

WELLS CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF WELLS CITY COUNCIL HELD VIA ZOOM ON THURSDAY 29TH APRIL 2021 AT 7.00PM

COUNCILLORS PRESENT (VIA ZOOM): Cllrs: L Agabani, S Briton, J Browne, S Cursley, R Humphreys, A l'Anson, N Kennedy, J Rust, J Parker, P Welch (Mayor)

IN ATTENDANCE (VIA ZOOM): Town Clerk/RFO: S Luck
MDC Cllr L Rogers
WCC Staff: A Westwood, C Hobbs
6 Members of the public

21/64/C APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
Cllr O Hartley (Deputy Mayor), J Osman, T Munt (Somerset County Council)

21/65/C DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
To receive Councillors' Declarations of Interest, made under the Council's Code of Conduct adopted 27th July 2012:
Councillors were asked whether they had any declarations of interest. None were declared.

21/66/C MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL HELD ON 25TH MARCH 2021
Minutes of the previous meetings were proposed, seconded, confirmed as a true record and will be signed by the Mayor.

21/67/C MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
The Mayor announced that this would be the last City Council meeting via Zoom in line with Government regulations and announced that the PC Dan Williams had apologised that the Police could not attend but had submitted a Police report to this meeting.

A member of the public spoke:

1. Christopher Simons requested an explanation after attending the Portway Annexe Committee meeting regarding the financial figures in the application for the loan, whether the loan was conditional on the building itself and had the proposed purchase gone through the Finance Committee.

The Town Clerk informed the meeting that the finances were a loan taken out by the Council and not a mortgage on the building. The Town Clerk reassured Mr Simons that in the revised Business Plan he had looked at costs beyond the first year and estimated the figures from previous expenditure and income, and taken staffing and maintenance costs into account.

Cllr J. Parker explained that the Town Clerk revised and updated the figures as the initial Business Plan were produced some time ago. Cllr J. Parker praised the Town Clerk for his hard work but said there was more work to be done regarding the income figures.

21/68/C MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS
Mayor's Diary

1. 2nd June 2021 – U3A Day in the Market Place
2. 13th June 2021 – Mayor's Charity has an Open garden at Coxley House, former home of John le Carre. On the same date in the evening, at the Bishop's Palace there is a Royal British Legion Dinner
3. 24th July 2021 – Wells Community Day. Wells City Council will have a stall in the Cathedral to promote the Mayor's Charity and inform people about the work done by Wells City Council. The Mayor invited Councillors to help him run the stall if they are free.

21/69/C MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 8th April 2021.
The Chair presented the minutes and asked for questions. None received.

21/70/C MINUTES OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 1st April and 15th April 2021.
The Chair presented the minutes and asked for questions. None received.

21/71/C PORTWAY ANNEXE COMMITTEE

Cllr S Briton, Chair of the committee, requested members to join the committee. Work is needed on the design brief for a public consultation, upgrading the Business Plan and developing community and residents' representation. She thanked Cllr L Agabani who will work on residents' representation and Cllr R Humphreys for supporting her as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

Cllr J Rust asked that the Business Plan, when finalised, will go before the Finance Committee for further scrutiny and asked for clarity regarding timelines for the purchase finances. The Town Clerk confirmed that initial payment to Somerset County Council was for 500k but the application for pre-approval of the loan is for the full amount of 620k. The second part of the loan cannot be drawn down until the next financial year. Somerset County Council have agreed, subject to legalities, to receive 90k in the second financial year, but hand the building over before that. There is more than one covenant on the building and a handover in July may not be feasible. Cllr S Briton agreed that a timeline would be helpful.

Cllr L Agabani responded to Christopher Simons' question regarding why the purchase had not gone through the Finance Committee. He explained that the Portway Annexe is such a big purchase that it was necessary to go before full Council, rather than the Finance Committee.

Cllr A l'Anson expressed a wish to be on the Portway Annexe Committee. He reassured that payments being made in stages is a normal process in the conveyancing and purchasing of property.

Cllr J. Parker queried the necessity for the Extraordinary Council meeting for the purchase. The Town Clerk confirmed that a decision was necessary before the end of the 2020/21 financial year. The Annexe's protection from an open market sale to a property developer through the Community Asset Register ends in June.

21/73/C WELLS NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REPORT

Cllr A l'Anson proposed that there is an application for additional grant funding to take us through this calendar year when the plan will be completed. Secondly there is a grant application for projects in the draft environment section to enhance bio-diversity in waterways, parks, open areas and allotments and that there has been discussion with the Diocese of Bath and Wells regarding enhancing bio-diversity in the churchyards of Wells. Cllr J. Rust seconded the proposal. Cllr J Parker offered his support going forward.

21/74/C REOPENING THE HIGH STREET FUND

Cllr S. Cursley reported that he and Cllr L. Agabani had looked into funding and met online with MDC Officer J. Reader-Sullivan. The Town Clerk updated the meeting that the Market Place will be improved by the removal of the red/white bollards and temporary heritage street furniture put in their place through a 15k grant, subject to agreements with Somerset County Council and Mendip District Council. Wells in Bloom will sponsor planters. The scheme will hopefully be in place by June 2021. As the scheme is temporary there will be no need for planning permission.

Cllr S. Cursley said the District Council are completing a footfall count. The Town Clerk said these counts will help Neighbourhood Plans to be created across the district. It is a 3-year survey done electronically and will happen across all towns and will help secure grants. Money will be available to replace cancelled Carnivals with smaller events such as regulated busking stations to help bring people into the city centre.

21/75/C COUNCIL DIARY

1. The Town Clerk reported:
2. We will move the Portway Annexe Committee meeting back a week to assist working parties to have more time.
3. Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group will have a couple of date changes. I will advise when those dates are confirmed.
4. S. Briton said the Covid 19 Working Group is continuing for another 6 months and would like to meet on the last Wednesday of every month at 6pm and she requested that the times go on the Council Diary.

21/76/C AWARDS WORKING GROUP

Cllr J Browne said businesses in Wells are reopening and the Manager of CanDo4U has designed a medal to go on the awards. Sponsorship will be provided by Harris & Harris. Awaiting hearing from more businesses. Businesses requiring more information have been referred to the Town Clerk.

21/77/C TO RECEIVE ANY WRITTEN REPORTS FROM COUNCILLORS ON OUTSIDE BODIES

None received.

21/78/C TO RECEIVE ANY WRITTEN REPORTS FROM DISTRICT OR COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Mendip District Cllr L. Rogers submitted a written report which is attached.

21/79/C ANY OTHER URGENT MATTERS OF REPORT

1. Cllr J Osman requested via email a 6-month Leave of Absence from Wells City Council. His request was granted.
2. Cllr S Briton reported on the Bus Back Better campaign. Bus use nationally had seen a 40% decrease in 10 years. Somerset has fourth lowest bus use in the country. Improvement needed to encourage people back to the buses. Cllr l'Anson said there was interest in particular regarding a route between Wells and Castle Cary which is in the Neighbourhood Plan.
3. Cllr S Cursley praised the Chair's management of the meetings via Zoom during government restrictions
4. Cllr L Agabani questioned the process for the management of Council meetings when they took place in the Town Hall again. The Town Clerk reassured that social distancing and face coverings will be adhered to and the public will be required to state an intention to attend meetings so that numbers can be managed.

21/80/C The next meeting of Wells City Council will be its Annual Meeting at **7pm on Thursday 27TH May 2021**

Minutes signed by The Mayor: **Date:**

WCC update from Wells MDC Councillors 29.4.21

Market

The market is now fully re-open. We know there is a suggestion for a public consultation on the wider plans for full pedestrianisation, which we would of course fully support.

Last summer we received offers from businesses around the market square to sponsor mobile planters to replace or break up the rather ugly red and white 'elephant's feet' barriers which are currently in use. £15,000 from MDC is great news for temporary bollards and planters

On the wider question of the transfer of ownership of the market square back to Wells, that as you also know, is bound up with the ongoing wrangling about local government reorganisation and whether we will have One Somerset - a unitary authority for the whole county or whether it will be split into two, the option known as Stronger Somerset (see below)

Ownership of high street buildings

We have embarked on an effort to identify unoccupied flats in Wells high street as part of an effort to see if more of them can be brought into use. We have already developed a list of some of them, but we would be very grateful if anyone who is aware of such empty properties could let us know.

Local government reorganisation

The Government's official consultation on the reorganisation of local councils in Somerset has ended. The majority of Councillors from the four districts endorsed *Stronger Somerset*, because it offers more 'local' government and should be more locally accountable and responsive than a large single council based in Taunton, and last week Mendip endorsed a critical examination of *One Somerset*.

Tomorrow the four District Councils are planning to vote to offer all local residents in Somerset a local referendum poll later in May or June on which of the two proposals they prefer. Mendip's virtual meeting is tomorrow Friday 30th April, at 5.00pm and will be live streamed.

Covid

The local threat of covid is continuing to recede. In the week to 17 April, approximately 70,302 tests were carried out across the county and there have been 71 new confirmed cases.

Somerset's rate is now equal the South West rate of 12.6 per 100,000. However, the official message from the Somerset Covid-19 Engagement Board remains very cautious – stay local, minimise travel and continue to follow 'hands, face, space and fresh air' to minimise catching Covid-19 and spreading it to others even if you have been vaccinated.

Electrical vehicle charging points

The electrical vehicle charging points are at last being installed into Mendip's car parks over the summer, and we are including the new generation of rapid chargers.

Big community energy switch

There is still an opportunity for Mendip residents to save money and reduce their carbon footprint this spring by switching energy suppliers through the big community switch which allows savings by group buying. This offer is open until 18th May and you can register interest through this link <https://www.mendip.gov.uk/bigcommunityswitch>

Energy efficiency grants

Similarly, we have already mentioned the funding of more than £1.3m which has been won by Mendip and the other Somerset districts to improve home energy efficiency. This is particularly targeting lower income households whose owned or socially rented properties will benefit from the energy improvements.

Please continue to spread the word about this scheme as we are doing. Interested householders should contact the Centre for Sustainable Energy on **0800 082 2234** to see what advice and support can be offered or pass on this link which has more information <https://www.mendip.gov.uk/article/9928/Funding-for-energy-efficiency>

Carbon literacy training

We are increasingly aware that many people don't understand the implications of the global warming crisis. Our climate change officer is putting together a nationally validated carbon literacy training programme for all members and officers at MDC which will then be rolled out across the parish and town councils.

Tree planting

Mendip is working with the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership to plant over 500 trees, in support of our climate and ecological commitment. Please email any suggestions to neighbourhoodservices@mendip.gov.uk. The council can also offer finance, guidance and support to people who want to boost this effort.

Anti-idling campaign

Mendip District Council's anti-idling campaign has progressed with the installation of No Idling signs in council car parks. "Idling" is when a vehicle's engine is left running while it is parked or stationary for a period of time, contributing further to **air pollution**.