



Bishopstoke Parish Council

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**Members of the Parish Council are summoned to attend a meeting on
Tuesday 14th November 2023 at 7.30pm at Bishopstoke Methodist Church, Sedgwick Road.**

AGENDA

PUBLIC SESSION – Residents are invited to give their views and question the parish council on issues on this agenda, or raise issues for future consideration at the discretion of the chair. Members of the public may not take part in the meeting itself.

Presentation from Helen Brown regarding the tree and bee corridors

1. Apologies for absence
2. To adopt and sign Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 12 September 2023
3. Declarations of Interest and Requests for Dispensations
4. Reports from Committees, Working Groups, Officers and Councillors
5. To approve and adopt the audited annual return for the year to 31 March 2023
6. To approve delegating authority to the Assets Committee to determine which open spaces and other areas could be included in the Tree and Bee programme
7. To approve the continued membership of and contributions to external bodies
8. To decide arrangements for travel tokens for 2024-25
9. To redesignate the Carnival budget heading as the Events budget
10. To consider staffing levels and decide upon a recommendation from the People Committee
11. To consider the 2024-25 budget, and funding for play areas, the Memorial Hall and the Glebe Meadow Project
12. To consider content for the next press release
13. To agree the date, time and place for the next meetings

D L Wheal
Clerk to Bishopstoke Parish Council
8th November 2023

Members: Cllrs Hillier-Wheal (Chair), Harris (Vice Chair), Candy, Daly, Dean A, Dean R, Francis, Kirby, Lyon, McKeone C, McKeone D, Moore, Thornton, Tidridge and Winstanley
FULL_2324_A04

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Bishopstoke Parish Council
held at Bishopstoke Methodist Church
commencing at 7.30pm on 12 September 2023**

Present: Councillor Louise Hillier-Wheal (Chair)
Councillor Geoff Harris (Vice Chair)
Councillor Ralph Candy
Councillor Andrew Daly
Councillor Anne Dean
Councillor Ray Dean
Councillor Dave Francis
Councillor Mark Kirby
Councillor Chris McKeone
Councillor Dermot McKeone
Councillor Gin Tidridge
Councillor Anne Winstanley

In Attendance: Mr David Wheal (Clerk to Bishopstoke Parish Council)

Public Session 0 members of the public were present.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

FULL_2324_M03/

32 Apologies for Absence

32.1 Apologies were noted from Cllrs Lyon, Moore and Thornton

33 To adopt and sign Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 11 July 2023

33.1 The minutes of the above meeting had been included in the document pack for this meeting.

33.2 Proposed Cllr Daly, Seconded Cllr Winstanley, **RESOLVED** with one abstention that the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 11 July 2023 be adopted as a true record.

Action: Clerk & Chair – to sign and publish the minutes and document pack

33.3 Cllr Daly voiced his concern over the bus shelter in Spring Lane. The Clerk noted that it has recently been cleaned but had almost immediately been vandalised again. Cllr Daly also asked whether the streets and gutters could be swept before Carnival. Cllr Tidridge offered to ask the Borough Council whether this could be done.

Action: Cllr Tidridge – to contact the relevant department at the Borough Council to see whether a pre-Carnival street sweep could be completed,

34 Declarations of Interest and Requests for Dispensations

34.1 There were no such declarations or requests.

Initial: _____ Date: _____

35 Reports from Committees, Working Groups, Officers and Councillors

35.1 The resolutions from Council Committees were noted. There were no recommendations to vote upon.

35.2 Cllr Tidridge asked for an update on the basket swing at Blackberry Drive. The Clerk informed the Council that he had contacted a play area company and been told that basket swings with ropes, like the one in Blackberry Drive, are taut when first supplied but can stretch over time. Other forms of swing are available with chain, or plastic, that already have the “dip” that people can sit in. The Clerk also noted that if the Council do decide to purchase a new swing for Blackberry Drive, then the existing one could be installed at Otter Close. Cllr Tidridge asked the Clerk to provide this information to the resident who has posed the initial question.

Action: Clerk – to email the resident with an update on the basket swing at Blackberry Drive

35.3 Cllrs also noted that the hedge planted at Stoke Common / Church Road play area is mostly dead, that the bin in the car park at Blackberry Drive is broken and that dogs are regularly let off the leash in the Cemetery. The Clerk will follow up on the hedge with Green Smile, add the bin to the replacement list and arrange a sign for the Cemetery

Action: Clerk – arrange for replanting of hedge at Church Road play area, the replacement of the bin at Blackberry Drive car park and a new dog sign for the Cemetery.

35.4 Cllrs Winstanley and Tidridge had submitted written reports which are attached to these minutes. Cllr Daly was seeking help for a disabled resident with their housing needs. Cllr Winstanley advised that the resident needed to be assessed as to their needs first, and then help – including grants for home alterations – could be provided by the Borough Council. Cllr Tidridge also noted that the Bishopstoke Neighbourhood Plan includes the need for more inclusive housing. Cllr Francis noted the recent meeting between Parish and Local Area officers and asked whether these could be held regularly with updates being provided to the Council. The Clerk noted that this was the plan.

36 To invite ideas for projects to add to the Community Investment Programme list

36.1 The supporting papers had included the most recent copy available of the Community Investment Programme list. The Clerk noted that the Finance Committee had recently discussed providing Community Planters and Book Swap locations. It was also thought that the paths across and around Glebe Meadow could be added to the list. The Clerk requested Cllrs think about what they might like to add to or remove from the list and to provide any suggestions by Tuesday 3rd October in order that they can be discussed at the October Finance Committee meeting. Cllr Ray Dean advised that smaller items are more likely to be achievable than large projects, due to the nature of the funding being requested. Cllr Kirby suggested low tech ideas rather than high tech.

Action: Councillors – to consider ideas for projects to receive developer funding and submit them by Tuesday 3rd October

37 To discuss, amend and adopt the Policy on Ethics and Ethical Procurement

37.1 The draft policy had been included with the supporting papers for this meeting.

37.2 Cllrs agreed the policy was an excellent start but wished to see additional clauses covering such things as applying minimum wage requirements for anything ordered from overseas, international trade difficulties, bonded labour and paper sourcing. It was also suggested that clause 1.5 have the following added at the end: “In addition, all other procedures contained within the Financial Regulations will be followed.”. Cllrs felt able to adopt the policy but requested an early review date for additions.

Initial: _____ Date: _____

37.3 Proposed Cllr R Dean, Seconded Cllr Tidridge, **RESOLVED** with two abstentions to adopt the policy, amended to include Financial Regulations and to review the policy in 6 months.

Action: Clerk – to update and publish the Policy on Ethics and Ethical Procurement, to add a review of the Policy to the March Council meeting and to remind Cllrs in advance of that meeting to suggest any amendments they might wish.

38 To decide whether to request a .gov domain name for the Council website

38.1 The Clerk noted that this item had been included on the item following a push by government persuade more Councils to adopt the .gov.uk domain, and previous Cllr interest in the subject. Additionally the Clerk noted that this decision would be likely to leave the Council needing to redesign the website, and with far less flexibility to do so. It would also likely lead to increased costs.

38.2 No Cllr wished to proposed requesting a .gov domain name and so the Council's online presence will remain at bishopstokepc.org.

39 To consider the Council's involvement in D-Day 80

39.1 Cllrs generally supported the Council's involvement in D-Day 80 but had concerns over the use of bonfires.

39.2 Proposed Cllr Kirby, Seconded Cllr Harris, **RESOLVED** unanimously that the Clerk obtain more information prior to the Council making a decision.

Action: Clerk – to obtain more information about D-Day 80 and bring it forward for discussion at a future meeting.

40 To consider content for the next press release

40.1 The Council agreed that the next press release would include Carnival, nominations for Bishopstoke Champion 2024 being open, the availability of litter picking equipment, the grant provided to ARK, and an update on the Cemetery gates and the relocation of the War Memorial.

Action: Clerk – to draft the press release and circulate it to the Communications Group for approval

41 To agree the date, time and place for the next meetings

41.1 The next meeting will take place on Tuesday November 14th 2023. It will take place at 7:30pm at the Bishopstoke Methodist Church, following the Parish Assembly. The Clerk requested any agenda items and supporting papers be with him by November 7th.

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting at 8:29pm.

Chair's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Clerk's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Full Council – 14th November 2023

Recommendations and Resolutions

Committee Resolutions – to note

Assets

26th September – Meeting cancelled

Finance

10th October – FIN_2324_M03

- Item 20.2 That the minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held on 8 August be adopted as a true record.
- Item 22.3 That the Council approve the reports on Council finances
- Item 23.7 That the changes to the CIP list be approved (see additional sheet)

Planning

12th September – PLAN_2324_M06

- Item 41.2 That the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 25 July be adopted as a true record.
- Item 44.4 That the responses of the Planning Committee be submitted to the planning authority.
- Item 47.1 Confidential Business

26th September – PLAN_2324_M07

- Item 50.2 That the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 12 September be adopted as a true record.
- Item 52.4 That the responses of the Planning Committee be submitted to the planning authority.
- Item 55.1 Confidential business.

10th October – PLAN_2324_M08

- Item 58.2 That the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 26 September be adopted as a true record.
- Item 60.7 That the responses of the Planning Committee be submitted to the planning authority.
- Item 63.1 Confidential business.

24th October – PLAN_2324_M08

- Item 66.2 That the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 10 October be adopted as a true record.
- Item 68.3 That the responses of the Planning Committee be submitted to the planning authority.
- Item 71.1 Confidential business.

People

17th October – Meeting cancelled

Committee Recommendations – to vote upon

Assets

26th September – Meeting cancelled

Finance

10th October – FIN_2324_M03

Item 24.5 That the Council approves opening additional savings accounts (see additional sheet)

Item 25.2 That the Council approve Burial Board fees for the year 2024-25 (see additional sheet)

Planning

12th September – PLAN_2324_M06

No recommendations

26th September – PLAN_2324_M07

No recommendations

10th October – PLAN_2324_M08

No recommendations

24th October – PLAN_2324_M08

No recommendations

People

17th October – Meeting cancelled

Working Group Recommendations

Communications Working Group

No recommendations

Carnival Working Group

No recommendations

Village Trail Working Group

No recommendations

Glebe Meadow Working Group

No recommendations

Full Council – November 14th 2023

Item 4 – CIP List Changes

- 23.2 It was agreed to remove the following projects from the CIP list:
- Brookfield open space play area
 - Church Road play area
 - Outside Book of Remembrance
 - Village WiFi
 - Charging points at bus shelters
- 23.3 It was agreed to keep the following projects on the CIP list
- Community Trails/Wayfinding
 - Brookfield MUGA – put to request a new estimate on costs
 - Glebe Meadow skate ramp and zone enhancement
 - Sewall Drive allotments
 - Stoke Common Cemetery
 - Bow Lake Gardens allotments
 - Bird / Bat Boxes
 - Walk signs
 - Solar Panels
 - Bishopstoke Memorial Hall
 - Parish Council Office
 - St Paul's Church
 - Peter Dibden Memorial Scout Hut
 - Whalesmead shopping area
 - Electric vehicle charging points
 - Digital noticeboards / public art
 - Replacement bin / street furniture project
 - Sensory Garden
 - Defibrillators
 - Community Development Workers
 - Bottle filling stations / drinking fountains
 - Sheltered respite benches
 - Bulb planting
 - Verge parking protection
 - Dropped, kerbs and tactile paving around Bishopstoke Whalesmead and other locations
 - Public Art

- 23.4 It was agreed to ask for an additional column on the spreadsheet to include a BIFFOH-wide project and move the following projects to be BIFFOH-wide and not only applicable to Bishopstoke
- Enhance public access to and use of Stoke Park Woods
 - Y Zone youth centre
 - Community Cinema
- 23.5 It was agreed to ask for the following projects to be moved to the Fair Oak & Horton Heath list
- Outside games tables (M/S/S)
- 23.6 It was agreed to ask for the following projects to be added to the CIP list
- Glebe Meadow Project
 - Cemetery Boardwalk
 - Underwood Road Allotment Shop
 - Village Map boards
 - Community Planters
 - Book Swap/Library boxes
 - Bishopstoke Beach rebanking

REPORT TO BISHOPSTOKE PARISH COUNCIL (Full Council)

14th November 2023

Agenda Item 4

Report Subject: Reports from Committees, Working Groups, Officers and Councillors
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On 10th October 2023, the Finance Committee met and resolved to make a recommendation regarding savings accounts arrangements.

Old recommendation:

- To open a savings account with the Co-operative to put aside allotment deposits and keep some savings. This account would mirror the current account bank mandate.
- To keep £85,000 with the EBC savings account
- To invest £85,000 in an ethical 1 year bond with the Charity Bank
- To invest £85,000 in a limited access account with Coventry Building Society
- To invest £85,000 in an instant access account with Ecology Building Society

Since the Finance Committee meeting, the RFO has discovered that Coventry Building Society and Ecology Building Society do not accept applications from organisation such as Parish Councils for the moment, so the recommendation is being changed

New recommendation:

- To open a savings account with the Co-operative to put aside allotment deposits and keep some savings. This account would mirror the current account bank mandate.
- To invest £85,000 in an ethical 1 year bond with the Charity Bank
- To invest £85,000 in a 35-day access account with Nationwide Building Society
- To keep the balance of savings with the EBC savings account for the moment, in the future limiting to a maximum of £85,000

The RFO will continue researching other ethical savings options and bring back other options to a future meeting of the Finance Committee. Unfortunately Tridios, who are recommended as being an ethical organisation, is closed to new applicants.

Sophie Thorogood
RFO to Bishopstoke Parish Council
8th November 2023

REPORT TO BISHOPSTOKE PARISH COUNCIL (Finance Committee)

10th October 2023
Item 7

Recommendation – that the Committee recommend maintaining burial board fees at the same level as for 2023/24

INTERMENTS	(Interment form required)	£
A child up to 18 years of age		Free
A person 18 years and over	– single depth	345
	– double depth	395
Ashes burial within grave		195
Scattering of ashes where grave turf is removed		100
Scattering of ashes around perimeter of Cemetery		Free (by prior arrangement only)

EXCLUSIVE RIGHT OF BURIAL GRANTS	£ (for 30 years)	£ (for 60 years)
Adult plot	420	820
Child plot ##	420	820
Ashes plot	320	620
Transfer of Exclusive Right of Burial **		35

where the child is under 18 years of age in most cases this fee, and the memorial application fee, are both payable from the Children's Funeral Fund and not directly by parents.

HEADSTONES & MEMORIAL INSCRIPTIONS (application form required)	£
Headstone (new)	195
Vase, or flat memorial with a maximum height of 13cm/5 inches (new)	145
Applications to alter or replace an existing memorial, or to add a further memorial **	35

Full Council - Clerk's report 14th November 2023

Clerk's Report

Actions from previous meetings

FULL_2223_M01/Item 11.2 Regarding training on the audit process and financial reports
The RFO will be arranging this training.

FULL_2223_M05/Item 63.2 Regarding youth provision at the Y-Zone
I have received a copy of the contract between EBC and the service provider, but this does not detail how many hours of provision are targeted at Bishopstoke, nor what that provision will be. I have requested more detail from the Borough Council.

FULL_2324_M02/Item 24.2 Regarding the War Memorial
The War Memorial was not able to be installed in time for the Armistice Day service. Not only had the Borough Council requested additional scale drawings, plans and elevations which we were unable to obtain in time, the Diocese also responded with around one week to go with requests for additional information. Both requests are being worked on and the Memorial will be installed as soon as it is feasible to do so.

FULL_2223_M03/Item 33.2 Regarding minutes
The minutes were signed and published on the website.

FULL_2223_M03/Item 35.2 Regarding the basket swing at Blackberry Drive
The resident has been emailed as requested.

FULL_2223_M03/Item 35.3 Regarding the hedge at Stoke Common play area
The Assets Officer has arranged that Green Smile will replant the hedge at the appropriate time. The replacement bin and dog sign are yet to be ordered.

FULL_2223_M03/Item 37.3 Regarding the policy on Ethics and Ethical Procurement
The policy has been published on the website. It will be reviewed in March.

FULL_2223_M03/Item 39.2 Regarding D-Day 80
More information has been requested.

FULL_2223_M03/Item 40.1 Regarding the media release
This was not done.

Communications Report

The next newsletter will be confirmed once the budget has been agreed. It will be delivered as soon after that as possible and will cover everything from September through to the budget. Cllrs are welcome to submit articles for possible publication.

Carnival Report

Sadly Carnival had to be cancelled this year. With less than 48 hours to go both our first aid provider and portable toilet provider let us know that they would be unable to provide what had originally been agreed. Preparations had been more complicated this year anyway due to the small number of volunteers involved in planning the event. Since the cancellation was announced a small number of new volunteers have come forward and offered to help for next year.

Memorial Hall

Regular meetings continue with the Borough Council. We are still awaiting the Land Registry confirmation that the land has been properly registered, which is preventing everything else from taking place. The Borough have asked the Working Group to look over their current draft documents for the architect tender process and this will be completed over the next few weeks.

Other Items

Asset Transfers – Nothing new to report.

Allotments – The wait for an allotment at Underwood Road is currently only about 6 months. This comes from a combination of people leaving as usual when the rent letters arrive, and others who have been on the waiting list either no longer being interested or having moved out of the area. The short waiting time will feature in the next newsletter.

Office – Nothing new to report.

Burial Matters – There were three new ashes interments in September, with one new interment and two new ashes interments in October. The total for the year so far is 19.

Play Areas – The DDA roundabouts at both Sayers Road and Glebe Meadow are in need of repairs – the former as it is out of shape and the latter as it needs new bearings. Additionally we are contemplating trying again with a basket swing at Otter Close.

Open Spaces – Nothing new to report

Cemetery Gates – These are currently being galvanised with powder coating in the week of the 20th November and installation in the week of the 27th.

Section 3 – External Auditor’s Report and Certificate 2022/23

In respect of

Bishopstoke Parish Council

1 Respective responsibilities of the auditor and the authority

Our responsibility as auditors to complete a **limited assurance review** is set out by the National Audit Office (NAO). A limited assurance review is **not a full statutory audit**, it does not constitute an audit carried out in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland) and hence it **does not** provide the same level of assurance that such an audit would. The UK Government has determined that a lower level of assurance than that provided by a full statutory audit is appropriate for those local public bodies with the lowest levels of spending.

Under a limited assurance review, the auditor is responsible for reviewing Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with NAO Auditor Guidance Note 02 (AGN 02) as issued by the NAO on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General. AGN 02 is available from the NAO website – <https://www.nao.org.uk/code-audit-practice/guidance-and-information-for-auditors/>.

This authority is responsible for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control. The authority prepares an Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with *Proper Practices* which:

- summarises the accounting records for the year ended 31 March 2023; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors.

2 External auditor’s limited assurance opinion 2022/23

On the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority:

None

3 External auditor certificate 2022/23

We certify that we have completed our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, and discharged our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31 March 2023.

External Auditor Name

BDO LLP – Southampton

External Auditor Signature

BDO LLP

SIGNATURE REQUIRED

Date

24 September 2023 YY

Full Council – November 14th 2023

Item 6 – Tree and Bee corridor

The Assets Committee has the power to make decisions on:

6.1.7 All matters pertaining to the management of existing open spaces and trees owned by, run by, or the responsibility of the Parish Council. This excludes taking over or creating any new open spaces.

However, as the decisions regarding the tree and bee corridor spaces are not just about managing the space but allowing an external body to make decisions about planting there, I would request the Council to formally delegate the authority over this matter to the Assets Committee.

Recommendation: That the Council delegate authority to the Assets Committee to make decisions on which areas of Parish held land can be included in the Tree and Bee project.

Full Council

Membership of external bodies

Current list

The Council is currently a member of and / or pays subscription fees to the following external bodies:

NALC (National Association of Local Councils)

HALC (Hampshire Association of Local Councils)

SLCC (Society of Local Council Clerks)

Hampshire Playing Fields Association

ICCM (Institute of Cemetery and Crematoria Management)

National Allotment Society

ICO Data Protection Registration

It is recommended that the Council approves the continued membership of all bodies on the list.

Full Council – November 14th 2023

Item 8 – Travel Tokens

The scheme continues to be popular and helps between 30 and 40 people every year who have difficulty using the local bus service. For the past two years the number of tokens given out has been 120 per person, with a 24 token bonus if the recipient cannot travel without a companion.

Since the Parish Council began the Travel Token scheme in 2011 (with 12 applicants receiving 48 tokens each), the number of allocated tokens has increased by 12 every two years (with one exception).

Generally it is the case that not all tokens handed out in a year are used and returned. It is therefore possible to budget for a lower number of tokens to be refunded than are actually handed out.

It is likely that further tokens may need to be purchased during the year. The cost of purchasing another 4,000 tokens is likely to be around £150.

I recommend that this year the budget for Travel Tokens be set at £2,800 for token refunds with an additional £200 to purchase new tokens.

Full Council – November 14th 2023

Item 9 – Events

Recently the Council has either considered or been asked to consider a number of different events outside of the Carnival umbrella. One obstacle standing in the way of these extra events is the lack of a budget heading and allocated funds. Redesignating the Carnival budget heading as Events would mean that these events could proceed more swiftly and with less fuss.

Another obstacle is that each event requires separate approval from the Council. This could be eased by allowing the Chair, Vice Chair and Clerk to decide, if the timing requires it, whether an event should be added to the calendar without having to gain approval from Full Council. This would be subject to the event planner providing details of expected costs as well as the required insurances and risk assessments. An event would not be permitted to be added in this fashion if it would lead to an expected overspend of the Events budget.

Recommendation: That the Council redesignate the Carnival budget heading to be Events and that, if circumstances warrant it, a decision on allowing an event to be added to the calendar could be taken by the Chair, Vice Chair and Clerk.

Full Council – November 14th 2023

Item 10 – Staffing Levels

The People Committee has considered the current level of staffing that support Bishopstoke Parish Council and is recommending the Council appoint an additional “Allotments & General Duties Officer”, starting at an initial 20 hours per week, with the understanding that as new allotment sites are taken on by the Council and new events are added, the role could increase up to 30 hours per week. The initial salary range is set to be from scale point 13-15. Making this appointment at scale point 15 for 20 hours would add £24,507 to the salary budget for 2024-25. This includes all the associated costs related to pensions and HMRC. The changes this would mean for existing roles and the proposed role were covered in the document pack for the People Committee meeting for 17th October 2023, and have also been included in the document pack for this meeting. The full job pack would be agreed by the People Committee over the coming weeks with a view to advertising the role before Christmas. The cost per household of such an addition is 57 pence per month per band D household.

Clerk’s Note – in the recent People Committee online meeting this was incorrectly estimated to be 31 pence per month.

Officers are also always ready to examine how they work with a view to maximising their performance and efficiency, but we do not believe that there is enough time to be gained via this process to negate the need for another member of staff.

The roles identified for the new member of staff have been arrived at after looking carefully at the strengths and weaknesses of each member of staff, as well as giving consideration to the fact that the current assets and inspections regime is only months old and therefore still bedding in.

Recommendation from People Committee: The Committee recommend to Full Council the appointment of an Allotments & General Duties Officer, working 20 hours per week, with the role to commence on 1st April 2024. The role to be advertised at scale point 13-15, subject to a full job assessment once the role has been agreed.

It was noted in the People Committee document pack that an alternative to adding a member of staff would be for the Council to reduce the services that it provides, but no suggested list was provided. It is not easy to make a complete assessment of each of the minor services that the Council provides and the time spent on them each year, but we have been able to provide the following options:

Option 1 – As the role is intended to cover both allotments and events run by the Council, one option would be to request the Borough take back responsibility for all allotment sites within Bishopstoke, and for no events to be scheduled until the workload of the current staff eases. This would mean that there would be no Carnival or Sports Day for the foreseeable future, but also that prospective events such as the Community Group day would also not happen. There is also no guarantee that the Borough Council would accept retaking the allotment sites. The other planned adjustments to job roles would still take place.

Option 2 – The Cemeteries Officer role is approximately 15 hours per week, so a second option would be to ask the Borough Council to take back responsibility for the Cemetery, and for no events to be scheduled as with Option 1. Again, there is no guarantee that the Borough Council would accept retaking the Cemetery, however, assuming they did then the Cemeteries Officer would assume responsibility for the allotments, allowing the other planned adjustments to roles to take place.

Option 3 – Handing back control of the play areas to the Borough Council may, when combined with other smaller reductions, produce enough of a saving in time to ensure that the remaining services can be managed by the current staff. Again, the Borough may not wish to take back responsibility for these areas.

It should be noted that these first three options do not produce a saving in costs to the residents of Bishopstoke (apart from the cost of a new staff member of course). This is because whilst handing back responsibility of services to the Borough Council would result in a decrease in the Parish Council's part of Council Tax, there would be a corresponding increase in Borough Council tax for Bishopstoke. The actual cost to Bishopstoke residents may even increase if the Borough costs for allotments, cemeteries or play areas are higher than Bishopstoke's.

Option 4 – As well as committing to no scheduled events the Council could cease offering travel tokens, stop producing the newsletter and cease working on the various one off projects that are currently either ongoing or planned. There would also need to a number of other smaller services identified for being stopped to ensure that the current workload becomes manageable for the existing staff.

Another possible way to accommodate worries about the cost of living whilst still being able to secure an additional member of staff would be to try to reduce costs across the rest of the Parish budget in order to fund the new staff member.

Option 5 – The Parish Council has for many years provided part of the funding for the Y-Zone. This increased from an initial £18,000 per year to £25,000 per year and has remained at this level for several years. A contract was signed to provide this funding but this expired in Jan 2022 and no new contract has been presented since. Responsibility for providing youth services across the Borough has now been contracted out and we have been unable to obtain any information regarding what costs the Parish Council might be asked to bear under this new arrangement. The Council could decide to reallocate this funding to the staff budget. This would mean a new member of staff could be employed, as described above, with the next cost to the Council being £407. This would lead to an increase in the Band D Council Tax of 1 penny per month per household.

Option 6 – Instead of redesignating the Y Zone / youth services budget, it may be possible to make savings across other budget areas to fund the new member of staff without having to increase the precept.

- Switching newsletters to online only, with printing on request, would save £5,000 per year;

- Only replacing one noticeboard next year saves £1,250;

- Reducing the events budget to £5,000 would save £3,000 per year but may restrict what Carnival can provide;

- Handing responsibility for bus shelters back to EBC could save £4,000;

- Reducing the budget for potential additional groundwork at the Burial Grounds to £1,500 would save £1,000.

Altogether, these changes would save £14,250 per year, leaving around £11,000 to be funded either through other small savings or through increasing the precept. Adding £11,000 to the precept would cost each Band D household 26 pence per month.

People Committee – 17th October 2023

Staffing Levels

Bishopstoke Parish Council has, over the years, gradually increased the number of staff, and hours worked, as the services provided by the Council, and the administrative requirements that go with them, have increased.

Currently the Council employs a full time Clerk (37 hours per week), a Responsible Finance Officer (15 hours per week), and a Cemeteries & Assets Officer (30 hours per week). In addition to finance, the RFO is also chiefly responsible for the running of the Council's allotments.

The Council has moved from the days when it had almost no responsibilities and few legal requirements or oversight, to the present day when it provides a wide variety of services to the residents of Bishopstoke. As the services provided have grown, so too have the administrative responsibilities and the health and safety requirements. Changes were needed to bring the Council up to date in terms of policies and procedures and that work is still ongoing.

There is a difference between the service the Council *is* providing and the service the Council *would like to* provide. Officers are currently overworked to the point that not all tasks can be completed on time or in the best possible way, and the workload is only increasing. New projects are being added all the time, some of which require a great many hours to move forward; the work on updating the Council's policy suite is not yet finished; we are still unable to inspect some of our sites or review our services as often as we would like and some recent proposals, such as joining the Greening Campaign, have had to be shelved as there is no officer time available to provide the necessary admin support.

Adding to the already overfull workload, the Council is potentially looking at adding multiple small events to the calendar, at least one if not two allotment sites, a second cemetery and additional open space.

Emergencies inevitably mean that important work is delayed and this cannot always be caught up. The Council is operating on a "just in time" basis, meaning that officers are suffering stress and feel constantly under intense pressure just to try to cope with their "normal" workload.

Our closest comparator in terms of population, location and services provided is Fair Oak Parish Council. In February 2022, the last time for which I have data, their staff consisted of the Clerk (37 hours per week), two deputy clerks (total 49 hours per week), the RFO (25 hours per week), a Communications & Events officer (25 hours per week), a Community Development Officer (37 hours per week) and various ground staff and caretakers which are not relevant for this comparison as they perform duties which Bishopstoke Parish Council contracts out.

In terms of staff hours, Fair Oak has 173 hours per week whereas Bishopstoke has 82. Even without the Community Development Officer – which is funded by Eastleigh Borough Council – Fair Oak Parish Council still has 54 extra hours being worked **per week** compared to Bishopstoke.

One direct comparison is particularly illustrative. Fair Oak employ an RFO for 25 hours per week. Bishopstoke employs its RFO for 15 hours per week, and expects her to run the allotments in addition to the accounts, and clerk one committee and one working group, as well as running the Memorial Hall were it still to be a going concern.

Their structure is broadly similar – two committees, one sub-committee and four working groups. They have 60 allotment plots to our current 140 with two more sites to add. They have one cemetery and one closed churchyard. They have five play areas compared to our 6 with an additional MUGA and skate park, with a further play area coming. They do have three community buildings whereas we are in the process of trying to rebuild our only one.

They also do a number of extra things, such as adding public art, having a café, looking after hanging baskets and planters and running a Greening Campaign. They can do this because they have a larger precept than Bishopstoke, and a far larger staff.

If Bishopstoke Parish Council continues to operate on its current staffing it will lead to further delays in current work, delays in implementing our preferred inspection routine and new projects not getting off the ground. It is also likely to lead to increased stress levels among staff, with a greater potential for time off work being medically required. One potential way forward is to cut the workload of the officers by cutting the services the Council provides. The other is to employ sufficient staff to allow the current work to be completed well rather than adequately, on time rather than late, and with scope to add new projects without risking the health of employees. It is the second approach that I think Bishopstoke needs and the Council should opt for.

Allotments & Events Officer

In response to the identified problems listed above, the Committee is asked to recommend a new post be created of Allotments & Events Officer.

Allotments

Currently work on managing the allotment tenants and tenancies is performed by the RFO with help from the Clerk. The allotment site reps have estimated that to do the job properly, fulfilling all current requirements, should take around 15 hours per week. This would include our planned move to monthly inspection of plots. We will also be adding up to two new allotment sites which will increase this workload further.

Removing allotments from the RFO would allow her to fully take over the Communications role, producing the newsletters, providing Facebook updates, investigated other social media possibilities and having an increasing role on the website. It would also allow her time to research grants for projects – something that is increasingly important for the Council.

Removing both allotments and communications from the Clerk would allow projects that are slipping to be brought back on time, new ideas to be brought forward and new projects to be undertaken without other work having to give way.

I recommend the new post, if approved, have a minimum of 15 hours for allotments. Appointing at 20 hours instead would lead to a shorter transition period and also mean that when the new allotment sites are added there would be less difficulty in coping with the increased workload.

Events

Work on the Carnival alone requires a substantial amount of time each year but it is distributed unevenly throughout the year. As a rough estimate, Carnival and the Sports Day together will require around 5 hours per week on average. The addition of the Sports Day will increase that total.

The Council also has the Parish Assembly and the Armistice Day service, which are currently done at a bare bones level but could be so much more if time permitted. In addition the Council is contemplating adding a Community Group Fair, a Grow Your Own event, and I have received requests and suggestions for additional events such as a car show, a pumpkin carving competition and a cream tea.

Adding these smaller events would enhance the visibility and standing of the Parish Council with residents but the current workload means we are unable to commit officer time to any of them.

I recommend that the new post, if approved, have a minimum of 5 hours for events. This would cover Carnival and the Sports Day. Appointing at 10 hours instead would allow work to be done on improving the Parish Assembly and the Armistice Day Service immediately, and also allow for the introduction of new events throughout the year.

Recommendation

If the Committee is convinced that the new post is needed, then I strongly recommend appointing at 30 hours rather than 20. Whilst 20 hours would definitely reduce the stress on current staff in the medium term, and allow for the current allotment sites and events to continue being served, it allows no time for additional allotment sites or new events. Additionally, 30 hours would both shorten, and reduce the impact of, the transition period. If the appointment were to be made at 20 hours I would recommended that it be specified this was with an increase to 30 hours planned as additional allotment sites and new events are added.

My initial assessment of the role is that it would be within the LC1+ range for salary purposes, although this may change slightly after a deeper look. This would suggest that the starting salary could be in the Scale point 13-15 range.

Total cost to the Council of such a role, including National Insurance and pension, would range from 20 hours at point 13 (approximately £20k per year) to 30 hours at point 15 (approximately £30k per year).

Recommendation: The Committee recommend to Full Council the appointment of an Allotments & Events Officer, working 30 hours per week, with the role to commence on 1st April 2024. The role to be advertised at scale point 13-15, subject to a full job assessment once the role has been agreed.

Full Council – November 14th 2023

Item 11 – Budget

The Finance Committee looked at the draft budget in October. A few items were adjusted upwards, and others adjusted down. A full list of changes made can be found in the Finance Minutes.

The Full Council is not making a decision today about the complete budget (that will take place in January), nor is it examining line by line (that will take place in December).

Instead the Full Council is asked to consider two major spending considerations – play zones and the Glebe Meadow project – for the next few years.

Additionally, depending on the outcome of the discussions on staffing levels, it may be necessary to include an extra £25,000 in the budget for staff costs.

Play Zones

The Council currently has responsibility for the following play zones:

- Stoke Common play area
- Glebe Meadow play area
- Glebe Meadow skate park
- Sayers Road play area
- Otter Close play area
- Templecombe Road play area
- Blackberry Drive play area
- Blackberry Drive MUGA (multi-use games area)
- Blackberry Drive bike track

The Council is expected to be offered responsibility for Judges Gully play area as well.

This is a total of 10 play zones each of which has an acknowledged lifespan of 15-20 years. This lifespan takes account of the Council engaging in necessary maintenance.

The implication of this is that the Council, over a 20 year period, may need to fund the replacement of all 10 play zones. Each area would require between £50,000 and £90,000 to replace with a brand new design (depending on size of area). This implies that funding of £35,000 per year is necessary to undertake this programme of play area replacement.

It may be possible to reduce this cost by working to a system whereby only equipment that is broken, dangerous or outdated and unused is replaced, with other equipment being repeatedly maintained when necessary in the hope of extending its lifespan. It is difficult to estimate the impact this would have on costs, but it is believed that it could halve the cost of new equipment. However, this would certainly increase the maintenance costs. It should also be noted that some individual pieces of equipment cost in excess of £25,000. The play area surface (wetpour) is also expensive and patched areas are more likely to fail more quickly.

One other negative impact of a “replace only when necessary” strategy is that the Council would rarely, if ever, have the opportunity to celebrate the opening of a brand new or refurbished play area.

A sensible estimate of the costs of managing 10 play zones would be in the range of £20,000 (replacement only when necessary) to £35,000 (re-doing a play area every two years on a rolling cycle) per year.

This cost would only have an impact on the precept once, at the time it was introduced, so once the cost is included in the budget the play areas should be fully funded for whatever strategy the Council has decided to employ. The only occasions when this would not be true would be for emergency repairs, or if the Council decided in the future to alter the strategy, either towards “full replacement”, or back down to “only when necessary”.

It is acknowledged that not only does the Council have other major financial commitments it needs to fulfil but also that whilst the financial outlook for the country is better than it was last year it is still not comfortable for many people. For that reason the initial recommendation is at the low end of the funding required.

Recommendation: That the Council add £20,000 to this and future budgets to ensure that play areas can have broken, dangerous or unused equipment replaced when necessary.

Glebe Meadow and the Memorial Hall

The Council has at various times decided to accept responsibility for running the Memorial Hall, become the sole trustee of the charity that owns the Hall, and to replace the Hall with a brand new building to both serve the needs of the community and to provide an office and meeting rooms for the Parish Council.

The Parish has been working in conjunction with the Borough Council which has set aside a fund of around £1.25 million for the project. Estimates for the new building have ranged from around £1 to £1.5 million when first discussed, to at least £4 million when last discussed. The Parish Council has agreed a design brief for the building and is keen to ensure the costs remain below £3 million.

In addition the Parish Council is planning to refurbish Glebe Meadow as a whole, with costs estimated at up to £250,000. All previous developer contributions that were aimed at projects such as the skate park have been rolled into the £1.25 million that the Borough is providing.

This gives a total estimated cost to the project of £3.25 million, meaning that the Parish Council would have to provide up to £2 million of funds.

Whilst delays in demolishing the building, and the agreement of the Borough Council to fund everything from their £1.25 million pot up to the point where there are costable plans and a planning application have allowed the Parish some leeway in securing the necessary funds, this leeway is running out and an initial decision needs to be taken on how to proceed.

It is hoped that some funding will be provided through grants and other means, but it is difficult to access those grants until there is a project to give grants to. Work on securing grants can begin once detailed plans, with associated estimates, are in place. However, it would be prudent to be aware of the worst case scenario, which is that the Council may have to obtain a loan of £2 million from the Public Works Loan Board.

Current interest rates charged by the scheme require that to fund a loan of £2 million over a 50 year period (the longest available), the repayments would be £60,213.85 every 6 months, totalling £120,417.70 per annum. The total repaid over the period would be in excess of £6 million. It would be possible to reduce the total cost by structuring the loan differently. An initial payment amount of £77,100.00, with each subsequent amount reducing by £571.00, leads to a total repayment of £4,883,550 with a final payment of £20,571.

These are fixed rate loans, so it can be hoped that interest rates will be lower at the time any loan is taken. However, as has recently been shown, interest rates can go up as well as down and so these numbers are changeable.

If grant funding is obtained after the loan has been secured, then it is possible to pay down part of the loan, although this will likely incur a fee.

Reaching a point where the Council is able to fund repayments of £120,000 per year can be done in one of two ways – in one hit or in several stages. Making the provision in one jump means that the increase in precept can be directly linked to providing a new building, but it also means that there is a year with a large increase in precept. Making the provision across several years obviously spreads the increases out but it also dilutes the value of the reason behind it. Either way, communication regarding the plans should be frequent.

Again, taking note of the current financial situation the recommendation is on the cautious side. Increasing the funding levels over up to three years should mean that there is sufficient funding available to make the first repayment in 2025-26, or earlier if Borough money is used to make up any difference between what is required and what is available. Taking three years to increase the levels also gives time for the Responsible Finance Officer to attempt to secure grants and other funding to reduce the value of the loan needed.

The final item to consider in relation to Glebe Meadow is the funding of a project manager. The Council could opt to fund this through annual expenditure, treating the project manager as a temporary member of staff. Alternatively, the Council could choose to fund the project manager through the Glebe Meadow fund and loan. This latter option costs the Council less but reduces the funds available for the project.

Recommendation: That the Council place £30,000 into the Glebe Meadow fund this coming financial year, with £60,000 being added the following year, and any increase for the third year being determined once any other funding sources have been taken account of.

Recommendation: That the Council fund the Glebe Meadow project manager through the Glebe Meadow fund and loan.