

Minutes of
Langham Parish Council (PC) Extraordinary Finance Committee Meeting
19th January 2021 7pm via Zoom

Present: Cllr Ellis, Cllr Bottwood, Cllr Thorpe
Clerk for minutes Carol Harbach
2 members of the public

20/43 Welcome and explanation of how the remote meeting will run.

Cllr Ellis welcomed everyone to the remote meeting of the Parish Council (PC) and went on to explain the rules of the meeting. No apologies.

20/44 Public Open Forum (maximum 10 minutes)

Questions to be recorded and answered at the next meeting.

A resident thanked the committee for earlier questions that he had asked, which have now been answered. He was pleased to see the reserves are going to be used in the coming years budget.

The resident had a question on the trampoline item which is in the draft budget. His question was: "Had Health and Safety (H&S) been suitably considered when looking to procure this item?"

Cllr Thorpe answered the question, (having been on the Recreation Ground Committee when the project was first muted). The answer was that H&S had been considered during the initial discussions. The application of H&S legislation was the rationale behind extending the play area in the first instance, given that LPC had received external expert advice and recommendation.

The trampoline being considered is mounted over a hole in the ground and is not like residential equivalents, which require climbing into. H&S will again be reviewed ahead of any final procurement decision. A business case will have to be approved before a purchase order is raised. It is expected that H&S implications will contribute to any final business case for such equipment.

A resident stated that Catherine Doyle (Colchester Borough Council Zone Manager) had been in contact with the Community Centre Manager enquiring if there were any new projects for S106 money. The committee thanked the resident and requested that the Manager contacted Cllr Ellis and passed this email on. It appears that this communication has probably gone to all stakeholders and all community groups within Langham. Cllr Ellis will contact Catherine Doyle and remind CBC that the village has both a Parish Council and a Community Centre which is not always the same in other villages.

Action Cllr Ellis

20/45 To review the draft budget for approval by main council

Cllr Bottwood explained the ratification process for the budget. The purpose of this evening's meeting was to agree a draft budget and precept to recommend to full council for approval as LPC's budget for 2021/2022. Adoption of the draft submissions being discussed tonight, would be an agenda item for Wednesday's full council meeting. Adoption of the budget at full council still does not authorise the procurement of the larger capital items.

It was explained that not only is the expenditure itself being considered, appropriate justification in the form of a business case must be associated with all larger items of expenditure before any money can be spent. (Even if it is included in the budget).

Whilst the Finance Committee has received sufficient supporting background information to approve the larger items in the draft budget, additional supporting business cases need to be provided, ahead of any final approval to procure being authorised.

During the precept discussion it was acknowledged that LPC currently has excess funds beyond the financial ratios recommended. This was acknowledged but justified in lieu of the fact that we no longer had any contribution from the solar farm and the fireworks event. This means that the current finances would reduce over the next couple of years because of planned expenditure and a significantly lower income from the precept.

The situation we are in now, is that we either massively spend by approving all budgeted items or increase the precept. Either way this still needs to be spent appropriately in line with financial governance.

A General observation made regarding big tickets items, is that by authorising the budget these will still need to be ratified.

A discussion took place regarding the budget line for an 'After Covid Party'. As this has been given an entry into the budget, there should be an income there for the same amount of money to help with costs. We cannot really justify using public money for such an event without offsetting it with some income in the form of fundraising/sponsorship. Fundraising for this event will need to happen, so the cost of the event is offset and not fully financed via LPC precept funds. This item is therefore in both the expenditure and income columns of the budget.

Voted to agree main budget to go to main council for approval.

This draft budget will now go to the extraordinary full council meeting this Thursday for recommendation with the big items still needing approval from the finance committee, once a sufficiently robust business case is provided and accepted.

20/46 To agree the Precept recommendation for approval by main council.

Colchester Borough Council (CBC) precept guideline is in line with the national RPI increase of 1.1%. With our perspective of the expenditure needed this year we recommend that we go with the RPI increase so not to fall behind and being cognisant of LPC's existing reserves.

The options regarding submitting or not submitting a precept were discussed.

The Clerk stated there is a fine line with not putting in a precept request, (which the council can do), but would recommend the council go forward with RPI of 1.1%.

If the minimum 1.1% precept was not applied for, then the amount of money necessary to come out of existing LPC funds would be in excess of the £30,000 already forecast to be spent within the draft budget.

Cllr Thorpe additionally stated that if no precept was applied for there would also be no small grants available. These are normally automatically added to the precept submission by CBC.

After due consideration of the above, a vote was taken and it was recommended that the precept was submitted to full council using the 1.1% minimum and recommended for approval at Wednesday's meeting.

Proposed Cllr Bottwood Seconded Cllr Ellis All agreed.

20/47 Items for the next Agenda

None at moment

20/48 Time and date of next meeting

Next Finance meeting 2nd February 2021 7pm
Dates will be posted on the website
Meeting finished at 7:30pm.

Signed

Cllr Ellis

Date