

EMPLOYMENT, FINANCE & STRATEGY GROUP MEETING

Thursday 17th October 2024 Minutes

- 1. Present:** Cllr Riordan (part), Sharp, Martin, Perry, and Hotson plus Clerk and RFO
- 2. Apologies for Absence:** Cllr Arger and Wakeford
- 3. Dispensations - NA**
- 4. Minutes of previous meeting – 19th September 2024 – agreed by those present.** Note agreed meetings schedule for budget setting for 2025/26.

Date	Meeting	Actions
31.10.24		Groups return proposals to RFO
7.11.24	EFS Group	ESFG meeting to discuss group's proposals and Fees i.e. allotments, pitch hire, youth club
21.11.24	EFS Group	EFSG meet to discuss working budget
9.12.24	Council	Council discuss working budget
19.12. 24	EFS group	EFSG meet to finalise budget
13.1.25	Council	Council meet at 7pm – single item agenda prior to Planning Committee to agree budget
RFO		Forward precept request to MBC

5. Action plan

1. Scenic – Risk Assessments Youth Club, Bell Lane, Surrenden Field then onto Council
Parish Office – SCCT replacing emergency lights soon
Outside light – SCCT new lamp required
Heating in room 1 needs repairing
Cllr Riordon asked for Office Health and Safety documents to be re-circulated

2. Assets of Community Value – Cllr Sharp to check and submit

9. Strategic Workshop - following a debate it was agreed to meet Wednesday 6th November 7:30pm in Youth Club to discuss a Council strategic action plan and the 3G pitch – Clerk to arrange.

6. Staplehurst Primary School – Grant application

Proposing to develop an outdoor learning area, total cost £7,500, requesting £1,000 from Parish Council. (note Policy maximum is £1,000 per application)

Cllr Martin proposed and Cllr Sharp seconded to recommend to Council a grant of £1,000.

RFO check CIL and report back to group

7. Rolling programme of strategy review

a) Finance, Assets and Activity Risk Assessment

Following a debate agreed minor amendments as discussed and Cllr Sharp proposed and Cllr Riordan seconded to recommend to Council – agreed

Note:

Air Raid shelter: Agreed PAT of electrical items in Air Raid shelter ASAP and then in line with Office PAT testing schedule – RFO

Youth Club land

SCEnic consider bridge on to Youth Club land.

Agreed for RFO to get cost for cutting Youth Club hedge in March and September each year – add to budget setting process.

8. Contracts

RFO led debate on Churchyard budget – Council agreed £10,500, legal agreement requires Council to donate funding to cover cost of maintenance, in precept an allowance of £13,467. All Saints Church are requesting £13,467.

General agreement that Council need to support the maintenance of the Churchyard, but do not have a bottomless pit.

Agreed set aside higher figure and for the Council representatives on Churchyard Liaison Committee should continue to work in supporting All Saints to manage the churchyard budget moving forward.

Cllr Martin proposed and Cllr Perry seconded to recommend to Council supporting fee of £13,467 – agreed unanimously

Note, recent CIL contribution £2,009, RFO to review CIL and bring forward report.

9. Working groups - discuss

Following a discussion agreed working groups could be working better

Council 3rd June 2024 (2339/6.3) agreed meeting dates to avoid clashes but meetings seem to have gone awol.

Resolution: To consider the Employment, Finance and Strategy Group recommendation to try and support working groups to be more effective

- a) each group should have a chairman and note taker – trying to chair meetings and take effective notes is challenging
- b) each group should have a working group action plan – see example attached **appendix A** of this report
- c) Standard agendas
 - Present

- Apologise
 - Declaration of interest
 - Minutes of previous meeting
 - Action plan update – with focus on delivery
 - Matters for discussion – if an item is agreed, add to the action plan to keep focus on delivery
- d) Project Champions – one of the best ways of moving projects forward is to have a Champion – i.e. a Champion for the Allotments, a champion for the Surrenden Field pavilion etc. They can focus on delivery or reporting.
- e) Reports to Council – as working groups can only make recommendations Cllrs should send through reports, a standard report attached in **appendix B**, of this report. Timing is important.
- If the council meeting is Monday 20th, The office sends out agenda packs reports on the

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Monday	Council / Planning / JFWG rolling 3 week cycle			
Tuesday				
Wednesday	SCEnic -7:30pm		Coms Group – 7:30pm	
Thursday	RSG – 7:30pm		EFS Group – 1:30pm	3G Multi-Sport Group – 7:30pm
			NDP Review 7:00pm	

Wednesday before (Wednesday 15th) Therefore the office needs the Cllr reports by Friday 10th – thus enabling the office to clarify any issues on the Monday / Tuesday before publication on the Wednesday.

- f) Set meeting dates – This would help groups, obviously meetings get cancelled or rearranged so it will also help in rearranging meetings and also Cllrs are involved in other groups help to avoid clashes, as set out below

Each working group should have a programme of work agreed by Council so the group can liaise with the office and the work is delivered. Very few work programmes last year so work has not been delivered, which is frustrating for everyone.

3G Multi-Sport pitch working group, last meeting invited all Cllrs to be invited to – site visits of the bidders references and to final meeting to assess Tender bids – date to be confirmed. Then 3G Multi-Sport pitch working group would finish.

Cllr Sharp – Chair of Planning Committee, Scenic, RSG and JFWG - observation other Cllrs need to step up and help deliver actions. Cllr Sharp could then delegate more to other Cllrs to liaise with the office to deliver actions.

Some good examples such as: Outdoor gym; Delegated to Cllr Hotson who worked with the office and reported back to the SCEnic and then on to Council

General agreement to try and improve working groups so Councillors are doing more – need Cllrs to liaise with office on projects - clarify what Cllrs can do – what does a work programme look like?

So way forward

1. Clerk forward some templates
2. Group must put forward projects / proposals for 2025/26 – currently doing so
3. Once Council agrees, January 2025, each group puts forward work programme for 2025/26 to Council in Feb / March 2025
4. Then group over sees Cllrs liaising with office to deliver work programme

NOTE T of Reference

SCEnic Terms of Reference transfer “Skatepark” to JFWG T of Reference and Churchyard donations to EFSG T of Reference

Clerk bring to Council workshop then onto Council

10. 3G multi-sport pitch update

ITT 3G pitch only – note vote only on amendment to resolution. No vote took place on the “amended resolution / substantive resolution”.

Cllr Hotson asked why not, Cllr Perry, who chaired the Council meeting apologised.

Clerk concerned amendment against procurement regulations –sought advice from KALC / procurement expert. Gave KALC background then advice below.

Background

- 1) The Council are working with the Football Foundation to develop a 3G pitch; we are awaiting planning permission in the near future and the Football Foundation decision on 75% capital funding in the next month. We already have £250,000 partnership funding secured. We are following the Football Foundation framework procurement process (design and build for the pitch) and the contract will go through the Parish Council.
- 2) The Council decided to procure the sport and recreational management of the whole site once 3G pitch is built. We have guidance: advertised on Contract Finder – assessed bids and informed 4 bidders they will be invited to submit a tender. The bidders have **not** been sent any documents yet so have not commenced any work on their tender submission.
- 3) At the last Council meeting an amendment was made to contract out “the 3G pitch only” and the Council manage the remaining grass pitches, pavilion, car park etc. No formal decision was made, asked for advice.

Advice

- 4) It is not against procurement regulations but highly unusual and opens the Council to potential risk either;

Firstly: Council is at risk of potential bidders who considered but did not put forward a bid to the Expression of Interest stage challenging the Council because they would have Expressed an Interest if it had only been to manage the 3g pitch

Secondly: If one of those invited to tender wants to drop out they could challenge us, potentially seek costs incurred so far

Thirdly: Any one of the 4 bidders invited to tender, who are eventually unsuccessful in the tender process, could challenge the tender decision due to the changes

- 5) However the long term financial implications for the Council needs to be considered:
- 6) If the whole site is procured as intended it is likely to be near zero cost to the Council as the contractor would retain all income / cover all costs. Therefore a near zero cost to the Council / residents.
- 7) "3G pitch only" contractor retain all income but Council retain the management of the costly elements of the site i.e. maintain the car park, mower the grass, maintain the pavilion etc
- 8) In addition, Council would need to employ people to open the pavilion when the 3g pitch is being hired out Therefore costs @£40,000 with limited income @£8,000. Therefore a cost to the Council / residents of @£32,000
- 9) In addition the 3G pitch only approach is likely to lead to "conflict" between contractor of the 3G pitch and Council such as:
 Council grass cuttings get blown onto the 3G pitch, whose fault?
 Or Toilets not working in pavilion for 3G pitch users – they want a refund from the Council
 Or a group books the pitch with the contractor and then has to book the pavilion with the Council
- 10) In conclusion the "3G only" option leads to a numerous challenges including contractual conflict and financial cost to the Council – in simple terms the Council would be managing all the costly items – maintenance of pavilion, car park etc and generate very little income to cover the cost.

It does not seem viable or practical or well thought out.

- 11) Therefore the Council need to decide either
- proceed with the originally intended ITT for the whole site with the 4 bidders
 - proceed with 3G pitch only by contacting the 4 bidders and asking them if they wish to proceed with the 3G pitch only

General discussion;

- If sort legal advice - similar to three points raised in 4 above
- Issue more about change –

Whichever option is taken the Council will own the land

Previously very little direct Council management.

The Council in 1989 purchased the land and immediately outsourced management to JFMC Trust with just a Council donation

Council direct management only since April 2024

Previously discussed options at Council meeting in March 2024 – agreed one contractor would be a cleaner, more cost effective arrangement reporting direct to Council

- If split between a contractor “3G pitch only” and the “Council the rest of the site” felt like a “Pigs ear”
- Will blame each other when problems occur
- If contractor whole site, would report directly to Council rather than JFWG

Agreed report back to Council with sport and recreation management options and decide at next meeting to re-commence process

Council to make final decision on 3G project after planning permission, capital funding and tenders received – running out of time for budgeting 2025/26

Football Foundation standard Terms and Conditions – previously discussed and Council obligations signed off with submission July 2024 – in simple terms

- a) Build the pitch
- b) Deliver submission - football development plan and work with Football Foundation if problems
- c) Clawback – phased over potential 21 years

Football Foundation have claim on land due to their investment.

Agreed to seek legal advice to review Council obligations and report back to Council meeting 18th November 2024.

(Note as Council have received a grant offer from Football Foundation – send actual Terms and Conditions for legal advice)

11. Budget setting 2025/26 – update

Office IT equipment – need upgrade: @£1,500 for DJ in 2024/25 – note to Council

Comms Group

- An increase of a 10% to cover costs to Village Update + annual report = £5,170
- 10% increase in website £1,110
- For the new IT system, we would like to have a reserve (we don't know if we would buy or lease equipment and the costs may change) £6,000 - would need extra for office equipment
- Project of Information Booklets (one for new residents coming to the village and one for new councillors) + Project of an Events' Website £2,000

Greener group

Area	Activity	Budget Allocated
Parade beds South (1,2,3)	Maintain current planting. Fill up with further compost for enrichment of soil. Relaying of weed membrane and woodchip is a priority for the spring season in this space.	£300
Parade beds South (4)	Build new bed, using green wood sleepers & liner + hexagon head screws + soil (already purchased) + fully planted up.	£400
Parade beds North (5,6,7)	Maintain.	
Maddie's Herb bed	Maintain. A couple of herbs need replacing + fresh woodchip for the path but for the most part it's maintenance and other items will be sourced through the group i.e. replacement edging branches.	£50
Notice Board bed	Bed structure plus planting – project for new year.	£100
Kebab Shop (3 beds)	Additional planting to thicken out the planting – further the impact. (maintenance budget)	£100
Village Sign South – 2 beds	Beds are due for refurbishment. We will need .75 of a bag of soil across the two beds and no liner as it's not as weedy as other areas. We will also source organic material to line the bottoms to use less compost rich soil towards the top. Beds will then need replanting, repurposing current plants/bulbs + adding in more for more of an impact as you enter/exit the village. We will likely use green wood sleepers and request that Homeleights splits in half to enable them to fit into the tighter spaces on the verge.	£200
Village Sign North – 2 beds	As above.	£200
Village Sign West – 1 bed	TBC – will come from the wider maintenance budget allocation if needed.	£100
Jubilee Field Entrance	This has been recently replanted. Further Maintenance and review once winter is over will enable focused idea on spend, but aligning small budget for any replacement/additional planting	£50
Chestnut Avenue (to extend around George Street along the hedge by traffic lights)	Spring bulbs around the trees and hedge with bulbs to make an impact in a space where much of the village spends time. Daffodils and Crocus will allow for naturalising and high impact planting.	£200
	Enhancement of Chestnut bed and new strategy for maintenance due to challenging position.	£400

Church Green Pavement	Identified as area for spring bulbs enrichment	£50
Jefrey Close	More wildflowers and naturalising plants in the new year.	£150
Ponytel Pond	Allocation of effort required for maintenance.	

RFO - need to clarify with Greener Group which financial year?

EFSG – any items – consider for next meeting.

12. HR Group update

Any update on T of Ref for HR Group? AM / MA to consider and report back to group

Extra Worknest Hours - £565 plus Vat for 5 hours – Agreed Delegated authority to Clerk in consultation with the Chairman to action asap.

Staff have received advice to request copy of emails to / from Worknest and exchange of documents / reports regarding decision not to upgrade staff salaries at that time - early 2024 – Cllr Riordan

13. Next Meeting 7th November 2024 – 1:30pm- Budget