

SWAFFHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes meeting on Wednesday 1st December 2010 at 7.00p.m. at the Town Hall, Swaffham.

Present: Mayor Cllr I. Sherwood (in the chair)

Councillors: - Mrs C Baker, Mr P. Darby, Mr D. Harman, Mrs T Jennison, Mrs S Lister, Mrs S Matthews, Mr F Sharpe, Mrs P Wade, Mr D. Wickerson.

Town Clerk:- Mr R. Bishop.
Deputy Town Clerk:- Mrs M Meyrick
Internal Auditor: - Mr T Lawler

Public: - 3

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

- 1.1. Cllr Butters.
- 1.2. Cllr Gunner.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – for items included on the Agenda.

- 2.1. There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

3.1. The minutes of the Finance and General Purposes meeting held on 20th October 2010 were agreed and signed as a true record by the Mayor.

4. Reports from Committees, representatives or outside bodies:-

4.1. SCALGA report on allotments by Christine Wright.

The main issue the committee have been looking at is membership subscription. They have decided to keep the charge at £5 for individuals but introduce a new family rate at £6 to try and get younger families involved especially with the financial climate. The Seed Scheme is continued this year and the catalogue will be available before Christmas. The commission received helps to run the club and it is hoped that it will enable the membership to be brought down to £2 if enough commission is made. The committee is still trying to find judges for the Best Kept Allotment competition and is grateful to the Council for providing the Certificates for the winners. The Committee wish to thank the Council for having a tick box on the allotment invoice which asks tenants if they wish for their contact information to be shared with SCALGA. Ian Robinson will be attending the environmental group of the Town Partnership in future. There is a new member of the Committee called Roger Trowell who used to be an allotment holder in Farnham, Hampshire who were self funding. He has had years of experience of running a self management allotment site. They were able to deal with any issues those arose as well as running 3 shops, having site managers and also bought equipment. The next meeting is on the 1st February 2011.

4.2. Market Committee.

The market has seen a steady number of casual traders coming to the market over the last couple of months which is encouraging. The auction is going really well and it is planned that

Page 632

it will be fortnightly from January to March and the weekly from April. The auctioneer has requested a bigger area as he had to turn people away at the last auction. The market committee is currently working with existing traders to accommodate this. There is still concern about the number of stalls as

4.3. Recreation Ground Committee.

The committee at their last meeting has been looking at their capital budget and has decided to make a few changes. They have cut toilet provision from their project as it has proven that is not likely due to the high running costs as well as the dog walking area. The old toilet block will be tidied up and then used as a valuable storage area. The old shed will be removed before Christmas with the gap being closed up by the addition of wrought iron fencing to match the gates. The cost of these items will be taken out of the toilet budget. The next phase of the project is a Teenage Assault Course project that will be in place before the end of the financial year.

4.4. Town Partnership Committee.

It was reported that the future make up of the Committee is being looked at, some of that aspect may come up in the budget, it is important that the structure is right.

4.5. Youth Council.

The Town Clerk attended the last Youth Council meeting in the absence of the Deputy. He reported that they are working on a survey which is partly funded from a grant received from the Breckland Youth Council. They are trying to find out what young people of Swaffham think and what national issues they should be working on as well as local ones.

4.6. Internal Auditors' report from Tony Lawlor.

The internal auditor reported that due to work commitments both with him and the Town Clerk, a meeting was not able to be established. He and the Town Clerk will be setting a date this evening to meet.

5. QUARTERLY FINANCIAL REPORT from the Responsible Finance Officer

5.1. The Clerk apologized to the Council as he had not printed off the quarterly financial report but all the details are in the budget.

6. BUDGET presentation by the Town Clerk (supported by the Deputy Town Clerk) for 2011/12.

6.1. Each Councillor was given a copy of the budget and supporting report prior to the meeting.

a) Capital Projects Expenditure

The Cemetery Improvements and Chapel Restoration were put on hold, with the report from a Quantity Surveyor pending; this was not commissioned. The project can only be taken forward in the future as a capital project competing for match funding. It is important to have the costings for the restoration of the chapel and conversion of a garage into a workshop, inclusive of gaining water supply and electricity (or using a generator).

There is also the costing out of a wall and gates at the entrance to the Cemetery to consider. A further meeting is required with the Development Officer from the Heritage Lottery Fund in order to complete the necessary groundwork for the grant application.

It was agreed in principle for the Cemetery & Chapel project of 2005/06 is carried forward in consecutive years. The balances have been adjusted to nil as the original source was revenue funds. The current status now and in 2011-12 is on hold.

ii) The Recreation Ground Project has made progress since the budget last year, with projects in progress and at various stages of delivery or development. The success in the past year has come from the 'Awards for All' lottery scheme with £8,160.50 going towards a £18,760.50 scheme 'fitness for all' installed earlier this year. Funding of £600 was obtained from the Friends of the Rec and £10,000 of Section 106 money. Anne's garden project (sensory garden) cost £3,500 in total but with only £1,000 of this coming from the Recreation Ground Committee capital budget. This project was completed in the summer and named after Anne Greaves who was a founder member of the Friends of the Rec, member of the Recreation Ground Committee and former Deputy Mayor. Anne sadly passed away in September.

All other projects are due to be completed within the current financial year with the exception of the MUGA (Multi Use Games Area, as the Section 106 money is not yet available for this.

It was agreed to have no budget for the Recreation Ground project unless existing budgets are not expended in the current year when they would be carried forward. It was also agreed for the MUGA to be completed when section 106 money is available.

iii) The situation is on-going with regard to the Northwell Pool wall. Alternative ways are currently being explored of stabilising the wall by some form of embankment and a combination of build outs to incorporate new seating etc. This could then be part of a larger scheme to include a cycleway and pedestrianised area, enhancing the aesthetics of the area. All are subject to Town Council funds being matched by other authorities. The health & safety aspects are acknowledged and the Council are trying to achieve best value by attaining grant funding

It was agreed to consider developing a project for the Northwell Pool to include restoration of the wall, creation of a pedestrian area and a board walk. A bid would be required for match funding and considered on its merit.

v) The 'Advance Swaffham' Town Plan was launched in October last year. Each project will have to be considered for match funding on its own merit.

It was agreed to have no Advance Swaffham budget but to consider each project on its own merit.

vi) Three years ago the Town Council took a hard decision to borrow funds from the Public Works Loan Board. The Town Council have taken out three loans in recent years totalling £155,000. This includes a £20,000 loan being serviced by Swaffham Museum Ltd. This budget is set aside to meet the repayments and £10,000 borrowed to complete a project for the Bowls Club which will be reimbursed by section 106 money. The Council were supplied with the loan settlement figures:

Loan 1 = £49,951.90 (interest £6,952.90) [£4,033.50 repay]
Loan 2 = £69,932.66 (interest £9,732.66) [£5,646.90 repay]
Loan 3 = £38,362.34 (interest £4,855.43) [£2,438.56 repay]
TOTAL = £158,246.90

Page 634

Note A. It is not a good time to settle the public works Loan as the interest rate is less than when the Council borrowed the money the penalty is much greater than if the interest rate was higher.

Note B. It is a good time to borrow money, as the interest rate will stay the same for the whole term of 25 years.

Loan figures with interest on annual payments:

Loan 1 capital = £43,000 (interest £23,177) to end of term
Loan 2 capital = £60,200 (interest £32,448) to end of term
Loan 3 capital = £33,485 (interest £20,978) to end of term
TOTAL = £213,288

It was agreed not to settle the public works loans at the present time.

It was agreed that the Public Works Loan Board repayments for 2011/12 will be £12,119.

vii) The budget for 'Capital Project Development' is a salary calculation reduced this year. It is an established part of the Town Council administration that is constantly under review with the Personnel Committee who discusses all staffing changes.

It was agreed to continue with a budget for a Capital Project Development inclusive of salaries and admin of £18,419 for 2011/12

viii) Swaffham Town Council has demonstrated the need in recent years for establishing a Match Funding Budget. This balance has emerged from the money carried forward from the previous year, repayment of certain money following the sale of the Shoulder of Mutton and adjustment by the auditors in respect of capital reserves. This is the balance of any un-earmarked capital that could be used to repay loans or used for capital projects.

It was agreed for the Match Funding budget on the expenditure side is £120,616 in 2011/12.

Income

ix) The Section 106 Planning obligations money is collected by Breckland Council Section 106 officer. The money is designated to various areas by a legally binding contract. A scheme has to be prepared and then the funds will be released to the Town Council. It is Breckland's responsibility to ensure that the money is used for the purpose stated in the legal agreement. There are funds in the pipeline, but none readily available to use (unless the Recreation Ground Committee need to carry forward their teenage assault course project over from the current year).

It was agreed to receive planning obligation/Section 106 money as and when it becomes available. It was also agreed to continue negotiating with potential developers at every opportunity in order to get facilities for the town.

x) The Museum Loan is being repaid with a calculation for interest agreed with Swaffham Museum Ltd.

It was agreed for Swaffham Museum Ltd to repay £1,680 in the financial year 2011/12.

**b) Asset Management Fund
Expenditure**

It is not possible to add to these balances in this financial year and balances were un-earmarked and re-allocated to reduce the revenue reserves deficit in the current year 2010/11.

i) The War Memorial Fund has been moved to this cost centre from the Capital Projects cost centre. It is more appropriate that any money set aside for the War Memorial will be used for future maintenance of the War Memorial.

It was agreed to retain the War Memorial Fund of £46 for 2011/12.

ii) There is an amount introduced for Street Furniture in this cost centre this year. This is where any amounts set aside from public seat donations will be held in trust. The Town Council introduced a policy whereby if a public seat is donated, then a contingency sum equal to replacing the seat and installation cost is also requested. This is the first of such a donation.

It was agreed the donation from the Bird family towards a seat on the Campingland makes up the balance of £690

Income

iii) A policy was established three years ago that the only income to this bank account would come from budgeted contingencies set aside or from interest earned on the balance in the account. It is envisaged that any cash flow difficulties within the Revenue Budget would be managed by the use of General Reserves being transferred to the Council's main bank account in the short term. The cash-flow difficulties experienced in the previous two years and the current situation of a revenue reserve deficit has delayed the setting up of this new bank account.

It was agreed to place on hold the opening of a bank account for the Asset Maintenance Fund until the revenue reserves deficit is fully dealt with and replenished.

**c) Town Hall
Expenditure**

i) There have been actual cuts of £500 applied to Repairs/Replacements and General maintenance and a further £100 in cleaning costs. N.B. All cuts are highlighted in red on the right hand column of the budget figures and should be considered individually by the Council, as they all represent an element of risk.

It was agreed to examine and approve cuts in expenditure for repairs/replacements of £500, General maintenance of £500 and the cleaning budget is cut by £100 in 2011/12. It was also agreed to look at alternative waste disposal companies.

ii) All other headings are straight forward in this cost centre showing a small inflationary increase for 2011/12 across the board.

It was agreed for all other headings to have a small inflationary increase for 2011/12.

Income

iii) The two small offices are well used at the Town Hall by Breckland Council, the Registrar and Age Concern during the day and KLARS on one early evening each week. With regards to hiring fees there is a need to keep pace with inflation to meet the cost of overheads. This as always needs to balance up against the potential loss of hirers, but in this instance the increase is justified.

It was agreed that all the hiring fees to be increased by 2% for 2011/12 with a projected income of £5750 for the offices.

iv) The Council Chamber is well used with regards meetings, but not hired by many outside of the Local Government sector. The projected receipts for hiring fees will never be high, as the town is well served with public meeting rooms and conference facilities.

It was agreed that all hiring fees for the Council Chamber to be increased by 2% for 2011/12 with a projected income of £300 for the Council Chamber.

d) Administration & Miscellaneous

Expenditure

i) Bank charges to pay are admin charges from our banks. The budget is £50 up from last year based on the current year figures.

It was agreed for the bank charges to be set at a projected £450 for 2011/12.

The cuts in expenditure come in two categories in this cost centre. First of all where budgets are not carried forward from the previous year due to baseline cuts made in the current year to reduce the Revenue reserves deficit balance. Legal/professional advice £660, advertising/publicity/promotion £500 and election/by election/parish poll £2,550 have all gone before the budgeted year starts.

ii) The cuts in expenditure in this budget are with Membership/Subscription £375 (all memberships and subscriptions will be reviewed to meet the budget. Stationery/books have been cut by £1,300 and to do this the Council will rationalise everything sent out of the office, more information will be sent electronically. Staff training budget has been cut by £700, there are less staff but a new Deputy Town Clerk and continuous professional development is an essential part of the senior management training. Councillor training is cut by £100 in election year when we have new councillors to train, not ideal. General Admin salaries has been cut by £2,247 (£16,746 has been cut from salaries in total; approximately 25% of this are real term savings) Staff salaries have been increased by 1%. Any variations to staffing levels have been discussed and agreed with the Personnel Committee. Computer software has been cut by £200 although the server may need upgrading at the next budget, this is beginning to run slower than it should, £500 has been cut out of the office equipment maintenance lease; the aim is to cut the copy-cost this year and finally the removal of the sundry budget at £175.

It was agreed to examine and approve cuts in expenditure to membership/subscriptions £375, stationery/ books £1,300, staff training £700, councillor training £100, salaries £2,247 (£16,746 in total), computer software £200, office equipment maintenance lease £500 and sundry budget £175 for 2011/12.

Page 637

iii) The insurance costs have been reviewed for General Insurance, Museum Artefacts insurance and Icenis insurance accounted for and reimbursed in the Amenities & Agency cost centre. The general insurance cost has been halved by a new company WPS, we are awaiting the breakdown for the Icenis contribution (the total estimate is £8,219, £2,000 allowed for Icenis to be confirmed). The Museum artefacts are owned by the Town Council and it is their responsibility to insure them. It will be necessary to have certain valuable items professionally valued at some stage to ensure that we are not under insured.

It was agreed for the general insurance of £6219 and Museum artefacts insurance of £715 to be set at a projected for 2011/12.

iv) The newsletter 'In Touch with your Town' has been replaced by the SWAFFHAM NEWSLETTER, moving from a quarterly to a monthly publication in September of last year. There is currently an on-going dispute with the editor which will hopefully be resolved shortly. The Council need to consider putting in place a contingency for the possibility of taking back the newsletter in-house and reverting back to a quarterly publication. There are other options such as producing an on-line version of a newsletter that could be available in hard copy on the Town Hall reception. The Council should also explore social networking options on 'facebook' and 'twitter' which could aid their communication with the general public and keep pace with the 21st Century.

It was agreed to conclude discussions with the Swaffham Newsletter editor. It was also agreed to explore on-line newsletters and social network options as a means of enhancing the Council's communications with the general public.

v) The other expenditure headings in this cost centre are subject to the usual inflationary increase or to maintain the budget its current level or slightly lower.

It was agreed for all other expenditure with the administration & miscellaneous cost centre to be maintained at their current level or receive a small inflationary increase.

Income

vi) The only budgeted income in this Cost Centre is for bank interest earned. The amount of interest earned is obviously dependant on the amount of money invested in a deposit account at any one time. It is also dependant on the cash-flow of the Council. The view taken this year is towards the upper end of the scale and the Council should look at whether they would like to decrease this budget by £500 if they believe it is too optimistic.

It was agreed to examine and approve the project interest for 2011/12 of £2,500. The income from the general bank account interest is offset against general administration costs.

e) Market Expenditure

i) The Market is no different to other cost centres in looking at areas where cuts in expenditure can take place. The three heading are £300 from the promotion budget, £500 from the entertainment budget and £280 from the sundry budget.

It was agreed to examine and approve cuts in expenditure of £300 from Promotion/advertising, £500 from Entertainment and £280 from Sundry expenses for 2011/12.

Page 638

ii) All other expenditure - waste clearance is maintained at £4,995, Non Domestic Rates at £7,370, Market salaries calculated at a more realistic rate of £7,607 and health & safety stays at £300.

It was agreed expenditure for the Market is projected at £20,772 for 2011/12.

Income

iii) The over optimistic income budget agreed last year is not going to be realised and this has created a void of some £42,000 to manage. The sum is spread over three financial years. A sudden downturn in the second half of 2009/10 and the first three months of 2010/11 resulted in the budgeted income being £12,981 down in 2009/10. Unless there is a sudden recovery the projected year end for the current year will be £15,500 down, so this has a knock on effect to the year we are now budgeting for. Averaging the two years together we cannot budget for expected income any higher than where we are now (or within reason). This will leave us a further £14,000 adrift, thus £42,000 overall that has suddenly disappeared from the budget. The Market Committee have recommended a 0% increase on Licence fees; but the budget working group have put forward a compromise of 2%, well under the inflation rate of 4.5%.

It was agreed to increase all licensed and casual trader fees by 2% for 2011/12.

iv) The opposite of cuts in expenditure is to make large assumptions in expected income. The introduction of the Farmers Market has been slow, with one regular stall plus others who attend on an ad hoc basis. The income projected is assuming that the average stalls are increased to four each week. The Licensed trade and casual trade has shown signs of recovery recently and an extra £500 income is added to each heading as it is assumed that two hard winters in consecutive years is less likely.

It was agreed to examine and approve the additional income budgeted of £500 for casual trade, £500 for licensed trade and £1664 for Farmer's Market.

f) Northwell Pool Expenditure

i) The on-going maintenance for the Northwell Pool area i.e. the Pool itself, the surround fencing, the new structures, the trees, the embankment, seats, bins, strimming and litter picking are carried out by contractors. There is a decrease in net expenditure less income for Northwell Pool to £1,152 from £1,259.

It was agreed to continue with a maintenance programme as listed in the cost heading in this new cost centre. The overall expenditure will be £3,490 for 2011/12.

ii) The Northwell Pool wall has been moved into capital projects as it is part of a larger project.

Income

iii) The income for the Northwell Pool maintenance will come from an Agency agreement with Anglian Water.

It was agreed to continue with the agency agreement with Anglian Water to offset two thirds of the on-going maintenance costs for Northwell Pool in 2011/12 at £2,338.

**g) Youth Council
Expenditure**

i) The Youth Council budgets are all derived from carried forward figures. It may be necessary to carry a full review including consulting with ACOSY at the Community Centre and the young people themselves in order to establish a more cost effective way forward that could deliver what young people actually want. With the Deputy Town Clerk Michelle Meyrick leaving at the end of January this also brings into sharp focus the urgent need for a review. As the new member of staff would need clear instruction and as a temporary measure the Town Clerk would in the short-term be managing any continuation of the Youth Council with any subsequent period of change

It was agreed to carry out a review in the period February – April 2011, with a view to reporting to the annual meeting of the Council in May 2011 (the first meeting of the newly elected Town Council).

ii) The Budget for the Youth Council this year is greatly reduced in real terms and actually costs no new money at all. The Youth Council themselves decided to cut £500 from their allocated match funding, this sum returns to the Town Council match funding pot. Similarly if the remaining £1,500 were cut it would be an internal transfer of funds, thus achieving no real saving on the Council's precept. A sum of £3,862 has been carried forward from 2010/11 accounts projected as the year end figure. This is the total expenditure of £1,500 match funding, £1,362 Youth Council fund (money raised by the Youth Council themselves), £800 Youth Council events and £200 Youth Council admin. The balances may be different if expenditure between now and the end of the financial year are not as projected, one or two match funding issues are in progress.

It was agreed to retain the brought forward Youth Council budget of £3,862 in 2011/12. (Match funding £1,500, Youth Council fund £1,362, Events £800 and Admin £200)

iii) The Youth Council are no different to any other part of the Council's administration when it comes to cuts in expenditure. In addition to the £500 match funding cut, £500 of other cuts are recommended.

It was agreed to examine and approve cuts in expenditure for match funding £500, events £200, admin £100 and sundry £200.

iv) The staff time allocated to the Youth Council covers the time of the Deputy Town Clerk as lead officer. There is no actual saving on staff time if there is no Youth Council as the time is re-allocated elsewhere.

It was agreed to increase the Salary cost of £3,685 for staff time allocated to the Youth Council.

Income

v) The Town Council has previously agreed a policy to ensure that the Youth Council's efforts to raise funds are not penalised by reducing their allocated budget. This would also include grants received from external funders. The level of funding for the Youth Council could also be averaged out over a three year period 2008 – 2011; this will then determine the base line funding required for running a Youth Council. This information forms part of the recommended review.

It was agreed to continue with the Youth Council funding policy that allows them the freedom to spend any net income raised in addition to the annual budget from the Town Council. The aim in the future should be for a self sustaining Youth Council.

Page 640

h) Allotments

Expenditure

i) The expenditure on the allotments is now much closer to the income; with a deficit balance of just £920 compared to £4,639 last year. We are on track for making the allotments self sustaining in the future. At this point the Council could look to passing local management to SCALGA in order to bring costs down further.

It was agreed to start preliminary discussions with SCALGA on how they can assist with the local management of the allotments in 2011/12.

ii) The salaries figure is a calculation to cover the cost of administration and outside staff time required in managing the allotments. The figures are separated out this year to take account of the outside staff taking over the grounds maintenance, access clearance, hedge cutting and maintenance of vacant sites. The change overall has produced a saving in real terms.

It was agreed that the Salaries are calculated at £2,405 for administration and £1,000 for grounds maintenance.

iii) The allotments have in recent years drained the Council coffers in terms of costing the town money year on year to get them to a reasonable condition. In the current economic climate it is necessary to cut public expenditure and allotments are no different in that respect. As with all cuts in expenditure these are managed risks and need to be considered carefully by the Council.

It was agreed examine and approve cuts in expenditure to Pest Control of £250, General Maintenance of £300 and Sundry budget of £200.

iv) The other budget headings are for Waste clearance which is reduced this year. Health and safety is kept at the same level to cover risk assessments, record keeping and actions arising from them; and the water rates have been increased well within inflation

It was agreed to continue with budgets for waste clearance reduced to £815; health & safety maintained at £300 and to increase Water Rates to £800 for 2011/12.

Income

v) The only income to offset against the expenditure is received from allotment rent. The proposed increase in the allotment rent this year is 4.5% in line with inflation. This gives an allotment rent of either £27.00 or £36.00. The allotment rent is in line with other authorities; the Council is able to look at no more than an inflationary increase each year. Increases in rent have to be measured against the possibility of losing allotment holders should the rent rise be too much and the extra cost of having to maintain vacant allotment sites.

It was agreed to increase the rents for 2011/12, giving an allotment rent of £27.00 or £36.00 (50% reduction for half size allotments). This produces an expected income of £4.900.

i) Recreation Ground

Expenditure

i) The grounds maintenance, hedge cutting and weekly health & safety checks on play equipment contract has been reviewed and changes made to accommodate outside staff taking on strimming, hedge cutting and weekly health & safety checks. This re-organisation has produced a saving in real terms for the Recreation Ground. The salaries calculations for outside staff and administration have been included in this cost centre for the first time.

It was agreed to accept the grounds maintenance changes down to £1,271, hedge cutting to nil and salaries for admin £3,865 and grounds maintenance £1,800 for 2011/12.

ii) The tree maintenance is carried out by local tree surgeon David Machin and has been estimated, not allowing for any storm damage. Further costs in the health & safety budget are allowed for the annual ROSPA inspection and report; this has been reduced this year.

It was agreed for the tree maintenance is estimated at £550 and Health & Safety costs reduced to £1,200 for 2011/12

iii) All the other budgets have been cut with the Skatepark Maintenance now forming part of the normal budget heading, thus re-allocating a previously brought forward balance to reduce the general reserves deficit. The pest control, play equipment repairs and sundry budgets are also cut this year. With the cuts come an element of risk and Councillors should consider this carefully before approval is given.

It was agreed to examine and approve cuts in expenditure for General Maintenance of £380, Play equipment repairs £380, Pest Control £200, Skatepark £150 and Sundry £150.

Income

iv) The only income for Recreation Ground usage comes from hiring fees received for the travelling Circus. There has been no income in the current year to date, but this is unusual. It is recommended to rounding up the hire fee this year to £400.

It was agreed to increase the hiring fee for the travelling Circus by 2% over inflation for 2010/11, to £400.

j) Toilets & TIC Expenditure

Toilets

i) The bulk of the expenditure is taken up by the Cleaning & Maintenance contract; this will be currently carried out by a contractor on a month by month basis. There are budgets for Water Rates, Electricity, Non-domestic rates. The calculations have been made for the next year as if there would be no charges in management.

It was agreed for the expenditure of the toilets to be £23,178 for 2011/12 (this is Cleaning & maintenance £15,015, general maintenance £615, Water rates £3,300, Electricity £1,350, and Non-domestic rates £2,898).

ii) The only cut is the Sundry budget which would have been £250

It was agreed to approve the cut of the sundry budget of £250 for 2011/12.

iii) The underlying issue for the public toilets is the balance of £73,123 remaining of the commuted sum which will pay for a minimum of two more years' expenditure after 2011/12 on the public toilets but will require the Council to Precept for 2014/15 to make up the balance required to maintain and manage the toilets. The Council need to consider whether to start setting aside a contingency to soften the blow or to prolong the time when the full amount will need to be added to the Council precept.

It was agreed consider the benefit of building a contingency for the future maintenance of the public toilets for 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15.

TIC

v) The only expenditure proposed for the current management option of the TIC is the £2,720 fee that goes with a service level agreement for providing a TIC service. The Town Council agreed that the current location of Swaffham Museum to be continued in 2010/13 (three years).

It was agreed not to increase the fee of £2,720 for the TIC service.

Income

TIC

vi) The only income proposed for the former TIC building is a rent for which a minimum value was set by the District Valuer earlier this year and offered for public tender, the current period is for a longer term lease. It was agreed by the Council that it would be for a period of five years from 1st January 2010 to 31st December 2014. The increase this year is in line with inflation.

It was agreed to increase the annual rent to £4,440.00 + Vat for the year 2011/12 as per agreed tender and minimum valuation.

k) Cemetery & Churchyard

Cemetery Expenditure

i) There are major changes in how the Cemetery is maintained that will come into play during 2011/12. The grounds maintenance contractor has taken on grass cutting and strimming at the Cemetery and staff Salaries has been cut considerably as outside staff will be employed in other parts of the town. There will still be some work to do at the Cemetery for the outside staff, but this exercise has produced a saving in real terms to the Council of £5,000.

It was agreed to approve a change from outside staff salaries reduced to £8,378; and replace partially with grounds maintenance contracting at £3,290 for 2011/12.

ii) The Cemetery has areas within its budget that are subject to cuts in expenditure. General maintenance by £1,000, outside equipment repairs by £100 and outside equipment replacement of £1,000 is removed altogether. These cuts need to be carefully considered by the Council as they create vulnerability and could be exposed if certain circumstances actually happen.

It was agreed to examine and approve cuts in expenditure of £1,000 general maintenance, £100 outside equipment repairs, £1,000 outside equipment replacement, burial records digitalise £750 and sundry expenditure £175 for 2011/12.

iii) The other Cemetery expenditure is as follows: Non-domestic rates have been increased to £1,346 as the phased increase following re-rating has been removed. The waste collection including soil removal and Cemetery fuel are increased in line with inflation to £1,495 and £445 respectively. The health & safety costs remain the same at £750.

It was agreed to increase non-domestic rates to £1346, waste collection £1495 and fuel to £445, with health & safety staying the same at £750.

Page 643

Income

Cemetery

iv) The only income to the Cemetery comes through the burial fees. The prices need to keep pace with inflation as a minimum. The cemetery fees are under review with the intention to increase in line with the upper 10% of Burial authority charges. This will include taking charge of grave digging, thus adding this to the charge with soil removal.

It was agreed to increase burial fees in line with the upper 10% of Burial authority charges. The fees to include grave digging and soil removal costs.

v) The number of burials is difficult to predict in terms of budgets. The actual income is offset against the expenditure. The Council need to satisfy themselves that the projected figure of £800 is realistic in terms of achievable additional income.

It was agreed to examine and approve the increase in the projected income to £6,500 which is putting in £800 for additional income.

Expenditure

Churchyard

vi) The grounds maintenance in the churchyard is split between our contractors T.T.S.R. and our own outside staff. The contractor costs have been reduced considerably, as the strimming is now carried out by our staff.

It was agreed for the Churchyard Grounds Maintenance is set at £1,400 for 2011/12

vii) The only cut in expenditure from the churchyard maintenance is the grass verge repairs & fencing. This will now have to be part of a larger project which will need to attract grant funding.

It was agreed to approve the expenditure cut of £500 from the grass verge repairs and fencing for 2011/12.

viii) The churchyard health & safety is of similar importance to that of the Cemetery. It is all about making sure that the gravestones are safe and other issues such as having the correct policies in place to ensure risk assessments are done. There will be work carried out during the course of this winter and the budget next year will keep on top of the health and safety issues in this area.

It was agreed for the churchyard health & safety to stay at £750 for 2011/12.

l) Open Spaces

Expenditure

i) There is a saving of £425 that has been made within this cost centre by our outside staff taking back hedge cutting from T.T.S.R. our grounds maintenance contractors. The salary calculation is now a more accurate calculation rather than a percentage of the overall staffing budget. It is always difficult to apportion staff time to particular tasks or cost centres, as in this case the Town Gardener is around the town each morning and does other tasks too, tidying up, picking up litter, cleaning signs, taking down or putting up notices. It is always a case of while you are there can you do this and/or that. Cllr Sherwood proposed and Cllr Lister seconded to cut the floral displays.

There were 9 votes against and 2 votes for; the proposal to cut out the floral displays was lost.

It was agreed with 9 votes for and 2 against for the floral display salary calculation is £8,103, grounds maintenance for Campingland increased by £4 to £414 and hedge cutting is reduced to nil for 2011/12.

ii) The budget for Open Spaces after addressing the areas where savings can be made then looks at cuts in expenditure. These are across the board with Town Clock maintenance £75, floral displays £600, Buttercross electric £454, Street furniture maintenance £600, and general maintenance £150 and sundry budget of £275 the areas where cuts have been identified. The Town Clock has cost a little more money this year as we required a part to put the clock in good working order. The clock is not getting any younger and in time will need more money to maintain it, to keep good time. The floral display budget has been reduced to encourage others to contribute. If value can be added to the Town Council contribution, then a similar amount of floral displays will be on show, if not then there will be a reduced display and perhaps it is time to look at some evergreen displays which may take less manpower to maintain. The Buttercross electric budget has been taken out as we are not being charged at present, this situation could change and it would be money that would have to come out of reserves. Street furniture maintenance has been cut by more than 50%, we did a lot of work in the past year and this like all of the cuts are measured risks. General maintenance is cut by 50% which could backfire; similarly with no sundry budget it leaves no room for manoeuvre, for unforeseen problems or for any changes in policy.

N.B. It was stated last year that it will be necessary to start putting aside a contingency for future replacement baskets and planters and one of the quick wins for 'Advance Swaffham' was to install planters at the entrances to town to give that welcoming feel. These are added to the work carried out by the Town Gardener.

It was agreed to approve the cuts in expenditure for the Town Clock maintenance £75, Floral Displays £600, Buttercross electricity £454, Street furniture maintenance £600, General maintenance £150 and Sundry budget £275 in 2011/12.

iii) It was previously agreed to put the replacement of the truck on hold until the Council's cash-flow situation improves with income from the proposed sale of surplus allotment land.

It was agreed for the budget of the Truck Lease continues at nil for 2011/12 and to postpone the funding of a replacement truck. When the Council's cash-flow situation improves with the income from the proposed sale of surplus allotment land, this issue could be looked at then.

iv) The other cost heading for the truck is for Fuel/ Maintenance/and Insurance. This has been greatly reduced from last year and maintained at the projected year end cost for the current financial year.

It was agreed for the maintenance/fuel and insurance for the truck is reduced to £1,500 for 2011/12.

Income

v) The only potential income in this cost centre comes from Town Centre floral displays in the form of sponsorship and the possibility of earning recycling credits. There is no potential income estimated, but anything received this year could be used at the Council's discretion. The intent is there it just needs sufficient time to develop and realise this potential income stream.

It was agreed for the Town Council to explore sponsorship opportunities and complete the town scheme for receiving Recycling Credits in 2011/12.

**m) Amenity & Agency
Expenditure**

i) The annual grant for the Museum is increased by 1% for this year. It is necessary to review the contribution towards the Museum in the lifetime of this Council as the current financial commitment to the Museum is only for one more year. It would make sense to start the review from February 2011 and conclude it within the budget debate for 2012/13 in December next year; this would allow sufficient time to do this matter justice.

The Museum Non-domestic rates were separated out of Museum utilities for the first time two years ago to highlight the 80% mandatory relief given to the Museum as a registered charity. The Museum was successful in gaining discretionary relief of the remaining 20%, thus removing the rates charge for the part of the Town Hall that they currently occupy. This is a saving of some £7,000.

It was agreed to increase the Museum grant by 1% to £3,686 and to start a review the Museum annual grant from February 2011.

ii) The calculation of Museum utility costs (Water Rates, Gas & Electricity) has also been increased by a small inflationary sum of £5.

It was agreed for the Museum percentage of utilities is increased to £725

iii) The electricity for the war memorial needs to have an inflationary increase. The energy costs have evened out this past year following a steep increase the previous year.

It was agreed for the budget for the War Memorial electricity supply to be increased to £454 for 2011/12.

iv) The rising cost of street lighting has been the subject of debate in last two years. Progress has been slow with carrying out the research to bring down the cost of street lighting; this work is in progress and the budget for 2011/12.

It was agreed to reduce the street lighting electricity cost to £28,000 for 2011/12. This includes taking on the administration of the lights direct and cutting out £2,500 of administration fees.

v) The Amenities & Agency other cuts in expenditure could be controversial as they come into the nice to have or nice to do category. £500 has been cut from the Mayor's Reception, £50 from the Civic Service, £130 from Christmas Lights, £250 from Best Kept Garden and £250 from Business in Bloom. There was no sundry budget to cut, but to date £187 of expenditure is already allocated so a sundry budget of £200 would be necessary. Cllr Sherwood proposed and Cllr Jennison seconded to allocate £1000 for the Civic and Mayors Reception combined and for the Mayor at the time to choose which event he/she would like to hold.

It was agreed to cut the budgets of £130 from Christmas Lights, Best Kept Garden £250, £250 from Business in Bloom and £200 from the sundry budget. It was also agreed to allocate £1000 for the Civic/Mayors Reception and for the Mayor at the time to choose which event he/she would like to hold.

**Agency
Expenditure**

vi) The expenditure is reflected in a similar cost to the income received to deliver an administrative service for Breckland Council for monitoring car parks and the Relief in Need Charity, where the costs are salaries. The Icen Partnership is for the buildings insurance for the structure of the Assembly Rooms and the Community Centre. The charge incurred on

Page 646

behalf of the Baptist Church is for grounds maintenance of their burial ground. All agency expenditure has a similar sum received as reimbursed income.

It was agreed that the Agency expenditure relates to Breckland Council £2,600, Relief in Need Charity £1,250, Icen Partnership £4,550 and the Baptist Church £200

vii) There is no twinning budget in 2011/12 and the Council need to meet with the Twinning Association to discuss how future Civic Twinning weekends will be funded. The pressure on the public purse is greater than ever and times have changed in the 40+ years of twinning. Swaffham hosted the two twin towns this year and are not due to do this again until 2016, but have visits to Couhe in 2012 and Hemmoor in 2014 before then. A full review is necessary in preparation for the new Council.

It was agreed to review the Civic Twinning visit of 2010 by a meeting with the Twinning Association in February or March 2011; with a view to leaving a policy recommendation for the new Council to take on in May 2011 for the next three visits in 2012, 2014 and 2016

viii) The Mayor's allowance remains intact; this is subject to an inflationary increase.

It was agreed to increase the Mayor's allowance to £990 in line with inflation for 2011/12.

Income

ix) The Town Council has agency agreements with Breckland Council for car parking supervision, the administration of the Relief in Need Charity and reimbursements for insurance that are arranged for Icen Partnership for the Assembly Rooms and the Community Centre. The Council's grounds maintenance contractors also carry out some work for the Baptist Church which is re-charged at cost.

It was agreed that the figures for 2011/12 for Agency income comes from Breckland Council £2,600, Relief in Need Charity £1,250, Icen Partnership £4,550 and from the Baptist Church £200

x) The additional income budgeted for 2011/12 is for sponsorship of the Mayor's Reception at £500 and of Floral Displays in the town of £1,000. Now obviously sponsors have to be found from somewhere and time is ticking between now and April/May when both budgets are required. It is suggested that an appeal is made to the general public which could include other things the Council have on their 'would like to do list'.

It was agreed to examine the idea of an additional income budget for sponsorship of the Mayor's Reception and Floral displays in the town and to approve in principle a public appeal to address these issues.

xi) Precept

The Precept for 2011/12 is recommended for a minimum increase this year of 4.5%. It is appreciated that the aim was to have a 0% increase or freeze if this was possible. The circumstance that the Council are in is difficult at best and impossible at worst. The Council cannot ignore the external auditor in respect of replenishing their reserves and they know that a major expense in the public toilets is coming on stream in the not too distant future. The Council should therefore consider making further in-roads into the Revenue Reserve deficit. The target of getting this replenished in 5 years is very slim unless an increase in Precept is made above the rate of inflation, (£2,000 = 1%). In addition to this the Council should also consider the possibility of a referendum coming in at the town level for future increases in the

Page 647

precept, as they know a substantial increase will be necessary to pay for the toilets from 2014/15. To avoid this would be to make a one-off increase of £20,000 now; this would be inflation proof for our public toilets when needed and in the short-term could help the Council reduce the deficit on their Revenue Reserves. It was proposed by Cllr Harman and seconded by Cllr Jennison to accept a 4.5% increase. There was a counter proposal which was proposed by Cllr Sherwood and seconded by Cllr Lister to have a 0% increase.

There were 9 votes against and 2 votes for to have a 0% increase on the budget for 2011/12 therefore the vote was lost.

It was agreed with 9 votes for and 2 against to have an increase of 4.5% resulting in the budget for 2011/12 set at £207,000.

The meeting closed at 10.00p.m.

Chairman