

## Finance & Governance Committee

**Present:** Cllrs Cooper-Marsh (Chair), Banks, Chapman, Collins, Goodman, Hitchin, Kumar, Maslen, Pitt and Slade

**Absent:**

**In attendance:** Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk

**Minutes** of the meeting of the **Finance & Governance committee** held on **Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2024** at **7.15pm** in the Priory Centre, Priory Lane, St Neots, PE19 2BH.

### Public Participation

There were two Members of the public present.

### ACTIONS

- 134 Apologies for Absence**  
No apologies were received. Admin
- 135 Declarations of Interest**  
Cllrs Pitt and Slade declared an interest in agenda item 9, the Priory Centre Redevelopment as an HDC Member.
- 136 Minutes**  
**RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 19<sup>th</sup> March 2024 as a true and accurate record subject to amending to state Cllr Cooper-Marsh chaired the meeting. Admin

*The Chairperson moved agenda item 4 up the agenda as a representative was present to speak on the item.*

### Revamp the Ramp

Members received and considered a report from the Town Clerk on grant funding previously awarded to Revamp the Ramp and a request that the Council consider further funding following the outcome of other match funding applications.

A representative for Revamp the Ramp addressed the Council and informed the committee that two grant applications towards the project had been unsuccessful, but that the outcome of a £15,000 application to the A428 fund was still awaited.

The representative expressed his gratitude for the Council's support and the funding it had awarded to the project. He also stated his concerns that the project and available funding will continue to 'go round in circles' without progress the much-needed enhancements the project aimed to deliver.

It was clarified that the project intended to deliver an enhanced facility which could host national competitions and provide a free facility where young people could participate in sport and learn new skills. The funding was not for general maintenance and repair, which was the responsibility of Huntingdonshire District Council.

The District Council was in the process of committing £5,000 in funding towards upgrading lighting at the facility and a further £4,000 for some required repairs.

Members asked a number of questions, including;

- Had other quotes been obtained for the works?  
It was confirmed two other quotes had been received and could be provided to the Council. The quote provided was the best quote and the contractor had continued to hold the price.
- Is there a timescale for when works would need to start?  
Works should start soon and take place when the weather is good. Works will take approximately 4 weeks.
- Has flooding been considered?  
The enhancements have been chosen specifically to cope with flooding. If undertaken, they will give the skatepark a further 15 years of life.

Members expressed their support for the project and emphasised the importance of the skatepark, which is an asset to the town.

Members noted the CIC had approximately £10,000 of its own funding to commit to the project, which had been raised from donations and grants.

Members queried whether CIL funding from the District Council could be made available. It was confirmed that it is not known when the next round of funding applications might be. The District Council are currently reviewing their CIL policy and funding process.

Proposed and seconded that the Council increase the funding awarded to Revamp the Ramp's Skatepark project by £25,210.88 and that this funding comes from the Council's CIL reserves.

The proposed funding considers the outstanding application to the A428 fund, which the Council hopes will be successful.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that St Neots Town Council grant a further £25,210.88 in grant funding to Revamp the Ramp CIC towards delivering the St Neots Skatepark ramp enhancement project, totalling £50,210.88 in Town Council funding. That the funding awarded comes from the Council's CIL reserves.

## 137 Payments

Members received and noted payments for February 2024.

A Member raised a query of a payment for flooring at St Neots Museum. It was explained that this was covered by the Council's maintenance budget for the museum, which it established to address repair and maintenance of the Council owned building.

## 138 Financial Governance

- i) Members received and considered the Council's Risk Assessment for 2024/25. The only amendment to the Risk Assessment was changing wording to reflect the Council 'notes' rather than approves monthly payments.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council adopt the proposed Council Risk Assessment for 2024/25.

- ii) Members received and reviewed the Council's Investment Strategy.

Members discussed the Council's investment of funds in savings accounts. It was noted that the Town Council needs to have quick access funds and it is not like a County or District Council where a long-term investment strategy and portfolio is needed. Members discussed bringing forward a future proposal on allocating further funds to the CCLA account to receive a higher rate of interest.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** the Council re-adopt the Council's Investment Strategy with an updated yield figure.

- iii) Members noted that the National Association of Local Councils was due to release updated model Financial Regulations which would be brought to Council for consideration once available.

## 139 Steve Van de Kerkhove Eynesbury Community Hub Recommendation from Operations and Amenities

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee that the Council progress with tarmac surfacing of the access track and parking area at the Steve Van de Kerkhove Eynesbury Community hub. The Chairperson of the Operations and Amenities Committee introduced the item.

Members discussed the recommendation, with a Member raising queries on whether the cost of tarmacking would be a good long-term investment which would uplift the building and what it can provide the community.

The Council's General Manager for the Priory and Eatons Centre explained the need for improved surfacing and the groups which would be using the facility during the Priory Centre closure. There is also the possibility of securing a longer-term tenant. Both organisations who will be using the building require better access.

A Member commented that the buildings will continue to be used for the community and will evolve over time to suit the needs of users and demand from residents. A tarmac surface will help make the buildings a more attractive and useful asset in the future.

A Member queried whether surfacing would include all of a large grass area adjacent to the former St John's building. It was clarified it would not, although a pedestrian pathway had been allowed for.

It was proposed and seconded to recommend to Council the motions as written.

It was commented that Councillors did have concerns over the environmental impact of the proposed surfacing, but it was the option that delivered the most suitable outcomes for need, cost benefit and requirement.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council progress with tarmac surfacing of the access track, car parking area and pedestrian walkway at the Steve Van de Kerkhove Community Hub and that Company B is approved as the preferred contractor at a cost of £73,000.00 allocated from the Council's Community Building Earmarked Reserve (EMR).

#### 140 **Armed Forces Day Budget**

##### **Recommendation from Promotion and Events**

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Promotion and Events Committee that £3,000 earmarked from the AFD 2023 budget is used to facilitate raising awareness of HM Armed Forces services and the 80th anniversary of D-Day.

It was explained members of the AFD committee are keen to raise awareness of the HM Armed Forces and their roles to a wider audience. The Armed Forces Weekend provides an ideal opportunity to do this using a big screen which will have videos, information, and short interviews on display throughout the event.

Members raised a number of questions regarding the proposed project and expenditure and shared some concerns over producing a quality video and what this would involve. The proposed budget would cover screen hire, but would not leave much of a budget for video production.

It was requested that more information be brought to the Town Council meeting on the proposal, particularly around the following points;

- Is the proposed video to be created and edited by external professionals?
- Is it to be specific to this event and St Neots?
- If it is to be produced, filmed and edited by staff how much resource will this take up?
- What length will the video be?
- Is audio play back included in the costs?

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that £3,000 earmarked from the AFD 2023 budget is used to facilitate raising awareness of HM Armed Forces services and the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day by using a large screen to show videos, information and interviews throughout the event. That the recommendation is subject to further information on the details of the proposed videos and their production coming forward.

#### 141 **Priory Centre Refurbishment**

Members received and considered a report from the Town Clerk on the Priory Centre refurbishment project and available funds should the Council consider investing in the refurbishment and redevelopment of the building. It was noted that delivering

the full-scale redevelopment of the building which included all of the Town Council's priorities would exceed HDCs budget for the project. Therefore, the Council had an opportunity to consider providing funding if it wishes to achieve all of its desired outcomes.

Members discussed the proposition of the Town Council providing funding for the Priory Centre refurbishment at length. Members expressed support for the project and the principle that the Council may providing funding to achieve a refurbished building that met its priorities.

However, concern was raised over lease arrangements between the Town Council and Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) for the building. A Member commented that if the District Council was looking to fundamentally change the relationship within the lease this would not, in their view by acceptable. There needs to be an understanding of building ownership and equity should the council invest any funding.

Two key areas of concern were raised;

- 1) Removal of a contribution to the operational losses of the building by Huntingdonshire District Council.
- 2) A split in equity should the building ever be sold by the District Council.

Any investment should include having suitable lease arrangements in place.

Never heard mention of rent to be charged, officers have talked about removing losses. Discussion about protection its asset. Any investment we make should have suitable lease agreements in place. There should be a strong argument put forward that the loss share agreement is maintained and the cap increased.

A Member commented that the project is at a key stage and the design team need to focus on one plan, the Council is being asked if it has an appetite to invest to help guide this process. If the Council is not minded providing any funding to the project then the design team needs to focus on a deliverable design within the budget available from HDC. A final decision on funding would not be made until actual project costs are received following a tender process.

Members commented on the level of CIL reserves and how this project would put pressure on the budget.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that should the Council be minded providing funding towards the Priory Centre refurbishment, that this funding is allocated from the Council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) reserves.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that, should the Council be minded to provide funding towards the Priory Centre refurbishment project from its CIL reserves, that the Council instructs the Clerk to write a letter of intent to support the project by providing additional funding, subject to confirmation of lease arrangements and confirmed costs arising from tender.

## 142 Grant Aid Scheme Review

- i) Members received and considered an amended Grant Aid policy and guidance document for recommendation to the Full Council. The amendments put forward were based on those previously recommended to the committee by a Working Group.

Members discussed the proposed changes to the Grant Aid Scheme and noted the following key changes;

- Splitting the grant aid scheme into a small and large grant application process.
- Setting limits on how often organisations can apply for funding. That this would be once a year for small grants and once every two years for large grants.
- Funding would not be provided for those organisations that use that funding for fundraising purposes.
- That grant aid would be focused on providing funding for specific projects.
- There would be regular grants that the Council would need to look at building into its budget setting process, such as Community Association grants, Pightle and Friends of Priory Park. This would allow for Service Level Agreements to be put in place.

Members noted that there would need to be a transitional year and that the policy, if adopted would not be able to be fully implemented.

Members noted that the majority of grants previously awarded would fall into the 'large grant' category. This might have an impact on some valuable annual projects. It was suggested that if the Council wished to support annually it could look at doing so through the budget setting process. A Member commented that the two year rule could work to the detriment of the town.

Members commented that they felt the small grant level was too low and should be £2,000.

Proposed and seconded to recommend the draft Grant Aid Scheme to the Full Council subject to increase the level of small grant applications to £2,000 and making editorial amendments on the eligibility of applications where funding is received from government bodies.

An amendment was put forward the level for small grant applications be set at £1,500. The amendment was not accepted.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council adopt the draft Grant Aid Policy subject to increasing the level of small grant applications to £2,000 and making editorial amendments on the eligibility of applications where funding is received from government bodies.

**RESOLVED** to approve the application form questions for small and large grant applications as set out.

**143** *21:25 the Committee **RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders and continue the meeting.*

**144 Internal Audit Report**

Members received and noted the 2023-24 second interim internal audit report following an inspection in March 2024. Members noted that there were no areas of concern raised by the auditor or actions which the Council needed to respond to.

**145 Date of Next Meeting**

Members noted that the date of the next scheduled Finance and Governance Committee meeting would be 21<sup>st</sup> May 2024 at 7:15pm.

**COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON**