

Worth Parish Council

Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on July 1st 2024 commencing at 7.30pm

Present:	Cllr Scott (Chairman)	Cllr Phillips (Vice Chairman)
	Cllr Casella	Cllr Coote
	Cllr Dorey	Cllr Hodsdon
	Cllr King	Cllr Kipps
	Cllr Lord	Cllr Pointer
	Cllr Williams	Cllr Wilson
	Mrs J. Nagy (Clerk)	1 member of the public

15 Public Question Time

There were no questions from those present.

16 Apologies

There were no apologies; all members were present.

17 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest at this point of the meeting.

18 Minutes

It was AGREED by all present that the Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 3rd June 2024 were a true and correct record.

19 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman had no announcements

20 Correspondence List

The Correspondence List was NOTED.

21 Accounts and Financial Matters

Financial information

Financial information is included in the meeting pack, with reconciled figures to date.

Councillors NOTED the bank transfer of £50,000 to Unity Account. This is being used as the main account for payments as it is easier to access so will be kept topped up accordingly.

It was proposed by Cllr Scott seconded by Cllr Dorey and RESOLVED by all present that the financial information was a true representation of the current financial situation.

Electricity meter at the Allotment Building

The meter has been changed onto a fixed tariff of 60p a day, and unit cost of 24.5p. This was previously 200p a day, unit cost 26.5p, on a variable tariff; the Clerk will monitor the usage.

Councillors NOTED this information

Bank Reconciliations

It was NOTED that the bank reconciliations have been signed; this has been done by Cllr Casella.

Savings Account

As reported at the last meeting, it had been previously agreed to open new savings account with Nationwide; however, new accounts are not currently being processed.

The Clerk referred to her report, with the recommendation that the Council opens a savings account with the Cambridge Building Society.

It was AGREED by all present to open an account with the Cambridge Building Society with an opening balance of £80,000, interest to remain in the account to avoid any transfer fees.

Tree Survey

The Clerk sought quotes from four companies to carry out a survey of all trees and wood on Council-owned land. Due to confusion in previous years, she has asked that trees be tagged so that they can be more easily identified in future years. The survey will identify works that are required to keep the trees safe, quotations for these works will be sought once the survey is in place.

One contractor declined to quote, this being the contractor who carried out the previous two surveys in 2014 and 2020.

All costs are ex VAT.

	£	Decay detection*
Contractor A	4500.00	450.00
Contractor B	2300.00	
Contractor C*	2698.00	

*If in doubt, a decay detection assessment can be carried out on a particular tree, cost quoted is per tree.

**Contractor C offered to produce a tree location plan in a digital format to allow to be added to Parish OnLine, total cost £4495.00.

It was proposed by Cllr Phillips, seconded by Cllr Dorey and AGREED by all present that Contractor B, that is PJC Consulting be awarded the contract for the tree survey.

Review of both Neighbourhood Plans

The Neighbourhood Plan Committee met on 30th May, with representatives from Squires Planning in attendance to offer advice.

It was agreed by that Committee that reviews of both Neighbourhood Plans be undertaken, and recommends that Squires Planning be appointed as consultants to oversee the work.

They have quoted £2,750 + VAT and expenses for each plan area, so a total of £5,500 + VAT + expenses for the initial stages of the work.

This will consider the effectiveness of the current plans, such as whether the policies are working, changes to national legislation and policy, local policy, local circumstances and evidence and any changes in local opinion. It will include a consultation exercise via web-based survey.

This sum is above the limit for this Committee to authorise as defined under current Financial Regulations and also 11 h) that for contracts over £5000, 3 quotations must be sought, for below £5000 and above £1000, we shall strive to obtain 3 quotations.

However, Worth PC has built up a working relationship with Squires Planning, which is based locally, so it is reasonable to waive Financial Regulations for this contract.

Andrew Metcalfe of Squires Planning has a conflict of interest himself, as he is a local resident; his colleague James Halls will undertake the work.

However, it must be noted that Mr Metcalfe has emailed the Clerk to advise that Squires Planning has been approached to progress a couple of significant development proposals in the parish. If appointed, he would ensure a "Chinese wall" is created within the company, with James Halls dealing with neighbourhood planning, and Mark Campbell working on the two other parish projects. This would avoid any conflict.

The Clerk is of the opinion that given Mr Metcalfe's assurances as to the work being allocated to separate consultants within Squires Planning, there should not be any conflict.

Councillors accepted Mr Metcalfe's assurances that there would be no internal conflict within Squire's Planning, and that local projects would be managed by separate consultants.

The proposal to waive Clause 11h) of Financial Regulations, namely, to waive the requirement to get three quotes was carefully considered by Councillors. It was noted that Squires Planning is a local company, which had worked very successfully with the Council on the Copthorne Neighbourhood Plan. It was felt that given the existing working relationship with a reputable local company it was reasonable to waive Standing Orders for this contract. It was further noted that it was proposed to recommend to Full Council that Financial Regulations would be amended as per the NALC model at Minute 22, where it was proposed to increase the limit that this Committee can authorise.

It was therefore AGREED by all present to recommend to Full Council that Squires Planning be awarded the contract as Planning Consultant to assist in the review of both Neighbourhood Plans at an initial cost of £5,500 + VAT + expenses.

It was noted that the cost of support for both plans to be taken through to adoption, is in the region of £22,500 each. The Clerk will use these budgetary predictions as evidence to apply for a government neighbourhood planning grant.

Crawley Down Play Area

The Working Party would like to appoint Squires Planning to assist with any planning application for the redevelopment of the play area. The Clerk has established that should the equipment be replaced on a like for like basis on the same footprint, planning permission is NOT required, although it may be prudent to get an LDC.

Squires have quoted a fee of £2,900 + VAT to prepare and submit an application for the proposed new playground which would be sufficient to reach the point of submission. However, they have advised that other studies will need to be commissioned to support any application, the costs of which are estimated to be

Input	Estimated fee
Topographical survey	£750-£1250
Noise Impact Assessment	£1000-£1500
Playground designer	Agreed direct
Ecologist	£0-£2500

The Clerk advised that as per the item above, Financial Regulations will have to be waived, in that she had not strived to get three quotes for this work.

The proposal to waive Clause 11h) of Financial Regulations namely, to waive the requirement to strive to get three quotes was carefully considered by Councillors. It was noted that Squires Planning is a local company, who had worked with the Council successful on other projects, such as Copthorne Neighbourhood Plan. It was felt that given the existing working relationship with a reputable local company it was reasonable to waive Standing Orders for this contract.

Therefore, it was AGREED by all present to appoint Squires Planning to assist in any planning application for Crawley Down Play area at a cost of £2,900 + VAT.

Copthorne Recreation Ground

In order to proceed with a drainage strategy, measurements of the porosity of the land are required. Costs are as follows:

To set up and dismantle test pits, and to supply testing barrels - £1127.50 + VAT
To monitor, record and measure the water levels; to provide results in tabular and graphical format, with photographic evidence - ££775.00, non-VATable.

This cost was authorised by the Clerk, together with the Chair of Council and the Chair of GP&F, as per Financial Regulations; the work has now been completed.

The costs of the work, and the actions of the Clerk were NOTED and AGREED by all present.

Appointment of a consultant to project manage the redevelopment of Copthorne Recreation Ground

The Copthorne Working Party now appreciate that the redevelopment of the site needs to be considered in the whole, rather than construction of a MUGA, then a play area and then a car park. Some aspects, such as drainage, needs to be considered for the whole site.

It is therefore felt necessary to appoint a project manager to oversee the works of the various stages.

PBA Planning prepared a quotation to act as Project Manager; this was circulated. PBA Planning propose a staged approach with the final total being £28,600.

The Clerk advised that Councillors will need to consider waiving Clause 11h) of Financial Regulations and also to waive Clause 18c) of Standing Orders, the requirement to go to tender for all contracts over £25,000.

The proposal to waive Clause 11h) of Financial Regulations, namely, to waive the requirement to get three quotes, and Clause 18 c) of Standing Orders, namely to go to tender for contracts over the value of £25,000 was carefully considered by Councillors. The fee proposed by PBA Planning was within 5% of the total project cost, which is reasonable.

It was further noted that it was proposed to recommend to Full Council that Financial Regulations would be amended as per the NALC model at Minute 22, where it was proposed to increase the limit that this Committee can authorise. These revised Financial Regulations allowed for an increase in the limit over which a tender process must be followed, i.e. an increase from £25,000 to £30,000.

The Projects Clerk was finalising a projects tracker, and the Clerk assured Councillors that given the high value of the Copthorne Recreation Rejuvenation project, the ongoing costs will be carefully monitored, and reported to each Finance meeting.

It was noted that the process by which Working Parties proposed initiatives to be listed on the project tracker was not yet finalised; this is to be an item on a future agenda.

The Copthorne Working Party budget will go over budget, so agreement will need to be sought to vire funds from general reserves to cover expenditure when required.

Disposal of play equipment from Copthorne Recreation Ground

The equipment is being removed on Tuesday, 2nd July; the contractor will be on site two to three days. Peter Plan playgroup has been informed, and Shane will be supervising.

Councillors NOTED the disposal of the equipment, with the exception of the swings, and its subsequent from the Asset Register.

22 Revised Financial Regulations

The Clerk referred to the draft revised Financial Regulations, which she has modified to suit the circumstances and operating procedures of Worth Parish Council. Wording **in bold** is a legal requirement and cannot be changed.

The draft Financial Regulations were considered, and limits for authorisation were amended. It was AGREED by all present to recommend to Full Council that these be adopted.

23 Section 106 Monies

Crawley Down Village Hall

The allocation for the Village Hall has been updated to show the latest figure, and now totals £48,299.95.

MSDC has confirmed that the sums allocated to the Village Hall can be spent on improvements to the new hall, (£26919.08 for parking and £21,680.87 for the hall) and not for building costs.

Councillors NOTED this information.

Copthorne Recreation Ground

The Working Party has asked the Clerk to apply for s106 monies from the Heathy Wood, Regency Hotel, and Holly Farm Formal Sport allocations.

This to be £300,000 for Copthorne Recreation Ground play area, plus a subsequent application for £31,000 for drainage at Copthorne Pavilion and £35,000 for irrigation at Copthorne Pavilion

This will necessitate a variation in the Heathy Wood s106 agreement to allow for Formal Sport monies to be used to fund a play area.

It will be pointed out that Copthorne currently has no play area; all other play areas in the district have been funded and maintained by MSDC, Worth is the only parish to provide and fund play areas.

This application will be going to the MSDC Grants Panel at its meeting on 15th July.

Councillors NOTED and supported the intention to apply for s106 monies as above.

Provision of new School on Heathy Wood Site

WSCC was considering not providing a main stream primary school on this site, but instead providing an SEN school instead. The Copthorne WP met with a WSCC Education Officer and lodged its concerns that an SEN school would have a wider catchment than the immediate geographical area, and that Copthorne residents would be benefit from all of the monies intended to off-set the impact of the development.

Should no school at all be built on the site, the developers agreed to pay £3 million to WSCC.

The Clerk has asked for clarification on this from WSCC, but is still awaiting a response.

NOTED this information. After the General Election, the Clerk is to approach the local Member of Parliament for support in clarifying this matter.

24 Projects

CCTV

The Clerk's report was noted.

She advised that ChromaVision, the preferred supplier, has now completed the updates to existing cameras in the Sussex network, and is available to progress the installation of the two cameras agreed.

The Projects Clerk will facilitate such a meeting, and will invite Cllrs Dymond and Scott as the two lead councillors for this project.

Bowers Place

The Clerk's report with the revised timeline, was noted.

Cllr Scott as project leader is meeting with Mr Hitchcock to discuss all outstanding works, and to review this timeline.

The Public Works Loan expires on 5th October 2024; the Clerk has contacted the PWLB which has said that an extension could be granted dependent on the circumstances for the delay. It suggests that any application to extend should be done as soon as possible.

The Clerk was asked to apply to extend the loan for a period of six months.

Copthorne Recreation Ground

The Clerk has commented on the draft conditions for the planning application, with the assistance of Cllr Casella and PBA Planning. MSDC has now come back with more requirements, such as more clarification of the lighting at the MUGA. As PBA Planning has been appointed in principle at Minute 21, they will be asked to assist supplying the additional information. It will be necessary to readvertise the application however, which will lead to further delay.

Councillor NOTED this information

Crawley Down Play Area

Squires Planning was appointed as planning consultant as per Minute 21; the Working Party will need to discuss preferred options for the area.

Councillors NOTED this information.

25 Council Premises and Land

Nothing to report.

26 Matters for Consideration submitted by the Village Working Parties

There were none.

27 Consideration of items for discussion by the Village Working Parties

There were none.

28 Date of the next meeting

Monday, 29th July 2024

Meeting closed at 8.35 pm.

Chairman: _____

Date: _____