

## LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the **FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** meeting held on **Thursday 26 November 2009** at the King Edward Hall, Lindfield

**Present:** Rev. M. Davies (Chairman)  
Mr. M. Allen  
Mr. W. Blunden  
Mr. A. Gomme  
Mr. S. Henton  
Mrs. M. Nicolle  
Mrs. V. Upton  
Mr. S. Willcox

**Also present:** 1 member of the public

**In attendance:** Mrs. C. Irwin (Clerk)  
Mrs. S. Koliien (RFO)

The meeting commenced at 8.00 p.m.

### **312. WELCOME AND EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

312.1 The Chairman welcomed those present and announced the emergency procedure for the King Edward Hall.

### **313. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**

313.1 No apologies for absence had been received; all members of the Committee were present.

### **314. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS IN RESPECT OF ANY ITEM ON THE AGENDA.**

314.1 No such declarations were made.

### **315. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.**

315.1 Denmans Court lease. Mr. N. Kerslake stated that he had spoken on this matter at the Administration Sub Committee and he hoped that the Committee would consider the wider aspects and whether the rent asked was a fair and reasonable rent. He had spoken to two estate agents who believed that £6 per square foot was a reasonable rent. He added that the Council was in a very strong negotiating position and should consider this very carefully having received advice from two independent valuers.

### **316. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON 24 SEPTEMBER 2009.**

316.1 The Chairman called for approval of the Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting held on 24 September 2009. These were **AGREED** and the Chairman **SIGNED** the Minutes as a true record of that meeting.

### **317. ACTION LIST / PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT.**

317.1 The list, which had been circulated with the Agenda, was noted.

- Parish Office Survey. There had been little response from the owner of the adjoining property and the Committee would have to consider how to proceed.

## LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

- Risk Management. The Insurance and Risk Management Sub Committee should allocate time to conduct a review before the end of the financial year and then report to the next following F&GP meeting. It was **AGREED** that Cllr. Henton should be invited to join the Insurance and Risk Management Sub Committee and that the Sub Committee should meet before the next meeting of the F&GP Committee.
- Internal Control. Cllr. Davies had agreed to prepare a spread sheet to create framework for the periodic reviews of the internal control mechanism.

### 318. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT.

- 318.1 External Audit. Mazars had asked the Clerk and RFO for clarification of a few points and this was in hand. It was noted that the Council had been selected for an "intermediate audit" for which more information had been required to be submitted and the auditor's opinion would take longer to produce.

### 319. GRANTS AND DONATIONS

- 319.1 Victim Support. Victim Support worked with victims of crime in the community and witnesses in the courts. There were 339 reported crimes in the Lindfield Parish from 01.08.08 to 31.08.09. Cllr. Allen stated that there was a long history of support for this organisation from the Parish Council and that it was clear that the work of Victim Support was relevant in this area. It was **AGREED** to make a grant of £100.

**RESOLVED** that the Council, in accordance with its powers under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, should incur the following expenditure, which, in the opinion of the Council, is in the interests of the area or its inhabitants and will benefit them in a manner commensurate with the expenditure: a grant of £100 towards the work of Victim Support.

- 319.2 Neil's Club. Neil's Club had been set up in 2004 to meet the individual needs of young people with Alzheimer's type disease who were active. It was now run by West Sussex Crossroads and was not state funded. The request was for a contribution towards hiring a minibus and entry fees for outings. Cllrs. Allen and Gomme had looked at the criteria and considered that it would be appropriate to make a small donation this year on the basis that the Club's income from other sources had dwindled and their area covered this part of Mid Sussex. It was **AGREED** to support the request with a grant of £50.

**RESOLVED** that the Council, in accordance with its powers under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, should incur the following expenditure, which, in the opinion of the Council, is in the interests of the area or its inhabitants and will benefit them in a manner commensurate with the expenditure: a grant of £50 towards the cost of hiring a mini bus and entry fees for outings organised by Neil's Club.

- 319.3 It was noted that from the grants and donations budget of £1,500.00, just £450.00 had been awarded so far in this fiscal year and it was **AGREED** that the Council should make it known in the community that funds were still available to organisations which met the criteria. It was further **AGREED** that the Council's Grants and Donations Policy should be made known. The Clerk would put the policy on the website and an article would be put in the next newsletter.

### 320. FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE BUDGET (CURRENT YEAR)

- 320.1 To review payments made to date in 2009/10. **NOTED:** that to 31 October 2009:

- the budget progress relating to the Finance and General Purposes Committee budget showed that from a budget of £99,900 a total of £41,661.13 had been spent
- from the overall Council budget of £154,300, £59,705.56 had been spent

## LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

- for outstanding projects – from a budget of £22,441.10, £21,348.55 had been spent.
- from the General and Designated Reserves of £75,069.66, £8,920.20 had been spent.

320.2 Analysis of the Administration Budget. **NOTED** that from £77,650 a total of £35,435.42 had been spent as at 31 October.

320.3 To note the quarterly receipts and payments summary 04.04.09 – 30.09.09. **NOTED:** the quarterly receipts and payments summary 04.04.09 – 30.09.09 and the bank reconciliation.

320.4 To review the Council's reserves. It was recognised that the Council had a duty to monitor its reserves, particularly after the half year point and when planning the following year's budget. The RFO had provided a summary of allocated funds which showed £147,681.25 in hand at the end of October, of which £67,242 was allocated to Reserves and Outstanding Projects, leaving £80,439.24 to meet the budget for the year. If the budget were to be fully or overspent, there would be a shortfall of at least £14,155.20. However this was not anticipated and it was hoped that by the end of the year some savings would have been made to enable rebuilding of the reserve and the various projects would be examined carefully when preparing the 2010 – 11 budget.

### 321. TO CONFIRM ATTENDANCE AT TRAINING AND CONFERENCE EVENTS

321.1 Power of Wellbeing Training. **NOTED** and **CONFIRMED** that Cllr. Upton would be going to the Power of Wellbeing Training in Tangmere on 14 December.

321.2 Code of Conduct Training It was **NOTED** that a training event on the Code of Conduct was being organised by MSDC on 12 January 2010 and that bookings were to be made by 4 January.

### 322. ADMINISTRATION SUB COMMITTEE

322.1 To receive the Minutes of the meeting of the Administration Sub Committee held on 25 November 2009. The Minutes had been circulated by email the previous day. **RESOLVED** to receive the Minutes of the Meeting of the Administration Sub Committee held on 25 November 2009 and to confirm their recommendations.

322.2 Report by Chairman of the Administration Sub Committee on any issues arising from the meeting held on 25 November not itemised elsewhere on the agenda. Councillor Blunden had been elected as Chairman of the Administration Sub Committee and he reported that the main item discussed had been the administration budget which was on the Agenda at item 16. The Committee had also discussed the lease at Denmans Court which was the next item on the Agenda for the present meeting. The list of members who had agreed to take the lead on various tasks and functions had been reviewed and it had been concluded that this system had been of some benefit by sharing some of the Clerks' workload. However it was recognised that the nature of some tasks made them difficult to share, for example the preparation of the Directory. It had been agreed that staff appraisals would be arranged for the New Year and a recommendation to make two minor amendments to the RFO's contract would be considered during the confidential session.

### 323. TO CONSIDER ANY ISSUES RELATING TO ADDITIONAL ACCOMMODATION AT DENMANS COURT: TO INCLUDE UPDATE ON LEASE OF PREMISES.

323.1 Cllr. Blunden, Chairman of the Administration Sub Committee, summarised the background: four to five years previously the Clerk had drawn the Council's attention to the need for additional accommodation as there was a lack of working space at the Parish Office. Local Estate Agents had been asked to advise the Council of any properties on the market, but it was apparent that suitable premises were rarely available. The Council was unsuccessful in obtaining a rental unit at the Enterprise Park; however space was now

## LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

being rented at Masters, although it was only suitable for storage. The Archive and a large amount of old paperwork had been removed to this room and the working conditions at the Parish Office had been significantly improved. Denmans Court had seemed ideal as an alternative to Masters as it was more conveniently located and was suitable for other uses besides storage. Negotiations had been going on for some time on the basis of a rent of £9,000 a year. The rent for a High Street property, which had changed tenants relatively recently, was understood to be £18,000, despite being smaller. This had hitherto been discussed in confidential session as the lease was still a working draft and concerned the business interests of a third party. However it had been revealed in open session at the Admin Sub Committee that the terms of the draft lease were based on a standard lease, intended for buildings with multi occupancy and were not appropriate for this particular letting. The Administration Sub Committee had agreed to recommend to the F&GP Committee that the Council's Solicitor, Maurice Moore of Stephen Gallico, should be advised that the Council was not prepared to accept the lease as drafted, that he should return it to the landlord's solicitor requesting a bespoke lease based on the one for Cottage Carpets and that unless a satisfactory resolution had been achieved by 24 December the Council would withdraw. Since the Administration Sub Committee meeting, Maurice Moore had informed the Clerk that the latest attempt at compromise following a meeting between Mr. Moore the Clerk and the Chairman of Council, was unlikely to succeed.

During discussion Members felt that an independent market appraisal should be obtained and that if this were less than £9,000 the Council may still agree to it having taken the other benefits into consideration, particularly as the Council had been seeking a satisfactory solution to the space problems for approximately five years. It was **AGREED** to proceed with an independent valuation in the knowledge that this would incur a fee. It was also **AGREED** that the Solicitors should be asked to produce a bespoke lease based on the lease for the previous tenants and that a meeting should be arranged with the landlord, the Chairman of Council and the Clerk, as soon as possible, to ascertain what could and could not be agreed. It was **NOTED** that a decision was needed by January when the budget had to be agreed and it was **AGREED** that the Administration Sub Committee should meet early in January to consider any subsequent developments.

### 324. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 324.1 From the check list circulated with the Agenda it was noted that annual tasks were being completed on time and that the list was proving to be helpful for setting the agendas for meetings. A review of the Freedom of Information publication scheme and the charging schedule was due but as this meeting had a full agenda, this was to be dealt with at a future meeting and meanwhile the Clerk would check that all appropriate information was published on the new website.

### 325. ANNUAL REVIEW OF SPENDING LIMITS AND THRESHOLDS

- 325.1 Spending limits and thresholds for tenders and contracts and the petty cash float (Financial Regulations). The Financial Regulations had been adopted on 23 October 2008 and would be fully reviewed at least every four years, but it was good practice to review the spending limits and threshold figures annually. A paper had been circulated with the Agenda listing the relevant extracts. It was **AGREED** that there should be no change to these figures at this time.

Normal maximum award for Grants and Donations normal maximum award. The normal maximum award was currently £250, although by resolution of Council higher grants had occasionally been made. It was **AGREED** that the normal maximum award should remain at £250.

### 326. LINDFIELD PARISH DIRECTORY AND YEAR BOOK

- 326.1 2010 Edition. There would be a full financial report to F&GP in the New Year. It was **NOTED** that advertising was up by £435 compared with the 2009 edition, but at £4,435 it was still £965 less than the printing costs. However Lindfield Rural Parish Council had generously agreed to contribute £429.50 towards

## LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

the 2009 edition and £364.00 towards the 2010 edition and invoices would be raised shortly. It was also noted that there had been some difficulties with production, partly due to staff changes but mainly due to delays at the printers and the proofs had only been received on 20 November and GC Publishing could not give any indication as to when the Directories would be delivered.

- 326.2 Outstanding debts – advertising, 2009 edition. Repeated attempts to recover two outstanding payments for advertising in the 2009 edition had been unsuccessful. It was **AGREED** to write off as bad debts the sums of £145 (Scaynes Hill Landscapes) and £50 (Garden Grafters) in respect of advertising in the 2009 Directory. However these sums must be paid before future advertisements could be accepted from these businesses and payment in advance would be required for their new advertisements.

### 327. FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE'S BUDGET FOR 2010/11 FINANCIAL YEAR

- 327.1 Administration Budget. The Administration Sub Committee had considered each heading of the administration budget at the meeting on 25 November and the RFO had since made the appropriate adjustments. The tabled analysis showed the current budget, the spend to date, the estimated spend at year end and the RFO's suggested figures for the next year, presented in two columns to reflect the position with and without Denmans Court. It was estimated that the current Administration budget would be underspent by approximately £15,000. The rent for additional accommodation appeared as a separate item on the full F&GP budget and the RFO agreed to move it to the Administration breakdown. The RFO stated that the Administration budget was more or less the same year on year, but if the Council proceeded with renting Denmans Court additional expense would be incurred: an initial capital cost of setting it up with ongoing revenue costs, however it would be difficult to show Denmans Court as a separate cost centre as some of the costs would be tied in with those for the existing office. The Administration Sub Committee had agreed to raise the figure for Denmans Court equipment to £5,000 and to include a £1,000 sinking fund for those premises. The costs associated with Denmans Court in the first year, excluding rent, were estimated at £8,900. The Administration Budget total without Denmans Court was estimated at £67,925 and £76,825 with Denmans Court. It was **AGREED** that the Administration Budget proposals as recommended by the Administration Sub Committee should go forward to the draft budget to be presented to the meeting of the F&GP Committee on 14 January.

- 327.2 F&GP Budget – other items. It was **AGREED** that the figures proposed by the RFO should be incorporated into the draft budget proposals to be presented to the next meeting of the F&GP Committee

- 327.3 Overall Budget. The E&A Committee would be finalising its budget proposals as the meeting on 10 December. The Planning and Traffic Committee had agreed £10,000 for professional fees (e.g. planning consultant) and £200 for miscellaneous items such as planning publications. The RFO would be preparing a full budget proposal paper, including income, for the whole Council ready for the next meeting of the F&GP Committee on 14 January, at which the Committee would agree a recommendation for consideration at the Full Council meeting on 22 January in respect of the budget and the precept request.

### 328. ANY OTHER BUSINESS.

328. No items were raised.

This part of the meeting concluded at 9.10 p.m.

There followed a second period for questions / comments from members of the public.

Grants and donations. Mr. N. Kerslake stated that charitable institutions, especially locally, were not well funded and this was exacerbated by the recession. He suggested that the grants and donations budget should be increased to £2,000 and that consideration should be given to how to communicate to the public that funds were available.

## LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Denmans Court. Mr. N. Kerslake commented on the strong position the Council was in compared with commercial tenants during the recession and stated that the current market value should be recognised when negotiating the rent.

329. The following two items related to a personnel matter and to a commercially sensitive issue. It was therefore **RESOLVED** under Standing Order no. 35(a) "that in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the press and public be temporarily excluded and they are instructed to withdraw".

The Confidential part of the meeting began at 9.15 p.m.

330. **TO CONSIDER RECOMMENDATION OF THE ADMINISTRATION SUB COMMITTEE RELATING TO TWO MINOR AMENDMENTS TO THE RFO'S STATEMENT OF PARTICULARS OF EMPLOYMENT**

- 330.1 Two minor amendments to the RFO's Statement, as recommended by the Administration Sub Committee, were **AGREED**.

331. **LEASE FOR DENMANS COURT**

- 331.1 There was a further brief exchange of information relating to details in the draft lease. The actions agreed at Minute 323.1 were not altered or added to.

The meeting concluded at 9.25 p.m.