

WALBERSWICK PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the Parish Council held in the Village Hall annexe at 7.30pm on Monday 14 November 2011.

PRESENT: Councillors Mr D Webb (Chairman), Mr A Hunt, (Vice-Chairman), Mr B Tibbles, Mr K Webb and Mrs J Gomm (Clerk).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Woodcraft, District Cllr Gower and County Cllr Leighton.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Personal interests: All Councillors and the Clerk declared a personal interest in item 5(b) on the agenda relating to the adoption of a mileage allowance.

Note: the personal interests did not amount to prejudicial interests because of the operation of paragraph 10(2)(c) of the Code of Conduct which states, *inter alia*, that a member will not have a prejudicial interest if the matter relates to an allowance, payment or indemnity for members.

3. PLAY AREA SAFETY

The Clerk reported that there were a number of items relating to the safety of the sports field and play equipment on the Village Green that needed to be addressed. It was important to have approximate costs to carry out the necessary work in order to make provision for those costs in the budget for the next financial year. Suffolk Coastal District Council (SCDC) was holding cleared balances for Walberswick in its s106 money of approximately £1,915 for play areas and £3,773 for sports areas. This money could be used for like for like replacement or new equipment, but it could not be used for repairs nor could money be transferred from one head to the other. The Chairman had investigated some prices for swings and slides as those on the Village Green needed repair work. The prices exceeded what was available in the s106 money. **Agreed** that Councillors would try to provide approximate costings for repairs and/or renewal to the Clerk before the next meeting, so the draft budget could be amended accordingly.

4. CLERK'S TIME IN DEALING WITH REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

At the previous meeting a Councillor had asked that the Council be provided with the approximate cost to the Council of the Clerk dealing with requests for information pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and other relevant legislation since her appointment in July. The Council was informed that she had spent approximately 131 hours between 5 July and 7 November on these matters and at her hourly rate of £8.344 this amounted to a cost of approximately £1,093. The Clerk pointed out that the time she was spending was not sufficient to deal with outstanding requests, resultant new requests, new requests on different matters and correspondence from the Information Commissioner's Office coming in on almost a daily basis.

5. ACCOUNTS

(a) Bank mandate

Proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Cllr Hunt and **agreed** that the banking mandate be altered to add Cllr Woodcraft as a signatory on cheques and that the Clerk be added as a signatory to enable her only to transfer money between Parish Council bank accounts, but not to allow her to sign cheques.

(b) Adoption of mileage allowance for Councillors and Clerk

The Clerk reported that the HMRC rate was presently 45p a mile without the claim having to be declared for tax purposes. There were also rates recommended by the National

Association of Local Councils which provided different rates for essential and casual users and also differentiated according to the engine size of the vehicle used. It was proposed by Cllr Hunt and seconded by Cllr Tibbles and **agreed** that the rate paid to Councillors and Clerk should be 45pence per mile.

(c) and (d) Monitoring of expenditure against income for current financial year and consideration of the draft budget for 2012 – 2013

These items were discussed together for ease of reference.

The Clerk summarised the draft budget presented to the Council. She explained that the reserves anticipated to be available at the current year end (31 March 2012) were likely to be considerably lower than she had estimated when she drafted the budget a few weeks ago. This was mainly, but not solely due to the actual and projected costs of dealing with requests for information and associated matters. In the draft she had shown, by way of example, three levels of anticipated reserves available at the next year end (31 March 2013) if the Council precepted for the financial year 2012 -2013 either £14,000, £15,000 or £16,000. The Council discussed receipts and payments for the last financial year, the current financial year and those projected for the next financial year.

The following was noted:

- Receipts for last financial year were approximately £1,500 more than those anticipated for the current year.
- Good practice presently advised that unallocated reserves should be approximately 50% to 100% of the main source of income i.e. the precept.
- It was difficult to reduce many of the costs for the rest of the current year or next year.
- No provision was being made for election costs for the next financial year.
- Salaries for last year had cost £4,371.33. The previous Clerk had been paid from April to the end of July in the current year and the new Clerk would be paid from the beginning of July to March in the current year. Based on the number of extra hours worked by her in dealing with Freedom of Information Act (and similar legislation) requests (FOI) she had added a further 50% to the cost of her salary which gave a figure of £6,363 for the current year including that paid to the previous Clerk. She had rounded this to £6,600 as it was possible the Council would need to pay National Insurance. However since the first draft of the budget, FOI work had substantially increased because some of the people making the requests were requiring reviews of the replies and more complaints to the ICO were being made and a number of Data Protection Act requests were being made. At a salary of £6,600 this only left sufficient funds to pay the Clerk for 41 hours per month between November and March.
- An additional £400 would need to be added to next year's budget for bark in the heading "village facilities" unless s106 money could be obtained from SCDC (see below).
- Reinstatement of the village sign was likely to cost more than the £600 which had been pledged by the British Crabbing Federation, but that donations for the additional costs would be found.
- £100 for the current year and £500 for next year had provisionally been budgeted for play equipment repairs, but this was likely to change.
- The usual £150 donation to the PCC to contribute to grass cutting in the church yard was not provided for in the current year.
- It would be possible to cut expenditure by reducing the number of Parish Council meetings.
- Further income needed to be found, to prevent at the end of the current financial year the reserves showing a negative balance, even allowing for the use of the Community Benefit Fund and Clerk's Gratuity Fund for general expenditure.

The following was **agreed**:

- To request the Walberswick Common Lands Charity for a contribution to the training expenses of the Council in the current and next financial year.
- To cut the cost of a Christmas tree in the current and next financial year, anticipating that at least for the current year a tree donation would be made.
- To request the cost of rubber tiles for underneath the play equipment on the Village Green from the SCDC s106 money for play equipment.
- To take out of next year's budget £500 provisionally provided as a contribution to the implementation of a 20mph speed limit in part of the village.
- To request the Clerk to make amendments to the paperwork to allow for more time to be funded for dealing with FOI requests.
- To request the Clerk to draw up amendments to the draft budget to take into account the issues discussed and to email it to the Chairman for distribution to Councillors prior to the next meeting.
- To request the Clerk to draw up proposals for reducing the number of meetings to be held up until the end of the financial year.
- To request the Clerk to consult with SALC on applying to the Secretary of State for permission to borrow.

(e) Financial Regulations

The Clerk reported that financial regulations had been adopted by the Council in the late 1990s, but that it was good practice to review them. She had copied to Councillors a draft based on a model provided by the National Association of Local Councils making changes to accommodate the size and spending of the Council and to ensure the financial regulations did not conflict with Standing Orders. New wording was in red and items for deletion were highlighted in yellow. It was **agreed** the Clerk would produce a final version for adoption at the next meeting.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Monday 5 December at 7.30 pm and the meeting closed at 8.42 pm.

Signed.....

Date.....