

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 18TH OCTOBER, 2016

Present: The Mayor, Councillor Miss S Morrison (Presiding) and Councillors, B Allen, Mrs B E Allen, R Arthur, E Bell, Mrs J A Bell, Mrs G Bleasdale, Mrs S Forster, R Meir, I Paul, K Shaw, C Snowball, R Whitehead, K Younger.

Apologies: Councillors, B Burn (Snr), Mrs H J Cahill, S Cudlip, B Taylor.

Prior to commencement of the meeting the Chair advised members of this Committee and members of the public that in line with the amendment to 'the public bodies (admission to meetings) act 1960', which came into force in August, 2014, parts of this meeting may be recorded by photographic, video and audio means.

1. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded prior to the start of the meeting of the need to disclose any interests, prejudicial or personal, in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

2. OPEN SESSION

In accordance with established policy the Council provided a fifteen minute opportunity for any members of the public to raise questions. During this period no issues were raised.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING OF SEAHAM TOWN COUNCIL HELD ON 20TH SEPTEMBER, 2016

RESOLVED the Minutes of this meeting, a copy of which had been previously printed and circulated to each Member, be approved, and they be signed as a correct record by the Mayor.

4. COUNCILLOR MRS H J CAHILL

RESOLVED that approval was given for Councillor Mrs H J Cahill's extension of absence be extended due to active service overseas.

5. REPORTS OF SERVICE COMMITTEES

RESOLVED that the reports of the following Committees, copies of which had been previously printed and circulated to each Member, be approved:

- a) Report of Arts and Information Committee held on 27th September, 2016; subject to the apologies of Councillors Mrs B E Allen and B Allen being included;

In discussion, a Member questioned whether any further action had been taken with regard to the telephone kiosks. It was noted by the Deputy Town Clerk that he had contacted Durham County Council and he had a further contact at BT that he needed to correspond with. The Deputy Town Clerk will report back in due course.

- b) Report of Town Promotion and Development Committee held on 27th September, 2016; subject to the apologies of Councillors Mrs B E Allen and B Allen being included;
- c) Report of Parks and Events Committee held on 27th September, 2016; subject to the apologies of Councillors Mrs B E Allen and B Allen being included;
- d) Report of Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 4th October, 2016; subject to the apologies of Councillors Mrs B E Allen and B Allen being included;
- e) Report of Planning and Environmental Committee held on 4th October, 2016; subject to the apologies of Councillors Mrs B E Allen and B Allen being included;
- f) Report of Twinning Sub-Committee held on 4th October, 2016; subject to the apologies of Councillors Mrs B E Allen and B Allen being included;
- g) Report of Establishment Sub-Committee held on 4th October, 2016; subject to the apologies of Councillors Mrs B E Allen and B Allen being included;

6. FACEBOOK

The Town Clerk reported on a Facebook post which had been brought to his attention and stated to Members that the post held a number of inaccuracies with regard to stated budget figures from 2010 and an employee salary. The post incorrectly gave the impression that the Cemeteries budget was the entire Parks Department budget, which it isn't. This gave a negative impression of the Parks Department which covers significant areas of parkland, open spaces, events and not just the cemeteries. The post also incorrectly stated that the Council employs a Tree Surgeon on a high paygrade, which it does not. In discussion, it was highlighted that it was disheartening to the staff when false information is posted on Facebook.

The Town Clerk also highlighted that the image of the half-cut tree which was posted was misleading and not a correct representation of the standard and quality of the work of the Parks Department. Members were informed that the image was taken mid-way through the work and the reason the tree was like that was because due to Health & Safety reasons certain members of the team are only allowed to work up to a certain height. The work on the top area of the tree would have been completed soon after by another member of the team who was trained and authorised to work safely with equipment at the higher height.

A Member stated that a member of the public had commented on the post saying that they had made numerous complaints and questioned whether the Council had received any of the complaints from this member of the public. The Deputy Town Clerk stated that he had received one complaint from this individual about the general condition of the cemetery. The Deputy Town Clerk had offered to meet the member of the public at the cemetery at the beginning of the year and the member of the public declined the offer. A Member stated that she had been to the cemetery on a few occasions and thought that the cemetery looked fantastic. Other Members also noted that they had been to the cemetery recently and all agreed the cemetery looked really good.

A Member stated that a Councillor had shared the post with regards to the cemetery complaint and therefore in his opinion must be endorsing the incorrect remarks made on the Facebook post. The Member stated that they find it incredulous that a Member of Seaham Town Council would endorse these remarks without checking that the facts are correct first. A Member informed the Council that the Councillor in question had previously shared images and posts on Facebook which were considered to be inappropriate and incompatible with holding public office. As this was of such a serious nature it was agreed to be in the public interest that this information was considered immediately by the Town Council at this meeting and Members were provided with further details of the Facebook activity.

In discussion, it was unanimously agreed that a letter should be sent from the Town Council to the Councillor in question asking him to consider his position as a Seaham Town Councillor after endorsing the comments that have been made on Facebook and after his previous Facebook activity which the Council had been made aware of. Such actions were considered to be incompatible to anyone in the Town Council, contrary to the Nolan principles and incompatible with holding public office.

Another Member suggested that it should be discussed with the Town Councillor at a meeting but as the Councillor in question was not at this meeting it was agreed that the letter should be sent to the Councillor immediately.

RESOLVED that a letter be sent to the Town Councillor asking that he consider his position as a Town Councillor in light of his endorsement of comments, and sharing of images and posts on Facebook which were felt to be incompatible with holding public office and not acceptable to Seaham Town Council.

7. DAWDON PARK BUNGALOW

Pursuant to previous discussions the Town Clerk raised the recommendation from Dawdon Working Party with regards to the bungalow at Dawdon Park.

RESOLVED that the Deputy Town Clerk be given authority to investigate the further options with regards to what can be done with the bungalow at Dawdon Park.