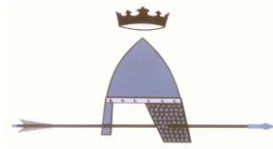




Battle Town Council



MINUTES of the FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on TUESDAY, 27th JULY 2021 at The Emmanuel Centre, Harrier Lane, Battle at 7.30pm

Present: Cllrs G Favell (Chairman), V Cook, M Howell, M Kiloh and H Sharman.

In Attendance: Two members of the public, C Harris (Town Clerk)

Public Question Time

A member of the public raised questions:

- at the term **Almonry Working Group** at item 7 following the disbandment of the former Almonry Development Working Group;
- why the **additional £21k cost for roof work** had not been found previously by the contracted professionals and suggested that the costs be challenged prior to ratification of payment;
- could the Council seek a solution to the **pedestrian road safety** issue caused by the hoarding.

The Town Clerk confirmed:

- the previous Development group had been disbanded and an **Almonry WG** was formed to produce a **Strategic Plan on the use** of the building for recommendation to this Committee;
- the **additional roof work at an approximate cost of £16k** has been raised as a concern to the Architect/Project Manager and it was suggested this is deterioration in the roof tiles due to weather during the delay between survey and agreement of works and that previous repairs have used substandard tiles. The work is considered essential for the building to be watertight;
- that advice had been sought from **East Sussex Highways** and it was felt that the road is not significantly wide to allow for a temporary footpath to be installed. No additional temporary pedestrian crossing had been suggested by ES Highways. The Contractor had hoped to remove the **hoarding** prior to completion of the project but this may be affected by the additional works now identified.

In response to a query by a member of the public, the Clerk confirmed that the: job description and person specification for the vacancy of **Deputy Town Clerk** has not been altered from the previous post; External Relations & Town Development Committee had not discussed the detailed function of the **Tourist Information Point** to be provided at the refurbished Almonry.

1. **Apologies for absence** – None.
2. **Disclosure of interest** – None.
3. **The minutes of the meeting held on 20th July 2021** were agreed and duly signed by Cllr Favell.
4. **Clerk's report**
 - **Battle Museum of Local History** has appointed Herington's and agreed costs for Emin Read to act on behalf of the Council for the **lease renewal**. Emin Read have been instructed.
 - Although no firm advice, it is suggested that **accident books** be retained for a period of 4 years but that any incidents relating to children/youth are retained for a period of 3 years after they become 18. This will be included on the **Document Retention Policy**.

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5. Correspondence and communications received post agenda publication

- A request from **Blade Consulting** to erect an **advertising board** on the hoarding at the Almonry and including a brief social media post of the project. Members agreed this unanimously.
- The receipt of the **Battle Civil Parish Neighbourhood Plan Referendum leaflet** was noted. This will be delivered by Royal Mail to all Battle Wards with volunteers hand-delivering to Netherfield the week commencing 2nd August 2021.

6. Almonry

- The **Almonry Working Group Terms of Reference** were agreed as attached.
- **The Clerk repeated the report** provided at Full Council that works had not been progressing as expediently as anticipated, in part due to ongoing communications in relation to the **electrical work**; in particular the heating provision. As the electricians are linked to the use of the building, the Almonry WG had held an emergency meeting with the Architect, Quantity Surveyor and Mechanical & Electrical consultant and this has now been resolved. However, the increase in heat requirement for this type of building requires an increase in mains power supply. This may result in a delay to completion of the contract, although it could be feasible for office staff, including the Rother District Council Officer, to safely return prior to the installation of the cabling. There is an anticipated additional cost of approximately £5k to UK Power Networks for the upgrade.

As reported at PQT, **additional work to the roof** had been identified. There are additional cost implications in the region of £16k although this is being negotiated. The Architect/Project Manager advised that it would be more expensive to do the work at a later date as the scaffold is in place and the roofs slopes either side and behind are being done at the same time. The Architect reported that all has now been uncovered and he was hopeful that there would be no further substantial unexpected works.

These costs are considered to be additional to the contract and, in relation to the roof, maintenance work, it is not appropriate to use the contingency sum.

It was highlighted that the Contractor had been given very little notice to commence work, due to delays in obtaining the Public Works Loan Board funds, and was therefore unable to arrange some sub-contractors previously agreed.

As there is a current lead time of 4 weeks for the roof tiles, which would have severe cost and time implication to the project, the Clerk had sought emergency authorisation from the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Council to approve the work. **Members agreed unanimously to ratify the additional roof work at an approximate cost of £16k to be taken from the Almonry Repairs Ear Marked Reserve (325).**

Members agreed unanimously that a tempered letter of concern at the additional works, despite surveys and professional advice, should be issued to the Architect and Quantity Surveyor.

- The **Battle Museum of Local History** had decided to **close from Thursday 22nd July** with the aim of **reopening on 1st September**, following concerns at the increase in the Covid infection rates. They highlighted that the Contractors have been very helpful and not to blame.
- As a consequence, the Contractor had recommended that the **front garden be closed during this period** to allow safe and preferred option to regrade and resurface the slope. This information has been shared on social media and website. Beautiful Battle had also been advised.

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7. Britain in Bloom Working Group

The group plans to meet in August. A representative from Beautiful Battle and Wild About Battle will be invited to join the group.

8. Almonry Garden

Beautiful Battle confirmed new herbs and shrubs had been planted prior to clearance of the bed between the two entrances and wisteria and other plants by the building in the rear garden to allow for Contractor's works. Some of the paving removed by the Contractor will be reused for a rock garden under the Judas Tree, due to issues with planting in this heavy shade. Members agreed unanimously to remove the wisteria from the rear of the building to prevent further damage to the repaired wall.

9. Grant requests – None.

10. Internal Auditor Report

The Clerk highlighted the suggestions made were not requirements but would add clarification. Members considered and agreed unanimously:

- To give a complete record of the proposed budget: **Reserve balances and movements are reported as part of budget setting process;**
- That the **Asset register insured values are updated to match insurance cover;**
- To assist with financial planning: **Review of assumptions for income and expenditure activity for the next 3 years are considered as part of budget setting process.**

12. Action plans

- Members agreed that the **informal training** provided prior to the June Council meeting was of value and it was agreed that the Chairman would present the session to those that had been unable to attend.
- Members agreed that a **formal Councillor training programme** should be discussed at the next meeting.
- **Almonry as wedding venue** – postponed to completion of Almonry refurbishment.
- The Clerk reported that, due to the effects of Covid, a Rother District Council Officer would not be working in Battle until the return to the Almonry. A reduction in desk space at the Old Court House will take effect from 7th August. A meeting has been arranged with RDC early in September and the **one-stop shop** could be an item for discussion.

13. Medieval Mystery event

Members noted that six medieval mystery plays are being planned as part of the Medieval Fayre in June next year. Some of the shows will be ticketed and others will be free. The Clerk was asked to provide appropriate numbers for events in the Almonry to the organiser and to invite her to view the building once the refurbishment is complete. Other suggested venues: Guild Shaw, Mansers Shaw; the Rec, Market Square. It was felt that the cemetery may be too far from the main Medieval Fayre activities.

14. Financial matters

- The **budget report to 30th June 2021** was noted as attached. The Clerk highlighted that this is at the quarter point and the % spend on regular items should show as around 25%. She highlighted items not confirming to this:

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- 1076 Precept is received in two tranches;
- 4005 NI&Pension is paid mid-month and is therefore slightly in arrears;
- 4040 Bank charges have reduced following decision to use online banking for payments. It was noted that Barclays have notified of a review to charges so this could increase again;
- 4045 Telephone, Broadband & IT includes Zoom and has therefore increased beyond anticipated budget;
- 4055 New photocopier contract (£335) is included;
- 4085 Amount transferred to EMR due to delay in Audit fees being claimed following objection raised by resident.
- 1100 and
- 1110 Items significantly lower due to the Almonry works. There will be income from RDC shortly as we have made provision for an Officer to be in the Old Court House;
- 4800 Projects – this effectively is balanced by 1600 PWLB Receipt.
- 4280 Grants – agreed but not yet claimed.
- The **budget report for all Council Committees to 30th June 2021** was noted as attached. The Clerk repeated the advice as above and highlighted:
 - 1200-1205 Cemetery income taken as a group are slightly above budget at present;
 - 4190 Water – remains high on two cost centres. Further investigation may be required at the cemetery and some research is ongoing at Cherry Gardens allotments;
 - 4335 Play equipment – horse springer required replacement following accidental breakage;
 - 4205 Gen Maint allotments – this will be adjusted this month following a direct debit being erroneously taken twice;
 - 4380 New machinery – contribution from East Sussex County Council towards grass cutting;
 - 4070 Competitions – refund from School paid in July.
- The **Bank reconciliation to June 2021** was noted and duly signed by the Chairman.
- As reported to Council, there are insufficient bank opportunities to open new accounts. The search for suitable additional accounts is ongoing. Members discussed the **transfer of further funds** to the Hodge Bank and Nationwide to mitigate the risk. The Clerk was asked to investigate the options to include Government Bond and Premium Bonds for discussion at additional F&GP meeting for recommendation to Full Council.
- The cost of **room hire for meetings at the Emmanuel Centre** is currently being allocated to 'misc expenditure' as external room hire would have been required due to Covid. Members agreed that this remains the situation at present
- There were no **Post Covid-19 Recovery Grant** applications.

15. Matters for information and future agenda items

16. Date of next meeting: 28th September 2021

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.55pm.

CLLR G FAVELL
CHAIRMAN