

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on 21 February 2002 in the Parish Room, Fiddlers Lane, Saughall

In attendance: Councillor Mrs M Anderson
Councillor A Bailey (in the Chair)
Councillor H Dobson
Councillor RA Storrar
Councillor A Warrington

Invited Members: Councillor Mrs BW Bell
Councillor Mrs P Humphrey
Councillor Mrs JE Storrar

8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor B Kerr

9 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 January 2002 be confirmed as a correct record.

10 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising from the Minutes.

11 BEST KEPT VILLAGE/CIVIC PRIDE COMPETITION 2002

The Clerk reported that she had asked Mr Ron Dunn, Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council's Amenities Manager, to prepare a quotation in respect of grass cutting, hedge trimming and street cleaning based on current arrangements in respect of frequency and manpower. However, she had indicated that the contract would run for a four year period (the life of the new Council). The detail of that quotation and any others received would be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.

Members were concerned over the state of the verge on Long Lane. Spoil from the ditch along with old car tyres etc. had been left on the verge and it was very unsightly.

The Committee considered how the hanging baskets which would be placed around the village could be erected and maintained and it was suggested that a full maintenance contract with the nursery was the way forward.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Clerk be requested to contact the Manager of the County Farms Estate, Mr David Job of Cheshire County Council, and request that he gets his tenant to tidy up the verge;

- (2) Councillor Kerr be requested to negotiate a maintenance contract with Oak Tree Nurseries in respect of the hanging baskets;
- (3) possibilities in respect of sponsorship for initiatives to improve the look of the village be discussed at the next meeting of the Committee; and
- (4) street cleaning and grass cutting be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

12 MILLENNIUM PARK LAND

It was reported that the Clerk had received a telephone call from Mr Ian Gould, the County Property Manager, on 11 February 2002. He had orally reported that he had received two quotations in respect of the survey work required on the Shotwick Park land.

In view of the costs involved with the work required he was prepared to bear the costs from his own budget, without recourse to Cheshire County Council Members.

The work was imminent but was dependant on the weather.

Members were delighted with the progress made and requested that the Clerk respond to Mr Gould in writing.

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk be requested to write to Mr Gould thanking him for his generosity in agreeing to pay for the survey work and informing him that the Council looks forward to receiving a copy of the survey report in due course.

13 RESPONSE TO QUALITY PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS CONSULTATION

The Committee received a copy of the response prepared by the Chairman of the Council, Councillor B Kerr, to the consultation undertaken by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The letter had been submitted to the Government Department as the Council's response to the consultation exercise.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the letter to DEFRA be noted.

14 MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT

All Members of the Council had been circulated with a copy of a document detailing information about the new requirements for Parish Councils under Part III of the Local Government Act 2000.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the document circulated be noted.

15 PARISH PLAN AND ACTION LIST

The Committee considered the proposal submitted by the Cheshire Community Council in respect of research required, the community questionnaire, the conduct of the survey and the report on subsequent findings with a view to drawing up a Community Plan along with associated costs.

Members, wishing to keep costs a minimum and to avoid duplication, considered all that could be provided and what was essential for them in the light of their Five Year Plan of Action, work already carried out and information already at hand.

It was noted that the Council could submit a bid to the Countryside Agency and if successful it would receive 75% of the cost of the work undertaken.

The Committee also considered its latest version of its Parish Plan Action List and discussed when to hold its Public Meeting to inform on the findings of the initial consultation.

It was recognised that there had been some slippage and that the Action List would need further revision as the Council went through the process. Consequently, the date of the revision would be placed at the bottom of the Action List in future, to avoid confusion.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) subject to assurance from Councillor B Kerr that the Council will be successful in obtaining 75% of the costs of the survey to be carried out and on the basis that it can “cherry pick” the work it requires from the list of Activities supplied by the Cheshire Community Council the following activities be commissioned at a total cost of approximately £2,640, including a £15 per day management charge, of which approximately £660 would be borne by the Parish Council:

Stage 2	Activity 2 Activity 3 Activity 5 Activity 8
Stage 3	Activity 3
Stage 5	Activity 10 Activity 12
Stage 6	Activity 20 Activity 21

and

(2) the Public Meeting be held on the same evening as the Parish Assembly
i.e. Monday, 15 April 2002 (revised Action List – Appendix A)

NB: Further revisions are now necessary

16 CULTURAL STRATEGY CHESHIRE, HALTON AND WARRINGTON

The Committee considered the draft Cultural Strategy.

RESOLVED:

That no response be made to the consultation exercise.

17 YOUTH CLUB

It was reported that the Vernon Institute Management Committee had refused the Youth Club Management Committee the lease of the Annexe in favour of the Play Group even though the Play Group, a profit making organisation, was already catered for within the Village Hall.

The Committee considered the Vernon Institute's (VI) Constitution and explored possible options in the light of an apparent contravention to the Scheme which regulated the VI as a charity. It had not taken into account the needs of all residents within the community and had effectively and deliberately barred one of its affiliated Groups from its premises. The Group who had been instrumental in improving a building which would otherwise have been condemned, now had nowhere appropriate to meet in the village.

Before the next steps were agreed it was considered appropriate to give the Vernon Institute Management Committee the opportunity to revisit its decision and the Clerk was requested to write to Mr Brian Huxley, the Chairman, accordingly and to copy the letter to interested parties in the village.

RESOLVED: That

(1) in view of the gravity and seriousness of the situation and in the interests of all concerned the Clerk be requested to expedite the situation by hand delivering the letter and asking for a response within strict and tight timescales; and

(2) the Council be requested to consider the response or otherwise and its next steps at its meeting on 4 March 2002.

18 PARISH ROOM – RATING ARRANGEMENTS

The Committee noted that the Clerk had written to Mr T Moseley, a Rating Assistant at Chester City Council, enclosing the form sent and drawing attention to its inadequacies in the light of the situation the Parish Council was in. The form did not fit the purpose. A number of questions on the form were either inappropriate or did not apply.

The Council was not adverse to paying Council Tax but it did not believe that it should be subject to Non-Domestic Rates. It occupied the premises of a former shop but did not carry out a profit making business from its office.

No response had been received from the City Council. Councillor RA Storrar reported that a number of other Parish Councils were also awaiting a decision on similar issues.

RESOLVED:

That the situation be noted and any progress be reported at the next meeting of the Committee.

19 COUNTRYSIDE AND RIGHTS OF WAY ACT 2000
DRAFT MAP INFORMATION FOR PARISH COUNCILS

Councillor A Warrington had duly completed the paperwork and had submitted it to the Countryside Agency's agent.

20 RURAL HOUSING WORKING PARTY

The Committee discussed when to hold the Working Party's inaugural meeting. It was agreed that there was no urgency and an appropriate date and time would be sought to hold the meeting after Easter.

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk be requested to ask Cheshire Community Council's Housing Enabler, Mr Brian Holmes, to submit possible dates for a Working Party meeting to be held after Easter 2002.

21 CHESTER CITY COUNCIL'S CONSULTATION ON THE OPTIONS FOR
MOVING FROM THE SYSTEM OF LOCAL PANELS TO A SYSTEM OF
AREA COMMITTEES

Members considered a draft letter submitted for consideration as a possible response from the full Council to the principal authority's consultation exercise.

After substantial deliberation and following minor amendment the Council agreed on a joint submission.

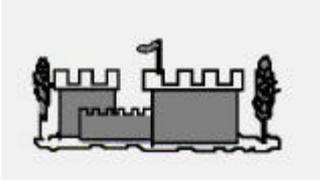
RESOLVED:

That the letter at Appendix B to Mr Paul Durham, Chief Executive, Chester City Council, be submitted as this Council's collective response to the principal authority's consultation on options for a system of Area Committees.

Appendix A**PARISH PLAN – ACTION LIST**

Action	Timescales
Register intention to compile a Village Plan with the Countryside Agency.	July 2001
Members to draw up list of consultees.	August 2001
Initial Consultation process begins. Local groups, businesses and individuals are encouraged to have their say on what they would like to see provided in the village in the short and longer term.	August 2001 - Letter out September 2001 - Newsletter out
Initial Consultation Process ends.	30 November 2001
Public Meeting held to inform what the Consultation has thrown up. (in the form of a social evening – tea and cakes.) Volunteers to be invited to serve on the Parish Plan Working Party.	15 April 2002
Working Party established to take the initiative forward. Will meet regularly.	March 2002 Council meeting
Professional support – decision to be taken on whether or not to commission Cheshire Community Council or another agency to carry out a survey into all aspects of village life in Saughall or whether or not the Parish Council will undertake such a survey itself. Alternatively, it may decide that the consultation already carried out will suffice.	End March 2002
Grant aid be sought from the Countryside Agency in respect of costs involved in the compilation of the Plan. – Apply	By March 2002
Further data collection and analysis if appropriate.	Mid May 2002
Feedback to community. Mapping exercise underway.	End of May 2002
Production of first draft of Parish Plan.	End of May 2002
Initial soundings taken, comments and feedback.	End of June 2002
Incorporated into final version of Plan.	End of July 2002
Launch and distribution.	September 2002
Projects prioritised and pursued.	October 2002 onwards
Annual review of Plan and revision as necessary.	Nov/Dec 2002

Revision Date: 21 February 2002



SAUGHALL AND SHOTWICK PAR PARISH COUNCIL

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23 February 2002

Dear Mr Durham

AREA COMMITTEE PROPOSALS

I refer to your recent consultation on the above and inform you that although members will be responding individually as you have requested, the Council was sufficiently concerned at your proposals that it was agreed to also send a collective response on which it would like your comments.

Saughall and Shotwick Park Parish Council supports the aim of developing a structure to connect more closely with people in the community. It regrets however that no consideration appears to have been given to the parishing of unparished areas, including the City Centre. While Chester continues to have a mix of parished and unparished areas, the unfairness of 'double rating' will persist. If the whole District were parished there would be a level playing field.

The Rural White Paper 'Our Countryside, The Future, a Fair Deal for Rural England' was published in November 2000. This White Paper set out details of the Government's initial ideas for a strengthened role for local councils (i.e. Town and Parish Councils). The White Paper detailed a number of measures to give people the opportunity to be more involved in the development of their community. The Government wants local councils, as the tier of local government closest to their communities, to have a central role in achieving this. The most prominent measure in the White Paper with respect to local government was the introduction of the new concept of QUALITY local councils. QUALITY status would enable parish and town councils to take on a stronger role in their communities and would be achievable by any council regardless of its size, location or current activities.

The Government has been consulting on the QUALITY Parish and Town Councils detailed proposals. The Government proposes that in all areas in which there are parish and town councils there should be a charter setting out how principal authorities and local councils will work in partnership. The charter will include the devolving of functions and services from the principal authority to the QUALITY

parish council. The consultation document lists possible functions which might be considered for delegation.

The Government over the next few months will be considering the responses to the consultation document and aims to issue the guidance in 2002 and to open the QUALITY scheme to application thereafter.

This Parish Council is concerned that there could be a conflict between the City Council's proposals for Area Committees and the Government's proposal for QUALITY Parish Councils. This Parish Council strongly urges the City Council to limit the introduction of Area Committees to the unparished urban areas only. The appropriateness or otherwise of introducing Area Committees into parished areas should only be considered after the Government has published its final proposals.

In the meantime Local Panels could continue in their present form to provide a forum where issues of general interest to groups of Parish Councils can be discussed.

Please let me have your comments as soon as possible on the issues raised.

Yours sincerely

Clerk to the Council