



CHIPPENHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of an extraordinary meeting of the Amenities, Culture and Leisure Committee held virtually on Zoom on 14 October 2020 at 4.03pm.

Councillors present: Desna Allen
Bill Douglas
Ruth Lloyd
David Powell
Pete Bishop
Teresa Hutton
Nina Phillips
Sandie Webb

Officers present: Mark Smith (Chief Executive)
Barry Pirie (Director of Community Services)
Daryl Jones (Business Support Manager)
Heather Rae (Democratic Services Manager)
Lynsey Nichols (Marketing and Communications Manager)
Michael Weeks (Democratic and Civic Officer)
Will Tidmarsh (Head of Environmental Services)
Melissa Barnett (Head of Museum and Heritage Services)
Paul Harvey (Head of Leisure Services)
Helen Bywater (Corporate Support Officer)

Public Present: There were six members of the public present

PUBLIC QUESTIONS There were three verbal questions and one written question from members of the public which are appended to these minutes at **APPENDIX A**. The responses to these questions were not part of the meeting but are appended to these minutes at **APPENDIX B**.

30. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Holly Bradfield, Melody Thompson and Chris Ruck.

31. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTION

No notifications of substitution were received.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

33. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

i) The Chairman was delighted to announce that Chippenham Town Council's Green Flag Status for John Coles Park had been renewed. The Chairman congratulated the John Coles Park staff team and members of the public who use the park for their efforts to make this possible.

34. **CHRISTMAS LIGHTS SWITCH ON 2020**

The Director of Community Resources presented to the Committee, the recommendations of the Events Working Party that was held on 13 October 2020.

- i) There not be a live streamed virtual Christmas Lights Switch On
- ii) A pre-recorded video would be produced internally by the Town Council and released on the 20 November
- iii) A wider community project be undertaken to engage the community of Chippenham.

The Head of Museum and Heritage Services informed Councillors of the planned community engagement project titled the 'The Joy of Christmas'. This would involve members of the public submitting artwork to the Town Council. A panel made up of the Chairman, the Leader and the Chief Executive would choose 24 pieces to be made into Christmas tree baubles that would be given to the chosen members of the public. The chosen pieces would also be displayed in local shop windows as part of an extended Christmas trail around the town. Using a QR code the public could choose their favourite piece of artwork, and the winner would win a prize.

Councillor Teresa Hutton endorsed the community focused project.

Councillor Bill Douglas raised a concern about running the community project as a competition, stating that it should be more about celebrating Christmas. There had already been enough disappointment this year with the ongoing COVID pandemic.

With all in favour

RESOLVED that:

- i) There not be a live streamed virtual Christmas Lights Switch On
- ii) A pre-recorded video would be produced internally by the Town Council and released on the 20 November
- iii) A wider community project be undertaken to engage the community of Chippenham.

35. **FREE CAR PARKING ALLOWANCE FROM WILTSHIRE COUNCIL**

The Director of Resources presented to the Committee, the recommendations of the Events Working Party from the 16 September 2020 that the town's allocation of free Car Parking should be used to support businesses in the lead up to Christmas on the 5 and 12 December 2020.

With all in favour

RESOLVED that:

That the Free Car Parking Allowance allocation be used on the 5 and 12 December 2020

36. **EVENTS WORKING PARTY UPDATE**

RESOLVED that:

All recommendations from the Events Working Party held on the 13 October 2020, approved by this meeting of the A C L committee held on 14 October 2020 (Minutes 34 & 35 refer)

37. **ITEMS FOR COMMUNICATION**

For the 'Joy of Christmas' community engagement, and the free car parking dates to be publicised.

38. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next Amenities, Culture and Leisure Committee meeting will take place on Wednesday 11 November 2020.

The meeting closed at 4.37pm.

These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

Signed on behalf of the Town Council as a true record of the meeting.

Signature

Date

Public comments and questions

The Democratic and Civic Officer read out a public question on behalf of a member of the public who wasn't in attendance, but had submitted their question prior to the meeting.

1. 'Dear Councillors on the ACL committee. On behalf of a group of concerned residents and users of John Coles Park I would like to table a set of questions about the upcoming new rule that all dogs should be on a lead in the Park at all times and areas. Your ACL chair, Deana Allen has received a comprehensive letter from Dr Richard Saull, countersigned by our group which the committee may wish to refer to for additional detail and references.
 1. Will the committee consider reversing or postponing the implementation of the new rule given the hundreds of signatories to an online petition against its introduction, in order to conduct a proper consultation?
 2. What evidence has the committee that it has adequately considered those dog owners with mobility issues, who are elderly or who are concerned about the safety of other, unsuitable locations to exercise their animal? We note that the Kennel club has been in contact with the CTC in this regard.
 3. On the previous minutes you refer to new signage to publicise the ban on dogs off lead in JCP. Given that there is no PSPO in place what will the Town Council do to ensure that all park users are aware of the voluntary nature of this change in rules?

At the invitation of the Chairman, a member of the public addressed the Committee.

2. Firstly thank you for the opportunity to address the Chair and the Committee. My response is in regard to the recent decision to change the dogs on lead rule in John Coles Park from the 1st of November. To some members of the local community this appears to be a unilateral and short sighted decision made by the Town Council without public consultation, based on private opinion, behind closed doors and not based on any facts. Despite several opportunities to publish the facts with us. We feel the decision is contrary to the wellbeing policies of local and national government, these being physical fitness and mental health, and made with regard to the small business that operates within the park. I am aware of a similar move in 2012, so we ask aside from COVID 19, what has changed since then? I would be grateful if the Council could share the facts upon which the decision was reached using park keepers records and police reports as to how many dog attacks, accidents and incidents have occurred in the park in recent times. We could also canvas our own dog owners that we are in touch with. You may be aware of the movement on social media against the decision which has also attracted BBC attention. Hardenhuish has a population of circa 4500 people of which 3500 are 18 and over. We have conducted a poll as you've heard and as of 10am this morning more than 800 people have signed a petition, and our research shows approx.500 of those people who signed the petition live within 2 kilometres of the park. That's about 14% of local residents. Dog walkers of all abilities, are generally law abiding, mature, responsible and disciplined people, who are capable of self-governing and self-policing the NHS guidelines regarding COVID 19 and dogs, which was updated on the 12th of October a few days ago, public space protection orders, rules and behaviours published on the park entrance boards. They contribute to casual policing of the park, often acting as the community's eyes and ears, and report antisocial behaviour occurring in the park during open and closed hours. Dog walkers really do appreciate the beauty of the park and generally clean up after themselves, and pick up other litter. They also contribute to the small business operating within the park, which could seriously be effected if people chose

to either not to use the park or where diverted elsewhere. Unlike other Wiltshire Parks, stepping in dog mess, feeling threatened or being confronted by serious anti-social behaviour does not seem to be a major concern in John Coles Park, but may cause distress to a number of our elderly, less abled and vulnerable townsfolk, especially at night. We fear that without criticising Wiltshire Constabulary and the Town council the areas of Monkton Park and Donkey Fields are not safe for dog walkers during the winter or summer evenings. I therefore urge the Town Council to consider postponing the all dogs on leads rule including the pen used for nervous, rescued and young dogs while they consult more widely and gather the necessary data, whilst we the quorum of this group would prefer no change to the current policy which seems to work, responsible dog owners are willing to consider alternatives.

The three minute time limit was reached and the member of public's microphone was muted. The statement was added to by another member of public which follows below after the Chairman invited them to speak:

3. They are dogs on leads during the summer months, possibly April to the end of September, when the park is used most, and allowed off leads during the winter months, somewhat akin to some of the UKs beaches or timings for dogs on/ off leads which might be more difficult to police, but the dog walkers are prepared to work with the park staff to assist in any rule enforcement that may be required. In summary local dog walkers do appreciate and applaud and actively support the efforts of the Town Council who voluntary give their time for the benefit of all those living in Chippenham to achieve the corporate plan priorities. Dog owners work with the park staff to ensure our front garden is safe and welcoming to all park users, and frequently challenge anti-social behaviour, and those who do not pick up after their own dogs. I regularly pick up after those who have missed, so I do look after that. Our contribution to keeping John Coles Park bright and shiny, should not be under estimated, and just to finish off thank you for listening to me, and I hope this representation will encourage you to reverse your decision from the 9th of September, to keep all dogs on leads or at least to postpone the rule while you gather evidence.

At the invitation of the Chairman, a member of the public addressed the Committee:

4. I have been a regularly user of the park and I live adjacent to the park, and have used it for 15 years. I have got 3 young children who also use the park and a dog. I have never witnessed any problems, many of the people I meet are there on a daily basis and there is a full range of ages, many are retired and live locally. During the winter months, from October through to March, the vast majority of people I see in the park, are people who have dogs, and I would say the vast majority of dogs in the park are medium to small dogs, and we are aware it's not a place you would run your dog's wild like you would maybe in a field, keeping the place a nice safe place to exercise. I do wonder if the people that put the ban on dogs being off leads appreciate that you can't exercise a dog on a lead, and therefore you are effectively putting a ban on dogs in the park. Yes a dog can accompany you on a small walk, but that's no different to walking around the house. The park is a safe place to walk. I have looked carefully at the information you presented, suggesting that Donkey Fields is my alternative, but I don't feel safe walking in Donkey Fields, if I walked at 3pm with school children I probably would, but if I walked at 6pm, I wouldn't feel safe it is isolated and it is dark. Similarly but not to the same extend, I am not comfortable walking in Monkton Park either. There is a distinct lack of bins in Monkton Park, and the bins that are there are often overflowing with dog bags, because they are not emptied to the same degree. I am also aware that if I have to go out for a 30 minutes

to walk my dog, I will be getting into the car and driving on congested roads and parking on Monkton Park streets because by the time I have walked to Monkton Park and back that would be 30 minutes. For picnickers, that has been a reason, tend to go there on a hot sunny Sunday afternoon, they are not the regulars. While I know it is delightful to picnic in the park, and it's responsible for owners to keep dogs on leads, if there are picnickers there, I do feel you are ignoring the majority of the park users when you put this ban in place. I think it's going to have a big impact over the winter period.

The three minute time limit was reached and the member of public's microphone was muted.

DRAFT

Not part of the meeting

APPENDIX B

The following written response was issued in response to the four public questions asked at the Extraordinary Amenities, Culture and Leisure Committee on 14 October 2020:

Response to public questions 1, 2, 3 and 4. Over the past few years the Town Council has received many complaints about dogs that are off lead and out of control. These have included children and adults being knocked over which has resulted in children being frightened of loose dogs and an elderly lady breaking her hip, dogs eating food from picnics and vicious attacks on other dogs. These situations have been managed on an individual basis but continue to happen.

Therefore, the Amenities, Culture and Leisure (ACL) committee on 09 September 2020 considered and debated a report concerning the current rules in John Coles Park for dogs on lead and off lead. The ACL Committee voted in favour of changing the rules to ask all dog owners to keep their dogs on the lead in all areas of John Coles Park.

The proper democratic process was followed by the Town Council. However, given extensive public feedback since the date of the meeting a Special Motion was received by the Chief Executive from four Councillors on 25 October 2020, this will be considered at the next meeting of the Full Council on the 25th November 2020.

The Special Motion will ask Full Council to rescind the previous decision regarding the implementation of the change in rules and to consider a future report being brought back to the Council's ACL Committee where further options can be presented and discussed. The Town Council will be seeking the views of all interested parties.

Therefore, the implementation date of 1st November 2020 has now been postponed.