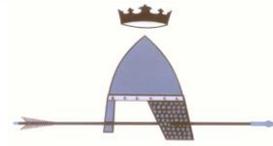




Battle Town Council



**MINUTES of a Meeting of the
FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
held on Tuesday, 10 January 2012 at
The Almonry, High Street, Battle at 7.30pm**

Present: Cllr R Harris - Chairman
Cllrs: R Bye, R Jessop, Mrs M Kiloh, Ms M-L Neill
and Mrs S Pry.

Cllr Mrs P Fisher was also in attendance as was Simon Alexander, Chairman of Beautiful Battle.

1. Apologies for Absence – None.

2. Disclosure of Interest – Several Members declared an interest in item 8:

- Cllr Harris – personal and prejudicial as a member of the Memorial Hall Management Committee;
- Cllr Mrs Pry – personal and prejudicial as a close relation of a member of the Netherfield Village Hall Committee;
- Cllr Bye – personal as the Council's representative on the Memorial Hall Management Committee;
- Cllr Jessop - personal as the Council's representative on the Scarecrow Festival Committee.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 November 2011. Cllr Jessop proposed approval of the minutes, seconded by Cllr Bye. This was agreed and they were duly signed.

4. Matters Arising from Previous Meetings

The Clerk said that the **Business Bond** had been reinvested but at a slightly later date than originally proposed in order to achieve an improved interest rate. Having carried out a forecast cash flow for the coming 12 months he had now suggested that a **further £20,000** could safely be tied up. The cash flow details had been circulated to Committee Members in the light of which **Cllr Jessop proposed, seconded by Cllr Bye that a further £20,000 should be so invested. It was agreed unanimously to recommend this to Council.**

The Chairman welcomed Simon Alexander to the meeting in order to provide an update on **Almonry garden** matters. His report focussed on the replanting of the north bed and a proposal to introduce some structure in the form of 2 obelisks. Having satisfied themselves that such structures are appropriate to a country cottage garden the Committee agreed to this proposal. Regarding the courtyard Simon Alexander said that the plans are to reflect the Golden Jubilee through the use of gold, red, white and possibly purple planting. This was noted. Having substantially pruned the trailing rose in the lower garden Simon Alexander asked that the Council workmen repair the supporting fencing.

5. Correspondence and Communications

The Committee noted that the next series of **Councillors' training courses** to be held locally will not take place until September.

The Clerk reported receipt of confirmation that, at present, Town and Parish Councils will not be subject to the provisions of the **Localism Act** which trigger a referendum in the

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event of proposed substantial increases in Council Tax.

The local **Lions Club** had asked whether they could have a stand at the Parish Assembly. Whilst having no objection in principle, the Committee were concerned that little space would be available in the main hall. The Clerk was asked to see whether the adjoining St Valery Room might be available in which case local groups and organisations could be encouraged to attend.

6. Budget Report 2011-12

The only significant change from previously reported figures was an increase in the Estates expenditure relating to equipment repairs. This included repairs to the SID machine which it was agreed would be more appropriately coded to the miscellaneous admin budget heading. Following receipt of further information about the precise split of the insurance premium some adjustments between Committees also need to be made. These changes are reflected in the summary table attached.

7. **Bank Reconciliation Statement** at 30 November 2011 was noted.

8. Grant Applications

The Clerk had circulated an up to date list of grant applications received including one which had arisen as a result of the press release inviting such applications. Each application was considered as follows.

Cllr Harris repeated his personal and prejudicial interest in the application from the Memorial Hall. He reminded the Committee of the recent history of work undertaken at the Hall and its importance as a community facility. He then took no further part in the discussion or the voting. **Cllr Mrs Kiloh proposed that the Hall should receive a grant of £500. This was seconded by Cllr Bye and agreed unanimously to recommend to Council.**

Netherfield Church had written indicating that, in addition to their continuing running costs they are now seeking to raise money for replacement heating. They had requested the usual grant of £250. **Cllr Mrs Pry proposed that this be agreed, seconded by Cllr Jessop and agreed unanimously to recommend to Council.**

Cllr Mrs Pry repeated her personal and prejudicial interest in the application from the Netherfield Village Hall and took no part in the discussion. As with the Memorial Hall the Committee felt that the Village Hall provides an important community facility. **Cllr Jessop proposed that the request for £250 be supported. This was seconded by Cllr Ms Neill and agreed unanimously to recommend to Council.**

The Battle Museum had initially written seeking an unstated amount towards general running costs. Subsequently they had indicated that their main concern is the need to overcome the reduction in visitor numbers and that they would like to enhance their marketing activity. Whilst much of the work can be done using volunteers the printing costs of a small brochure and charges for a new web-site server will be £550. Subject to making it clear that any payment is related to this activity and not a general subsidy, **Cllr Jessop proposed that a grant in this amount be paid. This was seconded by Cllr Ms Neill and agreed unanimously to recommend to Council.**

The organiser of the Battle for Tennis initiative had asked whether the Council would fund

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his third party insurance cost. Such insurance is required to comply with the Memorial Halls' hiring conditions. The Committee felt that, along with the Hall hiring charges themselves, this should be regarded as part of the total cost of the activity to be recovered from the participants. **The Committee therefore agreed to recommend to Council that no payment be made.**

Battle Area Community Transport currently have no coordinator who would normally send out to all Town and Parish Councils the annual letter seeking financial support. The Clerk had established this in conversation with BACT who had confirmed the need for the usual grant of £750. Noting these circumstances, **Cllr Bye proposed that the grant be paid. This was seconded by Cllr Jessop and agreed unanimously to recommend to Council.**

Cllr Jessop repeated his personal interest in the Scarecrow Festival. Although any net proceeds of the event would be distributed to charity Cllr Jessop explained that costs are incurred in a variety of ways, not least promoting the event, printing entry forms and taking a stand at the Mediaeval Fayre. The Committee felt that a contribution towards the cost of this third element would be appropriate and **Cllr Bye proposed that a sum of £100 be paid. This was seconded by Cllr Ms Neill and agreed unanimously to recommend to Council.**

The Clerk reminded the Committee of the request by the Town Band made in October to help match fund a grant offered by the District Council towards the cost of new instruments. He had replied in the light of the Committee's discussion of this request at the previous meeting indicating that further consideration would be given when all grant applications had been received. As before, the Committee were clear that the full amount necessary (£2080) to match fund Rother's offer was more than could be afforded. Nevertheless they wished to support the Band and **Cllr Ms Neill proposed that a payment of £500 be made. This was seconded by Cllr Jessop and agreed unanimously to recommend to Council** subject to the Band being asked to perform at the Big Lunch and invited to discuss with the Council future arrangements for playing in the town.

9. Devolution of Services

Cllr Harris confirmed that an **invitation has now been received to make a presentation to the District Council's Devolution Working Group meeting on 24 February.** The invitation had set out the criteria which the District Council will use when considering devolution including that no arrangements should increase Council Tax to Rother residents generally. The potential for "double taxation" would also be a consideration. The letter had also attached a list of land and property assets owned by the District Council in Battle, a number of which are unrelated to the provision of public services or amenity. The Committee agreed that these should not be part of any future discussion. Cllr Harris invited Committee Members to let him have any further thoughts on the subject. It was also noted that the District Council's forthcoming Localism Seminar on 30 January may provide useful background.

Cllr Harris had circulated what was effectively a financial summary relating to the **car park purchase option.** This pulled together the work previously undertaken by the Committee in its working party format. Whilst still needing to be refined, the summary indicated that even if car park charges were initially frozen for 3 years the operation could potentially be in profit from the first year of takeover. Equally the Committee were conscious that if

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income this year dramatically increases it might have an impact on the valuation of the car parks and therefore the loan required to purchase. On balance, however, the Committee felt that a position had been reached enabling the Council to go back to Rother with a positive indication of a desire to purchase. **Cllr Jessop proposed that this be recommended to Council.** As separate and supporting pieces of work Cllr Bye offered to speak to Station staff about their arrangements for cash collection from the car park and Cllr Ms Neill has a business contact who may be able to offer some guidance in evaluating the overall business case.

10. Localism Act Provisions Relating to Town and Parish Councils

Cllrs Bye, Mrs Kiloh and Ms Neill confirmed that the **Chairmanship course on 26 November** had included a useful discussion on these provisions. In addition, they highlighted numerous other aspects of the course which they felt would be of enormous benefit to other Council Members who may wish to become either Committee or Council Chairmen. For his part, the **Clerk** reported on a recent **networking day** organised by SALC at which there had been a lengthy presentation on the Localism Act. He highlighted 3 areas of particular interest. Firstly, the Community Right to Challenge which will enable voluntary or community bodies including Town and Parish Council to seek to takeover services provided by the County or District Councils. Such takeover, however, would be subject to a procurement exercise conducted within normal rules. Secondly, the creation of a list of Assets of Community Value. The purpose of this provision is to give communities a right to identify a building or other land which they believe to be of importance to the community's social wellbeing. Whilst the list will exclude residential premises and operational land of local authorities and other statutory undertakers all other property appears potentially to be capable of inclusion. Those attending the Rother Seminar on 30 January will pursue this uncertainty. Thirdly, provision relating to neighbourhood planning particularly the ability of Town and Parish Councils to prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan. This would have significance as the lowest tier of the development plan process and would be complimentary to the policies and allocations agreed in any local development framework. Cllr Jessop is pursuing this through the Planning Committee.

As already mentioned the Committee noted the **forthcoming presentations at RALC on 11 January and the Rother Localism Workshop on 30 January.**

11. Review of Standing Orders and Financial Regulations

The Clerk had circulated draft revised Standing Orders based on the latest model. In regard to general matters relating to procedures at meetings, the model applies them to both full Council and Committees whereas the Council's current Standing Orders deals with them separately. The Clerk had attempted to keep them separate but this had created some repetition and confusing cross referencing. Whilst a separate section on Committees is clearly necessary to record the Council's own procedures, the removal of duplication would be desirable wherever possible. Otherwise, whilst Committee Members had detailed drafting points, it was agreed that the meeting should focus on matters of principle and policy. The main items discussed were:

- retention of provision for signed ballots. Not in the model but agreed to retain as in Council's current Standing Orders;
- business to be discussed at Annual Council meeting. The model makes provision for a wide range of reviews of policies and practices not currently on the Council's normal agenda. Agreed that such reviews are necessary but better that, in acknowledging them, the agenda should make provision for how they are

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- undertaken (eg by delegation to Committee(s));
- recording of planning applications. The model refers to the historic procedure of all applications being recorded in a book. These records are now computerised but recognising the importance of consolidated records at a single reference point it was agreed that these should be kept “in a single place”;
- correspondence and communications. It was agreed that the Standing Orders relating to relations with press, media, District and County Councillors should be supplemented, emphasising the primary role of the Clerk as Proper Officer but with provision for the Chairman or, exceptionally, other Councillors to conduct correspondence where this is the specific decision of Council;
- allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct. Model suggests references to a Committee but agreed that this should be to the Chairman who would appoint sub-group of F&GP Members to investigate;

It was agreed that Cllrs Harris and Mrs Kiloh would consider these and the many other detailed drafting points with a view to a further draft being prepared for consideration at the next meeting.

12. Desk Instructions

The Clerk had completed this task and tabled a folder containing all the previously approved sections together with those promised at the last meeting.

13. Matters for Information and Future Agenda Items

The Clerk reported a last minute invitation to attend a Safer Stations Awards Ceremony to take place on 13 January at Etchingham Station. Certificates will be presented to station staff by the local MP. In view of the short notice the Clerk was asked to send apologies.

14. Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday, 6 March 2012

The meeting closed at 10.05pm

**CLLR R HARRIS
CHAIRMAN**

