

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF BURNTWOOD TOWN COUNCIL
HELD IN THE MAIN HALL, BURNTWOOD MEMORIAL INSTITUTE, RUGELEY ROAD,
BURNTWOOD ON TUESDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2024 COMMENCING AT 6.00 PM**

PRESENT

Councillor Coe MBE (in the Chair)

Councillors Banevicius, Bullock, D Ennis, L Ennis, Evans, Galvin, Gittings, Norman, P Taylor, S Taylor, Tranter, Willis-Croft, Wittstock and Woodward

In attendance

S Lightfoot, Town Clerk

Ms J Minor, Deputy Clerk

County Councillor Wilcox

PUBLIC FORUM

No questions were raised by members of the public.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR PLATFORM

In the absence of County Councillors Cox and Loughbrough-Rudd (due to prior commitments), County Councillor Wilcox gave the following update:

County Councillor Loughbrough-Rudd (Burntwood North Division)

Extra highways crews from Staffordshire County Council will be out and about fixing more roads over the next few weeks. Last winter was one of the wettest on record, and this has taken a toll on our local roads. Lots of residents have been telling me how important having good roads is to them, so crews will be pulling out all the stops over the next week to repair as many defects as they can. They will mainly be concentrating on repairing potholes and drainage issues but will also be making sure our roads are in a decent condition before next winter.

The Crews will be in the following areas between the 11-15th weather depending. In Burntwood North the roads are Myatt Avenue, Morley Road, Rochester Avenue, Ironstone Road, Redwood Drive, Water Street and Cannock Road.

County Councillor Wilcox (Burntwood South Division)

County Councillor Wilcox explained that extra highways crews will be out and about in Burntwood on a mission to fix more roads. Staffordshire County Council's highways crew will be on High Street, Miners Way, Baker Street, Cedar Road, Farewell Lane, Rowan Grove, Milestone Way, Sycamore Road, Norton Lane, Chase Road over the next week, carrying out pothole repairs and tackling drainage issues. These extra crews are the result of a nearly £8 million investment the County Council is making into Staffordshire's roads, to help repair the damage done by one of the wettest winters on record, and to ensure they are prepared for next winter. This is in addition to the £30 million investment the county council is making in maintaining and improving Staffordshire's highways over the next two years, alongside a total of £53 million being spent on a range of major projects, vital road improvements and general road maintenance in 24/25.

County Councillor Wilcox confirmed that he had held his Divisional Highways Meeting last week where he had invited the Leader and Town Clerk to join him, unfortunately the Leader was unable to attend however the Town Clerk did and had a valuable insight into planned works and was able to raise other issues affecting the town. He said that he intended to offer this invitation periodically to the Town Council.

County Councillor Wilcox explained that he was working with Burntwood Rugby Club to get the fence repairs that borders along the footpath near to their entrance, and he is also working with Chasewater Officers to get the footpath reinstated at the side of the Light Railway running down to the Café avoiding pedestrians having to walk down the main entrance road to the Club which has become dangerous with so many cars parked along this road. He is also looking at what quick wins – potentially painting some warning signs on the road to slow motorists.

County Councillor Wilcox stated that still early talks continue with interested parties including the District and Town Councils over bringing a piece of derelict land into a community space down opposite the Star Pub. Discussions about a peppercorn lease from the County Council and some highway improvements are being considered.

Councillor P Taylor suggested that perhaps members of the public could be signposted to Church Street car park which he believed was open most days now (Chasetown Football Club hold a key) and if the set of steps by the bridge leading from the football club could be repaired properly that would also be beneficial.

Councillor Woodward referred to Staffordshire County Council's investment of £7 million to redevelop Chasewater Innovation Centre and the surrounding area. She felt that public feedback was key to shaping these improvements however neither Chasewater Friends nor Burntwood Town Council had been officially consulted. Councillor Woodward asked if the improvements at the Rugby Club were part of the £7 million investment. County Councillor Wilcox confirmed that the proposed improvements would be funded through his Divisional Highways Fund. He also said that he was disappointed with the progress made with regard to the redevelopment of Chasewater as the £7 million had been allocated and would consult with the portfolio holder.

53. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Bacon (Unwell)
Councillor R Ennis (Work Commitments)
Councillor Flanagan (Work Commitments)
Councillor Hancox (Personal Reasons)
Councillor Holdsworth (Work Commitments)
Councillor Kirkham (Work Commitments)

The reasons for the apologies were approved.

54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

Councillor Woodward declared an interest in any items relating to Chasewater Friends as she is a member of that organisation.

55. MINUTES

The Chair reminded Members that they were being asked to comment solely on the accuracy of the Minutes.

It was proposed by Councillor D Ennis, seconded by Councillor Norman, and following a show of hands it was

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Town Council held on 17 September 2024 (Minute Nos. 38-52) be received and where necessary approved and adopted.

56. CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair read out the following statement:

The role of Chair is certainly diverse and very interesting. Since the last meeting I have taken part in a range of meetings and events, each one in some way contributing to our brilliant community.

I attended a launch party at Chasewater Mews Care Home. It was really interesting to talk to some of the residents and their families. There are a range of activities planned and, on the day, they had a singer there and staff were encouraging them to join in, sing along and dance. Being of a certain age I always worry in case I am mistaken for a resident and not allowed to leave.

Another interesting event was judging Burntwood Be A Friend's Scarecrow Competition. Being my first time I decided to consult an expert so I googled it. I wanted to make sure that I would judge fairly. Who knew there was so much to it. I had to judge on creativity, sustainability, materials used and a number of other technical aspects. It was lovely to see the very diverse ideas that people had come up with. If anyone needs a copy of my score sheet, I am happy to share it.

It was lovely to see the refurbished front of house at the Garrick Theatre and Studio. I got a photo with the Pantomime Dame for the upcoming Jack and the Beanstalk. The building looks really fresh, comfortable, and very up to date. We are lucky to have the Garrick and particularly this year as they are working with Burntwood Schools to deliver arts into our town.

On Sunday I was honoured to lay a wreath from the Town Council at the memorial at St John's Community Church Remembrance Service. It is always very moving to hear the names of those who sacrificed their lives so that we could live in freedom. I love that so many people support the events around the town and especially for the children from uniformed organisations, and to see them behaving so well and listening so intently.

As we head to Christmas the bookings are coming in thick and fast so there is going to be so much more to celebrate in Burntwood. Looking forward to it.

57. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

No questions were raised by Members.

58. FINANCIAL UPDATE FOR THE FIRST HALF OF THE CURRENT FINANCIAL YEAR

Members noted the report of income and expenditure compared to budget for the first 6 months of the financial year, April to September.

59. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 11 SEPTEMBER 2024

It was proposed by Councillor Norman, seconded by Councillor Galvin, and following a unanimous show of hands it was

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 11 September 2024 (Minute Nos. 12-22) be received and where necessary approved and adopted.

60. PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE – 16 SEPTEMBER 2024 AND 14 OCTOBER 2024

It was proposed by Councillor Gittings, seconded by Councillor L Ennis, and following a unanimous show of hands it was

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Planning and Development Committee held on 16 September 2024 (Minute Nos. 19-24) and 14 October 2024 [Minute Nos. 25-31] be received and where necessary approved and adopted.

61. ENABLING REMOTE ATTENDANCE AND PROXY VOTING AT LOCAL AUTHORITY MEETINGS

The Town Clerk explained that the Town Council had recently been consulted via the Staffordshire Parish Councils Association (of whom the Town Council is now a member) regarding a Government consultation on the re-introduction of remote meetings which had been announced at the LGA Conference by the Deputy Prime Minister. Members may recall that during Covid, the then Government temporarily changed the regulations to allow remote meetings. To make the changes permanent, the then Government would have needed to pass primary legislation, and they decided not to. The Town Clerk said that individual Councillors could give their views via the online form and the Town Council could put in a corporate response and if the Government does decide to give Councillors the option to attend meetings remotely, then the Town Council would need to review and then re-adopt their Standing Orders.

The Town Clerk said that he had emailed all Members on 28 October on this matter and had already received some responses.

Questions 1 – 8 refer to the proposal for remote attendance and Questions 10 – 13 refer to proxy voting).

Councillor Norman referred to the online form questions and in particular:

Questions 1

Please tick all that apply – are you responding to this consultation as: (a) an elected member, (b) a council body, (c) a member of the public, (d) a local government sector body.

Question 2

Do you agree with the board principle of granting local authorities powers to allow remote attendance at formal meetings?
Yes/No

Question 3

If you answer Yes to the above question, do you think that there should be specific limitations on remote attendance? (a) any formal meeting allowing remote attendance should have at least two thirds of members in physical attendance, (b) Members should only be able to attend council meetings remotely in exceptional

circumstances, such as those who are medically or physically unable to attend, or for reasons of local or national emergencies, (c) there should be no limitations placed upon councils with regard to setting arrangements for remote attendance of council meetings, up to and including full remote attendance.

Question 5

If you are responding to this consultation on behalf of the council as a whole, what proportion of the council's current elected members are likely to seek to attend council meetings remotely over the course of a year? (a) less than 10%, (b) more than 10% but less than 50%, (c) more than 50% but less than 90%, (d) most of them 90% to 100%.

Councillor Woodward said that she had replied to the Town Clerk's email saying that she was in two mind's about this. She felt that it was a good idea to give flexibility to those who have difficulty in attending in person due to health or employment reasons but it should not be abused in relation to the 6-month rule. She felt that Members should still be obliged to attend in person at least once every six months. Councillor Woodward referred to Question 3 (a) and in particular the reference made to at least two thirds of members in physical attendance and referred to being quorate at meetings already being in place. She also referred to Question 3 (b) and said that the caveats could also be extended when referring to exceptional circumstances. Councillor Woodward also referred to the proxy voting part of the online form and felt that remote voting was not appropriate and that voting should be made in person.

Councillor Galvin explained that he had experience of hybrid meetings but queried the equipment needed and wi-fi connection.

Councillor D Ennis said that he felt that there was limitations for Full Council meetings as he felt that this was part and parcel of a Councillor's role to attend meetings however a hybrid model could work for Committee meetings. He said however that he did not want to limit attendance at meetings due to barriers being put in place (e.g. equipment, wi-fi etc). Councillor D Ennis felt that Full Council could provide an answer to Questions 2, 3 and 5 tonight.

Councillor P Taylor felt, being one of the more technical members of the Council, that we should be streaming meetings for members of the public. However, with regard to proxy voting he felt that Members should be able to vote at Committee Meetings remotely.

RESOLVED That

Question 2

Do you agree with the broad principle of granting local authorities powers to allow remote attendance at formal meetings?

Answer: In principle, broadly speaking Yes

Question 3

If you answer Yes to the above question, do you think that there should be specific limitations on remote attendance?

Answer: Yes – There should be at least two thirds of members in physical attendance (quorate rules to apply); the caveats relating to exceptional circumstances, such as those who are medically or physically unable to attend, or for reasons of local or national emergencies could be expanded (these to be defined through Standing Orders).

Question 5

If you are responding to this consultation on behalf of a council as a whole, what proportion of the council's current elected members are likely to seek to attend council meetings remotely over the course of a year?

Answer: Less than 10%

62. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED That under the Public Bodies (Admissions of Meeting) Act 1960 (Section 2((and as expended by Section 100 of the Local Government Act 1972), the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information.

63. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 11 SEPTEMBER 2024

It was proposed by Councillor Norman, seconded by Councillor Galvin, and following a show of hands it was

RESOLVED That the Confidential Minutes of the Meeting of the Town Council held on 11 September 2024 (Minute Nos. 20-22) be received and where necessary approved and adopted.

(The Meeting closed at 6.31 pm)

Signed

Date