

STAMFORD TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 19 JANUARY 2021 AT 6.00PM AT REMOTE LOCATIONS USING VIDEO AND AUDIO LINK (Occasional Interruptions may have occurred during this meeting)

PRESENT Councillor Mrs Susan J Sandall - Chairman
Councillor Bob Sandall – Vice Chairman
Councillor John Dawson
Councillor Mrs S Sismore
Councillor Mrs Gloria Johnson
Councillor David Taylor
Councillor Andrew Croft

ALSO PRESENT Town Clerk, Patricia Stuart-Mogg
Councillor Dave Dorson
Councillor Mrs Elaine Hooper
Councillor Steve Carroll
Councillor Mrs Julie Clarke
Councillor Shaun Ford
Councillor Amanda Wheeler

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - None

Councillor Mrs S Sandall reaffirmed her Right as Chairman to avoid interruptions during Committee debate. Non-Committee members may be invited to speak on an item on the agenda at the Chairman's discretion.

Formal meeting commenced at 6.00pm.

385. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Point 2)

Councillor Bill Turner (Town Mayor) submitted his apologies and reasons for absence. This was noted and accepted by the Committee.

386. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Point 3)

No declarations made.

387. MINUTES (Agenda Point 4)

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2020 which had been ratified at the Town Council meeting of 22 December 2020 would be signed as a true record of the meeting by the Chairman at the earliest opportunity.

388. UPDATE ON ACTION POINTS (Agenda Point 5)

- a. *Museum Accreditation Application* – This continues in progress.
- b. *Red Lion Square furniture refurbishment & planter relocation* – It was confirmed that due to the Covid restrictions, the contractor was experiencing difficulties in addressing this work at present. It is anticipated that the refurbishment should be completed before the end of the 2020 Financial year.

- c. *War Memorial* – It is anticipated that the renovation work will be completed before the end of the 2020 Financial year. However, identification of storage space for the scaffolding has yet to be identified.
- d. *Community Watch Speed Signs* – These have been ordered and it has been confirmed that Lincolnshire Highways is comfortable with the Town Council installing the signs in appropriate locations, subject to a list being forwarded to Highways once the signage is in place.
- e. *Solar Panels* – A third quote is awaited; a report will be presented in due course.
- f. *Franking Machine* – The machine has been received and the device is being set-up for use.
- g. *Desktop App for mobile networking* – The Committee considered the Town Clerk's report in respect of this item. It was noted that at present, whilst the Administration Team operates from home, all telephone calls made to the Town Hall are answered by the Administration Team using the Horizon App on their STC mobile phones. This current system works well other than it is heavily reliant upon a good network signal. Very often whilst on a call the signal drops, and the call is lost. In addition, when trying to work at a location where there is very poor signal, for example the Cemetery, it is even more difficult to use the phone for verbal communications. However, with a Windows based Desktop App, set up to use with mobile phones, it would mean that telephone calls could also be made and answered via laptops using the Microsoft network. This would create and enable a far more effective and efficient method of working.

Cost:

- i. Set-up cost with Stamford Telephones £90.00 + VAT (one off charge)
- ii. Windows based desktop App £3.50 per month x 5 devices = £210.00 + VAT p.a.

The Town Clerk recommended that investment in this minimal cost will improve the efficiency and productivity of the administration team.

Discussion ensued and it was considered that significant investment had already been made in device communication and the sophistication of the mobile phones should offer adequate provision. Councillor Dorson explained that by using the Windows compatible application, the current system would be enhanced, and the current IT based telephony Horizon of forwarding calls would be improved. It was also suggested that when the current telephony contract is due for review, consideration could be given to the potential of Microsoft Teams based telephony. The consensus of the Committee was that given improved operations are achievable the recommendation is accepted.

Proposal 1 – It was proposed by Councillor Mrs G Johnson, seconded by Councillor D Taylor and unanimously **RESOLVED** that the cost for a Windows based desktop App at £3.50 x 12 months x 5 devices = £210.00 + VAT p.a. in addition to the £90.00 + VAT one-off charge by Stamford Telephones for the set-up costs.

389. FINANCE (Agenda Point 6)

- a. *Submission of the 2021/22 Precept* – The Chairman Councillor Mrs S J Sandall confirmed that the submission of the Precept request of £540,900.00 had been sent to the District Council.
- b. *Parish Agreement with LCC for cutting Stamford Highways verges* – The Chairman confirmed that the Committee had been circulated with the proposed contribution of

£5,876.76 from Lincolnshire County Council Highways towards a minimum of three cuts per annum. Discussion followed and it was noted that this contribution is further supported by Town Council funds to ensure that the specification of cut is upgraded and includes one additional cut, enabling four cuts to be made during the growing season. It was noted that the 2021/22 contracted work would now be tendered with an award to the successful contractor in March 2021. The Town Clerk observed that during the 2020/21 season there had been several calls from residents in respect of verges which are not included on the plans provided by LCC. This has been highlighted with LCC Highways and will be monitored to ensure that this matter is resolved.

Proposal 2 – It was proposed by Councillor Mrs S J Sandall, seconded by Councillor A Croft and unanimously **RESOLVED** that the Town Council proceeds with the 2021/22 Parish Agreement with LCC which attracts a contribution of £5,876.76.

- c. *Section 106 resource* - The Chairman Councillor Mrs S J Sandall advised that all members of the Committee had been circulated with confidential documentation in respect of the Sec. 106 funding details currently held by the District Council associated with several development sites in Stamford. Additionally, the Committee was circulated with the list of potential applications from the Stamford clubs interested in benefitting from such funding. Councillors are aware that as a stakeholder the Town Council needed to respond by the 22 January 2021. The Chairman was pleased to confirm that following negotiation this deadline has been extended and a meeting is scheduled in the coming week with District Officers regarding potential applications for consideration. The Town Council will be fully briefed on such discussions.
- d. *Schedule for Payment No. 10* - The schedule had been circulated to all members of the Committee for consideration. It was noted that invoices were still being received which would be included before submission to the Town Council.
- e. *Renewal of Microsoft 365 Licence* – The Chairman referred to the Town Clerk’s report in respect of this item which has been circulated to all Committee members. At present Stamford Town Council holds the Microsoft 365 Licence with Total Computers. This contract is due to expire this month (January 2021). What is being suggested is that the Licence is renewed with Cloudy Group, which operates the NALC and the SLCC computer software operations. The Town Clerk advised the Committee of the advantages:
 - Cloudy is already very familiar with council administration requirements and is able to share customised templates and forms which could be utilised by Stamford Town Council to evolve and develop the administrative services processes and operations, thereby enhancing professionalism and efficiency.
 - It would also allow professional software support and training to be available to the Administration Team and all Councillors.
 - A further secure Datasafe back-up facility outside of the current Microsoft Cloud.It was confirmed that there are two parts of the recommendation:
 - i. 29 renewals licences for Microsoft 365 at £185.50 per month or £2,226 + VAT for twelve months
 - ii. The additional benefit support services at a one-off charge of £2,551.90 + VAT

6.30pm - Councillor Julie Clarke joined the meeting.

There was debate as to whether there was a necessity for the enhancement and whether the value was justifiable. Councillor Dorson informed the Committee that he had been involved during the initial meeting with Cloudy Group and their offer included clear advantages enabling the administration team to use facilities available to streamline operations adding value to services. Cloudy has offered to deliver a presentation to the Committee if required to demonstrate the opportunities on offer. It is recognised that a significant investment has been made in upgrading the administration service. It is also appreciated that virtual meetings are a temporary means of conducting business and the Council will eventually return to face-to-face meetings. However, if this professional support will clearly benefit in enabling the delivery of a more streamlined service and operation it should be considered.

Proposal 3 – It was proposed by Councillor Mrs S J Sandall, seconded by Councillor D Taylor and unanimously **RESOLVED** that the 29 Licences for the Microsoft 365 is renewed with Cloudy Group at a cost of £185.50 per month or £2,226 + VAT for twelve months.

Proposal 4 – It was proposed by Councillor B Sandall, seconded by Councillor J Dawson and **RESOLVED** by majority vote that the Cloudy Group is engaged at the cost of £2,551.90 +VAT to assist in designing and developing applications to bring greater efficiencies, with all training and support necessary. There was one vote Against and one Abstention.

f. *Climate Action Working Group Projects* – Councillor S Ford provided a status report on the projects being led by the Climate Action Working Group:

- i. **Water Refill Station:** Three contractors have been consulted one of which is Kite Utility Services, which is Anglian Water approved and which will liaise directly with Anglia Water in respect of the installation which will save valuable time. A quote is awaited and will be evaluated against the other tenders. This installation cost is hoped to be covered by a Skells Trust grant presently being sought. The exact location of the refill station is yet to be confirmed but the preferred site would be in the High Street, opposite Boots Opticians. Permission is being obtained from LCC Highways to ensure there are no underlying service utilities close to the surface. Non-slip cobbles are to be installed around the station which are sympathetic with a Conservation Town. The anticipated running cost of £200 per annum (£40-70 water bill + £130 maintenance fee per year) would be covered by the Town Council. It would be helpful if an Amenities Operative could do a daily visual check and wipe down the filling station. It is anticipated that once full approval has been obtained, the Town Council will include this facility under their insurance liability for ‘Street furniture’. The Town Council will consider all costs once permission has been obtained.
- ii. **Wildflower Trial Project** - Following investigation, the conclusion is to commence this trial project on the south west verge opposite Morrisons Superstore on Uffington Road. It will be managed in-house making it more cost effective. A planting strategy is being prepared and the planting will be undertaken by a team of volunteers supported by the Stamford Endowed Schools groundworks team. Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust is also providing advice and guidance on a free consultancy basis. A £500 grant has been secured from Lincolnshire County Council towards this project. It is considered that a budget of £2,000.00 should be anticipated to deliver this project and it is hoped that Stamford Town Council would support as much of this cost as possible. Following discussion, it was noted that it has been established that the volunteers will attend the site regularly to ensure that the planting is properly nurtured. In respect of the funding towards the project, this could be allocated a grant of £2,000 or funds allocated from the Horticultural Cost Centre. At this stage the planting strategy is being developed and once the work commences funds will be

required. The Town Clerk advised the Committee that if the grant fund is the source, the allocation of the money will need to be issued as and when required to fund the various elements of the project.

7pm – Councillor A Wheeler joined the meeting.

Proposal 5 – It was proposed by Councillor B Sandall, seconded by Councillor J Dawson and unanimously **RESOLVED** to earmark £2,000.00 from the Grant Fund towards this project.

- iii. **Bike Rack for Town Centre** – Councillor S Ford reported that this is a project that the Climate Action Working Group naturally would like to promote. However, it came to the Group's attention that the Urban Group, which is part of the Civic Society, is already progressing this project with the District Council.

390. ASSETS (Agenda Point 7)

- a. *Transfer of Community Assets* – The Chairman confirmed that discussions continue with the District Council and hopes to schedule a meeting as soon as possible.
- b. *Town Hall Civil Ceremonies* – The Town Clerk reported that a number of requests had been received to hold Civil Ceremonies in the Town Hall later in the year. It was noted that the costs for the hire of Town Hall facilities for Meetings and Civil Ceremonies is to be reviewed. Following discussion, it was agreed that this matter is examined by the Chairman of the Committee, Councillor Mrs S Sandall, for presentation to the Town Council. All dates should be earmarked subject to booking confirmation once the rates have been reviewed.

391. TO CONSIDER GRANT APPLICATIONS (Agenda Point 8)

Councillor Mrs S J Sandall, Chairman reported that the grant application circulated had been withdrawn by the applicant as funding had been secured elsewhere.

392. PERSONNEL MATTERS (Agenda Point 9)

The Town Clerk reported that she had been approached in respect of a potential Town Caretaker role which come to light on Facebook. The individuals wishing to be considered for the post were informed that this was a fictitious post and no such role was being considered by the Town Council.

393. MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION AT THE NEXT MEETING (Agenda Point 10)

- Councillor B Sandall noted that there are schools conducting on-line teaching and suggested that the Town Council become involved and the Town Clerk investigates the needs of the schools and assesses the number of children who lack access to devices. This information should be brought back to be examined to see whether the Council can fund and support such children. This initiative was supported by Councillors who considered whether such an initiative could be promoted in the Stamford Mercury. It was also noted that all types of portable, or desktop devices are welcome as schools are desperate for such support. The schools have the facility to replace the existing hard-drives and to load the required software.
- Councillor G Johnson enquired as to the position of the Sec.106 agreement for an extension to the Cemetery. Councillor J Dawson confirmed that there is a reassurance from Burghley Estates that within the Northern Development of Stamford boarding Ryhall, there is area of green space to be allocated for a Green Cemetery.

- Councillor A Croft enquired as to whether there was any indication when events on the Meadows or Recreation Ground could be considered. Councillor G Johnson stated that it would be nice to think that by April the current situation will change, but it is entirely subject to Government direction and the containment of the Covid infection.

394. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Tuesday 16 February 2021

Chairman
(The meeting closed at 7.15pm)