

NAILSWORTH TOWN COUNCIL
FINANCE ECONOMIC & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
Minutes of a meeting held on 9 March 2011

Present: Cllr S Robinson (chairman)
Cllr J R Nicholson
Cllr M P Robinson* * not present for whole meeting
Cllr Mrs J M Way

Apologies: Cllr P Carter
Cllr I D Crawley
Cllr N I Kay
Cllr Mrs S E Thorpe

Consideration of grant applications received

Members agreed to recommend grants to the following:

Nailsworth Christkindle Committee	£ 200
Nailsworth Community Workshop	£ 1000
Stroudwater Textile Trust	£ 500
NYCE	£ 250
Nailsworth Festival	£ 2000
Rockness Trust	£ 150
Home Start	£ 500
Citizens Advice Bureau	£ 850
Forest Green Residents Association	£ 200

	£ 5650

Despite leaving a number of phone messages the Clerk had been unable to get any response from the **Car Club** following receipt of its application earlier in the year. Whilst members supported the aims of the Club, as there was no longer a car in the town they needed to be convinced of the benefits available to Nailsworth ratepayers. It was unclear what obstacles there might be to re-introducing a car and Cllrs Nicholson and Mrs Way agreed to try again to make contact and get information and clarification.

A young member of the **Stroud Area Youth Orchestra (SAYO)** had sent an email asking for financial support to help secure its future which was under threat. Insufficient details had been provided to enable any decision to be taken. The Clerk was asked to send a copy of the grants application form to the young person, inviting SAYO to submit a formal application for consideration in the next financial year.

It was considered that the **Forest Green Residents Association's (FGRA)** grant application for £1700 to fund five half day sessions with the Play Rangers in August 2011 should most properly be considered in the next financial year. However members were aware of the popularity of the event last summer and were agreed that it was an excellent scheme and very worthy of financial support. It was agreed to award the balance remaining in the grant budget this year as a "payment on account" and to hold the application on file with a recommendation for next year's committee members that they consider support for this initiative favourably.

Standing orders and financial regulations

Members reviewed existing standing orders and financial regulations and agreed that no changes were necessary.

The sub-group looking at the new model standing orders had been unable to make much progress as the accompanying revised model financial regulations had still not been received. Cllr Nicholson agreed to discuss the current state of play with GAPTC.

Review of insurances and internal audit regulations

Members pronounced themselves satisfied with current insurance cover and internal audit arrangements. The Mayor agreed to undertake a spot check of financial records in the following week.

Revision of audit regulations and proposals for "data transparency"

The Clerk reported on proposed changes to the audit regulations which were intended to come into effect on 1 April 2011. The important impact for NTC would be a relaxation of the requirement to undertake an annual review of internal audit although the need to maintain adequate and effective procedures would remain.

The Clerk explained that it was unclear at present whether government proposals to require councils to publish details of expenditure over £500 would be mandatory and apply to local town and parish councils. In the absence of any specific guidance it was agreed no action was required.

Formation of a buildings working party

A small group had been meeting informally to consider options for the current and future use of NTC and other local authority property in the town and it was now time to formalise discussions in order to make progress. It was agreed to recommend that council adopt the report attached to these minutes recommending that a working party be established and professional advice sought.

It was further recommended that membership of the working party should comprise Cllrs Carter, Crawley, Nicholson, Kay, S Robinson, Mrs Smith and Bill Affleck chairman of Nailsworth Community Partnership.

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Date

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Chairman

Nailsworth Town Council
Finance, Economic and General Purposes Committee – 9 March
2011

A Public Buildings & Assets Working Party.

Recommendations. That councillors approve:

1. Setting up a Public Buildings & Assets Working Party with the following terms of reference:
 - a) to review the buildings used for the provision of public services in the town centre by the Town Council, the County Council, the Stroud District Council and the Police and their utilisation;
 - b) to explore and make recommendations on the acquisition of buildings not in the Town Council's ownership, and on the location of Town Council services, in order to assist rationalisation and reduce public expenditure.
2. Appointing Andrew Watton, property consultants, to undertake valuations and enquiries as required, up to a maximum of £600 plus VAT.

Background.

1. The Town Council owns the Town Hall, converted from a chapel by the former Urban District Council in 1956. The building provides lettable space for events in the Hall; a playgroup in the basement; commercial offices on the first floor; and the Town Council's offices, archives and Council Chamber.

2. The Town Council also owns the Mortimer Rooms, built adjacent to the County Library in 1974 with a shared entrance and lobby. The police station was built at the same time on the other side of the library. The Town Council also leases a retail unit on the corner of George Street and Fountain Street, to house the Town Information Centre.

3. The County Council has indicated its willingness to sell the freehold of the library and lease back the building to continue to deliver library services. The Gloucestershire Constabulary has indicated its desire to provide a presence in the library, and potentially vacate the police station. It may then be available for freehold purchase.

4. The opportunity may exist for the Town Council to acquire all the interests in the street block, in the long term interests of the residents of Nailsworth.

4. Additionally, there could be scope for relocating the Town Information Centre, the town clerk and archives into this street block, with the Town Council meeting in the Mortimer Rooms and/or other locations around the town, for example, the new Arkell Community Centre.

The Next Steps.

5. Establishing a task and finish working party of this committee is considered to be the best way for town councillors to undertake the tasks set out above.

6. The Town Council needs professional advice on how to make the best economic use of its existing freehold and leasehold interests, and to establish the most appropriate approach it might pursue in acquisitions. Andrew Watton has a longstanding commercial practice in the Stroud Valleys and has previously served the Town Council well. The appointment of Andrew Watton is recommended.

7. The next stage would be to seek a meeting with the County Council and the Constabulary to explore the potential for Town Council acquisition of their freehold interests.

Financial Implications.

8. The Town Council does not have assets that can easily be disposed of. On completion of the Arkell Community Centre, a long term loan from the Public Works Loans Board of, in excess of £60,000 is anticipated to be required. The costs will be met by the letting income generated. Any acquisitions will need to be financed by borrowing.

9. The Town Council's Budget for 2011/2012 includes provision of £10,000 for the relocation of the Town Information Centre. The cost of appointing a property adviser can be met from this.

Conclusions.

10. A once in a generation opportunity may exist to rationalise the public buildings in the town centre. It is sensible for the Town Council to lead in exploring what is practical and feasible, through setting up a Working Party.

Cllrs. Stephen Robinson and Ian Crawley
9 March 2011