



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF HEDNESFORD TOWN COUNCIL

**on Tuesday 6th December 2022 held at Pye Green Community Centre, Bradbury Lane,
Hednesford**

**Members of the public were able to attend in person and the meeting was livestreamed
on the Council's Facebook Page**

Present:

CLLr Darrell Mawle (Mayor)
CLLr Mandy Dunnett (Deputy Mayor)
CLLr Paul Woodhead [Chair of Regeneration & Community Committee]
CLLr Laura Harrison (Chair of PGCC Committee)
CLLr Sharon Jagger (Chair of FP&Ops Committee)
CLLr Garry Jones
CLLr Chris Harborow
CLLr Stuart Crabtree
CLLr Arthur Roden

In attendance: Lindsey Smith (Chief Officer)

Members of Public: There were 14 members of the public

1. Public Participation

PCSO Rob Evans [Local Policing Team] attended with a colleague and gave a verbal update:

There has been an increase in the number of keyless vehicle theft in Cannock Chase district – with Ford Fiestas at top of the target list. An operation is currently in place with a dedicated team to tackle this. Rob offered signal-blocker wallets (Faraday pouches) free of charge which he left on the table for anyone to take, to keep their keyless cars safe overnight.

There have been issues with under-age anti-social behaviour in the vicinity of Tesco Victoria Street and in Hednesford Park. However, the number of reported issues has decreased since October 22 alongside. High visibility patrols are still ongoing in partnership with the youth offending unit.

PCSO Evans informed about the upcoming drink-driving campaign which will be in operation over the Christmas period targeting vehicles whose drivers may have been drinking alcohol the night before for example together with a focus on seatbelt wearing.

The feedback from the Hednesford Civic Remembrance event in November and the more recent Christmas lights switch-on event has been very good. There was a large attendance at both events – which were well organised safely, with a large police presence at the Christmas event but no recorded incidents and both events went off very well.

PCSO Evans reminded everyone about pickpockets around the Christmas shopping period and he left “purse bells” on the table for anyone to take free of charge.

PSCO Evans outlined several upcoming police engagement events locally which he invited members of the public to attend. Public advised to see Police social media pages for further details.

Councillor Jones asked, on behalf of a resident who had contacted via email, whether Tesco would consider lowering their underground car park barriers to prevent the issues of anti-social car driving and vehicles gathering with loud revving engines in their underground car park. PCSO Evans confirmed that this had been done by agreement with the previous Tesco store manager to close the barriers at 8pm. There has been a change of store manager and it is down to the store manager as to when the barriers are closed. PCSO Evans informed that the Police will not attend any reports unless Tesco are closing the barriers at an agreed time but will request the road team to patrol the area.

Councillor Mawle asked if it might help if Hednesford Town Council contacts the management of Tesco and asks for the barriers to be lowered to prevent these anti-social issues happening in the future. Rob Evans thanked the Council and said that would be very helpful.

ACTION: Cllr Mawle to speak with Tesco and will report to Rob Evans by email with update/update at next council meeting

Shaun Middleton, Chair of the local community group “Hednesford-in-Partnership” updated the meeting concerning the recent Christmas Lights switch-on event. This he said was a courtesy update because Hednesford Town Council had been heavily involved in the event in many helpful ways. The event was a fantastic success with record numbers of people in attendance. Nine local schools were involved and took part in a mass choir, two steel pan bands, theatre and acting groups. Stormtroopers also attended and there were activities provided by community volunteers in the library. Shaun thanked individual Councillors for supporting the event in so many ways. Shaun thanked all the volunteers from many local community groups including the Salvation Army:

- Liz and the team of Library volunteers
- Will and Rob from 1st Hednesford scout group
- David and the team from the Station adoption group
- Pam Chris and Debbie from the Minors Memorial group
- Hednesford Centennial Lions Club
- Susan and Keith and the Friends of Hednesford Community Volunteers

- Lynn from the Friends of Hednesford Park
- Gary from the Salvation Army
- Special thanks
- Matt, Paul, Darrell and Mandy from HTC
- Phil, Bryan and Paul our District Councillors.
- Local Policing Team
- All 9 schools within Hednesford
- The dedicated team at Hednesford in Partnership – Lesley, Harriet, Sue and Emma
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ACTION: A question arose from the event - can an open invitation please be made to residents in the vicinity of Market Street for an informal meeting so that they can express their views and explain how they are affected events and perhaps such a meeting could help to alleviate some of the problems and issues being experienced by town centre residents, together with abuse and threatening behaviour aimed at volunteers involved in supporting events. HiP always send out letters to all residents to explain what is going to be happening, but something more needs to be done to engage with town centre residents so that they can help to alleviate the issues they experience.

A member of the public stood to speak on the same issue saying that residents of Cardigan Place also experience issues on Market days. Residents of Cardigan Place are stranded on Market days because of the one-way system operated in the Aldi car park – many receive automated parking tickets [from “Parking Eye”] on Market days because they have to breach the one-way access in order to drive to their properties. The member of public stated that no road closure notices are received to their properties. The member of public further explained that it is a lengthy process for the residents to try to get any issued tickets cancelled. The member of the public confirmed that they all love the Market and wouldn’t want it to be cancelled. They want to work with the Council to find a solution to this problem if possible.

There was a lengthy discussion between councillors and the member of the public around the issue and possible solutions. Ideally the member of public would like the market to cease at Eskerett Street (post office end) so that they can still access cardigan place and their property.

ACTION: Councillor Mawle confirmed he will contact Aldi and/or “Parking Eye” to discuss the potential for them to relax the issuing of automated tickets on Market days so that Cardigan Place residents can access their homes.

A member of the public asked “are you fully, or partially closing this place?”. Councillor Mawle responded that Pye Green Community Centre is not closing – the only reason it is currently closed on some days is because the heating system is broken and officers are working from home whenever possible.

Councillor Mawle closed the public participation section of the meeting and opened the Full Council meeting.

2. Apologies:

None

3. Declarations of Interest:

None

4. Previous Minutes:

The minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on Wednesday 02nd November 2022 were reviewed and approved

Proposed: Councillor Mawle

Seconded: Councillor Harrison

Agreed: All in favour

5. Mayor's Announcements/Updates:

I. Resignation of Councillor Debbie Cartwright – West Hill Ward

Councillor Mawle stated *“Councillor Debbie Cartwright has been unable to attend meetings over the last few months, for a legitimate reason. There is a national policy that when a councillor hasn't attended meetings in a six-month period, they automatically lose their position as a councillor. Now, Councillor Cartwright hasn't been with us since June and that six-month period was going to come to an end a little bit later in December, so Councillor Cartwright has decided to step down as a councillor with immediate effect”*.

II. Councillor Roden

Councillor Mawle advised that Cllr Arthur Roden has resigned from the Finance, Operations and Personnel Committee.

III. Hednesford Lions Group War Memorial unveiling

Councillor Mawle expressed the Council's thanks for a successful public event to unveil the new replica historic sign installed at Hednesford War Memorial.

IV. Remembrance Event

Councillor Mawle expressed thanks to all involved, including the Hednesford Branch of The Royal British Legion and our Community Officer Matthew Johnson who has now compiled a written format for future use in organising this annual civic event. Thanks also to all the volunteers who helped as marshals on the day, led by adult leaders from 1st Hednesford Scout Group supported by the security team from Hednesford Hills Raceway.

V. Farmers and Craft Market 26.11.22

Councillor Mawle expressed thanks to all involved.

VI. Christmas Light Switch event

Councillor Mawle expressed thanks to all involved and to Hednesford-in-Partnership who organised the event on 2nd December from 5pm; the organisation was excellent, and attendance was the most we'd ever seen in the town!

VII. Farmers and Craft Christmas Market

Our Christmas market is upcoming on 10th December from 10 a.m.

VIII. New Market Dates for 2023 to be confirmed

IX. Welcome to Poundstretcher

Councillor Mawle welcomed the Poundstretcher store to the town; he had the pleasure of cutting the ribbon to open the store recently and he congratulated them for getting the store ready for opening in such a short space of time.

X. Electoral Review of Cannock Chase District Council

This is a Consultation by Local Government Boundary Commission for England to propose 36 Councillors to be elected in Cannock Chase in future and new ward boundaries within the authority. Consultation open until 6th February 2023.

ACTION: Councillor Woodhead suggested that this Council should submit a formal response – maybe a small group should get together or meet online to discuss a formal comment to be made by 5th February.

Councillor Woodhead confirmed he won't be involved as has already independently submitted his own comment, so he will not inflict his own opinion on other councillors, but he does feel that the Council should make a formal submission.

Councillor Mawle expressed his thanks to the Hednesford Town Football Club Supporters' Association who had organised a carol service at Keys Park last night to which he had been invited and enjoyed the event very much indeed.

6. **Verbal update from Committee Chairs**

I. Regeneration and Community Committee

As Committee Chair, Cllr Woodhead gave a verbal update regarding the Farmers & Craft Market and confirmed that there probably wouldn't be a market in January [a decision and announcement would be made soon]. Local residents' and councillor colleagues' concerns around parking [mentioned previously] would be addressed.

Two consultations have been circulated: the consultation for market stall holders had 39 responses. This had been a productive exercise and there were things which would be addressed and discussed in the new year. The consultation survey for the general public had been issued online but it had been "spammed" with some comments being inappropriate and the results of that consultation were skewed. That consultation will be re-issued in a different format next year.

Councillor Dunnett confirmed that she had also been in consultation with all traders in Market Street and she had visited them all to gain their responses. All traders apart from one appear happy with the way the monthly market is being run. Councillor Dunnett will share the information from her survey with Councillor Woodhead going forward.

II. Pye Green Community Centre Committee

As Committee Chair, Cllr Harrison gave a verbal update. Revision of hire rates will be brought as a motion later in the private business part of this meeting. Cllr Harrison updated the meeting concerning meeting room hire statistics, and the potential for a marketing plan. Cllr Harrison updated the meeting concerning an upcoming event in January "Historic Hednesford". The next meeting of this Committee will be 9th January 2023.

III. Finance, Personnel & Operations Committee

As Committee Chair, Cllr Jagger gave a verbal update concerning finance, personnel and operations matters. The Minutes of this Committee will be available separately. The next meeting of this Committee will be 19th January 2023 when the council tax Precept will be discussed and a recommendation prepared for full Council in February.

7. Hednesford Town Council Priority and Action List

Cllr Roden wished to re-visit the Council's priority and action list document, which had been prepared in May 2020. Councillor Mawle pointed out the age of the document, that actions had been impacted by lockdown and explained that there is no motion attached to this agenda item. Cllr Roden was asked to be brief in his delivery of this agenda item.

A conversation followed about how the document was put together and about the outstanding actions.

A call to order was made and the item called to an end.

8. Litter Bins Update

Chief Officer, Lindsey Smith updated the meeting regarding this issue. The street cleansing team at Cannock Chase Council cannot warrant the installation of a litter bin at the bus stop at the top of Pye Green Road as requested by a resident. The street cleansing team have monitored the situation and concluded that it is not needed. Funds are available for bins but the maintenance then falls to CCDC.

Member of the public informed that the reason there is no rubbish is because they litter pick the area.

The Chief Officer advised that the District Council have confirmed that litter bins will soon be installed in the linked walkways of the new estates along the Pye Green Road and that the situation can be re-monitored once the new shopping area opens by Poppy fields school. Provision and maintenance of the bins on the new estates are all to be privately managed and maintained.

Cllr Roden asked for an update regarding grit bins – it was confirmed that this is not on the agenda.

Member of the public was upset by the update and left the meeting.

9. Community Officer Update Report

Remembrance Event and Parade

The Town Council kindly funded the printing of the Order of Service sheets for St Peter's Church at a cost of £

In future, suggest that St Peter's Church will put in for a Community Support Grant to help cover this cost!

Hednesford Royal British Legion made a donation to Hednesford Town Council of £100 towards print costs

Both the event at the Clock on 11th November and the parade on 13th went very well. We are indebted to **Rob and Will Ryder** for organising and providing marshalling volunteers as well as barrier equipment. A big Thank You to **Robert Plumb** for organising wreath laying at the War Memorial. Additional thanks to everyone who took part or supported the commemorations. As this was my first Remembrance in Hednesford I was astounded at the turnout for the event on 13th. This is a credit to Hednesford and something to be proud of.

As a result of this year's events, I am preparing a Working Document that lists procedures, Risk Assessments and timelines to enable this event to happen in the future which will assist any Officer in post.

Community Support Grant Update

Since the last Full Council we have had one more grant application approved. This was for Hednesford Salvation Army. This was to support their Friendship Café. This is a pay as you feel café to bring people dealing with loneliness or isolation together. It is also registered as a Place of Welcome and Warm Space. The grant will go to cover running and food expenses.

The grant application has been approved by Cllrs Woodhead, Jagger and Harrison as well as myself.

Currently £4,500 of the Grant has been allocated. This leaves £6,500 due to the underspend last year. Since the extension of the offer has been advertised, we have had more enquiries, particularly from schools and I'm confident that we will have more successful applications by the end of the year.

AED Device / Old Co-Op Building

I have been in touch with Mid Counties Co-Op and Community Heartbeat Trust regarding this and its relocation to the exterior of Acorns Florist

- I believe that our 'Managed Solution' for this defibrillator is paid up until October 2023 but I will need to confirm this with the CHT Office Manager
- Mid Counties Co-Op will pay for an electrician to site the defibrillator at its new location, up to £200. This would cover the normal cost of installation of a defibrillator but if extra charges are incurred then these will need to be borne by HTC. I have done a site visit to Acorns and am waiting to get a quote from their approved electrician. Once we know of any costs that the £200 won't cover, I can consult with Councillors and move forward.

Hednesford Christmas Lights Switch On

This is an event run by Hednesford in Partnership but has been supported by HTC. The road closure scheme for the event was submitted by HTC and the delivery and installation of the Christmas Tree was facilitated by HTC

Volunteer Policy

Thank you to everyone who has looked through and commented on the draft for this Policy. I will produce another draft for circulation and look for this to go to Full Council in February for approval.

Community Newsletter

From January I will be putting together a monthly Community Newsletter. This will be produced inhouse with a digital format so no additional production costs. It will focus on community engagement from HTC. However, it will also share information from partners and local organisations.

Community Engagement Forward Plan

It is my intention from January 2023 to work with the Senior Officer to produce a Forward Plan for community engagement in Hednesford. This would identify short, medium and long term goals and targets. I feel that this would enable HTC to have a structured and measurable approach to community work as well as facilitating external funding applications for projects and impactful partnership working.

Councillor Jones thanked the Community Officer for his report, expressed the importance of proactive community engagement and stated that the community officer is doing a really good job in this regard – Congratulations Matt.

10. Volunteer Policy:

To go to full council in February 2023

11. Planning Applications:

Presented for ratification

12. PGCC building condition report update

Cllr Harrison gave the meeting a verbal update concerning the building condition report re: Pye Green Community Centre. A local tradesman has been asked to comment on the findings of the building condition report. Cllr Harrison has analysed these comments and it confirms that the most urgent work required is the roof above the bar area. Cllr Harrison advised that most of the rest of the works set out in the building condition report can be undertaken within the next 2, 3 or 4 years. Cllr Harrison asked full Council for guidance as to what to do next.

Cllr Jagger asked about the comments written in red on the document. Cllr Harrison confirmed that the comments made in red are written by a local tradesman who coincidentally was involved at the time when the extension was built and is therefore familiar with the items raised in the building condition report.

Cllr Jones asked if the local tradesman was a surveyor or similar? Cllr Harrison confirmed that he is a roofing contractor.

Cllr Jones pointed out that Council requires to receive a reliable independent schedule of works from a professional with the relevant qualifications to prepare one. For budgeting purposes, Council needs to be shown the projected cost of works that need doing during the course of this year's budget, the works that need doing during the course of the year after's budget and the works that are needed a bit further ahead for future years' budgeting purposes.

Cllr Jones highlighted a potential conflict of interest because a quote for undertaking building works at PGCC is on this evening's agenda – and it appears to be from the same person who has made the comments in red regarding necessary works? Cllr Harrison confirmed that the quote at this stage is for information only. It is a starting point. That is the figure that he is saying needs to be spent to undertake the most urgent works. Cllr Harrison explained that this shows we don't have to budget for works in the region of £60,000 but rather we need to budget currently for only around £1,000. Cllr Harrison confirmed that she could seek comparative quotes from other relevant professionals for Council to consider.

SUGESTED ACTION: Cllr Jones suggested that the Chief Officer should take up the matter to ensure that Council receives an entirely independent schedule of works, based on the building condition report, to assist in budgeting over the course of this year, next year etc.

Councillor Woodhead spoke to clarify that the PGCC Committee would now use this quote in order to prepare a schedule of costs for our upcoming budget discussions. Cllr Harrison confirmed this.

13. Motion from Cllr Laura Harrison

Motion from Cllr Harrison to approve the quote for required electrical works at PGCC.

Cllr Jagger said she would abstain from voting because she doesn't understand where the money would be coming from to pay for this work. Cllr Mawle said that CIL could be used to pay for this, and Cllr Mawle proposed an amendment to the motion: that the money would be coming from CIL funds.

Cllr Woodhead asked Council if this was the best use of CIL funds? Once CIL is spent it's spent. If we utilise CIL funds for works required at PGCC we cannot utilise CIL funds elsewhere in the community, to provide services to the wider community [examples given were new orientation boards in town, contribution towards the railway station project etc]

Cllr Woodhead informed that he would not support the amendment to CIL funds for the purpose of the motion and would prefer it to come from reserves.

Cllr Woodhead said a wider discussion is needed around whether Council agrees to the use of CIL funds to pay for the necessary repair works required to the Pye Green Community Centre building, and in his view, Council has not yet had that wider discussion.

Cllr Harrison explained this work is legally required, it is urgent and necessary. Cllr Woodhead agreed to the necessary spend but will not agree to the use of CIL.

Council took a vote on the amendment – to utilise CIL funds to pay for this urgent necessary electrical work:

For: 5

Against: 3

Abstain: 1

ACTION: Amendment carried – HTC will utilise CIL funds to pay for urgent necessary electrical works to be undertaken as per quote before Council this evening.

14. Setting of 2022/2023 Tax Base/Precept

Chief Officer reminded Council that in discussing the budget and finances we do need to keep comments in a general nature, because the meeting would need to be closed to the public if confidential information is shared.

Chief Officer explained to the public what the Precept is.

Chief Officer explained that Council needs to agree in principle how we are going to set the 2023/24 Precept – overview from RFO and FP&Ops is all open to discussion but basically we need to agree whether we are going to agree no increase, a small increase or a larger increase.

Committees must meet to discuss and bring all their discussion together so that a recommendation can be brought to full council in February.

Cllr Jagger explained that if HTC agree not to increase the Precept, HTC do potentially gain a small amount [approx. £5k] because there are more households in the parish than last year.

Cllr Jones explained since being elected in 2019, the current administration have been through this process three times now. The first time HTC agreed to increase the Precept - which had been continually frozen by the previous administration, which had led to a gradual attrition against individual household payments because the same amount of Precept was coming from more households – due to the increased development of housing on the Pye Green Road.

Cllr Jones explained that unfortunately this meant that whilst inflation continued to increase, the previous administration had slowly chipped away at the income source of the Council, which meant that each year the Council was servicing its day-to-day running costs using reserves year-on-year. That meant that when the current administration were elected, HTC was already in a small deficit position.

That increase was made alongside HTC commitment to do what HTC had promised to do at election time – ie: all of the additional work around community and regeneration, as well as the community centre operation.

HTC decided in 2020 and 2021 to freeze the precept at a 0% household increase. Cllr Jones stated his view that inflation and the cost of living has increased significantly, and he would find it very difficult to ask his neighbours to pay more to get less.

Cllr Jones explained that asking households to pay more would not mean they would get an additional community programme, or an additional regeneration programme – HTC would be asking them to pay more. In reality, unless HTC significantly increases the Precept, HTC are going to have to make some cuts somewhere.

Cllr Jones felt that the Council needs to learn to live within its means and needs to find the savings within what we're doing - not simply ask residents to pay more. Cllr Jones explained that is why he believes we ought to be deciding on a 0% household increase.

Cllr Woodhead said he is generally supportive of Cllr Jones' position; Council finds itself in a position where it's living outside of its means, and we need to make some difficult choices. HTC can set the Precept in whatever way HTC feel appropriate – but HTC do need to set a balanced budget. Nothing should be off the table for discussion. HTC are not restricted in how HTC set the Precept level – committees should give an indication of projected spend.

Cllr Woodhead went on to explain that we currently pay (£26,000) towards the cost of CCTV in the town in return from the facility of free parking. This is a historic agreement with

Cannock Chase District Council. We could stop paying for the CCTV [which would give us the sum of £26,000] but the implications of doing so could impact upon local residents. Cllr Roden stated he has always felt it is not value for money. Cllr Woodhead said it is one option which should be on the table for discussion as we do need to present a balanced budget which means the council are going to have to make cuts in spending somewhere and have difficult discussions around difficult issues.

Cllr Harborow suggested a public engagement consultation or on-line survey; the logistics of doing so was discussed. Cllr Mawle informed that as councillors all are meant to represent the community and should be aware of the issues and needs.

Cllr Harrison stated she has a financial background but cannot understand how the Council is in a position with such a large deficit. She welcomed the public to the next PGCC Committee meeting for them to have their say on the issues being discussed around budgeting.

A lengthy discussion followed around setting the level of the Precept and potential cost that could be saved together with a request for indications on where individual councillors stood on increasing the precept or not.

Cllr Jones emphasised that it's our responsibility as current elected Members to look at what is complex information and make a judgement based upon what we've heard from our own constituents and what we think is in the best interests of the Council and the town's residents.

9pm Meeting closed to the public for private and confidential business.

16. Date of next full Council meeting is Tuesday 7th February 2023 @7pm