



**NOTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE PROPERTY WORKING GROUP
HELD ON MONDAY 5 JULY AT 2.00PM**

PRESENT: Councillor Scicluna (Chairman) and Councillors Dignum and Plowman and Quail

IN ATTENDANCE: Deputy Town Clerk, Property Manager and Member Services Support Officer

NOTES

Post meeting note: Due to technical issues, the Chairman's connection to the Zoom meeting dropped at a couple of points during the debates. At these points, discussions of the relevant issues were ongoing. However, no Working Group decisions were made during her absence.

The Chairman informed the Working Group that Councillors Bell and Quail had agreed to join the Property Working Group, bringing the total membership to six.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Quail to her first meeting of the Property Working Group.

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

The Mayor (Councillor J Hughes) and Councillor Bell were absent from the meeting.

12. MINUTES OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 10 MAY 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Property Working Group meeting held on Monday 10 May 2021, having been printed and circulated, be approved and signed by the Chairman at a later date.

The Property Manager's Report had been circulated to all Members with the agenda in connection with the agenda items 2 to 6.

13. COUNCIL HOUSE

(a) Salix grant funded energy improvements.

The Property Manager advised that Listed Building Consent was being awaited for the installation of the additional solar panel array as part of the Salix funding.

Members were informed that a decision was expected during the week beginning 19 July 2021 but that no indication had been forthcoming about what that decision might be.

The Property Manager also advised that a structural engineer would be undertaking a survey of the Assembly Room roof on Friday 9 July 2021 to confirm whether it would be able to support the new solar panels. He further advised that no issues were expected to be identified.

(b) Carbon Neutral Strategy.

The Property Manager reported that he had instructed Save Money Cut Carbon to undertake the development of this strategy, as agreed at the previous meeting. He further reported that he was liaising with their surveyor to provide all relevant information.

Members were advised that the report and recommendations were expected to be available in early September.

(c) Proposal to upgrade heating controls to reduce energy use.

The Working Group were informed that the City Council had recently been receiving very sizable gas bills, even during the period of closure for the Council House.

Members were informed that this was due to long standing issues with the current heating controls and radiator valves that were not controlling the heat in the building as they were designed to. They were also informed that this was due to the technology that had been installed not being suitable for the style of building or for the hard wear that being in a public space had incurred.

The Property Manager advised Members that he had been liaising with the City Council's current heating maintenance contractor with a view to putting forward a costed proposal for the upgrade of the heating system controls.

He further advised that the quote, which had been circulated with the agenda, specified the replacement of the central heating controller with one fitted with an outside weather compensator, as well as replacing the unsuitable radio controlled radiator valves with lockable thermostatic radiator valves to overcome issues with damage, tampering and radio reception quality.

Members were informed that this system design would better control the heating by making adjustments based on the weather outside, as well as making sure the radiators were not running if it was too warm inside. They were also informed that it had been estimated that the new system could cut the City Council's gas bills by approximately 50% meaning the investment would be repaid over approximately 2 to 3 years.

The Chairman and Working Group were supportive of the proposal on both the money saving and environmentally friendly aspects of the project.

Councillor Quail asked for confirmation that the new valves would be resistant to tampering. The Property Manager confirmed this was the case and also that the current valves were very susceptible to damage by hirers and subsequent malfunction.

The Property Manager reported that he had also sent the contractor's proposal to the surveyor at Save Money Cut Carbon for their review to ensure it was in line with the ongoing carbon neutral strategy they had been working on. This approach was supported by the Working Group.

He advised the Working group that, subject to the response from Save Money Cut Carbon, he was recommending that the upgrade work be undertaken as specified.

He further advised that, while potential upgrade to heat pump systems had been discussed, the current wet heating system in the Council House would not be suitable due to the operating temperatures and pressures of heat pump installations. This meant that discussions were being focused on working with the current system rather than complete replacement, including more use of green electricity or hydrogen burning boilers.

After a short further discussion, the Property Working Group AGREED to recommend to the Finance Working Group that the upgrade of the heating system by Saunders go ahead as proposed subject to the obtaining of two additional comparative quotes for the upgrade from other suppliers, and confirmation from Save Money Cut Carbon that this would not compromise the longer term carbon neutral strategy currently under development. This work to be funded from the Council House Reserve.

Post-meeting note: Save Money Cut Carbon have confirmed that the heating control upgrade as proposed would not compromise any medium to long term recommendations and that, currently, there is not a financially viable alternative to the gas boilers currently installed in the Council House, but it was hoped that advances in air source heat pump technology would make it viable in the next 5-10 years.

(d) Council Chamber – investigation in to signs of recent structural movement.

The Property Manager informed Members that, recently, he had noticed cracks had appeared and lengthened in the area of the south-west corner of the Council Chamber. He also informed Members that this section of the building had previously had work undertaken to rectify similar issues.

The Working Group was advised that a structural surveyor from Archibald-Shaw would be inspecting the issue on Wednesday 7 July 2021 to assess the matter and propose actions that may need to be taken. They were also advised that this could mean installing “tell-tales” to monitor any movements in the structure of the building.

The Property Manager advised the Working Group that he had reviewed the details of the previous work but that the surveyor at the time had now retired so was unable to provide further advice.

Councillor Plowman asked for an update on where the redecoration of the Council Chamber was on the building maintenance schedule.

The Property Manager advised that no set date had been proposed for this work as it had been felt that the recent external works took priority so that the building itself was weather tight.

He also advised that, now that this work had been undertaken, the Council Chamber was likely to be the next large project to be planned.

Members were informed that the insides of the Council Chamber windows had recently been repainted due to their poor condition. They were also informed that it could be possible to undertake minor repairs to cracks and peeling paint in the Council Chamber in the short term as a quick fix.

The Property Manager advised that, due to the special nature of the Council Chamber and its history, any larger scale work would require specialist contractors and a significant financial commitment.

Councillor Plowman expressed his support for this approach and informed Members that he felt that the time was coming when the full refurbishment would become necessary due to the over all condition of the room.

The Chairman informed Members that the last redecoration had taken place in 1976 and that she understood that funds had previously been set aside for the work but that she was unsure if these funds were still available.

Post-meeting note: The Deputy Town Clerk has advised that, further to a decision by the Finance Committee approximately five years ago, the various Council House reserves had been combined in to a single reserve of just under £100,000. She further advised that this has since been used for a number of maintenance projects at the Council House but that there is an annual transfer of £20,000 in to the Reserve from the City Council's revenue budget.

14. ALLOTMENTS

(a) Durnford Close

The Property Manager reported that the tenant and waiting list information had now been transferred to Hyde Housing in a GDPR compliant process. Members were informed that the water billing would be transferred to Hyde on 1 November 2021.

Councillor Plowman commented that, after a recent visit, he felt that the Durnford allotments were being handed over in good order.

In response to a question from Councillor Quail, the Property Manager gave Members a short reminder of the history behind the decision that had been taken to hand back the allotments on this site to Hyde Housing.

(b) Update

It was noted that there were currently two vacant plots at the St James site with 262 people on the waiting list for allotments across the City.

(c) Wild flower areas

The Working Group were advised that the Property Team had trialled planting wildflower areas on some of the common areas of the allotment sites, with the planting taking place as far away from the active allotments as possible.

The Property Manager informed Members that this had resulted in a number of complaints from allotment holders due to the self-seeding on their plots from wildflowers that had been planted.

Members were also informed that correspondence had been received in response to standard "uncultivated plot" letters, blaming the wildflower planting for creating the issue.

The Property Manager recommended that, despite the positive aspects of wildflower planting, such as increased pollinator populations; no further planting of this type should take place on the allotment sites. He further recommended that the Property Team should look at wildflower planting on other green areas under the City Council's management with one such area being Brewery Field.

The Chairman and Members agreed that, while the idea was a good one, allotments were historically intended for growing food and the City Council should set an example by not wilding the allotment site common areas.

15. DISUSED BURIAL GROUNDS – ST BARTHOLOMEW’S

The Property Manager reminded the Working Group that he had written to the Church Commissioners regarding the proposed sale of St Bartholomew’s church and churchyard for use as a dance studio.

Members were advised that a response had been received confirming that, should the sale go ahead, the City Council would be released from its maintenance obligations under S.215 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Members were further advised that the response had also given assurances regarding the protection and preservation of the war memorial on the site.

Councillor Quail, as a member of the Westgate Residents’ Association (WRA), informed the Working Group that the WRA had also been reassured by responses received from the Church Commissioners regarding the sale of the St Bartholomew’s site.

She also informed Members that the intentions of the new owners of the church included opening the facilities for wider community use.

16. BUS STOPS/SHELTERS – SWANFIELD DRIVE

The Chairman reminded Members that this had been a long running issue that had now resurfaced.

The Property Manager summarised the history of the request to install a community bus shelter at the bus stop nearest to the Swanfield Community Centre.

He reminded the Working Group that, as the pavement at that point was too narrow, the shelter would have to be set back from the path and that an area of approximately 1800mm by 900mm would need to be “reclaimed” from the neighbouring ground which would include removing a panel from the current fence line and installing the shelter in its place.

Members were also reminded that A2 Dominion, as the landlords of the Swanfield Estate, had indicated a willingness to release the land for a financial contribution but that the agreement needed to be reached between themselves and Chichester District Council for the work to proceed.

The Working Group were advised that this was beyond the powers of the City Council as the Parish Council.

The Property Manager reported that the Town Clerk had now contacted senior management at Chichester District Council, requesting that they expedite the legal and contractual matters between the District Council and A2 Dominion; to make the necessary land available for a shelter.

He advised Members that, once this had been done, it would be possible to liaise with West Sussex County Council to obtain S.106 funding to install the new Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) ready shelter.

Councillor Plowman asked for clarification about the application of the General Power of Competence by the City Council in order to progress the bus shelter installation.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that, while the General Power of Competence could apply in this situation; it would be necessary for the issues between the District Council and A2 Dominion to be resolved before it was legal to do so.

17. PUBLIC REALM PROJECTS

(a) Wayfinding (finger posts)

The Property Manager reminded Members that the existing finials and fingers had now been removed and that the refurbishment work to the posts had been completed with the new post in East Street also having been installed.

Members were advised that Leander Architectural had experienced delays in providing the new fingers for the posts and that it was hoped that the work would now be completed by the middle of July.

The Property Manager expressed frustration at the further delay from Leander Architectural.

The Chairman highlighted that, with the opening up of the local economy and with visitor numbers rising; it was even more important that this project be completed as soon as possible.

The Property Manager advised Members that he was pushing for completion from Leander Architectural and that the contractor due to install the finger pointers was ready to go as soon as they had been supplied.

(b) Precinct paving

The Property Manager advised that this issue had been discussed by the City Council's Planning Adviser at the Planning and Conservation Working Group meeting held on 27 May 2021.

He further advised that she had suggested at the meeting that a resin bonded surface be agreed.

Members were reminded that the Property Manager had proposed a similar surface to West Sussex County Council Highways Service several years previously and that, while it would be visually appealing; it had been rejected on the grounds of lack of durability under heavy traffic situations and the difficulty of implementing seamless repairs in the event of utility service excavations taking place.

The Property Manager expressed concerns that this issue had been raised by the Planning Adviser and that this had caused confusion with Officers at West Sussex County Council. He also suggested that it was important that the City Council Committees and Working Groups should take a joined up approach on issues of this nature.

The Working Group agreed that it was very important that this issue continue to be raised with the appropriate partner organisations as regular reports were being received of trips and falls in the city centre due to the poor condition of the current surfaces.

Councillor Plowman advised Members that, while it was important to choose the correct surface for the intended use of the precinct surfaces; it was more important that progress was made given the very longstanding nature of the problems being experienced.

He informed Members that the problems being experienced by visitors would deter tourists and others from coming in to the city centre at a time when it was vital to increase visitor numbers. He also informed Members that, in his opinion, the solutions being looked at had moved away from the very high budget proposals to something that would be more affordable and that it was important to keep the pressure up to make progress.

The Chairman reminded Members that the original present surfacing was now 47 years old and that it had been handed over to the County Council in good condition but that very little maintenance had been done since.

Councillor Dignum agreed with the points being made about the condition of the precinct surfaces and advised Members that he felt that the only appropriate funding stream currently available would be the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds available to the City Council and Chichester District Council.

He suggested that it may be appropriate to review the priorities currently within the CIL infrastructure plans to better prioritise the precinct resurfacing project.

In response to a question from Councillor Dignum, the Property Manager advised that he had previously undertaken a costing estimate for resurfacing North and East Streets with tarmac bays broken up with granite setts with this estimate being approximately £650,000. He further advised that raw material costs had recently been rising significantly and that a new estimate of £800,000 would now be appropriate.

The Property Manager informed Members that this cost was only for the central parts of the precinct. He reminded the Working Group that an important part of the discussion would be on how to limit the use of the precinct by heavy goods vehicles and also how to restrict heavy vehicles from parking and driving on the York Stone paving immediately to the sides of the areas being discussed.

He further informed Members that, if these restrictions were to be implemented, the repairs to this area could be specified for foot traffic while the central precinct areas could be specified for heavier vehicle traffic with limits placed on which vehicles would be allowed to travel along it.

Councillor Plowman reminded the Working Group that, further to concerns about the possible use of Tarmac; the areas being discussed had previously been laid to Tarmac roads and that recent resurfacing in other areas of Chichester with Tarmac had provided acceptable surfaces within the Conservation Area. He also suggested that it was not Tarmac in itself that could be a problem but the digging up and patching of the surface that created the greatest issues.

The Chairman reminded Members that, as had previously been discussed, towns such as Romsey had undertaken precinct resurfacing using coloured Tarmac which had resulted in improvements to the areas where it had been used.

After a short further discussion, Councillor Dignum agreed to a request from the Chairman to try to progress the issue with Chichester District Council.

18. BOARD OF TOWN CLERKS

The Property Manager advised Members that, further to a suggestion from Councillor Plowman it had been suggested that a Board of Town Clerks be installed in an appropriate location in the Council House to accompany the existing Board of Mayors and Board of Freedom Holders.

He advised Members that he would welcome suggestions from the Working Group for potential locations of the Board of Clerks if the decision to proceed was taken.

Councillor Plowman gave the Working Group a short background on his reasons for making his suggestion.

He advised Members that he felt that it would be appropriate to list the Town Clerks as they formed an important part of the City Council's history and that, due to the relatively small number of Town Clerks, the board would not need to be of a significant size.

Councillor Plowman informed the Working Group, that as part of the traditional gift from an outgoing Mayor, he would be willing to make a contribution to the cost of adding a Board of Town Clerks in the Council House.

The Chairman agreed with the proposal and suggested that a board in the same style as the existing boards would be appropriate. She also advised Members that she had researched Town Clerks of Chichester back to 1685 and that the list to the current day would include 20 names.

After a short further discussion, the Working Group asked the Property Manager to put together a costed proposal for the installation of a Board of Town Clerks with this proposal being presented to the next meeting of the Property Working Group.

19. ITEMS TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AGENDA

- Update on the proposal to add a Board of Town Clerks at the Council House
- Public Realm projects
- Transfer of Round Table regalia to the Council House

Date of next meeting – Wednesday 1 September 2021 at 10am

The meeting closed at 2.49pm