

SOUTH SWINDON PARISH COUNCIL
(CENTRAL SWINDON SOUTH PARISH COUNCIL)

COUNCIL MEETING

Minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2020 at 6.30pm
at a VIRTUAL ZOOM MEETING

Present	Cllr C Watts	Chair
	Cllr J Howarth	Vice-Chair
	Cllr S Ahmed	
	Cllr J Ali	
	Cllr V Ayriss	
	Cllr J Firmin	
	Cllr M Gladman	
	Cllr D Griffiths	
	Cllr E Heavens	
	Cllr P Herring	
	Cllr N Hopkins	
	Cllr W Horley	
	Cllr S James	
	Cllr L Kasmaty	
	Cllr M J Miah	
	Cllr J Miah	
	Cllr J Milner-Barry	
	Cllr S Pajak	
Cllr T Philpot		
Cllr M Strinkovsky		
Cllr N Watts		
Officers	Rob Core	Clerk
	Jake Mee	Deputy Clerk and RFO
	Matt Bradley	Communications and Events Manager
	Theresa Gordon	Agenda Clerk

Public Two

Public Session A member of the public asked what involvement the Parish Council had in cutting down trees in the parish. They noted two locations where in the first location, Cambria Bridge play park the parish council had commissioned the removal of one tree and heavy pollarding of others after a survey had been carried out at the start of the year. It appears that two further trees had been removed and asked how many more trees are to be cut down, and the way it is being performed does not appear to be cost effective in the use of public funds. In the second location at the County Ground, pollarded trees had now been cut down to stumps with no chance of survival and as in the first location this had also been agreed by the Parish Council.

The Clerk responded that the trees in the first location had been pollarded to save them and the Parish had committed to 2-3 years annual pollarding. In the second location at the County Ground the site belongs to the Swindon Borough Council, and the Parish were not responsible for the trees which had been cut down.

A member of the public said that the Parish had promised plates showing the open/closing times of the Town Gardens and Queens Park which would replace previous plates whose removal had meant there was no indication of open/closing.

The Clerk responded that signage had been agreed with fabricators prior to the Coronavirus outbreak they had just re-opened and the plates are on their list to be made.

A member of the public asked why the van used by the Services Supervisor had not had the parish logo added yet.

The Clerk responded that the signage had not been done as the company closed due to the Coronavirus, but the signage will be completed when the company resume working.

1100 **Apologies.**
Cllr S Allsopp

Not Present
Cllr A Hamid

1101 **Declarations of Interest & Applications for Dispensation**
To receive any Declarations of Interest required by the Code of Conduct adopted by the Parish Council on 14 May 2019.

None

1102 **Chair's Report**

When the outbreak of Covid-19 started in March the Parish Council stepped up to the plate and made sure we were doing all we could to protect staff and residents, while keeping the basic delivery of services running where we can.

Prior to the government declaring lockdown and in line with other Parish Councils, the Parish Clerk declared emergency powers, suspending all Parish Council Meetings leaving delegated authority to the Chair and Vice-Chair until meetings could restart in practicable and safe way.

As well as suspending Parish Meetings, the Parish Council also took the following decisions prior to lockdown to protect residents and staff:

- Broadgreen Community Centre and Old Town Library closed.
- Broadgreen Food Festival was cancelled.
- The Parish Office closed to the public and staff were encouraged to work from home if practicable.
- All play areas maintained by the Parish Council were closed to the public. Where necessary equipment was removed, as well as safety tape and heras fencing being put up.
- The public toilets at Victoria Road closed.
- Postponing the delivery of projects like the Cambria Bridge Play Area refurb, Cavendish Square park landscaping work and the WW2 Queens Park Memorial.

In line with government guidance GWR Park, Town Gardens and Queens Park have remained open throughout lockdown and we are grateful to our gardeners for keeping the parks so well maintained. We have done our best to ensure the safety of residents using the park with signs placed at park entrances encouraging social distancing, closing park toilets, and regularly communicating with the local police team about any breaches to social distancing guidance. The Town Gardens café was also closed from the time of lockdown until Friday 15th May when it was reopened following a risk assessment and measures agreed that would deter mass gatherings. It was already known that Queen Park Café would be closed this year due to safety measures needing to take place on the old Hothouse structure.

Our allotments have also remained open with new guidance for allotment holders on steps they should take to minimise the risk of catching or spreading the virus. However, as we cannot complete a safe handover process the admissions system for allotment holders has had to be frozen.

Since the 11th May when the government issued new guidance stating that they wanted to see the construction sector reopen, projects that the Parish Council stopped when lockdown was first announced are in the process of restarting.

Staffing & Finance

It is a testament to the team we have at the Parish Council that despite the public health situation we face all staff members wanted to continue working. Sadly, one member of staff has caught Coronavirus and has been recovering at home. Another staff member also had to self-isolate as a family member was displaying Coronavirus symptoms. That staff member has now returned to work after displaying no symptoms himself.

Broadgreen Community Centre and Old Town Library staff have been working from home where they can. The Broadgreen team have been supporting office staff in parish projects and the Old Town Library team have been continuing to upload online resources on Facebook for parents homes schooling and have recently started their own You-tube channel called "Old Town Library at Home".

Though we do not face as challenging a financial position as other large Parish and Town Councils who are dependent on commercial income, lockdown has had an effect on the Parish Council's budget.

Areas we have lost income through lost bookings and rental income include:

- Broadgreen Community Centre income: Projected £15k to end of June
- Two months of lost Town Gardens Café rental income: £1,200
- Lost Events Bookings: £5,500

Money saved from events and projects we had budgeted to support that have subsequently been cancelled:

- Broadgreen Food Festival: £10,000
- Old Town Festival: £7k
- Bandstand Concerts: £2,500 (may restart these later in the year)

TUPE Transfer

When Lockdown started the Parish was clear with the Borough Council that the original June 1st TUPE transfer completion date had become unrealistic due to the challenges faced in having a satisfactory handover process for staff. This would normally include organisation of staff consultation events and other activities to fulfil due diligence requirements.

We had proposed a September completion date and had trade union support for this. To start with the Borough Council was reluctant to delay TUPE transfer to September however we thought we had made progress in late April when we had written agreement with SBC that the TUPE completion date would be set for the end of August/September.

It looked as though common sense was prevailing until we received a new notification from Swindon Council reneging on their previous commitment and bringing forward an August/September TUPE completion date to the 31st July. No reason was given why the Borough Council indicated they wished to bring forward the TUPE transfer completion and I am sceptical of their motivations. Whatever the reason it is an unfair way to treat staff who are being transferred to a new employer. Given the uncertain times we face from a public health perspective the last thing staff need is to be messed around by their employer.

We have challenged SBC's proposed completion date and I understand Unison have done the same. At the time of writing this report it is still unclear whether SBC can transfer staff across to the Parish Council at a date we have not agreed to.

1103 Internal Audit Review

The Deputy Clerk submitted a report regarding the Internal Auditor a copy of which appears as Appendix A in the Minute Book.

Quotes had been prepared for a decision to be made by Councillors to appoint itself an Internal Auditor with the following options:

Company	Annual Price	Add. Full Days	Add. Half Days	Visits per year
Company 1	2100	600	300	3
Company 2	1540	385	222.5	4
Company 3	1335	445	285	4

RESOLVED that Company 3 be approved.

For: 21 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

1104 Payment Schedule March 2020

The Deputy Clerk submitted the Payment Schedule for March 2020, a copy of which appears as Appendix B in the Minute Book.

RESOLVED that the March 2020 Payment Schedule be approved.

For: 21 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

1105 Payment Schedule April 2020

The Deputy Clerk submitted the Payment Schedule for April 2020, a copy of which appears as Appendix C in the Minute Book

RESOLVED that the April 2020 Payment Schedule be approved.

For: 21 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

1106 Accounts February 2020

The Deputy Clerk submitted the Accounts for February 2020, a copy of which appears as Appendix D in the Minute Book.

RESOLVED that the February 2020 Accounts be approved.

For: 20 Against: 0 Abstentions: 1

1107 Accounts March 2020

The Deputy Clerk submitted the Accounts for March 2020, a copy of which appears as Appendix E in the Minute Book.

RESOLVED that the March 2020 Accounts be approved.

For: 20 Against: 0 Abstentions: 1

1108 Review of Property and Assets

The Deputy Clerk submitted the Asset Register to be reviewed, a copy of which appears as Appendix F in the Minute Book.

Noted

1109 Review of Insurance

The Deputy Clerk submitted the Insurance effected on 1 April 2020 to be reviewed, a copy of which appears as Appendix G in the Minute Book.

The Deputy Clerk said that the levels of cover needed be agreed by the Councillors

RESOLVED that the reviewed Insurance be approved.

For: 21 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

1110 Review of Risk Assessment

The Clerk submitted a Risk Assessment and report, a copy of which appears as Appendix H in the Minute Book.

The Clerk said that all Parish assets had been reviewed and were in order and should be agreed by the Councillors.

RESOLVED that the reviewed risk assessment be approved.

For: 21 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

1111 Internal Audit 2019/20 – Final

The Deputy Clerk submitted for consideration a report of the Internal Auditor, a copy of which appears as Appendix I in the Minute Book.

The Deputy Clerk said that the end of year review gave a lot of good practice points and it was noted how much the parish will grow in the next few months, the only recommendation regarded transparency which due to the size of the parish council there are a few things the parish are not compliant with which the Deputy Clerk intends to action presently and he also confirmed that they are only best practice and no laws are being broken.

RESOLVED that the Internal Audit Report be approved.

For: 21 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

1112 Year End Accounts 2019/20 - Annual Governance Statement

The Deputy Clerk submitted the Annual Governance Statement 2019/20 as part of the 2019/20 Annual Return to be approved a copy of which appears as Appendix J in the Minute Book.

- 1 Put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year and for the preparation of accounting statements.
- 2 We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.
- 3 We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance laws, regulations and Proper Practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances
- 4 We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 5 We carried out an assessment of the risks facing this authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required.
- 6 We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.
- 7 We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.
- 8 We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events, or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and, where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements.

RESOLVED that the 2019/2020 Annual Governance statement be approved.

For: 21 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

1113 Year End Accounts 2019/20 – Accounting Statement

The Deputy Clerk submitted the Year End Accounts 2019/20 and the Accounting Statement 2019/20 as part of the 2019/20 Annual Return to be approved a copy of which appears as Appendix K in the Minute Book.

The Deputy Clerk/RFO summarised how much the parish are receiving and that the support grant from Swindon Borough Council had been reduced this year and that staff costs had increased. The balances are staying the same, but reserves are being impacted slightly and there will be a bigger impact this year and confirmed that the year ahead would be very busy.

RESOLVED that the 2019/2020 Accounting Statements be approved.

For: 21 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

1114 Delegated Decisions

The Clerk submitted the decisions approved by the Chair, Vice-Chair and Clerk under the delegated powers during the Coronavirus lockdown period, a copy of which appears as Appendix L in the Minute Book

Noted

1115 Loan Funding Grounds Maintenance & Street Cleaning Equipment

At the Central Swindon South Parish Council meeting of 26th May 2020, it was **RESOLVED** to seek the approval of the Secretary of State for Housing Communities & Local Government to apply for a PWLB loan of £512,085 over the borrowing term of 5 years for the purchase of vehicles, machinery and equipment for the provision of Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleaning Services. The annual loan repayments will come to around £108,163.

It is not intended to increase the council tax precept for the purpose of the loan repayments.

1116 Future Council Meetings

The Clerk submitted a review of Full Council meetings based upon the SLCC advice during COVID-19 (Social Distancing).

The Chair said that the current meeting had gone well, although some of the Councillors had experienced technical difficulties, The Chair said that it could be an option that a future meeting could be held in the Council Office whilst adhering to social distancing. The Clerk said that it would be possible to hold up to 6 councillors at a meeting in separate rooms in the office. Cllr Firmin said that it could be helpful if other councillors could help with any that are experiencing technical difficulties.

RESOLVED that the Chair and Vice-Chair prepare a schedule of future meetings to be adopted.

For: 21 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

The meeting closed at 19.15 pm

Signed.....

Date.....

Chair of the Council