

Minutes of the monthly meeting of Johnston Community Council held on 13th January 2020 in Johnston Institute.

Present: Cllrs Neil James, Jeffries, Pratt, Rowlands, Wilkins, Jones, Philpott; Peter Horton (Clerk);

Apologies : C’llrs Spilsbury, Young, Morgan, F. James.

0145 – Declarations of known Interests

C’llr Rowlands re-stated his ongoing personal and prejudicial interest in the agenda item about the land opposite the Johnston Institute, due to an ongoing unrelated boundary dispute with the other party.

0146 – To receive the minutes from the December 2019 monthly meeting

The minutes were accepted as an accurate record, and signed by the Chair (proposer C’llr Rowlands, seconder C’llr Jones).

0147 - Discussion of potential issues surrounding school transport from Johnston to Milford Haven

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mrs. Kate Evan-Hughes and Mr. Steven Richard-Downes from the P.C.C. Education Department, and Mr. Hubert Mathias and Mr. Owen Roberts from the P.C.C. Transportation Unit. Also present was Mr. Gareth Thomas, Headmaster of Johnston Primary School.

C’llr Rowlands referred to the statutory guidance document from the W.G., outlining guidance applicable to situations where no safe walking route to school exists. In these situations the Local Authority has an obligation to provide free transport for all children, irrespective of whether or not they live within the three mile limit.

Mr. Hubert Mathias referred to legal guidance that the Authority had sought in respect of their obligations under the terms of the guidance document, which suggested to them that the presence of a service bus ‘could’ transform the route into a safe one even if no safe walking route existed. Members disagreed with this, as the guidance clearly stated that the safe route is designated solely by the provision of a safe walking route. They also drew attention to the requirement that transport provided by the Local Authority in such situations must be provided free of charge. C’llr Jones mentioned problems with the use of service buses, citing problems of fighting etc. on these that had occurred. She felt that a dedicated school bus was necessary and preferable.

Mr. Gareth Thomas mentioned problems of confidence of parents over the lack of proper transport arrangements, and suggested lack of transparency by the Local Authority when the change in catchment was being planned and publicised.

However, Mrs. Evan-Hughes rejected any suggestion that parents had been misled in this matter while making their choice of school.

C’llr Rowlands raised concerns over potential safeguarding issues for the children of the Village due to the approach being taken by P.C.C. He also felt that it could lead to a problem of increased absenteeism in the future.

Mr. Hubert Mathias mentioned the cost implications of providing free transport, equating this to the approximate cost of providing one teacher.

C’llr Wilkins asked about help for parents in meeting the costs of transportation, commenting that this may well be unaffordable for many. Mrs. Evan-Hughes

mentioned the possibility of assistance in exceptional circumstances, such as for pupils with certain medical conditions, etc.

The Clerk outlined the legal position as perceived by J.C.C., which was that the designation in the W.G. guidance document of a route to school as 'safe' was solely based on it being safe to walk along. There was no provision for this to be side-stepped in cases where public transportation was available along the route. In such cases, the Authority was under a statutory obligation to provide free transport to school for all pupils, irrespective of the three-mile limit. He also pointed out that the guidance document specifically stated that subsidised transportation was unacceptable, and that it had to be provided free of charge. In response, Mrs. Evan-Hughes acknowledged the difference in opinion in relation to the matter. However, she referred to their legal advice, which she said suggested otherwise. She further commented that they had a duty to act in accordance with their legal advice in the way they planned their use of public funds.

C'llr Neil James raised the issue of future increases in the numbers of children needing transportation to the school. Mr. Hubert Mathias acknowledged that a tipping point would be reached, after which a contract bus would be needed. However, he was confident that this would not result in any increase in the £1 per child per journey cost.

Mrs. Evan-Hughes undertook to forward a copy of their legal advice, and provide clarification on their position. She also undertook to provide clarification on what exceptional circumstances might allow concessions to be granted. She encouraged J.C.C. to submit comments in their current budget survey regarding the matter.

C'llr Neil James commented that, while appreciating the financial constraints facing the Authority, it would be a dis-service to the children of the Village if the W.G. statutory guidance was not followed.

Following the discussion, the Chairman thanked the officers of P.C.C. for attending, after which they, and Mr. Gareth Thomas, left the meeting.

It was resolved that, once the legal advice had been received from P.C.C., the Clerk should write to the P.C.C. Council Cabinet Leader (David Simpson), with copies to Bob Kilminster (Cabinet Member for Finance) and Guy Woodham (Cabinet Member for Education) raising concerns over safeguarding and ignoring of statutory W.G. guidance (proposer C'llr Rowlands, seconder C'llr Neil James).

Matters Arising from the approved minutes

0148 – Bus shelter / seat outside NISA Shop

No further update available.

0149- Close Field Skatepark

C'llr Rowlands mentioned that further damage had recently occurred at the playpark, further highlighting the need for security measures to be put in place. He had made arrangements to discuss the matter further with P.C.C. officers, and stressed that J.C.C. would need to be prepared to contribute to the cost of any works undertaken.

0150 – Overhanging tree, junction of Church Road / Hall Court.

Matter still with C'llr Fran. James to forward photographs to Clerk.

0151 - Brambles on footpath to school.

C'llr Rowlands mentioned that he was hoping to get this area included within the school grounds maintenance contract.

0152 - Narrow footpath outside Johnston Farm.

Members noted that the work was complete. Though an improvement, there was still a significant pinch point by the end of the Johnston Farm building. However, it was recognised that there was nothing further to be done regarding the matter.

0153 - Discussion of purchase of WW1 commemorative memorial seat

Matter still in hand with C'llr Spilsbury.

0154 - Discussion of possible action to retain Community Police Forum

C'llr Rowlands confirmed that he had still heard nothing from anyone in Neyland regarding the matter, and that the ball was currently in their court.

0155 - Discussion of action to discourage badger activity on sports field

Matter still in hand with C'llr Pratt, who was due to speak further with Sean Tilling of P.C.C. to seek a quotation for altering the gates.

0156 - Discussion of development of Vine Field

Due to lack of use at present, and potential safety concerns, Members were disposed towards removing the equipment from the field. C'llr Rowlands undertook to obtain a price from P.C.C. for this, and for making good of the affected area. Matter to be placed on February meeting agenda for discussion.

0157 - Fly tipping, land adjacent to Glebelands Field.

C'llr Rowlands mentioned that P.C.C. had rejected responsibility for this, as it was not on land in their control. It was agreed for the Clerk to contact Mr. Gerald Rowlands of P.C.C. to request that the items be removed, and recharged to J.C.C. if necessary (proposer C'llr Philpott, seconder C'llr Neil James).

0158 - Car in car park opposite the Institute.

Members noted that the vehicle in question was still there. C'llr Rowlands undertook to chase this up again in P.C.C. C'llr Jones mentioned another vehicle that had been abandoned in Glebelands for several months.

0159 - Discussion of possible unauthorised scrap merchants in Village

The Clerk reported that as no application had been received by P.C.C., arrangements had been made by the Enforcement Section to serve a Planning Contravention Notice, as a first step towards possible Planning Enforcement action.

0160 - Johnston in Bloom.

Still in hand with C'llr Wilkins. It was arranged that she would email the certificate electronic files over to C'llr Philpott for printing.

0161 - Discussion of possible fence provision along Cunnigar Lane

Due to the lack of support by P.C.C., it was decided to leave the matter of fence provision in abeyance. Members were encouraged to report to P.C.C. any rubbish dumped in the lane.

0162 – Path from The Close to St. Peter's Road

Members noted that the situation had not been resolved. Clerk to chase up with P.C.C.

0163 - Discussion of problems due to closure of cycleway boardwalk

Members were pleased that the work was now scheduled for completion by the end of March 2020, as funding had been secured for the work.

C'llr Wilkins mentioned that the barriers isolating this section of the cycle path had been interfered with at the bottom end. Clerk to report this to Sustrans.

0164 - Discussion of Highway safety issues, Langford Road

C'llr Rowlands to pursue the possibility of getting some works undertaken via the Community Works Grant scheme.

0165 - Discussion of possible use of '2 minute clean' boards

C'llr Philpott had advertised this matter on the Community Facebook page, but had received no responses to date.

0166 - Discussion of any problems with rubbish collection arrangements

C'llr Rowlands said that he had received calls from many individuals experiencing problems with the new arrangements. It was recognised as an imperfect system, especially for elderly or infirm residents. However, the funding of the new collection vehicles by the W.G. had been conditional on this arrangement being adopted. It was explained by C'llr Rowlands and the Clerk that arrangements could be made with P.C.C. to collect bags from the house in cases of illness or inability to carry them to the gate.

0167 - Discussion of problems with cars at end of Brickhurst Park

The Clerk confirmed that he had reported these. However, Members noted that they still had not been taken away. Clerk to check on land ownership of the land in question in advance of the February meeting.

0168 - Discussion of possible request for yellow lines in Hall Court

Matter still in hand with C'llr Rowlands to discuss with P.C.C.

C'llr Rowlands asked for any outstanding items to be passed to him that needed discussion with P.C.C. Highways. The Clerk responded that he would research this, but didn't think there were many such items, as Darren Thomas was normally good at responding promptly to matters raised.

0169 - Discussion of problems with lighting on footbridge, Langford Road

C'llr Jones reported that the bridge was still very dark, and she needed a torch to walk over it at night. C'llr Philpott mentioned that a light was still out of action close to the bridge. C'llr Rowlands undertook to take up the matter again with Darren Thomas of P.C.C.

0170 - Discussion of possible one-way system, Glebelands

C'llr Philpott mentioned a recent incident in which a resident's van parked in Glebelands had been hit. Members were in agreement that the problem was more acute in Glebelands than in The Close. It was confirmed that complaints and concerns had been expressed by residents living there about the situation. It was also commented that emergency vehicles may well not be able to get through due to the way in which vehicles were being parked.

The Clerk mentioned that the matter had been passed to P.C.C. for their comments / action to address the possibility of introducing a one-way system. A response had been received that the matter had been referred to Mr. Ben Blake for attention. C'llr Philpott to forward photographs illustrating the problem to the Clerk, for these to be passed on to Mr. Blake.

0171 - Discussion of Community Land Trusts

C'llr Rowlands felt that it was important to try and get something under way to develop and use the land in a way that was genuinely beneficial to the community. Various ideas were briefly mentioned, such as wind turbines, enhanced sports facilities, etc.

Matter to be placed on February agenda for discussion.

Planning

0172 - Applications

None received this month.

0173 - Decisions

None received this month.

Correspondence

0174 - Alistair Veck – information relating to ongoing legal matters – noted.

0175 - Sustrans – Response to letter sent about boardwalk closure on cycle path – covered in agenda item 0163 above.

0174 - Darren Thomas – holding response to messages sent in regarding various highway-related issues – covered in agenda items 0170, 0162, 0167 and 0163 above.

0175 - O.V.W. – Information regarding forthcoming Innovative Practice and National Awards Conference – noted.

0176 - W.G. – Notification of consultation on proposed increases to planning application fees – noted.

0177 - P.C.C. – Notification of forthcoming engagement sessions to inform the P.C.C. budget-setting process for 2020/21 – noted.

0178 - P.C.C. – Information on new Community Works grant scheme – noted, and discussed in agenda item 0164 above.

0179 - P.C.C. – Notification of decision to establish new Learning Resource Centre at Milford Haven Comprehensive School – noted.

0180 - O.V.W. – Information promoting Women's commemoration of V.E. Day in 2020 – noted.

Accounts

0181 - Payments

David Banfield (bus shelter cleaning)	:	£60-00
Norrards Electrics (Christmas lighting arrangements)	:	£432-00

0182 - Internal audit for 2019/20 accounts

Members agreed for the Clerk to contact the internal auditor to initiate arrangements for the internal audit for the 2019/20 accounts.

0183 - Precept for 2020/21

After discussion of the precept notes prepared and circulated prior to the meeting, and consideration of the required budget, Members agreed to set the precept for 2020/21 at £35,000.

It was noted that the uncommitted sum itemised in the precept notes was there for likely necessary upgrading of play equipment and facilities in the Village.

The above items were approved by Members (proposer C'Ilr Neil James, seconder C'Ilr Rowlands).

0184 - Discussion of Risk assessment actions (including discussion of any remedial works needed to St. Peter's Road bus shelter and arrangements for renewal of risk assessment before March 31st 2020)

It was agreed that C'Ilr Nail James would review and update the risk assessment, for completion prior to the end of March 2020.

Regarding painting and repair of the St. Peter's Road bus shelter, C'Ilr Philpott mentioned that the person from whom she had hoped to get a quotation would not be able to provide one after all. C'Ilr Pratt undertook to seek a quotation from Mr. Nathan Thomas of One Stop Property Development.

Members noted that there was no update on the future site meeting to be held regarding works to secure access to the rear of the bus shelter.

0185 - Discussion of problems of illegal signage around railway bridge

Members were concerned that the signage was an eyesore. However, it was recognised as important to do whatever was possible to support local businesses, and not create unnecessary problems for them.

C'Ilr Rowlands undertook to discuss the matter again with the business owners, to try and achieve an improvement in the situation, especially in relation to signage on the footpath, which Members agreed needed removing to leave the pathway clear.

Members agreed to remove the matter from the agenda until such time as the problem became more serious, as no specific complaints had been received (proposer C'Ilr Neil James, seconder C'Ilr Wilkins).

0186 - Discussion of possible support for purchase of defibrillator for school

Members agreed to offer to match fund up to 50% of the cost of a defibrillator for the school (proposer C'Ilr Neil James, seconder C'Ilr Jones). Clerk to write letter to school accordingly.

0187 - Discussion of possible establishment of community vegetable beds

Matter deferred for discussion in February.

0188 - Discussion of arrangements to commemorate 75th anniversary of V.E. Day, 8th – 10th May 2020

Members were in agreement that it would be good to either arrange or support some kind of commemoration. It was agreed that efforts should be made to get the new commemorative bench completed and installed by then.

Members discussed various possible ideas, especially centred around the possibility of financial support for organisations that wanted to arrange an event.

Matter to be discussed further in the February meeting.

0189 - Discussion of any necessary measures to assess impact of Ash Dieback on community-controlled land

It was agreed that C’Ilr Neil James would arrange for Lee Summons to carry out a survey of the Ash trees at the Cunnigar within the next 6 months (proposer C’Ilr Neil James, seconder C’Ilr Jeffries).

0190 - Discussion of requirement to report on progress towards producing a plan to encourage biodiversity

Members thanked C’Ilr Neil James for the work involved in preparing the initial report.

It was agreed that mention should be made in the report of actions being taken to address Ash dieback.

Subject to this addition, and final proof-reading, Members adopted the report (proposer C’Ilr Philpott, seconder C’Ilr Wilkins).

C’Ilr Neil James to send final document across to the Clerk once complete, for publication.

0191 - Discussion of possible dates for Chairman’s dinner

Matter deferred for discussion in February.

0192 - Discussion of gratuity / pension arrangements for Clerk, and annual review of salary and expenses

It was agreed that the Clerk’s salary and fixed expenses would be increased in line with the N.J.C. pay award for public service employees effective from April 2020. Regarding pension provision, it was agreed that the Clerk should write to O.V.W. to seek their advice on possible ways to achieve this. However, in principle it was agreed by Members that a provision equivalent to 10% of salary would be made by a means yet to be agreed, and that this would be backdated to January 2020 when finalised (proposer C’Ilr Neil James, seconder C’Ilr Rowlands).

0193 - Discussion of situation regarding land opposite Johnston Institute

There was no discussion this month.

Any other business

0194 – Christmas Santa sleigh and Christmas Fair arrangements. Members thanked C’Ilrs Pratt and Jones for their work in arranging these events, which had been highly successful.

0196 – Litter bin, Church Road. C’Ilr Pratt had received requests for a litter bin provision in Church Road. Matter to be tabled for discussion in February.

The meeting concluded at 9-40pm.

Next scheduled meeting – Monday 10th February 2020.

Signed.....Chairman

Date.....