

**STANSTED MOUNTFITCHET PARISH COUNCIL****F&GP**

MINUTES of a meeting of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held at 8.05pm on Wednesday 7 December 2011 at the Friends' Meeting House, Chapel Hill, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex

**PRESENT:** Cllr P L Jones (Chairman), Cllrs B Gott, J Hudson, T Owen, R Rawlinson, J Rich and G Sell

**ATTENDING:** Mrs R Clifford – Clerk  
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**273 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs C Dean, J Loughlin and J Salmon.

**274 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST -** None.

**275 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2011 were signed by the Chairman as a true record.

**276 MATTERS ARISING -** none.

**277 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT -** none.

**278 FINANCE**

The list of cheques for signature was approved.

The Chairman reported that the UDC Cabinet had been asked to delay by eight weeks a decision on the allocation of the S.106 Foresthall Park Community Fund to ensure that all bids had been properly examined and to give other organisations the opportunity to submit bids. There was no hurry for decisions to be taken.

The Chairman reminded members that for some time he and the Clerk had been looking for an alternative fund for the Council's reserves offering a higher interest rate. Santander are offering a Business Bond paying 3% over one year and he proposed that the sum of £50,000 be placed with them. This was seconded by Cllr Sell and unanimously approved.

**279 LIGHTING**

a The outage report was tabled. The Clerk has chased up the contractors regarding lights which have not yet been repaired. The Clerk reported that the faults with lights in Bentfield Causeway and Green had finally been rectified. Cllr Hudson reported that the two lights in the Memorial Gardens need to be cleaned.

**280 WINDMILL**

The Chairman reminded members that a meeting would be held the following week with our co-Trustee and representatives of the Millers to discuss the way forward, particularly with regard to maintenance of the Mill now that so many more parts of it are moving. A report will be circulated to all ahead of the meeting listing the items to be considered.

Cllr Owen reported that the re-painting has almost been completed. The windows have been returned. One final piece of metal is due to be fitted the following day by IJP after which all of the mechanics should be operating smoothly.

Cllr Sell agreed that there was a need to re-establish the Windmill capital maintenance fund so that the Trustees will not have to find a vast amount of money in one go when the next refurbishment falls due.

## **281 BONFIRE AND FIREWORKS**

The Clerk circulated the final accounts for this event which had proven to be successful. Attendance appeared to have increased and many complimentary remarks had been received. Constructive comments had also been received from members on how to improve for next year, including properly authorised collectors for the Lower Street car park where many people gathered to watch the event free of charge.

## **282 CRAFTON GREEN PROJECT**

The Clerk had invited tenders from six firms of architects based on the Briefing Report prepared by Cty Cllr Ray Gooding. To date, five responses have been received. The Clerk will meet with Cllr Gooding to discuss these and circulate information to the working party. That group will take a decision on how to proceed to the planning stage as already agreed by the Council. Cllr Jones hoped that, once a scheme is agreed, planning might be achieved by mid-2012. Cllr Sell agreed with comments that the Council must keep the momentum going on this scheme.

## **283 NEW HOMES BONUS**

Cllr Jones reported that he had met with Cllrs Sell and Dean, along with the Clerk, to consider the applications which had been received from village organisations. In addition, Parish Council projects had also been considered and a report drawn up and circulated to members ahead of the meeting. One e-mail from Cllr Brett had been received in response, supporting a greater contribution to be made to Stansted Cricket Club rather than on planting daffodils. Since the report had been circulated, the Millers had applied for the sum of £2,000 to produce improved display/Information boards and for a visitors' guide book, and the Day Centre for funds to purchase audio-visual equipment/laptop/portable screen etc.

Cllr Sell stated that he was conscious that a decision on the distribution of the funding was to be taken at the Council meeting the following week and he hoped that this paper would give members a starting point for discussion. He stated his desire for preference to be given to Parish Council projects as, if these were not undertaken by the Council, nobody else would do them.

Cllr Owen queried whether any of the funds could be held over to the next financial year? The Clerk replied that it may be better for the Parish Council to claim the full allocation from UDC, but perhaps funds could be held in a separate account pending distribution locally.

Cllr Sell agreed that members must ensure the funds are spent in the best way possible, but he believed that mass daffodil planting would bring a benefit to the whole community. Cllr Jones agreed.

Members then considered the report item by item. It was generally agreed that the applications covered various age groups across the community, and different interests.

Cllr Jones spoke on the Youth Centre and it was hoped that a bid to the Community Fund would be successful. Cllr Sell agreed that if the work of the Centre continued, then the whole community would benefit as anti-social behaviour appears to have dropped and the Police agree and support the work of the Centre.

It was agreed to advise the Millers to apply to the Stansted Airport Community Trust – if that application was unsuccessful then this request would be considered.

Cllr Sell then proposed that the Council should be asked to consider the allocation of the NHB as detailed in the report. This was seconded by Cllr Gott and unanimously agreed.

## **284 BUDGET 2012/13**

The draft budget had been circulated again ahead of the meeting together with a detailed report from Cllr Jones. Members were informed that very recently the Government had stated that parish and town councils may have their precept capped in the future, and any “excessive” increase in the amount raised could be queried by the district council and become the subject of a local referendum, the costs of which would be borne by the community. If parishioners voted against the increase, a new budget would have to be set.

In line with national policy, staff pay has been frozen, although it was acknowledged that the Clerk’s salary scale, as set by the National Joint Council, has not yet announced the 2010/11 increase which will be implemented when received. The only new item which has been included in this draft is an allocation for the provision of green waste skips as these will be discontinued by UDC from April 2012 although they have reduced by 50% the hourly charge to parish councils. The Clerk has made a provision for one day per fortnight from April to November – UDC stated that they will not supply the skips beyond the end of November. The Council may consider bringing in a private contractor once further details were available for Christmas tree disposal etc.

Cllr Jones went through the draft budget and report item by item explaining the reasoning behind any increases or decreases and highlighting the windfall sums available. Under lighting, he proposed that the Council start to build a fund now to cover the periodic bulk clean and change as well as electrical and structural testing. If funds were set aside each year, this would avoid any excessive increase in the years that the tests fall due.

Cllr Jones finished by stating that, with the increased numbers of properties in Foresthall Park, and the boundary change which takes effect on 1 April, the income to the Parish Council will be greater than the increase in expenditure. The net result of that is that the Parish Council could, if it so chose, levy a reduced precept for 2012/13.

Cllr Rich believed that it would be better to have a freeze in council tax, in line with the county and district councils, rather than a reduction, with the surplus going into the Council’s reserves. The principle of this was discussed. Cllr Jones was in two minds given that the rise in the current year had been greater than hoped because of uncertainty around the number of occupied properties at Foresthall Park, he felt it would be fair to give something back. However, he would not wish to see the Council caught under the Government’s proposed new legislation on “excessive” spending, so perhaps a freeze would be a sound decision.

Cllr Rich then proposed the following

**RECOMMENDATION** that the level of Council Tax raised by the Parish Council should remain frozen for 2012/13 at £65 for a Band D household.

Seconded by Cllr Owen. With Cllrs Gott, Hudson and Rawlinson voting in favour, and Cllrs Jones and Sell abstaining, this was agreed for consideration by the Council.

Meeting closed 9.40pm