



Minutes of The Finance Committee held at The Rackliff Centre on

Monday 25th October 2021 at 7.30 pm

Members Present:

Cllr M O'Callaghan, Chairman; Cllr D Funnell, Vice-Chairman; Cllr E Ellicott, Cllr B Edwards and Cllr A Britcher-Allan

Officers Present:

Ms Linda Neusten, Deputy Clerk

Others and Members of the Public:

Cllr D Smith; Cllr P Gripper; Mr Chris May, RFO Speldhurst Parish Council

1. Enquire whether anyone present intends to film, photograph and/or record the meeting
No-one present intended to film, photograph and/or record the meeting

2. To receive and approve apologies for absence
None

3. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests
Personal interest: Cllr Britcher-Allan was a Commons Conservator

4. Declarations of Lobbying
None.

5. Open session for questions from the public:
Cllrs Smith and Gripper to address the committee under the relevant agenda items. No other members of the public present.

6. To consider a grant to Rusthall Cricket Club (Anti-incursion measures and pavilion repairs)
In discussion it was noted: The committee strongly felt a duty to protect the land for all parishioners. Maintenance of the cricket pavilion was rightly the responsibility of the cricket club. The Council could save the cost of VAT if it undertook the work itself. The spending limit of the committee was £2,000 so any greater proposals would be in the form of a recommendation to Full Council.

RESOLVED – That Full Council be recommended to approve completing the anti-incursion works as quoted to Rusthall Cricket Club at a gross cost of £5,640, contracting with the supplier directly.

7. To consider a grant to Friends of Tunbridge Wells & Rusthall Commons (All-access path)
In discussion it was noted: Although the Council did not have the General Power of Competence (s.1 Localism Act 2011) it did have power for the requested purpose under either s.137 Local Government Act 1972 or s.19 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976. The all-access path was very close to the parish boundary and would be commonly, if not mostly, used by parishioners. An appropriately sized grant would act as a signal of the council's support and as an anchor attracting other donors. Paying the grant upfront would

signal a firm commitment and reduce the Council's surplus holdings (as recommended by the Auditor). The Council's 'Contingency budget' was a backup for the Council's operations rather than a discretionary pot, the grant should come from reserves. The grant should only be spent on the path and be returned if not spent within 3 years.

RESOLVED – That Full Council be recommended to approve a grant to Friends of Tunbridge Wells & Rusthall Commons of £10,000 on condition that it be spent solely on the all-access path and that if it be not spent within 3 years it is returned to the Parish Council.

8. To vire funds into Grants and donations as necessary

The discussion on the previous two agenda items was taken into account.

RESOLVED – That a new budget line for 'Rusthall Commons' be created under the 'Amenities' heading and £16,000 be allocated from General Reserves.

9. To consider the results of the Budget Consultation and any next steps

The key findings from the consultation as set out in the summary by Cllr O'Callaghan was discussed. Key points against top priorities included –

Education: There was strong support for schools and education services and this was particularly topical given the recent resignation of the Board of Governors to Rusthall School. Whilst Parish Council's could not fund schools directly there were examples where Councils assisted with capital expenditure items such as books and building/grounds maintenance. A meeting with the Head Teacher would be a useful first step.

Footpaths: Previous decision on the Rusthall Common all-access path demonstrated commitment to this priority. Work was ongoing with Town & Country Housing regarding the path behind Grange Gardens, it was not fair that tenants were being asked to bare the cost of maintaining a publicly used path.

Litter: Employing a road sweeper not supported, expect similar problems as employing own traffic warden. Action being taken through the Environment committee to encourage volunteer litter-pickers. Budget may be requested to provide equipment and marketing. Accessible businesses: Ramps, painted markings and other measures would help accessibility. A pack of resources could be compiled with the assistance of the Dementia Friendly Society outlining the benefits of becoming dementia (and other conditions) friendly and the assistance available to achieve it.

Nursery/childcare: Difficult to help as mostly private businesses. Surestart expected to reopen, provided community-based early-years development and family support.

Recycling: Good recycling programme at the school could be supported with capital expenditure items (e.g. bins) or marketing.

Street furniture maintenance: Bins and benches recently painted. Lamp posts in poor condition, need cleaning and painting, needs permission from KCC.

General: response rate to consultation low but not unexpected. 1.4% electors in the parish responded compared to 0.6% of electors in the borough who responded to TWBC's budget consultation. Consultation showed support for increasing council tax but precept need not be raised for the sake of it. This discussion was a precursor for setting the precept at the next meeting.

ACTIONS –

1. Cllr Ellicott to invite the Head Teacher of Rusthall School to a meeting to discuss whether the Council can assist in any practical way.
2. Cllr Britcher-Allan to renew dialog with Town & County Housing regarding path between Grange Gardens and the lower end of Grange Road.
3. Cllr O'Callaghan to contact Dementia Friendly Society, Surestart and KCC regarding the items discussed.
4. All to consider initiatives for advancing the priorities in the consultation in advance of the next meeting.

10. Items for Information

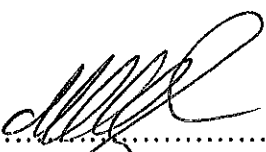
10.1 A264 Crossing

Recent correspondence regarding the A264 crossing gave the impression that KCC officers were not aware of the available funding from the Parish Council. A meeting between Councillors Ellicott, O'Callaghan and Duckling and KCC officers and County Councillor McInroy was being arranged to make the Council's position clear with a view to progressing the project.

No other items for information raised.

11. Next meeting – 2nd December 2021, 7.30pm

The meeting closed at 8.55pm


..... Chairman

Dated 2/12/2021