

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on 20 November 2003 in the Parish Room, Fiddlers Lane, Saughall

In attendance: Councillor A Bailey (in the Chair)
Councillor R Shukla.
Councillor RA Storrar
Councillor A Warrington
Councillor C Wynne-Eyton
Councillor Mrs M Wynne-Eyton
Councillor Mrs J Young

Invited Members: Councillor Mrs JE Storrar
Councillor Mrs D Whitton

53 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

All Members of the Committee were in attendance.

54 CODE OF CONDUCT – DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Interest were received.

55 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 September 2003 be confirmed as a correct record.

56 CHESTER CITY COUNCIL – HOUSING REGISTER POLICY

The Housing Act 1996 permitted all local authorities to set up and maintain a Housing Register, which contained the details of all those persons who qualify to be considered for local authority housing, or to be nominated for other social housing. Chester City Council operated an open register and anyone, regardless of tenure, was permitted to apply. Allocations or nominations would only be made to those persons who were eligible and had been placed on the Housing Register.

The City Council did not operate a blanket exclusion policy on certain categories of applicants. Each individual application would be assessed on its own merits and a decision regarding eligibility would be made accordingly. Anyone excluded from the Housing Register would receive full reasons for this exclusion and would be given the opportunity to appeal against that decision.

The Parish Council had been concerned for sometime that young people who had grown up in the village were unable to secure social housing for themselves in Saughall and had to leave the village to obtain accommodation. Once out of the village it was very difficult for them to return.

However, there was confusion and some people who were housed in Saughall appeared to have the same circumstances as others who were unable to obtain housing.

Members considered what amendments could be made to the points system to favour Saughall families. Extended family relationships and support networks were being broken up as a result of the system currently in force.

Social housing in Saughall was predominantly three bedroom. There were very few one and two bedroom units and this was another reason why young couples had to leave the village as three bedroom houses were reserved for families with children. Members also considered that more stringent checks should be made on people's personnel circumstances before housing was allocated. This would make the process more fairer.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Clerk be requested to contact Ms Alison Amesbury of Chester City Council and ask if she will arrange suitable representations from the City Council and the Chester and District Housing Trust to make a presentation to Council and offer advice on how the Housing Allocation Policy can be modified to favour Saughall people.

57 **PARISH PLAN**

Chester City Council held a seminar/workshop between 4pm and 6:30pm on Tuesday, 11 November 2003 in the Vernon Institute. Rural Parish Councils were invited to attend.

The Chairman had made a thought provoking presentation on why Saughall decided to draw up a Parish Plan and on what issues had so far emerged from residents of the village. As a result Saughall and Shotwick Park were firmly on the map as a progressive Parish Council.

The Chairman reported on proceedings of this enjoyable event.

The Parish Plan Steering Panel had met on 10 November 2003 and discussions had centred on how to put the Plan together. The hardware had arrived, computer training had been provided for volunteers immediately before this Committee meeting and it was expected that a draft questionnaire would be available for consideration at the next Parish Plan Steering Panel meeting arranged for 8 December 2003.

An introductory letter would be put together to accompany the questionnaire and arrangements for its distribution would be firmed up.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made with the Parish Plan initiative be noted.

58 **GOLDEN JUBILEE PARK DEVELOPMENT**

(a) **Planning Application**

Chester City Council's Planning Officer, Mr Mark Dickens, had written to the Clerk on 7 November 2003 to inform her that he was now in possession of the County Engineer's comments and those of the Cheshire Constabulary.

(i) Police

The Police had concerns over the car parking provision. They considered the proposed layout not to be practicable for safe vehicular circulation and manoeuvring and that some of the spaces would need to be omitted. Also there was no provision for older children.

A letter had been sent to the Planning Department in Chief Inspector Dave Hill's name and the Clerk had received a copy. It seemed that the principle police concern related to access and egress to the site from Fiddlers Lane and also the potential for traffic congestion when events were held for which the identified car parking was inadequate.

The Police did not believe that the amended proposals met the concerns identified within their previous observations in relation to the location of the proposed entrance/exit, the size of the car park, and overspill arrangements. In short, the police considered that the proposal as it stood, could represent a road safety hazard both in terms of collision potential and congestion.

In addition the police considered that it was unfortunate that the Council did not appear to be taking the opportunity to provide facilities for the diversion of teenagers from causing annoyance to local residents. Similar villages with similar problems had provided youth meeting areas, skate board/BMX facilities, and the like. Saughall had an identified "youth nuisance" problem so it would appear sensible for such provision to be incorporated within this development.

(ii) County Engineer

The County Engineer had raised issues relating to the level of car parking provision. This related to the in and out. It was considered that there should be a combined double width access point located closer to the out and the Uniform Groups Headquarters. This would possibly require the re-siting of the lamp post which would need to be agreed with the County Engineer, as well as the removal of 10m of hedgerow fronting onto Fiddlers Lane (and its replanting and the re-siting of the existing railings). This would provide a visibility splay and sight lines. Concerns over the conflict between car movements and the entrance to the children's play area had also been expressed. It was suggested that there was a path (possibly 2m in width) with a protective fence/treatment running the entire boundary between the play area and the car park. This would also retain the existing hedge and would provide a safe passage for children between the play area and the remaining open space. There needed to be 6m between the marked out spaces (rear to rear) to ensure that vehicles could pull out of the spaces safely.

It would also be beneficial to provide a management plan for the car parking areas setting out how it would be secured and when it would be available for use. This would assist in allaying locals fears that it could be used by anyone at anytime and to ensure that the marked out basketball court could be utilised. The car parking layout also needed to take account of where the basketball hoops would be positioned (to ensure that there was adequate manoeuvring space around them).

Concern had also been raised that the car park was positioned right up to the boundary with the first residential property resulting in noise and disturbance to those particular residents. The inclusion of the path from the playground to the open space would help in pushing the car park away from that particular property and details of the retention of boundary hedging, etc. would also assist.

(iii) In Conclusion

The list of issues raised by the Police and the County Engineer were extensive and needed to be addressed prior to reporting the application to Chester City Council's Planning Board.

It was reported that Members of the Council had met with PC Burnham recently to discuss possible parking arrangements. It was agreed that the parking details on the layout (38 spaces) was adequate for normal use of the playing fields. However, on match days arrangements would need to be made with a local landowner for use of his/her land as an overspill car park.

The hedge would need to be cut back and the in and out moved slightly.

The Panel agreed that the Parish Council must overcome local objections to the car parking arrangements and it should do all it could to compromise.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Council take the action outlined above and enter into negotiations with a local landowner to provide an overspill car park.

(b) Business Plan

Work was progressing with the Business Plan and Mr Mike Bell was leading on this with the help of Mr David Parry.

(c) Funding

The Chairman reported that he had recently attended a meeting at the County Officers Club in Upton where a presentation had been made on putting funding bids together by one of the Club's employees. The Officer had offered his help to secure funding for the Golden Jubilee Park.

It was also reported that Mr Brian Huxley of the Saughall Cricket Club and Mr Keith Evans of the Saughall Colts were working together on a joint funding bid.

Councillor Kerr had obtained information from WREN on its funding rounds.

RESOLVED:

That the Golden Jubilee Park Funding Working Party be informed of the offer of help, on the dates in respect of WREN's funding rounds and its next meeting be

held at 6:30pm on Thursday, 18 December 2003 in the Parish Room, 2 Fiddlers Lane, Saughall.

59 PROPOSED AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN SAUGHALL

It was reported that no progress had been made. The County Property Officer, Mr Ian Gould, had informed sometime ago that he would be discussing Arena's proposal with the County Council's relevant Member Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk be requested to e-mail Mr Gould to request a progress report.

60 CHESHIRE COMMUNITY COUNCIL'S COMMUNITY PRIDE COMPETITION

The Committee received the marking sheets and judges' comments in respect of this year's Community Pride Competition.

Members unanimously agreed that the whole ethos had changed to the detriment of the competition. It was considered that the judges had been very picky and although the results seemed to be good the village had come 6th out of the nine entrants in its section (population between 2,501-5,000).

The Chairman reported that he had been invited to a meeting as the village had been short listed for a particular award only to find that he was expected to make a detailed presentation for which he had not been prepared. When informed of this the judges were disappointed and informed of the presentation that had been made by other Parish Councils also short listed.

On the whole the Committee considered that entering the competition was more bother than it was worth. The competition was now onerous, it had lost its spirit and had got out of hand. A lot of work, time and effort had gone into completing the entry form and the Council had more important initiatives that it should concentrate on in future.

Although Members agreed that in future years the village should not be entered in the competition they agreed that other ways must be found to encourage people to keep the village tidy and it was suggested that the Council run its own competition.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Council does not enter future Community Pride Competitions run by the Cheshire Community Council and instead runs its own competition to encourage a tidy village and community pride.

61 NEWSLETTER

The Clerk shared with the Committee the items she had collected for the forthcoming newsletter that would be published in early December 2003. She reported that she wished to see more articles coming forward from villagers and community groups and that the newsletter should be used as a mechanism for informing the local community on aspects of village life and community activities.

Although the Council should make a contribution, finance the publication, and act as a co-ordinator it was important that local people knew that newsy submissions from them would be welcomed.

The more items that were generated by local people the better and if there was enough material it would mean that the newsletter could be published more frequently than twice a year.

RESOLVED:

That the approach to the Parish newsletter detailed above be endorsed.

62 PARISH COUNCIL BUDGET 2004/2005

RESOLVED:

That this item of business be deferred to a special single item meeting of the Committee to be held at 7:30pm on Thursday, 18 December 2003 in the Parish Room, 2 Fiddlers Lane, Saughall.

**** However, after the meeting the Chairman requested that the next meeting be on its published date of 11 December 2003.**