

LEEK TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of the General Purposes Committee held
on Tuesday 17th November 2020

Chairman: Cllr. Lyn Swindlehurst

Present: Cllrs: Benerfer, Coleman, Emery, Johnson, Molson, Ottewell, M. Swindlehurst and Wales

Apologies: Cllrs: Cawley, Wood & Worthington

One member of the public was present.

Leek Town Mayor, Cllr. Stephen Wales welcomed everybody to the meeting.

40. Minutes of the General Purposes Meeting held 20th October were received for Chairman's signature.

Public participation session

Ann Sharratt asked why the services at Kniveden are still not available, when they are urgently needed. It was stated that the Kniveden project is ongoing, although the clients have been informed it is currently closed. Cllr. Lyn Swindlehurst is being kept up to date by Cllr. Charlotte Atkins and will pass on any further information.

Ann Sharratt also asked why the Newton House car park, which is being used for Covid testing, has still not been cordoned off from the nearby Cheadle Road allotment holders. Councillors made the following comments:

The risk assessment is needed from the organisation responsible for the site.

Cllr. Lyn Swindlehurst will email Cllr. Atkins and Cllr. Deaville to find out more.

41. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Interests and consideration for the granting of Dispensations Cllr. Johnson declared an interest in 43 (a).

42. Monthly reports/updates:

- i) Mayor's Report – On 29th October, Cllr. Wales had welcomed the High Sheriff of Staffordshire and members of Survive Together at St John's Church. Earlier in the day, the deputy mayor, Cllr. Lyn Swindlehurst had welcomed the High Sheriff at Haregate Community Centre.

Remembrance Sunday had been attended by around 100 socially distanced people. The Mayor had laid a wreath on behalf of the town council, the MP and many local organisations and the service had been live streamed on Leek TV. In the afternoon, the Mayor and Deputy also laid wreaths at Ball Haye Green War Memorial. Thanks were given to Matt, Roy and Ben Benerfer who were key organisers of the event. Cllr. Wales also attended the service at St Edward's church on Armistice Day.

The Mayor had recently sent a letter of support to Staffordshire Moorlands District Council in support of a Leek to Stoke rail link.

- ii) Allotments – Cllr. Coleman's report was received. Cllr. Coleman is continuing to post the Newton House Covid testing dates on the Cheadle Road notice boards. Leek Allotment Holders have installed two cameras at Peggs Field and the vandalism situation will be monitored.
- iii) Events – Cllr. Matt Swindlehurst's report was received. Councillors made the following comments:
The P.A system should not have been used as it encouraged members of the public to attend. The town council should concentrate on the organisation of the service at Ball Haye Green. A meeting will be held in February next year with SMDC to agree the roles for Remembrance Sunday. Members of the public were not encouraged to attend the event and everything was done in a controlled way.
Government advice was changing on a regular basis.

The military vehicles that attended were not authorised by the town council.
We are only responsible for the area around the Monument.
It was broadcast by Leek TV and the service was well organised and carried out in a dignified way.
A 2 year -old had laid a wreath, which received 250,000 likes on Facebook.

The Christmas lights will be switched on next week and it will not be a public event.

- iv) Climate Change – A very interesting meeting had been held with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. Topics discussed included bee friendly corridors and planting at Brough Park.
- v) Leek Health Campaign
Correspondence was received from the Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust (MPFT) regarding the continued closure of the Minor Injuries Unit (MIU). Councillors comments included the following:
The number of people using the MIU has been under- estimated by MPFT.
The numbers were from March 2020, when Covid was high, which may have deterred people attending the MIU..
It is impractical and costly to travel to the Haywood Hospital.
People are still trying to access the MIU as the signage is still in place.
Karen Bradley MP could provide assistance.

It resolved that a letter would be drafted to SCC Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee requesting Leek MIU to be re-opened.

43. **Finance/Audit**

- a) **Payment of Accounts** In accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 section 5 (150), the following were accepted for payment. The payments total is £14,459.70.
- b) **Financial Statement** The financial statement and financial report for the 7 months to 31st October 2020 were received.
- c) **Benches**
The lady who had requested a memorial bench on the Mount, would be asked to select from the 2 most popular Broxap benches chosen by councillors, which were Blackburn and Ashbourne. The colour choices would be either black or green.
It was resolved to purchase a replacement bench for one that had been removed from the Mount.

44. **Social Media** – Information was received from Cllr. Mike Ottewell regarding the appointment of a voluntary social media editor. Cllr. Ottewell volunteered for the role which would involve setting up and administering social media channels. Councillors made the following comments:

This could be undertaken when the administrative assistant is appointed.
It will need to be independent.
Facebook needs to be constantly monitored, so a YouTube channel may be better.
There should be no interaction and the information needs to be factual and replicate the website.
The task should not add to Julie's workload.

It was resolved that Cllr. Ottewell and Cllr. Wales would draw up parameters for the role.

45. **Homelessness in Leek** – Information regarding homelessness was received from Cllr. Cawley. The number of homeless & housing advice approaches in Staffordshire Moorlands in 2019 and 2020 was received. Councillors comments included:
There are problems with rough sleepers in the town.
Rough sleepers and sofa surfers can increase the spread of Covid.
Cases of domestic abuse have increased during the pandemic.
We need to work with SMDC and SCC.
The numbers of homelessness have decreased due to the reduction in landlord evictions.
The Villas (near to Moorlands House) owned by SMDC, was refurbished to provide 5 self-contained flats, but are not being used.

There are concerns regarding security and parking for this property.
The majority of the statistics provided by SMDC relate to Biddulph.
Some of it is caused by people moving on to Universal Credit.
Anecdotal evidence in Leek suggests that homelessness is increasing in Leek and we have a responsibility to provide support where we can, for example, to support affordable housing in planning applications.
The figures for homelessness solely in Leek are needed.

46. **Correspondence**

- a) The information from SMDC regarding Green Infrastructure projects was received. Councillors comments included:

The suggestions fit in with the ideas from the Climate Change group.
There have been delays with handing over responsibility of the country parks to Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.

- b) There will be free parking days in Leek on Saturday 5, 12th and 19th December and it had been agreed with the Leader of SMDC that the remaining 2 could be taken on 3rd April (Easter Saturday) and Saturday 1st May (May Day).

47. **To receive items for information** To report matters for information not on the agenda and to raise items for future agendas.

- i) Congratulations were given to Grace Buckley for being awarded the government’s Points of Lights award for 'Survive Together', a community platform connecting those in need in Leek and the Staffordshire Moorlands.
- ii) It was resolved that Cllr. Benefer and Cllr. Matt Swindlehurst would produce a short paper regarding the likely effects of Covid on the town. For example, unemployment, holiday hunger and mental health issues. It was also suggested that we should work with SMDC, SCC, Biddulph and Cheadle.

48. **Exclusion of the Public** - The Chairman moved: “That in accordance with section 19 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 by reason of the confidential nature of the business next to be transacted, the public and press be excluded from the Meeting”.

49. **Confidential** - Bank House was discussed.

Chairman..... Date.....