



**NOTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE PROPERTY WORKING GROUP
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 1 SEPTEMBER AT 10.00AM**

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

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Gaskin

IN ATTENDANCE: Property Manager and Member Services Support Officer

NOTES

20. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from The Mayor (Councillor J Hughes).

21. MINUTES OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 5 JULY 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Property Working Group meeting held on Monday 5 July 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.

22. COUNCIL HOUSE

(a) Salix grant funded energy improvements.

The Property Manager advised that all the works planned for the first Salix grant funded project had been completed.

Members were advised that this included the installation of the additional solar panels, the low energy hand dryers and the completion of the replacement of the old light fittings with LED equivalents.

The Property Manager referred Members to his report and indicated that the new solar panels were wired in and generating electricity and that they were only visible from a very restricted viewpoint.

(b) Carbon Neutral Strategy.

The Property Manager reported that he had supplied all the required information for the strategy report and that the initial draft had now arrived.

Members were advised that the report would be circulated once it had been finalised.

Members were further advised that the report would cover broader issues relating to the City Council's carbon footprint including vehicles, all physical property and activities.

Councillor Plowman commented on a very positive story that had recently been published in the Chichester Observer about the solar panels and the City Council's efforts in this area.

The Property Manager informed the Working Group that it was expected that the report would outline other possible sources of grant funding.

The Working Group then discussed current alternatives such as ground or air source heat pumps and hydrogen burning boilers for the future of the Council House's heating requirements.

The Property Manager reported that the heat pump solutions were not suitable for the Council House due to potential archaeological issues in the surrounding ground, as well as the physical design and layout of the Council House that would necessitate significant structural work on the building.

The Property Manager also reported that he had begun investigating the potential for a City Council electric vehicle to supplement the existing large flatbed/tipper truck which could be used when the capacity of the large vehicle was not needed.

Members were further advised that the investigation also encompassed the possible installation of electric vehicle charging facilities to accommodate a City Council electric vehicle and to encourage wider use of electrical vehicles by Councillors and Officers.

Councillor Plowman emphasised the need to prioritise the City Council's response to the climate emergency in light of the extreme weather events currently being witnessed.

The Working Group agreed that the City Council was making good progress and that any further developments in this area would be welcomed.

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

The Property Manager reminded Members that he had previously advised that the incumbent heating contractor, Saunders Specialised Services, had provided a quote of £7,500 + VAT to install new thermostatic radiator valves and heating controls to allow better and more efficient heating of the Council House.

The Working Group was advised that the Property Manager had, as requested, obtained two additional quotes, both of which had been more expensive. He also advised Members that, as Saunders were very familiar with Council House heating system, they were best placed to undertake the work.

The Property Manager reported that he had placed the order, which was to be funded from the Council House reserve, and that the work was due to take place shortly. He also reported that it was expected that the savings on the gas heating costs would repay this investment in a relatively short period of time.

Councillor Plowman expressed his support for the upgrade in terms of the energy efficiency as well as the cost saving it would enable.

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

The Property Manager advised Members that he had commissioned a structural survey from Archibald Shaw in respect of suspected subsidence at the front of the Council House.

He also advised that he was awaiting the final report but that he had been informed the front of the building was showing slight signs of subsidence which could require underpinning in the future.

The Working Group was advised that the surveyor had expressed an opinion that the subsidence may be due to soil being washed away by surface water drainage in the street drain gully that ran in front of the Council House.

The Property Manager explained to Members that the issue may be being exacerbated by the shape of the highway guiding the water to the drain gullies.

Members discussed the issue and were reminded that the gullies had been put in place during the pedestrianisation of North Street in 1974 by West Sussex County Council.

The Working Group suggested that West Sussex County Council could be approached for assistance with the cost of any underpinning. The Property Manager responded that he expected that the City Council's buildings insurance would cover any subsidence work.

Councillor Gaskin emphasised that addressing the issue of drainage was vital to the resilience and response efforts necessary to combat the increased likelihood of "extreme" weather events.

(e) Update on event room hire

The Property Manager advised Members that, after a very tough year for room hire in 2020-2021 due to Covid restrictions; the situation was not greatly improved in the 2021-2022 year.

Members were advised that, while the over all picture was not improving quickly, there were positive signs with Cards for Good Causes, the Chichester Chamber Concerts and NADFAS (The Arts Society), all expressing a wish to start using the Council House again.

Members were also advised that the expectation was that conferences that had been taking place online in during the pandemic would likely continue to do so.

The Property Manager informed Members that he felt that it would be best to start thinking creatively about alternative types of use and users for the Council House to drive income generation without relying on the users who had been regular customers in the past.

He highlighted an example from BBC4 where rock concerts featuring well known artists had taken place in front of small audiences but in venues of historic interest. Members agreed that, given the history of the Council House, this would be a very apt use of the space.

Councillor Bell asked about the progress of the series of rock concerts that had been held in the Assembly Room recently. The Property Manager advised that they had appeared to be running well although there had been one or two issues

with positive Covid tests among band members meaning short notice cancellations.

In response to a question from Councillor Plowman, the Property Manager advised that, while the Government now issued guidance rather than directives; the City Council still had its risk assessment in place for the building and that it was expected that hirers would take responsibility for putting in place safe and appropriate procedures and policies for their events.

23. ALLOTMENTS – UPDATE

The Property Manager advised that, with all allotment plots currently occupied, there was a waiting list of 259 people who had applied for a City Council allotment.

He also advised that 60 letters had recently been issued to allotment holders where it was felt that the plots had not been properly maintained.

Members were reminded that the City Council and its Officers had expended considerable time and resources in maintaining the allotments and ensuring that plots were handed to new tenants in good condition.

Councillor Plowman, speaking as an allotment holder and in response to messages he had received from other allotment holders; advised the Working Group that he felt it had been a particularly bad year for allotments with problems around blight, poor weather and bad crop yields.

He also advised that he felt the timing of the recent round of letters was not ideal as allotment holders closed down from the growing season and prepared for autumn.

Members were also advised that he felt that the wording of the letter had been found to be upsetting for some of the recipients.

Councillor Gaskin reported that she had been contacted by other allotment holders about the letters and other concerns and that she would be putting these and other suggestions into a report which would be presented in the future.

24. BUS STOPS/SHELTERS – SWANFIELD DRIVE

The Working Group was advised that agreement between Chichester District Council and A2 Dominion, the Housing Association for the area; was still being awaited. They were also advised that no works could go ahead until this had been finalised.

The Property Manager reported that he had recently had a meeting with the Chichester District Council Monitoring Officer who was in the process of trying to ascertain the progress of the discussions about the Swanfield bus shelter project.

The Property Manager advised that he had received comments from Councillor Lishman, also a Stagecoach Buses driver, querying the necessity for a bus shelter at the location being discussed.

Members were reminded of discussions that had taken place two years previously with Stagecoach management who had also queried the necessity for this particular shelter. During this discussion, Stagecoach had highlighted that a more appropriate location for a new bus shelter might be one of the stops closer to St Richards Hospital.

The Working Group discussed the various locations of bus stops in the area and whether the Covid pandemic and reductions to bus regularity might have affected the use of buses on this route.

Councillor Dignum suggested that investigations could take place about the suitability of other bus stops for a new shelter on land with less complex consent requirements, closer to the hospital.

The Working Group were reminded that this project was of particular interest to the current Mayor and, after a short further discussion, agreed that it was too far progressed to cancel given that the Section 106 funds had already been identified.

The Property Manager was asked to investigate possible additional sites for bus shelters nearer to the hospital and report back to the next meeting.

25. PUBLIC REALM PROJECTS

(a) Wayfinding (finger posts)

The Property Manager advised Members that approximately half of the new finger pointers had been fitted to the refurbished posts with the remaining pointers expected to be delivered to the installer's depot imminently.

Members were advised that a small number of issues had been identified with the angles between the pointers meaning that the directions being indicated were not quite accurate. Members were further advised that this issue was being rectified and it was expected that all the new finger pointers would be in place by the end of September.

The Property Manager expressed the opinion that he felt that the new pointers and posts were a big improvement and an attractive addition to the city centre.

Councillor Plowman reported that he had received comments that the finger posts looked unfinished and asked for confirmation that the City Council finials would be reinstated as part of the project.

The Property Manager confirmed that the finials had been restored off site and that they would be reinstated once all the finger pointers had been installed and there had been confirmation that they were all correct.

The Chairman expressed her thanks that this would be happening and reminded the Working Group that the finials had been the City Council's contribution to the original finger post project.

26. BOARD OF TOWN CLERKS

The Property Manager reported that he had received a quote from Acorn Joinery in the amount of £275 + VAT to construct a Board of Town Clerks in a similar design to the existing Board of Mayors.

He also reported that the board would measure 1800mm x 750mm.

Members were advised that the City Council's signwriter would be undertaking the black lacquering and gold leaf signwriting and that he was awaiting confirmation of the words and names before providing a quote for the work.

Councillor Plowman informed Members that he would be happy to pay the cost of the Acorn Joinery work as his gift to the City Council as departing Mayor.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Plowman for his gift.

The Property Manager highlighted the two potential locations he had identified in his report with his recommendation being the top of the main staircase as it would line up with the other pictures and features.

The other location, to the left of the Assembly Room anteroom door was felt to be too obscured.

Councillor Quail expressed concern about locating the board at the top of the stairs on safety grounds. The Property Manager advised that he had taken this into consideration and that he felt that the board would be easily visible to viewers standing further back from the top of the stairs.

The Working Group agreed that the top of the stairs looked like a good location subject to confirmation.

Members were invited to visit the Council House to view the suggested locations with the installation position to be confirmed at a later date.

The Chairman agreed to provide the words for the board and also the list of names of the Town Clerks who would need to be included.

Councillor Bell suggested to Members that relatives of those being included should be contacted to ensure that the names were added to the board in an appropriate format.

After a short discussion, the Working Group agreed that the names of all former Town Clerks should be included in the form that had been published in the Chairman's book "A Chain of Mayors", with the incumbent Town Clerk being asked his preference at the time of his retirement.

27. ITEMS TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AGENDA

No items were suggested

Date of next meeting – Monday 8 November 2021 at 10am

The meeting closed at 10.55am