begin in mid-April.
- b. Playground upgrade – further quotes for alternative equipment has been requested.
- c. Town Sign – quotes to replace like-for-like being sought.
- d. Love Lane Office – valuation received, electrical work and certification underway, efficiency certification underway, new tenants being assessed.

Correspondence:

Banking hub proposal – it was noted that the proposal concerns training in use on online banking rather than a proposal to open a site where customers can speak to their bank representatives. Cllr Gunn will conduct more research and report back on potential for this proposal to be taken forward.

The Great British Spring Clean. Cllr Mendoza will be liaising with volunteers.

46/23 Consultations.

The Epping Forest District Council Local Plan was noted.

47/23 Reports from District and County Councillors.

There was no report from the County Councillor.

Cllr Vaz advised Councillors that the Epping Forest District Council Local Plan had been adopted.

48/23 Police matters.

Rural Burglary Reduction Operation – PC Shepherd.

The Police have introduced a synthetic DNA tracker kit to mark equipment and property. It puts a faint marking of an index number which is visible under UV light. Epping Forest District Council have agreed £1,200 funding for monitoring equipment and will bulk purchase the kits. Will work with the parish and town councils to bulk purchase the equipment for the area. Council commits to purchase some kits up to £700 with the formal decision being made at the April meeting.

An update on Special Constable recruitment was noted.

An invitation to the Community Specials marketing workshop was noted.

49/23 To agree the Full Council meeting minutes of 16th February 2023

Following a brief discussion about some changes requested by Cllr Reynolds, it was agreed that the minutes were a record of what was said and should not be amended to reflect different information, views, or opinions made outside the meeting.

Resolved. The minutes of the Full Council Meeting are approved as a true record. Proposed Cllr Piggott seconded Cllr Mendoza and carried with one against and two abstentions.

50/23 Finance reporting.

- a. To receive a list of all payments up to the end of February 2023.
- b. To receive a list of budgetary information on all accounts.

Resolved. The Council notes the budgetary information and confirms that the account balance £53,429.82 agrees with the reconciliation. Proposed Cllr Piggott seconded Cllr Cole and carried unanimously.

51/23 Citizen of the year.

Consideration of nominations to be carried forward to the April meeting.

52/23 Love Lane office repairs

To consider rental value and repairs required prior to next occupation. The Clerk reported that the electrical work has been done; new LED lighting installed, a replacement wall heater fitted, and an electrical safety certificate issued. A valuation analysis has been received, and a potential tenant is willing to accept the offer. Based on the valuation and offer, the Clerk will authorise the preparation of a three-year lease with a two-month rent holiday to fund redecoration by the new tenant.

53/23 Council Van

The Council notes the trade-in of the current Ford Connect and purchase of a Peugeot Partner for £6,995 with £2,500 trade-in and the balance drawn from the £5,000 earmarked reserve.

54/23 Section 106 monies

- a. The Council notes the current Section 106 funding held.
- b. The Council will consider suitable projects for Section 106 funding based on the statements of the Neighbourhood Plan.

55/23 Ongar - Cerizay twinning event.

The council viewed the postcard montage and thanked Cllr Birch on his work. The Budworth Hall is booked for Good Friday afternoon. Light refreshments will be available, and volunteers are needed to dispense drinks and snacks.

56/23 Lease with Tennis Club.

Cllr Reynolds left the room.

When questioned about the reason why the Sporting Trust had been receiving the rent money, Mr Bacon responded by saying that he believed that the Tennis Club lease was going to be assigned to the Sporting Trust. He advised that the rent money was being used to maintain the whole site and was being taken in part-payment for the Tennis Club's use of Trust facilities.

Cllr Piggott queried the need for a surcharge to the Tennis Club for use of facilities, when they were already paying their membership subscription to the Trust, in common with the other membership sections. It should not be necessary to levy an additional charge from the money that was not paid to the council. It was clear that there are two separate issues; the Tennis Club lease which confirms the Town Council is the landlord to whom rent is due, and any agreement between the Tennis Club and the Trust for use of Trust facilities. The two matters are separate.

To consider a request for a rent revaluation.

The council noted the request but had reservations about the purpose and value of the idea. As previously agreed, the money for previous years will not be demanded, but an invoice for the money will be issued for 2023-24. The Tennis Club and the Trust were both asked to consider putting-together an application for a more substantial funding bid. Rather than supporting minor works, the council could consider providing seed funding for a more substantial bid.

Cllr Reynolds returned to the room.

57/23 Jubilee Park maintenance

- a. The Clerk will seek financial support from the Council's insurance company to take legal action and enforce Essex County Council's obligation to maintain perimeter trees at Jubilee Park.
- b. The Council notes that the rent arrears from the Sporting Trust have been cleared, so the repairs can go-ahead as requested.

58/23 To consider alternative play equipment for roundabout site.

Three options are available and noted. The council will consider which design to adopt and purchase the replacement in the next financial year.

59/23 Elections

The Councillors were advised of the timetable and requirements for election candidates.

60/23 Bus services in Ongar.

- a. Cllr Mendoza will attend the consultation standards of bus services.

- b. No update on bus shelters this month.

61/23 Speed indicator devices.

The Council will consider bidding for funds to install gateway signage. Beyond that, the working group is moving away from the idea of speed management and is looking at methods of deterrence. Some Councils have produced 'slow down' posters that can be stuck on refuse bins and displayed on waste collection days.

62/23 Staffing Matters.

The Clerk reported that the fixed-term appointment is working extremely well. The post-holder is settling in and will be an asset to the organisation.

63/23 Items for the next agenda.

Citizen of the year.
Risk assessments.
Cemetery price structure.
Funding for DNA kits.
Fence work for play area.
Programme of maintenance.

Meeting closed at 9.51