



MINUTES OF FULL COUNCIL MEETING OF HEDNESFORD TOWN COUNCIL

Wednesday 6th December 2023 AT 7.00 PM

Meeting held at Pye Green Community Centre, Bradbury Lane, Hednesford, WS12 4EP

Present:

Cllr Alan Pearson (Chair)
Cllr Ronald Turville
Cllr Ann Turville
Cllr Sheila Cartwright
Cllr Arthur Roden
Cllr Laura Harrison

Cllr Pearson addressed the meeting to say Cllr Jagger and Cllr Walker had resigned as Hednesford Town Councillors on Friday 1st December 2023

In attendance from Hednesford Town Council:

Lindsey Smith – Chief Officer
Cheryl Kinsella – Responsible Finance Officer
Cheryl Oakey – Administration Officer

Members of the Public:

There were 12 members of the public present

1. Apologies:

Cllr Paul Jones
Cllr Debbie Cartwright
Matthew Johnson – Community Officer

2. Declaration of Interest

None

3. Previous Minutes

The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on Wednesday 1st November 2023 were reviewed and approved.

Proposed: Cllr Pearson

Second: Cllr A Turville

Agreed: Cllr Pearson, Cllr R Turville, Cllr A Turville, Cllr S Cartwright, Cllr L Harrison, Cllr Roden

4. Statement from Chief Officer to Public and Full Council

Cllr Pearson read out the statement from the Chief Officer:

Polite reminder of Hednesford Town Council's pledge to the National Debate Not Hate Campaign and of the requirements of the Councillor Code of Conduct. While debate is healthy and disagreements to be expected disrespectful, threatening, aggressive and/or personal remarks will not be tolerated towards Cllrs, between Cllrs, towards Officers or towards or from members of the public.

5. Public Participation

A member of the Public raised his hand and gave the Cllr's his apologies for previous meetings if it seemed he came across difficult this was not his intentions

A spoke person for Hednesford Artisan Market group read out a statement on behalf the group:

"Thank you Chair and good evening, Member's.

This statement is made on behalf of a group of existing stallholders who regularly attend Hednesford Market. The group have come together to form 'Hednesford Artisan Market' in order to ensure the future of the market is secured.

The market has been a huge success for the town and has created a sense of community for Hednesford and its retailers, drawing large numbers of visitors into the town on a monthly basis. This in turn has benefitted existing retailers and market stallholders. To cease the market would therefore in our opinion have a detrimental impact on shops and businesses which is why the 'Hednesford Artisan Market' group has been formed.

Whilst we would love for the town Council to remain involved, we appreciate resourcing is currently an issue and may therefore result in delays in the market being held in 2024 onwards. We would of course welcome any future involvement from the Town Council should resourcing become available.

Stall holders have raised concerns regarding tending the market to a third party as this too may result in delays in the market being held in 2024 due to availability. There is also a fear that the market would lose its sense of identity, becoming a commercial operation rather than a community led market. This is a feature that everyone loves about the current market so it would be a shame for this to be lost.

Hednesford Artisan Market therefore propose to run a market in a similar order to the existing one in terms of dates it is held, time and location but would utilise any monies secured from stallholders to go towards the general running of the market and local charities.

We as a group would therefore favour option 3 in this evening's debate and request the Town Council allows Hednesford Artisan Market to take control of the market. This would ensure the market is up and running from February next year so that traders do not lose any trade and the momentum of the market is not lost. Thank you for your time.

Hednesford Artisan Market Group"

Cllr Roden enquired about the completion of the work to the trees along Market Street. HTC were informed that the full works were due to be completed but that only tree had been trimmed. The Chief Officer informed that they had already chased for an update on this and will update further when a response had been received from County

Member of the public enquired if the recruitment to the 2 vacant Councillor positions would be by co-option or election and was advised that until notification was received from CCDC that this would not be known

6 Verbal Updates from Committee Chairs

Finance, Operations and Personnel

Cllr P Jones Chair of the Finance, Operations and Personnel Committee sent his apologies, and no update was available

Regeneration and Community

Following the resignation of Cllr Jagger no update was available

Pye Green Community Centre

Cllr L Harrison had sent her apologies to the last PGCC Committee meeting and information that the main points were the building repairs and budget

Planning

Cllr A Pearson informed that there was a discussion about a planning decision made by CCDC and the Draft Local Action Plan for HTC

7. Community Officer Update

The Chief Officer read out the update on behalf of the Community Officer.

Community Support Grant

To date there have been 11 enquiries about the grant and 6 application submissions. The closing date for applications is Monday 11 December and this has again been advertised. The Chief Officer and Community Officer will review the submitted applications week beginning Monday 8th January 2024.

Christmas Light Switch On

The commitment of Hednesford Town Council was the following:

- The road closure certificate for Anglesey Street/Market Street
- The Christmas Tree purchased and installation in Anglesey Gardens
- Electrical testing and structural testing along Market Street for the lights

- Certificates and prize trophies as part of the Best Dressed Shop Window competition
- The presence of the Community Officer all day to assist Hednesford in Partnership with marshalling and to ensure the light switch on part of the event went smoothly.

Evaluation of Hub and Wellbeing Walk

The final Wellbeing Walk of 2023 was on Wednesday 6th December 2023 and the final The Hub of 2023 will be on Monday 18th December 2023.

To date there have been 114 Wellbeing Walk participants and 226 attending The Hub since September 2024

The Community Officer is preparing a grant application to The Inclusive Communities Fund to assist with future running of The Hub.

8. Finance

The Responsible Finance Officer discussed the figures within the CIL Report 2016 – 2024.

i) CIL Update:

St. Saviours Bell (1K) - The Chief Officer is still awaiting the invoice for the bell.

South Staffs College – The Chief Officer is meeting with South Staffs College during the coming week to progress community learning sessions at PGCC

ii) Prosperity fund Update:

The Chief Officer updated that HTC are working in partnership with the Miners Memorial Group and The Friends of Hednesford regarding grant funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and is awaiting quotes from both groups

iii) Taundry Doors:

The Responsible Finance Officer discussed that the service of the automatic doors has not been done since 2021. An engineer came out and found that the motor was leaking, that a pivot needs replacing and that correct signage was missing. The quote totals £1386.25 (inc VAT)

Cllr A Turville asked about the warranty?

The Responsible Finance Officer said the warranty was 1 year but clarify this

Cllr L Harrison asked normally for maintenance we have 3 quotes but is happy to go with this company as it has previously been agreed to hold a preferred contractor list

Cllr A Pearson said if it fail's we are stuck

Cllr A Turville said if it is 12 months happy to go ahead but if not to hold until the Responsible Finance Office can obtain further information

Proposed: Cllr A Turville

Second: Cllr R Turville

Agreed: Cllr Pearson, Cllr R Turville, Cllr A Turville, Cllr S Cartwright, Cllr L Harrison, Cllr Roden

Action: proceed with works from Taundry Doors

iv) PGCC Heating System

Following issues with the heating system at PGCC not working correctly and showing a fault on the system panel the Responsible Finance Officer discussed the heating options/solutions and was concerned about a low warranty of only 3 months.

The Responsible Finance Officer also discussed that another company had also informed that a 3 month warranty was not sufficient. The second company recommend that they would carry out a system health check and then make their recommendations.

The compressor on the system may have gone. Where the external units are located the cages are restricting the flow of air to the system/compressor and making it work much harder than it should. The compressors are not talking to each other as they should be doing. There should also be an immersion heater to stop they system from freezing Ideally and the external unit should also be on legs and not on the floor. The heating system is a good system but it not installed for optimum functionality.

The cost for the health check will be a maximum of £500 for the full day.

Cllr A Pearson said he was not happy with a 3-month warranty.

Cllr A Turville asked is there a service contract.

Cllr R Turville mentioned that he telephoned the first company and was not happy with the way they were dealt with and based on that would not advise that they were used.

Proposed: Cllr R Turville

Second: Cllr L Harrison

Agreed: Cllr Pearson, Cllr R Turville, Cllr A Turville, Cllr S Cartwright, Cllr L Harrison, Cllr Roden

Action: Responsible Finance Officer to action health check of heating system from 2nd company and will update further

9. Market

Cllr A Pearson read out the 3 options for the future of Hednesford Street Market:

- i. Bring the market back 'inhouse' at Hednesford Town Council and be responsible for all aspects of the market. This will require a new part time Officer post

- ii. Outsource the market to a third party by means of a formal tendering process. This will provide Hednesford Town Council with an element of control and input
- iii. Cease the market and all involvement from Hednesford Town Council

Cllr L Harrison said she remembered 4 years ago sitting in a Council Meeting and discussing small businesses and the market. Cllr L Harrison said she knows how the Market Traders feel and understands what the Traders do with the long hours and early starts.

Cllr L Harrison said options 1 & 3 are not an option in her opinion and would recommend to go with number 2. She continued to say that this is a difficult decision to make, with rent increases and the traders do not always make a profit but that it is important to have looked at all the options and follow the due process. Cllr Harrison stressed that it is important to retain the market to what it is meant to be and that she does not want a large organisation coming in and making it into something else as it is not always about profit. Nor is it Hednesford Town Council washing their hands of the market and that it is important to make it clear that if a third party takes it on that the Council still have an interest and will provide help and support where possible.

Cllr A Turville agreed with Cllr Harrison

Cllr A Pearson said Cllr Harrison had stated what all the other Councillors also feel and that the market each month brings people to the town and helps with the footfall figure.

Cllr R Turville said that option 2 was the best option

Proposed: Cllr L Harrison

Second: Cllr R Turville

Agreed: Cllr Pearson, Cllr R Turville, Cllr A Turville, Cllr S Cartwright, Cllr L Harrison, Cllr Roden

Action: Agreed option 2 – Outsource the market to a third party by means of a format tendering process.

The Chief Officer/Responsible Finance Officer to action the tender

Cllr A Pearson would like to discuss with the Chief Officer about holding an Extra ordinary meeting in January

There is no Market in January and will start in February/March 2024.

10. Budget

i, ii

The Responsible Finance Officer led a detailed discussion on the Draft Budget 2024 – 2025 proposal

The Responsible Finance Officer explained that it is an incremental budget and calculated by taking into account inflationary pressures.

Current year (2022/2023) the budget was £219,016.

The budget proposal for 2024/2025 is £225,960.

The precept is considered as standstill = 0% increase. The difference in budgets is offset due to an increase in the number of band D properties across HTC footprint

Cllr A Pearson enquired why the Chairperson expenses had been reduced and that he has not received any expenses before confirming that although he does not wish to receive any expenses that future chairs might. The Responsible Finance explained that in 2022/2023 that £0.00 of the Chairperson expenses were spent and that the 2024/2025 calculation was based on level of spend for this financial year. If more was required, then this would need to be found from elsewhere in budget

Cllr Pearson and Cllr R Turville encouraged Councillors, and especially new Councillors to go on training and courses and utilise the budget available for this remit

Cllr Harrison queried the difference in the Town Centre Maintenance amount from the previous year. The Responsible Finance Officer informed it was for the minor repairs in the town centre. Cllr Harrison sought clarification on whose responsibility uneven surfaces and health and safety is in the town and was informed that this falls under County.

The Chief Officer informed there is an expected £32,000 due for 2024/2025 from the UK Prosperity Fund which is intended to be utilised on the town centre, especially with regards to the brink planters, the miner's bricks to be replaced due to being damaged over the years of the installing of the Christmas lights and tree and to enhance the area as a whole

Cllr Harrison enquired about the proposed new role of Project Support Officer and could this be accommodated in the budget spend.

Chief Officer provided an overview and explanation of the proposed new role. Using an underspend that has been carried forward the role was initially factored in should the market have come back in house. Due to the market going to tender the role has converted to a Project Support Officer to support in the level of work required to progress CIL and Prosperity Funds, as well as supporting on other project work as part of the wider HTC team. The new role will enable the Chief Officer and Responsible Finance Officer to focus on the roles they were employed to do and is initially for a temporary 12 months on a part time basis. It permits an opportunity to build a case, or not, for a longer term role for the 2025/2026 budget.

Cllr Harrison also sought clarification regarding the PGCC forecast and noted that it is showing a slight reduction. Chief Officer informed that lots of major works have already been carried out during 2022/2023 and that CCDC have been approached to enquire of CIL funds can be utilised, as PGCC is a recreational building, and are awaiting a response. £50,000 of reserves are also held.

Cllr Pearson sought clarification regarding the costs for the Christmas Lights and event. The Responsible Finance Officer informed that the infrastructure testing had unexpected costs this year that were not budgeted for, so the proposed costs are to take this into account. The £2,500 is a grant given to Hednesford in Partnership who co-ordinate the Christmas Light Switch on on behalf of Hednesford Town Council.

Cllr Roden asked about the Hednesford Life Magazine and opinionated that it is £5,500 in debt and what is happening with the magazine? Chief Officer advised that there was no Officer capacity to do the magazine this year and the Community Officer is looking at doing a digital copy. The Responsible Finance Officer said the magazine was not in the proposed budget. The Chief Officer informed that if full council wish to re-ignite Hednesford in Life then they need to lose another part of the proposed budget

Cllr A Turville asked if the magazine could go out with the council tax forms to save costs?

The Chief Officer mentioned the amounts for Citizen Advice service had stayed the same £5,000, as had Community Grants at £5,000, Hednesford in Partnership Summer Festival at £3,000 (£2,500 for Christmas Light Switch On as previously discussed) and Chase Pride Event September 2024 was £2,000 under discretionary grants

Cllr Harrison enquired about funding for Friends of Hednesford Park to decorate the town for Chase Pride. Chief Officer informed that they had not been approached by either a Councillor or Friends of Hednesford Park regarding this. Cllr Harrison said she will discuss the Friends of Hednesford Park Chase Pride event at the next Regeneration meeting

Cllr Pearson stated he was concerned about admission fees for the events supported by the Council

Cllr A Turville fully supports the Chase Pride event but feels as the park is for the public and they should not have to pay to go into the park on event days nor have access to the park denied to them as it is a public space

Cllr Pearson said to propose and agree the £2,000 for the discretionary event(s) and allocated of funds can be discussed at later date.

Proposed: Cllr S Cartwright

Second: Cllr L Harrison

Agreed: Cllr Pearson, Cllr R Turville, Cllr A Turville, Cllr S Cartwright, Cllr L Harrison, Cllr Roden

Action: To retain the £2,000 discretionary grant in the proposed 2024/2025 budget

Cllr Pearson asked full council if there were any further questions or queries relating to the proposed budget

Cllr S Cartwright enquired if there is a list of what each officer is paid, and the details of their roles are available. Chief Officer informed that this falls under probate and confidential and will need to be discussed in a closed meeting. The Chief Officer also informed that this information has previously been circulated to all Cllrs

Cllr Harrison enquired what the subscriptions of £650.00 relate to and was informed that it is for the accounting system

Cllr S Cartwright enquired about costs for cleaning and was advised that it is items that do not fall under maintenance

Cllr A Turville asked if eco friendly items are used and was advised due to costs that this is not a feasible option

iii Salaries and Proposed Split costs

Cllr Pearson asked Members for their views on the proposed Project Support Officer and whether they had any objections

Cllr A Turville informed as long as it is for an initial 12 month period with opportunity to review for 2025/2026

Cllr Roden enquired if existing Officers would want more hours. Chief Officer informed that they cannot discuss individual Officers in an open meeting but that approaches have been made and none have capacity or want to take on further hours at this stage

Cllr Harrison stated that she is conscious of needing to support current Officers and that an additional role was factored into the structure for 2021/2022 which has not yet been fulfilled and clarified that it is a part time fixed term post in order to make progress on projects and to see if the role is required longer term.

Proposed: Cllr A Turville

Second: Cllr L Harrison

Agreed: Cllr Pearson, Cllr R Turville, Cllr A Turville, Cllr S Cartwright, Cllr L Harrison, Cllr Roden.

Action: Chief Officer to proceed with recruiting to fixed Term part time role for Project Support Officer

iiii Council Tax Charge Summary

The precept is a 0% increase due to more band D in the area

Cllr Pearson again asked if there were any further questions or queries relating to the proposed 2024/2025 budget

Cllr Harrison asked about the electrical charges for PGCC and a discussion took place regarding how this has been forecast using spend to date and anticipation of the contract change in November 2024. Rates of hire will need to be re-visited late summer 2024 to reflect the end of the current electrical deal in time for the 2025/2026 budget

Cllr Harrison stated that she felt there was nothing to dispute in the proposed budget

Proposed: Cllr L Harrison

Second: Cllr A Turville

Agreed: Cllr Pearson, Cllr R Turville, Cllr A Turville, Cllr S Cartwright, Cllr L Harrison, Cllr Roden

Action: 2024/2025 budget agreed. Responsible Finance Officer to call for the precept

11. Date and Time of Next Meeting

Wednesday 7th February 2024 – 7.00 pm

Pye Green Community Centre

The meeting closed to the public at 8.30pm

12. Private and Confidential Business

The Public was asked to leave the meeting so the Chief Officer, Responsible Officer and the Cllr's could discuss the Draft Local Action Plan

The Chief Officer reminded Members of the need for a Local Action Plan, explained the 4 proposed priorities of the Local Action Plan and provided a timeline for implementation

Cllr L Harrison asked for PGCC to be added to priority 2 and all agreed to amendment and agreement of Draft Local Action Plan

Proposed: Cllr L Harrison

Second: Cllr A Roden

Agreed: Cllr Pearson, Cllr R Turville, Cllr A Turville, Cllr S Cartwright, Cllr L Harrison, Cllr Roden.

Action: 4 key priorities of Draft Local Action Plan agreed. Chief Officer to populate the plan further and present back to full council

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm