



SOUTHWATER PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Extra-Ordinary meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 16th October, 2019 in the Council Chamber, Beeson House, Southwater, West Sussex, RH13 9LA commencing after the F&GP Meeting of the same evening.

Present: **Councillors:** G Watkins (Chairman), M Neale (Vice-Chairman), G Scoon, G Cole, D Moore, C Vickers, P Flores-Moore, R Stranks, N, Knott, H Timson and B Varley.

Members of the Public: 25

Clerk: Dawn Spouge

Press: Not Present

ACTIONS

The Chairman asked those present to turn off their mobile phones for the duration of the meeting, unless in an emergency, when they should go through the Chairman. In the event of a fire alarm sounding, everyone should evacuate the building via the exits indicated.

The Chairman advised that the meeting was being recorded.

114/19 Public Forum – Standing orders were stood down and the public who attended were informed that the usual limit of 3 minutes per person and an overall limit of 15 minutes would not be applied to allow those who wished to ask questions in regards to Southwater Leisure Centre time to do so. However, it was stated that the session could not continue longer than one hour to allow for the Meeting to then be convened and business to be conducted as usual.

Mr Rory Rafferty asked the Parish Council what had been done to stop the Gym losing members.

The Chairman explained that many incentives had been undertaken over the years, these included leaflet drops, advertising using various different media, posters, discounts on memberships etc. However, these sadly had not had the result required or hoped for. He went on to give further information on the past and current situation at the Leisure Centre and explained that staffing of the Leisure Centre was a contributing factor to high costs, that was not justified given the small numbers that attended the Gym, however, to continue to run the Gym, staff were required to be present for the whole time it was open to the public and this was no longer viable. He went on to explain that it was hoped to obtain S106 monies from recent development in the Village, some of which would be used to improve the facilities in the future.

Mr Rafferty thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to ask questions and for his full explanation.

Mr James Heather also had raised the question in regards to what advertising had been undertaken. The Chairman reiterated what had been explained to Mr Rafferty. Mr Heather

raised a query in regards to past maintenance in regards to the Gym equipment. The Chairman explained the history in regards to the lease hire of equipment in the past and the current situation in that the equipment was owned by the Council. Regular maintenance was carried out by an approved contractor when machinery broken down etc. However, sometimes parts required are more difficult to obtain as the equipment was quite a few years old now and this took time. It was not feasible at this time to invest large sums of money on new equipment when membership numbers had dwindled and would be a bad business decision. The building in general was maintained, currently, a new flat roof was being put on. However, improvements to the facilities have not been possible because the incurring financial loss. The Chairman explained that he had commented on possible S106 monies being used for future improvements to the previous member of public.

Further discussion took place and in regards to the decision by the Parish Council to close the Gym at this time. The Chairman explained that now was the time that the Council had to consider and agree the budget for the next financial year, this had to be done on actuals, therefore had the Council not decided to undertake the Gym closure now, they would have had to consider and include the current running and staff costs for the next financial year which would have produced another significant increase in the precept and the Parish Council were agreed that they did not want to have a large increase, which would be a burden on the public purse, again for the next financial year.

Councillor Stranks stated that the decision was wholly consistent with Horsham District Council strategic report, it was logical, rational and a timely decision taken by the Parish Council.

Mr Steve Clarke asked if the Leisure Centre had always run at a loss? Councillor Flores-Moore explained the history in regards to the fact that in some time in the past, it was run by a Charity, however, they had folded and the Parish Council had been handed back the Leisure Centre with a large debt. This together with more recent competition etc, had resulted in increased losses and the decision by the Parish Council to close the Gym. Councillor Flores-Moore continued to give a full account of the history and explained that the Leisure Centre was not closing, just the Gym, the Parish Council were passionate about offering a Leisure Facility to the community, however, this had to now be rethought and delivered in a different way to ensure that the current losses did not continue.

Mr Mike Fuller came forward to speak and to state how he had enjoyed using the Gym and was concerned about elderly people being able to access Gyms a bit further afield. He also wanted to ask if People and Places had been asked if they wished to undertake the running of the Gym/Centre. Councillor Watkins stated that meetings had taken place in the recent past and prior to that with several large Gym management companies, however, they had not been interested in running the Gym due to the small numbers and had required a minimum of a 1000 members to consider an interest. Given that Southwater Leisure Centre had never had 1000 members and currently less than 200, this was not an option. Interestingly though, since the closure had been announced, several interested groups had enquired about future possibilities which would be explored. Mr Fuller also raised the query that residents felt that they were double tax in regards to paying towards the continued running of a leisure facility in Southwater and to Horsham District Council to the running of others in the district. In effect, he felt this was double taxation. Councillor Watkins replied that this was a valid comment that would be raised with Horsham District Council.

Councillor Watkins stated that the first Saturday of every month a Councillor surgery was held at Beeson House, all were welcome to come and raise concerns about issues or indeed just chat about current affairs in the community.

Mrs Sandra Kingsley felt that people would support any future proposals and ideas for the Gym going forward. Councillor Watkins stated that as long as they were financially viable, the Parish Council would consider all ideas and explore them.

Councillor Watkins went on to state that he was glad so many of the community had attended to ask questions and felt that the Council had answered them clearly, explaining possible future options of the running of all areas in the Leisure Centre, including exploring the option of a future Charity or CIC managing the Centre which would be discussed by the Council later on in this meeting. He thanked all for attending.

The meeting was Reconvened.

115/19 Apologies for absence

To receive apologies and reasons for absence

Apologies received from Councillors Vickers and Lewis due to prior commitments.

116/19 Declarations of Interest

None.

117/19. Minutes - To approve the Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Wednesday 18th September 2019

These Minutes will be approved at the next Full Council Meeting on 20th November 2019.

118/19 To receive an update, discuss and consider the future of Southwater Leisure Centre

To consider the recommendations of the Leisure Centre Working Party

The Chairman reiterated that it was important the public noted the Leisure Centre was not closing and that as had been stated in the public forum, it was hoped that S106 monies would become available to enable various improvements to the building in the future.

He reported that it was important for all to note that certain protocol and procedures had to take place in a certain order before public announcements took place. For example, following HR procedures it was only fair and right and legally correct that once the Parish Council had decided to close the Gym, the staff had to undertake a confidential consultation process, which had to be completed prior to any public notice on the closure. Equally, any hires that would be affected in terms of classes etc also had to be consulted and meetings and discussion to take place with those, prior to any public announcement. The Parish Council were not trying to be secretive, however, legal, fair and correct protocol was paramount and would be adhered to. Once these procedures had been undertaken in the time-lines required, announcements could then be made. It was not beneficial to anybody to speculate prior to correct information going out. He stated that the public would be updated as much as possible and given the above, when possible at each stage of changes taking place.

Councillor Watkins then gave an update on the time-line for current and proposed future changes at the Leisure Centre and proposed that the best and most beneficial way to undertake these was to form a Charity to manage the running of the facility.

Councillor Timson asked about S106 monies, proposed alterations and changes and updates to the building that were being considered.

Further discussion took place including the benefits of a Charity running the Leisure Centre, which would help on rate relief, currently a large annual sum that the Parish Council had to pay. The Chairman stated that further discussions with Horsham District Council on the release of S106 monies for improvements to the Leisure Centre would need to take place, however, prior to this, an architect was being contracted to undertake a full report and various charity models needed to be explored with the Parish Councils legal advisor, with which a meeting was being planned.

Councillor Watkins therefore proposed moving the running/management of the leisure Centre to a Charity, which would include a board of trustees and an advisory committee of users of the facilities. Seconded by Councillor Cole and **AGREED** unanimously.

** The Press and Public may be excluded due to the Confidential Nature of the Business to be transacted and in accordance with Section 1 (e) of Standing Orders (Meetings).

The following item was taken in confidential session due to the nature of business to be considered.

119/19 To receive an update, discuss and consider any HR procedures**

120/19 Date of next meeting - 20th November 2019

The meeting ended at 10.15pm.