

LEOMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Leominster Town Council Meeting held on Monday 25th January 2021 commencing at 19:00 hours remotely via Zoom.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillors Thomas (Mayor), Rumsey (Deputy Mayor), Bartlett, Davies, Herschy, Marsh, Murdoch, Norman, Parris, Preece, Rosser, Smith-Winnard and Sutcliffe (19.35).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Town Clerk and the Democratic Services Officer.

ALSO PRESENT: Ward Cllr Stone.

58/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr. Sutcliffe had informed the clerk that he would be late as he was attending another meeting.

59/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr. Bartlett – Trustee of Leominster District Community Centre.

60/20 REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

No requests for dispensation had been received.

61/20 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

No members of the public were present. No matters were raised.

62/20 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Council **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Leominster Town Council meeting held on 30th November 2020 be agreed and signed as a correct record when social distancing regulations are lifted by central government.

63/20 CLERK'S REPORT

Council noted the following Clerk's Report:

- (a) That the Projects & Grants Officer is in the process of producing a Budget Consultation Summary Report which will be distributed to the Budget Task and Finish Group before publishing.
- (b) That a doodle poll will be sent out to members of the Planning & Highways Committee in order to arrange a date for councillor training.
- (c) That the bins in The Grange that have been replaced by Balfour Beatty in error will remain and that the damaged and corroded bins around the town are currently in the process of being replaced.

64/20 COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Council approved the minutes of the following meetings held and ratified the decisions and recommendations made:

- Cllr Rosser, Chair of the Planning & Highways Committee, presented the minutes. It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Planning & Highways Committee held on 30th November 2020 and 14th December

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2020 and to authorise the decisions and recommendations contained therein;

- Cllr Rumsey, Chair of the Communications & Events Committee, presented the minutes. It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Communications & Events Committee held on 17th November 2020 and 12th January 2021 and to authorise the decisions and recommendations contained therein;
- Cllr Murdoch, Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, presented the minutes. It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on 14th December 2020 and to authorise the decisions and recommendations contained therein;
- Cllr Herschy, Chair of the Environment & Services Committee, presented the minutes. It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Environment & Services Committee held on 11th January 2021 and to authorise the decisions and recommendations contained therein.

65/20 FINANCES

- (a) **Accounts Paid and Invoices for Payment** – It was **RESOLVED** to ratify the payment of invoices December 2020, as outlined on the payment statements provided.
- (b) **The Income & Expenditure Report and budget notes for Month 9** – Council **RESOLVED** to accept Income & Expenditure Report and budget notes.

66/20 BUDGET 2021/22

Council reviewed the final budget presented for 2021/222 financial year that had been developed by the appointed Budget Task & Finish Group. Public consultation had taken place by means of an online survey and engaging with residents at the Farmers Market and this had informed the budget setting process. A summary of the results will be published shortly.

Following discussion, it was proposed by Cllr. Bartlett, seconded by Cllr. Rumsey and **RESOLVED** to formally adopt the Budget for 2021/22. Thanks were extended to the Budget Task & Finish Group for all their hard work.

67/20 PRECEPT 2021/22

It was proposed by Cllr. Murdoch, seconded by Cllr. Thomas and voted by Cllrs. Rosser, Rumsey, Davies, Norman, Smith-Winnard, Parris, Preece, Bartlett, Herschy and Marsh and **RESOLVED** to request a precept of £544,536 from Herefordshire Council for 2021/22, which would result in a Band D charge of £158.02, an increase of 4.25% on last year.

68/20 STANDING ORDERS AND FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Council **RESOLVED** to adopt the amended Standing Orders for 2020/21.

Council **RESOLVED** to adopt the Financial Regulations for 2020/21 without amendment.

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69/20 THE GREENWAY PROJECT & PROJECT SUGGESTIONS FOR MARKET TOWN INVESTMENT PROJECTS

It was proposed by Cllr. Barlett, seconded by Cllr. Norman and voted **10 for** and **one abstention** and **RESOLVED** to support in principal the Greenway Project.

70/20 ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP

It was **RESOLVED** that the following councillors would represent the Environmental Working Group, as a result of the Climate Emergency that has been declared, on the following Committees.

Finance & General Purposes – Cllr. Marsh

Planning & Highways – Cllrs. Herschy and Parris

Environment & Services – Cllrs. Williamson and Bartlett

Communications & Events - TBC

71/20 REPORTS

The following reports were received;

Leominster South Ward Report from Ward Cllr. Marsh

The council noted the report contained in the agenda.

Leominster North Ward Report from Ward Cllr. Stone

The council noted the report contained in the agenda.

Cllr. Stone added that whilst the toilets were open in Central Car Park and The Grange 8am – 2pm Monday to Saturday, that all of the Herefordshire Council toilets in Leominster Bus Station were closed. This is because of an electrical fault and the contractors are waiting for a part. Broad Street toilets are open as usual.

The Head Teacher of Earl Mortimer College has provided a reassuring report on the homeworking situation and that GCSE work is still being carried out with help from laptops provided by the government.

Leominster West Ward Report from Ward Cllr. Norman

The council noted the following report;

Can I begin by wishing everyone a very Happy New Year! Things are beginning to look a little more positive as health and care workers and many older and more vulnerable people are getting their first coronavirus vaccination. I think we are likely to be in lockdown for some time yet as the protection takes some weeks to kick in, and most people have not yet had their second jab. However, Herefordshire has made an impressive start with very high numbers being vaccinated through efficient organisation across the county.

Things were very confused before Christmas, with Herefordshire moving from one tier to another at short notice, and it was difficult to keep up with the rules and expectations. Sadly, numbers of infections and hospital admissions went up sharply after Christmas, and the hospital is now under very severe pressure, although there has been a slight downturn in the past week. Most people are taking the care needed with staying home except for exercise and essential shopping, and

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distancing and wearing masks when near others. Unfortunately, there are still a selfish few persisting with socialising and putting other at risk, especially our health and care workers who continue with their support for those who are ill or in need of essential care.

Schools are still closed except to the children of key workers and vulnerable children. Numbers attending are quite a lot higher than during the last lockdown, because those who cannot learn on-line or do not have space for working at home are also able to attend this time. Testing in schools has started and will begin to make a difference, but schools are unlikely to be able to fully open safely until teachers and school staff are vaccinated, something I and council colleagues have been calling for. Herefordshire Council has made arrangements to cover the cost of providing free school meals (FSM) over half term and during the Easter holiday, if the government does not meet this need. There are increasing numbers of families in need as businesses close, jobs are lost and incomes reduced due to the lockdown and reduced economic activity.

Flooding has been a huge problem once again, with emergency services flat out supporting those whose homes have been flooded, roads closed, vehicles stranded and all the other problems this causes. Although the weekend snow was a lovely sight to wake up to, it will increase the problem with ground already totally saturated. The weather continues to look unsettled for some time to come.

I welcome the appointment of a new chief executive of Herefordshire Council, Paul Walker, as the current chief executive, Alistair Neill, retires. Paul will take up the post in April and bring a new perspective to the challenge of revitalising and regenerating the county following the pandemic.

A number of meetings have been held with councillors and business representatives to consider future plans for Leominster with funding from the Market Towns Investment Fund, a project to support development in Leominster and boost our local economy. Issues discussed included the need for roads improvements, better broadband, buildings refurbishment, visitor accommodation, visitor attractions, including our heritage, festivals, our landscape and countryside, walking, cycling and much more.

I end by thanking all those involved in providing support and services during these very difficult times, those providing health and care, emergency services, our town and county council staff, and all those volunteering and offering support within our communities.

Cllr. Norman reiterated Cllr. Stone's comments with regard to Earl Mortimer college and highlighted that although laptops are available for pupils, there were other issues that they face such as poor internet connections and the provision of quiet spaces to work.

Leominster East Ward Report from Ward Cllr. Bartlett

The council noted the following report;

So far 2021 seems to have got off to a rocky start, but the roll out of the vaccine gives us all hope that some normality can be restored this year.

2021/22 Budget and Covid-19 financial pressures

The impact of covid-19 on finances has been huge for Principle Authorities up and down the country, just as it has been for the Town Council and businesses.

The County council tax base for 2021/22 has declined by 2%. This reflects an increase in excess of 25% of working age council tax reduction claimants, an increase of 1,400 households throughout the county receiving council tax discount due to the low level of income the household receives. Under current local government budgetary rules this loss of council tax income must be absorbed through budget savings elsewhere in our council budget. This is the first time anyone can remember the council tax base income has gone down over a year's budget, it is unprecedented!

In response to the national pandemic central government have awarded grants to cover expenditure e.g. Talk Community additional help, PPE to care homes, food parcels etc., however this is only expected to cover around 70% of the cost. Other costs, such as early free parking in council car parks to support the local economy has to be absorbed 'in house'. In response the council have taken the decision to raise the ring-fenced adult social care precept back up to 3% and the core council tax to 1.99%. The ring fenced adult social care precept was introduced by the Government in 2017 so that the additional costs of looking after residents a council has to meet are raised through the local precept, rather than funded by central government.

Adult & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

The committee have considered the new Market Position Statement for adult social care and Learning Disabilities. This rather unassuming title refers to our strategy for working with partners over the next few years to deliver and or commission services, as well as building on the new Talk Community successes. So very much linked to the adult social care ring-fenced money and how we make it work better for all of us.

Re thinking Governance Task and Finish

Much of my time in December was spent working on the review of our governance processes and our Constitution. The main focus has been on Scrutiny and planning and how well the current committee systems are working. Changes made in 2017 to the constitution have never been evaluated and these have also been part of our remit this month.

Mental Health Advisory Group and Blue Monday

I continue to attend the newly formed Mental Health Advisory Group forum. The mental health transformation of services in the county continues in partnership with MIND. These services are now aligned at the local level with the NHS Primary Care Networks (PCN's) that Talk Community and Parish summits are. So everything is becoming much more joined up at the local level.

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Blue Monday, the most depressing day of the year fell on January 18th. The gloomy title is due to a combination of post-Christmas blues, cold dark nights and the arrival of unpaid credit card bills. It has become an annual day in recognition that our mental health is really important, especially this year when we add lock down and covid to the mix.

Leominster Area Neighbourhood Development Plan review

I continue to chase for news of our 'critical friend' review which has been offered by planning to help us understand what works, doesn't work, or what could work better in our neighbourhood plan. How we respond to planning applications is vitally important if we want Herefordshire Council to listen to our requests.

Trees Woodlands and Hedgerows all members briefing

This half day seminar set out what, when and how decisions are made about trees in towns and the countryside. Whilst it was very informative and a lot to take in, I still came away feeling that there should be more we can do to protect the trees in our town.

Full Council

At the December council the revised Licensing Policy was adopted. I am pleased to see that the HAND Scheme has been given greater recognition and statutory footing. Under this scheme licensees work together with the police and council to reduce anti-social behaviour in the city and market towns.

The council bestowed Lady Darnley, the retiring Lord Lieutenant the title of honorary freewoman of Herefordshire. Lady Darnley was a regular visitor to and supporter of our civic and community life here in Leominster.

72/20 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

As certain items to be discussed included the consideration of exempt information, Full Council **RESOLVED** that, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded during the discussion of the matters referred to in the items listed below, on the grounds that they would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in the respective paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

(a) Grant Funding Ratification

- Council noted both grant applications that had been submitted and asked for further supporting information. The applications will be reviewed at the next meeting.

(b) Staff Report

- Council noted the staffing report and **RESOLVED** to accept all the recommendations contained in the report. A confidential appendix will be provided with the minutes.

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(c) Potential Devolved Asset Acquisition

- Council noted the three potential Devolved Assets.

(d) Museum Partnership Verbal Update

- Council noted that the Museum Partnership had now come to an end. A comprehensive report detailing the three-year project is currently being completed.

73/20 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Council noted that the next Town Council Meeting would be held on Monday 29th March 2021 commencing at 19:00 hours either remotely via Zoom or at the Council Offices, 11 Corn Square, Leominster HR6 8YP depending on social distancing regulations being relaxed by central government.

There being no other business the Mayor thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting at 20:58 hours.

MAYOR _____ **DATE:** _____