

SOUTH SWINDON PARISH COUNCIL
(CENTRAL SWINDON SOUTH PARISH COUNCIL)
ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING

Minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2021 at 6.30pm
at the Marriot Hotel, Pipers Way Swindon SN3 1SH

- Present** Cllr C Watts (Chair)
Cllr J Howarth (Vice-Chair)
Cllr S Ahmed
Cllr J Ali
Cllr S Allsopp
Cllr V Ayris
Cllr J Firmin
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 Milner-Barry
Cllr S Pajak
Cllr T Philpot
Cllr M Strinkovsky
- Officers** Rob Core Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Jake Mee Chief Finance Officer (CFO)
Matt Bradley Communications and Events Manager (CEM)
Theresa Gordon Planning & Agenda Clerk
- Public** Two
- Public Session** No public questions.
- 1375** **Election of Chair for 2021/22**
Cllr C Watts was proposed and seconded.
Resolved that Cllr C Watts be elected Chair for the 2021/22 municipal year.
The Chair signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.
- 1376** **Election of Vice-Chair 2021/22**
Cllr J Howarth was proposed and seconded.
RESOLVED that Cllr J Howarth be elected Vice Chair for the 2021/22 municipal year.
- 1377** **Apologies**
Cllr M Gladman
Cllr M Hamid
Cllr J Miah
Cllr N Watts
- 1378** **Declaration of Interest & Applications for Dispensation**
None

1379 **Chairs Report**

From the day of its inception 4 years ago the operation of South Swindon Parish Council has thrown up many extreme challenges that the staff, officers and councillors have routinely met head-on with resourcefulness, ingenuity, dedication, and energy that has ensured this council continues to be progressive, efficient, and relevant for our Parishioners.

It is therefore no surprise that when presented with the immense challenges of the Pandemic our Parish stepped up and faced this head on. Despite sometimes conflicting guidance and constantly changing positions our officers and staff were able to navigate, indeed lead the way, through the Pandemic, understanding the importance in the services and assets that we provide to help our Parishioners in this time. Open spaces such as our formal gardens, Shaftesbury Lake and GWR Park took on a vital role in the community as a place to walk, exercise and breathe in the most restrictive time of lockdown. Whilst initially we were under pressure to close the formal parks, I am content that we made the right decisions at the right times in order to positively contribute to the health and well-being of the residents in the Parish.

The Parish hand-over of Broadgreen Community Centre as a covid test centre was a crucial decision in the height of the pandemic. In an area of Swindon that was disproportionately affected by transmission due to social, economic, domestic, and working conditions. Such eventuality had previously been planned through the work of the emergency response working party, chaired by Cllr James, in conjunction with Swindon Borough Council.

I would like to thank the councillors who visited care homes throughout the Parish and delivered thank you cards and hampers for staff that were on the front line battling the devastating and heart breaking effects of covid. The parcels were put together by our Parish staff who also contacted all care homes to make arrangements for their delivery.

I would also like to thank our staff who took on emergency duties throughout the worst period of the pandemic contributing to the collective effort ensuring that the most vulnerable and isolated in our community were not left wanting.

The Parish has now completed its fourth year of operation. We all know that in 2017 the Parish, and indeed many other Parishes, were not born out of a need or desire by local people but were a vehicle, a back door even, for the Borough Council to raise council tax beyond the Government cap and offload £3m of services directly to the residents of Swindon to help ease a stressed Borough budget.

Whilst most in this room, and indeed most residents opposed this strategy, the Borough forged ahead driven by mounting fiscal necessity to balance the books. It is testament to most in this room that we understood that once the order to create the Parish was signed we had a responsibility to put opposition behind us and work for the greater good. And over the last 4 years this is exactly what we have done.

To some of those outside the Parish looking in, the success has been an unexpected and unintended, although in most quarters welcomed, consequence.

It seems strange to look back to a time when, as one of the largest Parishes in the country, we were allocated just one part time clerk by the Borough Council and employed one part-time member of staff, located in a small corner of the old Town Hall. The Parish Council now has 40 staff and officers directly employed.

This rapid growth has been managed magnificently by our officers whilst we transitioned from primarily building the organisation to becoming a service focused Parish, a transition that I believe is now complete.

Throughout this process we strived to improve on what had been transferred to the Parish. As I have stressed before, a Parish council exists for the purpose of enhancing services provided by the primary authority. Not to have done so would have put into question the reason for the existence of a Parish.

So, what has the Parish achieved in a relatively short period:

Where playgrounds were tired, unimagined, poorly maintained and underinvested we have regenerated and redesigned, increasing play value and inclusivity whilst creating quality communal space for children and adults alike. Whilst it has been a challenge throughout the pandemic to deliver playground refurbishment at a pace previously seen, we have managed to complete refurbishments of the Play Areas at Westcott Rec, Cambria Bridge and East Wichel with the latter including a stone circle and the installation of an educational Tiny

Forest in conjunction with BMW Mini.

Our work is not finished.

Where allotment fences were broken, tracks rutted and potholed and plots unused, we have worked with the allotment holders to rebuild and improve. We now have a waiting list for plots and are able to supply an excellent service to allotment holders at one of the lowest prices in Swindon.

Our work is not finished.

Where libraries were to be closed in Park South and Old Town by the Borough Council, we sought appropriate funding and took control where necessary ensuring we had library provision for all Parishioners. We understand that well-run libraries giving universal access to literature and computer access and providing a communal space to combat isolation is crucial in any community. Throughout the Pandemic, our Library staff continued to engage through social media and providing story trails for children in our parks. It is this dedication that has seen footfall in Old Town Library nearly triple pre-pandemic.

Our work is not finished.

By size, and I would argue by our achievements, we are considered a Super Parish. We have not been afraid to extend our portfolio beyond that of a Parish Council with an extended portfolio that takes in the formal gardens of Queens Park and Town Gardens. Again, years of underinvestment had left these vital assets of our town in a sorry state. In 2019 we finally secured the leases for these parks and were able to start the regeneration work. In the Town Gardens we have saved the 120-year-old listed gates from dereliction, a project two years in the making. The Town Gardens are a vital part of the town's history and refurbishment of the gates crucial to securing a small part of our heritage when the town is at risk of losing other key heritage assets. The additional investment has given our Parks staff more freedom to express their expertise with stunning floral results. We have installed a VJ Day memorial in Queens Park, concluded restoration works on the listed and much loved Town Gardens cafe, completed reclamation works on the PC Webb memorial sundial and the Sassoon VE Day memorial stone. The Parish Gardeners have been unwavering throughout the pandemic and their work and dedication has been a tonic for so many in such trying times.

We will soon be announcing exciting projects and events for Town Gardens and Queens Park.

Our bloom working party has been unstoppable during the pandemic. Great progress has been made of the 5 mile green corridor, although frustrated by adverse weather conditions. The community garden projects and the first stage of the wild flowering of several areas of the parish have been a success and we look forward to improving on our South West Britain in Bloom silver award this summer. I would particularly like to thank Cllr Kasmaty for her tireless enthusiasm brought to these projects and look forward to the results that should be realised over the summer.

Last year the parish engaged a youth worker. We should take a moment to reflect on the effect of the pandemic on younger members of our parish, whether this is losing a loved one, disruption to education or the effects of isolation. Our youth worker has been proactive in approaching schools in our Parish and offering assistance and guidance to those most affected by these extraordinary circumstances and many schools have reached out for assistance. I would like to thank the youth worker for her dedication and Cllr Griffiths for chairing the working party that has pushed for this vital provision.

During the pandemic, our officers completed the complex task of concluding the TUPE transfer of streets and grounds maintenance staff from the Borough whilst ensuring that we had facilities, equipment, and vehicles to secure continuity of service. Indeed, services have been improved. This was completed in November 2020 and we have already seen the considerable benefits of being able to directly employ staff. We now have a flexibility that has allowed us to deliver on such projects as the pocket garden in Swindon Road, the re-wilding of areas from Shaftesbury Avenue to Pipers Way and the progress on the Parish 5 Mile Green Corridor. By having direct access to deploy our personnel we have increased litter picking routes and are able to maintain a three-week grass cutting rota. I would like to thank the streets and grounds staff for all their hard work, dedication and going the extra mile to get us through the pandemic.

So, the coming year:

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I mentioned earlier exciting projects at the Town Gardens and Queens Park. Parish Councillors agreed to trigger work to refurbish the historic Town Gardens Bowl and Queens Park Hothouse. Despite some initial teething problems, we now have a Project Brief in place to take to market and ensure we are getting best value for what will be huge regeneration projects for Swindon.

As we come out of Lockdown, hopefully for the last time we will be reinstating services that were very popular prior to Covid- notably Broadgreen Community Centre and our two libraries. We stand ready to fully reopening them back even better than before.

Work improving our 3 historic parks will continue. We have been working with the Heritage Action Zone on ways we can restore some of the historic features of GWR Park. We hope our cooperation with them proves fruitful.

In the Town Gardens I mentioned work we have already done and our plans to refurbish the Bowl. We will continue to support the gardeners with their aspirations to further improve the flower beds and will build on the refurbishment work we have already completed in the park. Of course, our new tenants at the Town Gardens have only recent started their lease and feedback so far has been overwhelmingly positive. I believe as they become more established the service in the café will get even better.

In Queens Park, Parish Councillors have already agreed to significant improvements to the gates, boundary wall and steps. In the next month we will be seeking to tackle the street drinking in the park, working with the Police and Swindon Borough Council to establish a PSPO banning the consumption of alcohol in the park. And we will be adding more features to the park.

There will be more Parish Events. Councillors have already agreed to an innovative mobile photography exhibition in all 3 of our Parish parks. We are soon to be announcing more events in the Town Gardens Bowl and another massive event in one of our parks. More will come to light in the next few weeks.

Finally, many other projects that we have started will reach completion over the next year. These include tree planting, another Tiny Forest, our nature trail, rewilding, and more youth events.

So, 2021/22 will be another exciting year for the Parish Council. I am sure all Parish Councillors will be excited to see how it plays out.

1380 Minutes of Full Council Meeting – 27 April 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 27 April 2021 be approved as a true record.

1381 Payment Schedules 1 & 2 – March 2021

The CFO submitted the Payment Schedules for March 2021, a copy of which appears as Appendix A in the Minute Book.

RESOLVED that Payment Schedule 1 for March 2021 totalling £31,736.58 and Payment Schedule 2 for March 2021 totalling £142,221.73 be approved.

1382 Payment Schedules 1 & 2 – April 2021

The CFO submitted the Payment Schedules for April 2021, a copy of which appears as Appendix B in the Minute Book.

RESOLVED that the Payment Schedule 1 for April 2021 totalling £33,284.29 and Payment Schedule 2 for April 2021 totalling £191,683.69 be approved.

1383 Accounts – March 2021

The CFO submitted the accounts for the period to March 2021 a copy of which appears as Appendix C in the Minute Book.

RESOLVED that the March 2021 Accounts be approved.

1384 Accounts – April 2021

The CFO said that the accounts were not available in time for the current meeting but would be brought to the next suitable meeting.

RESOLVED that the accounts for April 2021 be deferred to the next suitable meeting.

- 1385** **Planning Applications delegated to the Chair & Vice-Chair**
The Chair submitted a report containing the delegated responses of the Chair and Vice Chair, a copy of which appears as Appendix D in the Minute Book.
RESOLVED that the Chair & Vice Chair decisions be approved.
- 1386** **Planning Decisions**
The Chief Finance Officer submitted for information a report containing the decisions made by Swindon Borough Council to be noted, a copy of which appears as Appendix E in the Minute Book.
NOTED
- 1387** **Broome Manor Extension Allotments**
The Chief Finance Officer submitted a report regarding track improvement at the Broome Manor site, a copy of which appears as Appendix F in the Minute Book.
The CFO said that nearly all allotment sites had been improved as part of an improvement plan and that the report was as tabled.
Broome Manor Extension Specification & Quote
Scrape off existing track & cart arisings off site.
Re-set 2 manhole lids.
Supply, lay level & compact average 50m/m depth type 1 roadstone.
Remaining tracks
Dig out average 150m/m depth type 1 roadstone.
Lay, level & compact 150m/m depth type 1 roadstone.
Labour, plant & materials for the sum of £8,310.00 excluding VAT.
Recommendation
That the submitted price of £8,310.00 excluding VAT be accepted.
RESOLVED that the recommendation £8,310.00 excluding VAT be approved.
- 1388** **Review of Standing Orders**
The Chief Finance Officer submitted draft Standing Orders to be reviewed, a copy of which appears as Appendix G in the Minute Book.
RESOLVED that the Standing Orders be approved and adopted.
- 1389** **Review of Financial Regulations**
The Chief Finance Officer submitted a copy of the Financial Regulations to be reviewed, a copy of which appears as Appendix H in the Minute Book.
RESOLVED that the current Financial Regulations be approved and adopted.
- 1390** **Election of Chair of Finance & Staffing Committee 2021/22**
RESOLVED that Cllr C Watts be elected Chair of Finance & Staffing Committee for the 2021/22 municipal year.
- 1391** **Election of Vice Chair of Finance & Staffing Committee 2021/22**
RESOLVED that Cllr J Howarth be elected Vice Chair of Finance & Staffing Committee for the 2021/22 municipal year.
- 1392** **Election of Chair of Leisure, Environment & Amenities Committee 2021/22**
RESOLVED that Cllr N Hopkins be elected Chair of Leisure and Amenities Committee for the 2021/22 municipal year.
- 1393** **Election of Vice Chair of Leisure, Environment & Amenities Committee 2021/22**
RESOLVED that Cllr L Kasmaty be elected Vice Chair of Leisure and Amenities Committee for the 2021/22 municipal year.

- 1394** **Election of Chair of Planning Committee 2021/22**
RESOLVED that Cllr P Herring be elected Chair of Planning Committee for the 2021/22 municipal year.
- 1395** **Election of Vice Chair of Planning Committee 2021/22**
RESOLVED that Cllr J Firmin be elected Vice Chair of Planning Committee for the 2021/22 municipal year.
- 1396** **Terms of Reference and Delegation Scheme**
The Chief Finance Officer submitted a copy of the draft Terms of Reference to be reviewed, a copy of which appears as Appendix I in the Minute Book.
Councillor Griffiths Proposed an amendment to increase the Events Working Party to 7 members.
Cllr T Philpot joined the meeting during this item.
RESOLVED that the Terms of Reference and Delegation Scheme with amendment be adopted.
- 1397** **Appointment of Working Parties**
RESOLVED to approve the appointment Working Parties a copy of which appears as Appendix J in the Minute Book.
- 1398** **Membership of Other Bodies**
The Chief Financial Officer submitted a list of Membership of Other Bodies a copy of which appears as Appendix K in the Minute Book.
RESOLVED to approve the list of Membership of Other Bodies.
- 1399** **Representatives on Outside Bodies**
The Chief Finance Officer gave a verbal report regarding Councillor's representation on Outside bodies.
Cllrs C Watts and D Griffiths agreed to continue their membership of the Swindon Area Committee (SAC).
RESOLVED Councillors Watts and Griffiths Membership of Outside Bodies be approved.
- 1400** **Appointment of Internal Auditor**
The Chief Financial Officer submitted a report for review and appointment of Internal auditor for 2021/22, a copy of which appears as Appendix L in the Minute Book.
The CFO said that the report with recommendation was as tabled and that the next internal audit for 2020/21 would be brought to the next appropriate meeting.
Recommendation
That the Council re-appoint Auditing Solutions Ltd. as per 2.4 of the report.
RESOLVED that re-appointment of Auditing Solutions Ltd be approved.
- 1401** **Review of Property and Assets**
The Chief Financial Officer submitted a report regarding the review of Property and Assets, a copy of which appears as Appendix M in the Minute Book
RESOLVED that the Review of Property and Assets be approved.
- 1402** **Review of Insurance**
The Chief Financial Officer submitted a report regarding Insurance, a copy of which appears as Appendix N in the Minute Book.
RESOLVED that the Review of Insurance be approved.
- 1403** **Review of Risk Assessment**
The Chief Financial Officer submitted a copy of the 2021 Review of Risk Assessment, a copy of which appears as Appendix O in the Minute Book.
RESOLVED that the Review of Risk Assessment be approved.

1404 **Councillor Allowances**

The Chief Financial Officer submitted a report regarding an allowance which is available to every elected Councillor will be the same except for the Chair, who can be paid more, a copy of which appears as Appendix P in the Minute Book.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1** That the Parish Council agree the payment of Councillor Allowance for 2021/22.
- 3.2** That the amount of the allowance for Councillors be set at £1,028 per annum and the Chair's Allowance be set at £5,138 per annum.
- 3.3** That expenses only be paid to Councillors when representing South Swindon Parish Council outside of the parish.

Cllr Watts said that the Independent Remuneration Body had suggested that councillors should get three times more than they currently receive particularly for a Council the size of South Swindon Parish.

RESOLVED that the recommendations 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 be approved.

1405 **Review of other Policies**

To review and adopt the following Policy Documents:

Code of Conduct, Complaints Procedure, Data Protection, Employer Discretions, Equality & Diversity, Freedom of Information, Grants, Habitual & Vexatious Complaints, Health & Safety, Internal Controls, Investment Strategy, Memorials, Press & Media, Privacy Notice, Recording & Reporting, Records Management, Safeguarding, Services, Training, Whistleblowing.

RESOLVED to approve and adopt en-bloc the policy documents .

1406 **New Policies**

To adopt the following new Policy Documents:

Allowances, Health, Wellbeing and Attendance, Internal Audit ToR, Member-Officer Relationship, Privacy Notice – Employee, Vehicle Tracking (Copies attached).

RESOLVED to approve and adopt en-bloc the policy documents .

The meeting closed at 7.26pm

Signed.....

Date.....

Chair of the Council