

Minutes of a meeting of VENTNOR TOWN COUNCIL held at The Winter Gardens, Ventnor, IW on 8th December 2008.

Present: Councillor Mrs.M.Cawley Deputy Town Mayor
Councillors A.C.Bartlett, C.J.Elvers, J.S.Fitzgerald-Bond, B.M.Lucas, R.J.Mew,
S.B.Milford, M/S D.Robinson, Mrs.V.Taylor and C.Welsford.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mrs.S.J.Scoccia.

1. PRAYERS

The meeting opened with prayers led by Rev.B.Downer.
Rev.Downer was leaving the Parish of Bonchurch and this was the last occasion he would be in attendance as the Mayor's Chaplain and the Deputy Town Mayor thanked him sincerely for his service in this capacity.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th November 2008 were approved and signed.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors J.S.Fitzgerald-Bond, Mrs.V.Taylor and C.Welsford declared personal interests in agenda item No. 7 relating to Ventnor Schools Reorganisation.

4. REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD OFFICER

Mr. R.Reed submitted his report and thanked everyone involved in the Town Council for being so supportive during his first full year in office. It was Resolved – To place on record the appreciation of the Town Council of Mr.Reed's work during the year.

5. WORK AT THE EASTERN ESPLANADE VENTNOR

Following the representations made by the Town Council to the IW Council at the last meeting relating to the work being carried out on the Eastern Esplanade the Town Clerk submitted letters from Mr. Stuart Love, Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods and Mr.Bill Murphy, Head of Planning Services.

Mr. Murphy stated that in terms of process the Cheetah Marine planning permission required under condition 15 the provision of a new access roadway, footway and means of separation of vehicles and pedestrians, including traffic calming within the vicinity of the proposed new building and adjacent to the childrens' paddling pool. Once an application had been determined it is not the current practice (and it is not a statutory requirement) of the Planning Authority to consult with local councils on the discharge of conditions which were often of a highly technical nature. In this particular case the details provided had to balance the need to protect the health and safety of people visiting the publicly accessible areas against the need for good quality materials to meet the requirements of the Supplementary Planning Guidance for the Eastern Esplanade. Mr.Murphy said that officers monitoring the works were pleased with the quality of the work on site. In respect of the concern that the areas around the pool was being made smaller it was necessary to build the stone faced vehicle containment wall abutting the pool but the abandonment of the old road means that whilst the shape around the paddling pool has changed, far from being smaller the actual dry play area will be increased considerably and this will become apparent once the works are completed.

Mr.Murphy appreciated the importance of this part of The Esplanade to the overall appearance of Ventnor and if the Town Council did wish to meet with officers to have an explanation as to how the final scheme has been designed this could be arranged. As the site is Council owned a number of different officers have been involved and it would be necessary to fit any such meeting into the diary of the most appropriate officers.

5. WORK AT THE EASTERN ESPLANADE, VENTNOR (continued)

The Town Clerk said that he had asked that such a meeting be arranged.

Members expressed their concern that the works now being carried out were very different to those shown in the original scheme and planning application and did strongly believe that the Town Council should have been made aware of the changes and given an opportunity to discuss the new layout. The view was expressed that the action taken was not consistent with the policy of consulting with local councils on issues of major local importance and the Town Council should make it clear that they strongly objected to a change of work without consultation.

Councillor Fitzgerald-Bond said that the problem would be solved if the paddling pool was repositioned northwards by about 2 metres.

It was agreed to seek an urgent meeting with officers of the IW Council and Councillor Fitzgerald-Bond said that he would endeavour to expedite this meeting.

6. VENTNOR SCHOOLS REORGANISATION

At the request of Councillor C.Welsford the Town Council considered his proposal that the Town Council should send a letter of objection to the Isle of Wight Council regarding their failure to consult properly with Ventnor Town Council regarding the decision made on 24th November 2008 to approve the closure of Ventnor Middle School and the amalgamation of Ventnor's three primary schools into Ventnor Middle School to create a single voluntary aided joint faith 4 - 11 primary school.

In support of his proposal he submitted a statement a copy of which is attached to these minutes as Appendix A.

The Council proceeded to discuss this proposal and various views and comments were made.

A request was made that a recorded vote be taken on this matter.

It was Resolved - That the Town Council write to the Isle of Wight Council and to the Diocesan Authorities to state that it is the view of this Council that the Isle of Wight Council and Diocesan Authorities failed to consult adequately with the Town Council on this matter and that a copy of this letter be sent to the Secretary of State for Education so that he is aware of this Council's feeling.

Those members voting FOR the motion were Councillors Mrs.M.Cawley, C.J.Elvers, R.J.Mew, S.B.Milford, M/s D.Robinson, Mrs.V.Taylor and C.Welsford and those members voting AGAINST the motion were Councillors A.C.Bartlett, J.S.Fitzgerald-Bond and B.M.Lucas.

7. IW ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

Councillor R.J.Mew reported upon meetings of the Executive Committee of the Association and issued which had been raised.

8. WINTER GARDENS COMMITTEE

The report of a meeting of the Winter Gardens Committee held on 24th November 2008 was received.

9. REPORT OF FINANCIAL OFFICER

The written report of the Financial Officer was circulated to members.

10. QUESTIONS

Councillor Mew asked if members would themselves carry out a survey of signs in streets in Ventnor of which he thought there too many and let him have their views so that the Town Council could consider if any action should be taken.

Councillor Mew also asked if any members of the Youth Council resided in Ventnor and if so could they be invited to attend Town Council meetings. This was accepted.

Councillor M/s D.Robinson reported on work being carried out at the junction of Whitwell Road and Upper Gills Cliff Road to remove the bollards which had caused many problems for vehicles.

Town Mayor

APPENDIX A

VENTNOR SCHOOLS REORGANISATION - To consider whether Ventnor Town Council should resolve to send a letter of objection to the Isle of Wight County Council regarding their possible failure to consult properly with Ventnor Town Council regarding the decision made on the 24th November 2008 to approve the closure of Ventnor Middle School and the amalgamation of Ventnor's three primary schools onto the Ventnor Middle School site, to create a single voluntary aided joint faith 4-11 primary school.

Part of my election commitment to the residents of Ventnor East and one reason for my being elected, was to bring to the attention of the Town Council, my reservations regarding the failure of the Local Authority and the Diocesan Authorities to consult properly on their proposals to reorganise education in Ventnor.

Specifically I would like the Town Council to consider making a formal objection to the Isle of Wight Council, on the grounds that Ventnor Town Council was not properly consulted on the matter.

Only after representations from me as a resident to Cllr Millford, did the Local Authority agree to send an officer to a special meeting to allow Town Councillors an opportunity to ask questions about the proposals.

This meeting was held with only four clear days to go until the extended deadline for responses. The original deadline had already expired and I submit that without Cllr Milford's request for the meeting, this council would not have had a chance even to ask questions.

This meeting was listed as a consultation meeting by the Local Authority but it was not attended by main proposers: the Diocesan Authorities. The Officer who attended did not make a formal presentation and there was some considerable confusion as to whether the meeting was a part of the statutory process or not.

Guidelines laid down by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, for proposals on closing maintained schools are very clear. Specifically I believe that the Local Authority have failed in their duty to Ventnor Town Council in sections 1.2 and 1.4 of the statutory parts of the guidance. These are:

1.2 The Secretary of State considers that those bringing forward proposals should consult all interested parties. In doing so they should:

- *allow adequate time;*
- *provide sufficient information for those being consulted to form a considered view on the matters on which they are being consulted;*
- *make clear how their views can be made known; and*
- *be able to demonstrate how they have taken into account the views expressed during consultation in reaching any subsequent decision as to the publication of proposals.*

1.4 The Secretary of State considers that the interested parties who should be consulted by proposers include:

- *the local district or parish council where the school that is the subject of the proposals is situated;*

In summary, I believe that this Town Council was not provided with sufficient information upon which to make an informed response.

My evidence for this is:

- A lack of balance in what was said to you by the officer, Keith Simmonds, who attended the special meeting of the 6th October.
- He suggested that small schools are weak schools and that larger schools are stronger. You may be prepared to accept this but there are many who would disagree with him, including the National Association for Small Schools and Human Scale Education both of who can provide overwhelming evidence to show the merits of small schools.
- The fact is that Ventnor Middle School is judged "Good" by Ofsted and our three primary schools are judged satisfactory was not considered.
- The impact on the town, of closing Ventnor Middle School, both for parents and businesses was not discussed.
- No mention was made of the problems experienced by the Diocese of Portsmouth in their Ecumenical school in Oxford which has since been closed and replaced with a Roman Catholic school.
- Differences between Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled schools were played down as being largely irrelevant – which they are not. If the differences were so unimportant and the two things so alike, then why not make the new school a voluntary controlled school and avoid the objections. Who controls a school, particularly the only school for the town is extremely important, as are the funding streams available for the school, the appointment of governors and the control of the religious education curriculum. The differences between local authority controlled and church aided schools are big and in order to make an informed response full and balanced written information should have been provided.
- The issues surrounding parental choice and diversity of provision were glossed over and dismissed as irrelevant – Niton and Wroxall being cited as adequate alternatives
- The very fact that the Diocesan Authorities did not present their proposals to you is a clear breach of the statutory guidance.
- On top of this, the Town Council was given insufficient time from the date of the meeting to the date of the deadline to provide a formal response. There was no time for questions to be formulated and answers to be given let alone a response itself.

I move that this Council should write to the Isle of Wight Council and to the Diocesan Authorities to state that it is the view of this Council that the Isle of Wight Council and Diocesan Authorities failed to consult adequately with the Town Council on this matter and that a copy of this letter should be sent to the Secretary of State for Education so that he is aware of this Council's feelings.