

**NOTES OF THE WORKING GROUP MEETING OF WOLSTON PARISH COUNCIL
HELD VIA ZOOM ON THURSDAY 30TH MARCH 2020 AT 7.00 PM**

PRESENT Cllr T Harvey-Smith (Chair), Cllr D Cross, Cllr Miss T Ball, Cllr G Fewkes, Cllr R Grainger, Cllr J Milne, Cllr A Parker, Cllr L Wright, and Mrs M Meede (Clerk).

Plus: Borough Councillors A Bearne and Mrs S Bragg and 4 members of the public.

After members of the public and Councillors had been given the opportunity to raise any issues, the Chairman thanked everyone for attending, and the Parish Council meeting commenced at 7:10pm.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The apologies of Cllr Miss S Cross and Cllr Mrs M White were approved. The apologies of Cty Cllr Mrs H Timms and Borough Cllr D Poole were noted.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (existence and nature) for items on the Agenda

No declarations of interest were made. The Chairman advised that Councillors could declare an interest later in the meeting should this become apparent for any agenda item.

DELEGATION OF POWERS TO THE CLERK/RESPONSIBLE FINANCE OFFICER

Councillors discussed the recommendation from WALC to delegate additional powers to the Parish Council Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer during the current unprecedented health crisis, and discussed the attached Appendix 1. It was noted that some of the information provided may be more relevant to larger Parish or Town Councils, and after discussion Councillors recognised that some of the proposals for delegation may provide greater powers and levels of authority than are required by Wolston Parish Council. It was agreed that with the recent introduction of Zoom video conference meetings, this would be a good way for the Clerk to communicate with Councillors. However, for the sake of expediency Councillor Milne recommended that the suggestions put forward (as detailed in Appendix 1) be accepted and endorsed – with the caveat that they be reviewed and amended as required at a future meeting. Due to technical issues Cllr Fewkes left the meeting at this point. The recommendation was seconded by Cllr Grainger and the all Councillors present were in agreement.

RECCOMENDATION: When possible, for the Clerk/RFO to be delegated additional powers during the current unprecedented situation caused by the current pandemic, which are to be reviewed and amended as required as soon as is practicable. When possible there will be an agenda item at a future Parish Council meeting to discuss all of the delegated extra powers to the Clerk/RFO (see Appendix 1).

Note: The delegation of powers to the Clerk cannot take place until this recommendation has been endorsed at a properly convened meeting of the Parish Council.

PLANNING

Councillors were given the details of all planning applications to review prior to the meeting. All planning applications can be viewed at <https://planning.agileapplications.co.uk/rugby/search-applications/>

- a) R20/0172 – Reconfiguration of existing allotment plots including the demolition of the existing sheds and storage facilities, erection of a new allotment management and storage building along with enhanced access, parking and landscaping in association of 48 dwellings on Land South of Warwick Road.

Councillors discussed the planning application. Mr J Taylor from the Allotments Association was invited to participate in this agenda item as the representative from the Allotments Association Committee. A letter received from the Allotments Association was noted and discussed, including their request that the Councillors support this application, subject to a number of caveats detailed in the letter.

Cllr Miss Ball asked a number of questions about the number of plots and members the Allotments Association have, and about their consultation process with their members. It was noted that there were around 60 plots and approximately 50 members. Mr Taylor advised that members had originally been canvassed for their opinion by way of a questionnaire, and then members had been updated at each stage where there had been significant developments with the planning proposals. All of the planning details, including drawings and plans etc. had been placed in the allotment shed so anyone (member or resident) could view the information. Updates had been put on Facebook and on the allotment noticeboards and Mr Taylor stressed that the committee had been as open and upfront as possible. Members had also been liaised with by telephone and email to get their views, and the committee had tried as much as possible to communicate with as many people as possible. Mr Taylor acknowledged that, in relation to the planning applications, the majority of

members want the proposals to 'go away'. However, they understand the reality and want the best for the Allotments Association in the long run. In relation to the letter submitted to the Parish Council which gave their support to the application subject to a number of conditions and queries, the Allotments Association committee had voted unanimously that this is the best way forward if the principal application to develop the northern portion of the site is approved. The committee and members have mixed feelings, they can see the benefits and opportunities, - but it is tinged with sadness, and most members are being pragmatic and recognise the need to be practical.

Cllr Wright raised some queries about the proposals, including about ownership of the building and how it will be designed and constructed – as no real details were given.

All Councillors had reviewed the application prior to the meeting, and many had passed their comments to the Clerk, - these comments were discussed. Cllr Wright also highlighted some concerns about the development proposals for the north side of the site.

Cllr Milne felt it was important to support the Allotments Association who had requested that the Parish Council support this application – subject to conditions, and Cllr Cross agreed that although there were some queries to be raised in relation to this application, in general it should be supported.

Due to technical issues Cllr Wright temporarily left the meeting at this point.

Mr Taylor reiterated that he hoped everyone recognised that this is a painful process for the Allotments Association, as members have both emotional and physical ties to the site, and the upheaval is dramatic for many. They are supporting the application with a heavy heart as they feel it is the 'best fix' for the future although it will be challenging, and should RBC decide to approve the application, the Allotments Association may need the support and help of the Parish Council (as their Landlord) going forward.

Cllr Miss Ball asked about the possibility for expansion in the future, and queried if expansion is built into the plan. Mr Taylor advised that although there would not be as many plots in the new design, on the smaller site there were still likely to be a few vacant plots available. He noted that it was recognised that allotments sites which were in demand with minimal or no vacancies were the most productive. He felt that there would probably be plots available for all those who want one, but said sites with a waiting list are usually the most healthy sites.

Cllr Milne thanked Mr Taylor for attending. He stated that the Allotments Working Group had always worked closely with the Allotments Association to work together and seek views, and he thanked the Allotments Committee for the way they had approached this.

Cllr Milne recommended that, when possible the application be supported subject to the list of caveats from the Allotments Association and the comments raised by Councillors. This was seconded by Cllr Grainger and the majority of Councillors were in agreement with the recommendation.

Cllr Wright returned to the meeting at this point and the discussion he missed was summarised and the recommendations made again, Cllr Wright then put his view forward, but the majority of Councillors were in agreement with the recommendation made by Cllr Milne.

RECCOMENDATION: For the Parish Council to continue working with the Allotment Association and to support this application, subject to the caveats detailed by the Allotments Association and comments and queries raised by Councillors. (Note: A letter from the Parish Council cannot be sent to the Planning Officer until this recommendation can be endorsed)

As there were no further items to be discussed, the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8:10 pm

Signed:..... Chairman

Date:

Notes on the Public Forum held during the Meeting on 30th March 2020

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited representations from all who were present. He recognised the unusual circumstances of the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

Borough Cllr Bearne reported on the information which had been circulated prior to the meeting, which related to the work and activities of the Borough and County Councillors during the current crisis, and some information for Councillors.

Signed.....

A letter received from a resident highlighting concerns about the allotments application and the opportunity to comment and discuss the application with Councillors (especially in a face-to-face meeting) was discussed and noted by Councillors. During the discussion about the correspondence, Councillors recognised that the Government requirement not to hold physical meetings was not ideal, but that they were operating under the guidelines given by the Association of Local Councils. The Clerk advised that a response had been sent to the resident and all Councillors had been copied in. Councillors also noted that Zoom was not ideal for all residents to access, but hoped that the majority of those who usually attend Parish Council meetings would continue to do so and that some residents who cannot usually attend physically may be able to attend 'remotely'.

As there were no further questions, the Chairman closed the public forum part of the meeting 7:10pm.

Note: Borough Councillor A Bearne Mrs S Bragg gave their apologies and left the meeting at this point.

Appendix 1

Agenda item 233 – 30th March 2020

To agree the delegation of additional powers to the Parish Council Clerk/RFO until further notice as follows:

1. To note that it is lawful for the clerk to spend against specific items in the Parish Council's budget i.e. for contractors, hall hire, utility bills, salaries etc, all of which having been identified in the budget when setting the precept, any such payments to be reported to the Council at the next ordinary meeting.
2. To approve provision of delegated powers for the RFO to spend up to a limited amount of £10,000 and to authorise urgent work when unforeseen circumstances occur.
3. Delegated powers to the Clerk to respond to consultations and planning applications (councillors are still able to submit their own personal comments) – following consultation with Councillors (see point 7 below).
4. Agreement to delegate the postponement of future meetings of the Parish Council (should this be required)
5. Agreement to receive and act upon Government advice in relation to the holding of the Annual Meeting of the Parish (noting at present such meetings must be held before 1 June) and the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council (noting at present such a meeting must be held in May), thereby giving delegated power to the Clerk to make necessary re-arrangements for these meetings in consultation with the Chair.
6. For the Clerk/RFO to make any essential decisions that mean that Parish Council business can carry on as required.
7. The Clerk/RFO, prior to taking any action under points 2) to 6) above, shall take all reasonable steps to inform Councillors of the necessity for a decision and to obtain their support, or otherwise, for a decision to be taken. The decision taken by the Clerk/RFO shall be informed by responses of Councillors consulted, and shall be fully documented, for example by asking councillors to confirm their opinions by email to the clerk, for the clerk to keep as a record of the decision.

Signed.....

8. There will be an agenda item to discuss and if appropriate rescind the delegation of extra powers to the Clerk/RFO, at the first usual Parish Council meeting after the current emergency situation is over.