

**MINUTES OF THE 132ND ORDINARY MEETING OF
PORTISHEAD & NORTH WESTON TOWN COUNCIL
HELD AT THE FOLK HALL, HIGH STREET, PORTISHEAD
ON WEDNESDAY 7TH APRIL 2004**

- PRESENT** Councillor Johnston – in the Chair
- Councillors Mrs Bickley, J S Clark, Mrs Cruse, Daws, Gething, Mrs Lord, Mrs Mason, Miers, J McMurray, Pasley, Walters
- Mrs P Rendle – Clerk of the Council
- APOLOGIES** Councillors Brown, J H Clark, Miss Griffiths, A McMurray, Rigby, Terry

1103 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were in excess of 200 members of the public in attendance.

Standing Orders were suspended to allow members of the public to address the Council.

Mr Pat O'Shaughnessy of 47 Conference Avenue, speaking on behalf of the residents, raised a number of issues in connection with Planning Application No. 04/P/0576/CN1 – Change of use from Office (B1) to Home Office Screening Unit (Sui Generis) and creation of new public access in north elevation at Unit D, Portishead Office Park, Portishead.

Mr O'Shaughnessy expressed his deep concern about the unsatisfactory information that had been provided both with the application and by the representatives of the Home Office at the Planning Committee meeting on 3rd April 2004 and asked whether any further information was now available. He pointed out that the consultation document was factually inaccurate and questioned how the Town Council could make a decision on assumptions that were unsubstantiated and a document that was flawed.

In referring to the interviewing process that would take place at the proposed Screening Unit Mr O'Shaughnessy pointed out that the Home Office representatives had been unable to confirm, when asked at the meeting on 3rd April, how many ARC applications were likely to be processed in the South West region in any one year. He questioned how they were able to include the figure of 50 visitors in the planning application if no statistical evidence was available to back this up.

Mr O'Shaughnessy also referred to the inadequate car parking facilities at the Office Park and pointed out the difficulties already being experienced by residents on the Vale.

In summing up, Mr O'Shaughnessy questioned if the Chamber of Trade had been consulted on the application and asked the Council to consider what overall benefit the Home Office Unit would bring to Portishead. He acknowledged that asylum seekers needed to be treated fairly but considered that the proposed location was inappropriate. He urged the Council to inform North Somerset Council that a valid judgement could not be made on the scant information currently available. Mr O'Shaughnessy also suggested that the Council investigate the impact the proposal would have on the lifestyle of those people likely to be affected.

Mr Tony Southwood of 52 Conference Avenue, also speaking on behalf of the residents, pointed out asylum seekers would need to travel to Portishead on public transport from all parts of the South Wales and South West Region. He considered that such a unit would be better placed in the commercial area of Bristol which had better public transport links and would be easier for asylum seekers to reach.

Ms Liese Stanley of 6 The Park urged all present at the meeting not to close their minds to the proposal. She considered that further information was needed before a valid judgement could be made.

Mr Bryan Sealey of 23 Mulberry Avenue questioned why Councillor Terry, the local ward district councillor, was not present at the meeting.

All residents called for a public meeting to be held as soon as possible.

Standing Orders were resumed.

1104 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs Cruse

- Personal Interest in Planning Application 04/P/0553/F3
Merlin Park Public Open Space, Portishead
Removal of condition 2 of Planning consent 02/P/2659/F for the installation of skateboarding equipment to allow the permanent siting of the structures and equipment.
Reason – member of Skateboarding Working Party

Councillor Daws

- Personal Interest in Minute No. 1111(RW561) – Application for a Grant for the Annual Portishead Music Festival
Reason – Gordano School Governor

Councillor Gething

- Personal Interest in Minute No. 1111(RW561) – Application for a Grant for the Annual Portishead Music Festival
Reason – Gordano School Governor

Councillor Mrs Lord

- Personal Interest in Minute No. 1110 – Planning Committee item ref. Safeguarding Crossings of the Railway Line
Reason – Member of Portishead Railway Action Group

Councillor Mrs Mason

- Personal Interest in Planning Application 04/P/0553/F3
Merlin Park Public Open Space, Portishead
Removal of condition 2 of Planning consent 02/P/2659/F for the installation of skateboarding equipment to allow the permanent siting of the structures and equipment.
Reason – member of Skateboarding Working Party
- Personal Interest in Planning Application No. 04/P/0457/RG3 – Single storey classroom and nursery extension at Highdown Infants School, Down Road, Portishead
Reason – Highdown School Governor

Councillor J McMurray

- Personal Interest in Minute No. 1111(RW561) – Application for a Grant for the Annual Portishead Music Festival
Reason – Gordano School Governor

Councillor Pasley

- Personal Interest in Planning Application 04/P/0576/CN1
Unit D, Portishead Office Park, Portishead
Change of use from Office (B1) to Home Office Screening Unit (Sui Generis) and creation of new public access in north elevation
Reason – daughter lives opposite the Office Park

Declaration by members who serve on both the Town and District Council

Councillors Daws, Gething, and Walters stated that any views they expressed on matters to also be considered at North Somerset Council would be provisional and based on the facts currently known. They would be exercising their rights to reconsider the matter afresh when the matter went before North Somerset Council.

1105 PLANNING COMMITTEE – 04/P/0675/CN1 UNIT D, PORTISHEAD OFFICE PARK, PORTISHEAD

Change of use from Office (B1) to Home Office Screening Unit (Sui Generis) and creation of new public access in north elevation.

In view of the public interest in this planning application consideration of this item was brought forward and dealt with separately from the remainder of the Planning Committee report (Minute No. 1110).

In responding to the comments made by Mr O'Shaughnessy earlier in the meeting, Councillor Mrs Bickley confirmed that despite the request made by the Planning Committee on 3rd April, no further information had been forthcoming from the Home Office representatives.

Councillor Mrs Bickley referred members to the comprehensive report of the discussions held at the Planning Committee meeting, highlighting in particular –

- The number of letters of objection that had been received.
- Delivery of petition to North Somerset Council.
- Current difficulties experienced by residents – out-of-office-hours working, overlooking of properties, car parking overflowing onto Conference Avenue.
- Lack of public transport.
- Ambiguous and flawed Supporting Statement.
- Procedure for dealing with asylum seekers from initial interview to issuing of an Application Registration Card

Councillor Mrs Bickley also reminded the meeting that as this was a Crown Application (Circular 18/84) it would be determined by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, not North Somerset Council. The ODPM may be influenced by the weight of public opinion and could direct that a public enquiry be held.

A lengthy discussion took place with members commenting in particular about –

- The Vale residential area being an inappropriate location for such a facility.
- Not appropriate for facility to be located in a small town like Portishead. Similar facilities elsewhere in the country are in much larger towns.
- The difficulties that would be faced by asylum seekers trying to reach the office by public transport.
- Acknowledgement that asylum seekers attending for interview would be accompanied by a solicitor.
- The lack of facilities for visitors to the Office Park.
- Facility should be located centrally, ie Bristol where there are better public transport links.
- The effect of the proposal on the Town.
- Possibility of expansion of facility in the future.
- Difficulties already being experienced by residents of the Vale.
- Lack of car parking at the Office Park.
- Inadequate public transport facilities – lack of railway, infrequent bus service, poor location of bus stop.
- Acknowledgement that asylum seekers are entitled to a better quality of life and deserve support.
- Acknowledgement that the proposal did not have the support and goodwill of the local residents.

The recommendations made by the Planning Committee were taken separately. On being put to the vote it was –

RESOLVED that

1. The Town Council recommend that the part of the application concerned with the issuing of ARCs be REFUSED. The public transport for the client base is inadequate and this function should be carried out in an area better served by public transport.

The proposal for Approval of the interview process was defeated.

2. The Town Council recommend that the application be REFUSED as the proposed number and frequency of visitors is incompatible with a B1 office use.

In bringing this part of the meeting to a close the Chairman thanked the residents for attending and urged them to make their views know to North Somerset Council and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The meeting was adjourned at 8.45pm

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The meeting reconvened at 8.55pm

1106 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the 131st Ordinary Meeting of Portishead and North Weston Town Council held on 10th March 2004 be confirmed as correct.

1107 LOCAL INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGATIONS OF MISCONDUCT

Members were informed that two consultation documents had recently been received – one from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on the proposed Local Authorities (Code of Conduct)(Local Determination)(Amendment) Regulations 2004, the other from The Standards Board for England on Guidance to Monitoring Officers on local investigations. The documents covered such matters as the investigative powers of monitoring officers and the circumstances under which confidential matters may be disclosed.

RESOLVED that the documents be noted.

1108 AUDIT OF 2003/2004 ACCOUNTS – APPOINTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDITOR

Members were reminded that the Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996 (as amended) required local councils to appoint an independent internal auditor.

RESOLVED that Mr Martin Staines be appointed internal auditor for the audit of the 2003/2004 accounts at a cost of £465.

1109 SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS AND BANK RECONCILIATION/CASH STATEMENT FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH 2004

RESOLVED that the Schedule of Payments and Bank Reconciliation/Cash Statement for the month of March 2004 be APPROVED.

1110 PLANNING COMMITTEE

Councillor Mrs Bickley, Chairman of the Planning Committee, presented the report of the Committee meeting held on 3rd April, with the exception of Planning Application

No. 04/P/0576/CN1 which had been considered earlier in the meeting (Minute No. 1105).

RESOLVED that the report and recommendations thereon be APPROVED, subject to the following –

04/P/0524/F 1 BURLINGTON ROAD

Single storey rear extension

Recommend APPROVAL

The report of the Committee meeting held on 3rd April 2004 is attached to and forms part of these minutes.

1111 RECREATION & WORKS COMMITTEE

Councillor Mrs Cruse, Chairman of the Recreation and Works Committee, presented the report of the Committee meeting held on 24th March 2004.

RESOLVED that the report and recommendations thereon be APPROVED, subject to the following –

RW557 TRAFFIC WORKING PARTY

(a) Local Transport Plan Programme – Prioritised Schemes

add to schedule of new schemes –

Harbour Road – reinstatement of setting-down lay-by in vicinity of Leisure Centre to enable coaches etc to stop and drop off passengers safely.

(b) St Mary's Road

As no clear view had been expressed at the Committee meeting, members were again asked to consider whether upper St Mary's Road should be closed or remain open to traffic.

As voting on this matter was recorded as 6/6 it was RESOLVED on the casting vote of the Chairman that –

Upper St Mary's Road should be closed to traffic.

RW560 TOWN COUNCIL PLAY AREAS

(b) Application of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 on Outdoor Play Areas.

Add to recommendation 1.

Councillor Miers to also serve on the working party.

1112 MATTERS THE CHAIRMAN PUT BEFORE THE COUNCIL

Parish Transport Grant – Joint Gordano Valley community transport pilot project awarded a grant of £46,802 from the Countryside Agency.
Cycle Parking – New cycle stands to be installed at Lake Grounds café during April.
Correspondence – Letters of thanks for grants awarded received from Portishead Youth Centre, Mencap 8-18yrs Playscheme, Mencap Cool Summer Club and Gordano Valley Church Cludo Club.
NSC Liaison Scheme – Jon Thompson to continue as Town Council’s Liaison Officer.
Local Authorities (Members Allowances)(England) Regulations 2003
CCTV – January 2004 log supplied to the Clerk.
Organisation and Administration of the Town Council – Working Party to report to July meeting of the Town Council.

The following items were circulated for information –

NSC Highways Services Newsletter – February 2004
Portishead Heritage Rail Project 26.1.2004 & 8.3.2004
Portishead Quays Public Art Steering Group – 24.2.2004
Portishead Tourism Group – 24.2.2004
Redcliffe Bay Hall Man.Cttee – 23.2.2004

1113 CONFIDENTIAL

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds that its consideration would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

STAFF ANNUAL PAY REVIEW

RESOLVED that

1. Mrs Rachel Tranter be awarded an incremental increase with effect from 1st April 2004.
2. Mrs Jackie Bagnall be awarded an incremental increase with effect from 1st April 2004.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the meeting at 9.20pm

..... Chairman

12th May 2004