

Minutes of the meeting of
Yarm Town Council held at
The Fellowship Hall (side entrance)
West Street, Yarm TS15 9BT.
Date: Tuesday 14th November 2023
Time: 7pm
(immediately following Weigh & Tolls)
Members of the public were invited to
attend the meeting
SIGNED: Juliet Johnson, Proper Officer to YTC



Yarm Town Council
Town Hall
High Street
Yarm
TS15 9AH

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YARM TOWN COUNCIL - MINUTES

PRESENT: Cllr John Couslon (voted to Chair); Cllr Steve Atkinson; Cllr Yvonne Pybus;
Cllr Pam Smailes (Vice Chair); Cllr Marje Blair; Cllr Barbara Wegg;
Cllr Philip Addison; Cllr Joyce Hardy; Cllr Robert Wegg;
Town Clerk; 9 members of the public.

1.0 Notice of Meeting - public notice of the meeting was given in accordance with schedule 12, paragraph 10 (2) of the LGA 1972.

2.0 To appoint a Chairman in the absence of the Chair and/or Vice Chair - Vice Chair, Cllr Smailes did not take the Chair. Following a vote (prior to the preceding Weigh & Tolls meeting), Cllr Coulson took the Chair.

3.0 Apologies for Absence - apologies were received from **Cllr Peter Monck**.

4.0 Code of Conduct | Declaration of Interest | Dispensation

- a) To record declarations of interest from members of any item to be discussed
- b) To consider, vote upon and record any requests for dispensation

4.1 Cllrs R & B Wegg declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 10.2 and will not be voting as regards 10.2.2.

5.0 Confirmation of Minutes

To approve the minutes of the previous meetings:

5.1 Weigh and Tolls Committee held on Tuesday 10th October 2023 and approve their signature by the Chair of the meeting.

PROPOSED: Cllr. Coulson **SECONDED:** Cllr. Addison **AGREED**

5.2 Yarm Town Council held on Tuesday 10th October 2023 and approve their signature by the Chair of the meeting.

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PROPOSED: Cllr. Blair

SECONDED: Cllr Coulson

AGREED

5.3 Yarm Town Council EGM held on Friday 3rd November 2023 and approve their signature by the Chair of the meeting. **The Clerk** reminded councillors that these minutes had not been circulated 3 clear days in advance of this meeting and therefore they could choose to approve them at the next meeting instead. Councillors chose to approve the minutes.

PROPOSED: Cllr Coulson

SECONDED: Cllr Blair

AGREED

6.0 Clerk's Report: Matters for Information - CCTV for Willey Flatts - awaiting fitting of booster to mast at Green Lane (not been possible in recent storms); **Holes in Roads around Willey Flatts (e.g. Clapham Rd.)** - response received from Highways at SBC (Stockton Borough Council) - dates for this work to be confirmed; **Jet Washing of High Street Bus Stops** - (issue of used as 'toilet' over weekends) - cleansing are keeping an eye and cleaning as required; **Stockton and Darlington Railway 200th Anniversary** - Clerk has been in touch with the SBC lead - meeting pending as regards project that can link to the Heritage Centre in relation to the proposed mural engagement/visitor project; **Play Surface Repair (Willey Flatts)** - now complete (original company stated could not be repaired under the original guarantee despite argument being put to them on several occasions - with pictures - that premature wear and tear had made vandalism easier); this repair has now been achieved under YTC insurance (circa £1,700; previously agreed facebook feature on this to follow i.e. requesting all vandalism to play parks is reported to the police as soon as spotted and highlighting repair costs).

[Other summaries of some of the Clerk's work are referenced in (e.g.): weigh and tolls agenda items (re. Events and Town Hall Heritage Centre); agenda items on Finance; Correspondence List for October to November; Allotments and Cemeteries report (if requested)].

7.0 Council Finances

7.1 To authorise payment of the accounts - Payments List Refers

Cllr Addison presented the payments list for approval, and for regular payments/ direct debits made to be noted. . Two additional payments were presented: renewal of annual Pest Control contract (Stockton Borough Council, SBC) - **£439** (ex. VAT) and payment for a volunteer's DBS check (Christmas and Yarm Town Hall Heritage Centre) - **£18**. The Payments List was proposed for approval.

PROPOSED: Cllr. Addison

SECONDED: Cllr. Coulson

AGREED

7.2 Bank Reconciliation (DOCUMENT REFERS) The Bank Reconciliation was presented and noted by the meeting.

PROPOSED: Cllr. Coulson

SECONDED: Cllr. Blair

AGREED

7.3 Income and Expenditure Report (DOCUMENT REFERS)

Cllr. Smailes asked why the Clerk's National Insurance isn't being paid. **Cllrs. Addison & Atkinson** explained the position re. HMRC & NI credit (Cllr Addison referenced the recent NYE article on the same subject). **Cllr Smailes** suggested non-payment could cause problems. Approval of the Income and Expenditure report was proposed.

PROPOSED: Cllr. Coulson

SECONDED: Cllr. Atkinson

AGREED

7.4 To consider and note the audited Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) for 2022/2023 and any recommendations (DOCUMENT REFERS) **Cllr Addison** stated the need to note and approve

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the recently returned AGAR for 2022-2023 following an investigation by the External Auditor - EA - (& a similar investigation by the Internal Auditor - IA) prompted by a group. The AGAR has been published on the website according to requirements. **The Clerk** gave detail of the recommendations, in summary: that a 'no' box had been ticked instead of an 'N/A' box at question 11b; that the risk management of the Yarm Town Hall Heritage Centre (YTHHC) had not been written into the Risk Register for '22-'23 (risk management being in place even though not written into the Risk Register at that time). The Clerk read the Auditor's report as regards the following: further clarity/detail should have been given in the minute of the decision re. the Clerk's additional hours paid for the Town Hall project (e.g. how potential conflict of interest was being avoided and financial regulations complied with). The EA identified that the IA had reviewed the arrangement as being well-intentioned & likely to achieve significant savings - the process to ensure the decision to award the work in house was to provide value for money (e.g. the benchmarking), whilst covered in the accompanying report, should have been recorded in the minutes, along with clarity as to it being an extension of hours/contract or consultancy. The council noted and discussed the recommendations including a suggestion (e.g.) when the Clerk is not to be present and therefore unable to take minutes and give advisory prompts as to what should be covered in agreement/discussion (i.e. during the above referenced discussion of her salary/role/additional hours when it was necessary for her to leave the room), that support and advice could be given to Councillors who might scope in advance of the meeting, what should be covered in discussion to be included and recorded in the minutes. *[NB cross reference to minutes of previous meetings: Risk Register updated, including work on the Town Hall (recorded at YTC Meeting of 10.10.23); Clerk's suggestion of YTC identifying professional HR support on occasion (minute ref 10.11, 10.10.23) i.e. would help YTC approach issues (e.g.) like additions to contract such as the work on the Town Hall project].*

7.5 Approval of any additional expenditure for Christmas Events (as per discussion from Weigh & Tolls - £2-£3k)

PROPOSED: Cllr. Coulson

SECONDED: Cllr. Addison

AGREED

7.6 Update on Utility Contracts

The Clerk reported on work to interrogate existing contracts including: unmetered electricity account for public lighting around the town hall (which, following request for detail, in past years seemed to include lighting listed as for Newbiggin by the Sea) - bill being challenged and refund sought; allotment hut electricity contract - challenged and refund of over £1k received previously (over £500 still in credit) and new, cheaper supplier contracted resulting in significant reduction; water charges seeming harder to challenge but being pursued; cemetery waste collections now reduced by £4-500 PA (only collection cycle possible is weekly so bin size reduced). Councillors were asked to nominate any other utility/ similar contracts they thought should be looked into.

7.7 Cemetery Fees : April 2024

Cllr Addison stated that Cemetery fees should be looked at in terms of comparison with charges in other authorities ready for the 2024-2025 budget preparation. **Cllr B Wegg** pointed out that SBC charged for the burial of children whilst YTC does not charge.

ACTION: **Clerk** to compose a costs comparator table with other authorities (noting variables with types of cemeteries).

7.8 Planning Process for 2024 / 2025 Budget

The Clerk detailed the timetable and process for planning the 2024-2025 budget to include: prior to Christmas - production of first draft for discussion (Clerk & Lead Councillor for Finance) for discussion in meeting with Committee Chairs (having consulted with their committee members) to identify budget requirements, amendments and likely issues for '24-'25; second draft produced (in response to committee chairs' feedback) for Full Council to consider; there may be initial consideration by Finance and Governance Committee (all Councillors) or by Full Council as an Agenda item in January and a further EGM if required.

Cllr Addison informed the meeting of a further item relating to 7.1 above - a national pay award has been agreed (representing a 5.7 % increase to the Clerk's salary) that would be included in November's salary; a related back pay lump sum (April - October '23) is also to be paid.

8.0 To Review and Consider the Correspondence List

(DOCUMENT REFERS) - no queries raised.

9.0 Adjournment and Questions From the Public

Member of the public (MP) 1 asked what the cost of the internal and external audit investigations were in relation to the reference at 7.4. The cost of both internal and external investigations being **£1,200+** (excluding salaried time).

MP2 requested details of financial gain from the Fair. Answer was given that there is little income (*NB Clerk's Note post meeting - small amount of income from the travellers for being present on the cobbles*). **MP2** wished to know why there was financial outlay by the council to support it and couldn't it move to elsewhere. It was clarified that there is no financial outlay (other than staff time) - expenditure discussed related to YTC's event, the Fair Ridings and Reception; Cllr Coulson stated that the presence of the Fair relates to an ancient charter which can only be changed by an Act of Parliament.

MP3 requested details of the SBC Pest Control contract for the Allotments and stated that this seemed to be a high cost. The Clerk summarised what the contract covered. MP3 detailed that 10 years ago, the contract had been self-managed (with the appropriate poisons simply being dropped off to be administered at the allotments). It was suggested that legislation may have changed. **MP3** offered to deliver this contract (if possible, subject to legislation and appropriate training) - the offer was provisionally accepted following further investigation.

ACTION: Clerk to investigate the possibility of **MP3**, a member of Yarm Community Allotments Association Committee, administering pest control and what this would entail.

YTC's Rate Payers' Representative, Karen Shields, asked the Council to note the issue of dog muck on pavements, a particular problem following the gathering for Remembrance Sunday. **Cllr Hardy** noted the many responsible dog owners who had turned up and cleaned up after their pets.

ACTION: Clerk to contact SBC regarding dealing with this issue; note to include in Evaluation of this year's Remembrance event with aim of highlighting responsibility of owners prior to 2024 Remembrance.

YTC's Rate Payers' Representative, Karen Shields asked YTC to feedback to SBC an instance where drains blocked by leaves on Green Lane had been pumped out, only for the uncleared leaves left on the bank to fall straight back in i.e. the cause of the problem should be dealt with.

YTC's Rate Payers' Representative, Karen Shields noted that the obstructing tree/hedge branches along the Green Lane footpath had largely been cleared (close to the school) but that there were still issues about number of 'darkly clad' school children being at risk by stepping off the path - a path on the other side of the road is also needed i.e. the 'school pick-up side'. Speaking as **Ward Councillor, Cllr Coulson** stated that there were plans for an additional path.

ACTION: Ward Cllr Coulson to check and feedback plans for the additional path (including location).

At the end of the public session, **Cllr Addison** gave a **Vote of Thanks** to **Councillors Marje Blair and Joyce Hardy** for handing out programmes to the public for the Yarm Act of Remembrance (**Cllr Addison** also took part in this).

10.0 Policy and Resources:

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10.1 Cemetery Report

Cllr B Wegg reported that prior to the change of season (bad weather), a working group had been clearing the south end of Yarm Cemetery including untidy/neglected graves. The work resulted in large amounts of branches /natural debris that needed disposal. A place to store these was suggested until they could be taken away by the gardener who maintains the cemetery (**CLERK TO ACTION**). **Cllr B Wegg** asked if ex-**Cllr Moffitt's** work on the latest update of the cemetery database could be sent to her as 'Pray For' sheets so that she could place the most up to date version on the chapel noticeboard (**CLERK TO ACTION**). **The Clerk** informed the meeting that ex-**Cllr Moffitt** had offered to continue to update the database each year - **the council accepted this offer with thanks**. **Cllr B Wegg** asked if councillors would offer to do 1 hour shifts on Boxing Day to ensure that The Cemetery Chapel was open for certain periods; **Cllr Pybus** volunteered.

Cllr Coulson informed the meeting that a plaque bearing a mobile phone scannable QR code had been placed on the north facing bench at the side of Yarm Chapel by MP Matt Vickers as part of a grief counselling campaign.

10.2 Allotments Report

10.2.1 General Update(including feedback re 'Top Allotments', Worsall Rd). The 2023-2024 allotment rents have largely been received. Several transfers are currently underway; there are approximately 24 people on the waiting list. **The Clerk** has followed-up several concerns raised by **Cllr R Wegg** (following the Summer 'Allotment Walkabout') now clarified as follows:

a) concern that the path between allotment B28 (and allotments B27 b & a) has largely disappeared at the back (being absorbed into B28 in the past); records suggest that the path was to be properly established in the past (as another access to the allotments on the slope at the rear nearest the school) but that in order to do this in a safe way, YTC had voted that the cost was prohibitive (pre 2019); b) concern that the tenant of Brickyard Allotment B1 had not been consulted properly and was unhappy as regards reclamation of part of her allotment plot to create a communal/social garden area; the tenant has confirmed that she was happy to give up part of her allotment for such a good cause, was properly consulted, preferred the alteration in shape this made to her irregular shaped plot and was very pleased to be given several fruit trees to plant (as compensation for the one lost when the boundary was altered); the tenant is happy to confirm this in writing if required.

10.2.2 Allotment Transfer Requests (DOCUMENT REFERS)

The Clerk notified the meeting of Cllr Monck's selection of a tenant from three applications for a transfer to allotment B25a in line with allotment policy and rules.

10.3 Vote of Thanks for Councillor Ian Carter and Councillor Alan Moffitt

Cllr Blair advocated a **Vote of Thanks for the excellent work and contributions made by Cllrs Moffitt and Carter** who have now left YTC. The Clerk conveyed a message from Ward Councillor Sherris that he wished to join this Vote of Thanks.

Members of the public present asked to be joined in this thanks to Cllrs Moffit and Carter.

PROPOSED: Cllr Blair

SECONDED: Cllr Addison

AGREED

10.4 Update on Councillor Vacancy

No election is to be called (10 signatures not received by the Returning Officer); the Council can now co-opt a member. Referencing NALC guidance, a simple recruitment process was suggested: description of Councillor role/responsibilities is drafted; any 'skills gaps' should be assessed and included; outline of the application process e.g. short CV & letter of application (detailing aptitude/experience re the role, and pertinent skills); deadline for applications; informal interview involving all Councillors (e.g. several small group conversations); outcomes of this process to then be decided at Council (candidates discussed as A, B, C etc.). It was proposed to adopt this co-option process. **PROPOSED: Cllr Addison SECONDED: Cllr Coulson AGREED (all)**

10.5 Discussion and Proposal: Location of YTC Meetings

Cllr Atkinson reported to the Council that whilst attending an event at Challoner House, he'd been approached by an elderly resident who expressed interest in attending Council meetings but was unable to travel to the High St / Fellowship Hall. Cllr Atkinson detailed the facilities available at Challoner House and proposed that some council meetings could be held there (potentially encouraging a wider cross-section of residents to attend). **Cllr Hardy** supported the idea and stated that the Fellowship Hall was also often challenging re. noise from the adjoining room.

Cllr Coulson would like one meeting a year at the Town Hall, given historic civic importance. A debate ensued as to legalities as regards accessibility (**ACTION: CLERK** to investigate). It was proposed to hold future Council meetings alternately between Fellowship Hall & Challoner House (Clerk advised this represented a change to a non-statutory Standing Order; signatures from 4 Councillors would be required to finalise this change). The motion was **agreed in principle subject to the 4 signatures being received**, in order to fully ratify the motion at the next meeting.

PROPOSED: Cllr Atkinson

SECONDED: Cllr Addison

AGREED (in principle)

11.0 Planning & Environment:

11.1 Matters Arising: Planning Applications & Lists - Deferred until **Cllr Monck** is present.

11.2 Latest Play Area Reports & Issues

The Clerk reported that the repair to the play surface at Willey Flatts had finally been completed and the swings could be reinstated. **Cllr Smailes** asked why this could not have been done under the guarantee. **The Clerk** confirmed that the company would not accept a guarantee claim as the damage was the result of vandalism (even if wear and tear had made vandalism easier). The matter will be placed on Facebook (as previously agreed) stating the cost of vandalism and encouraging residents to make a 101 report immediately if any vandalism is witnessed.

11.3 Yarm-on-Tees Sign (Thirsk Rd) - Enquiry to MPs Office

The Clerk reported that a suggestion had been received that the above sign (confirmed as owned by YTC) should be repaired. SBC can action this.

ACTION: Cllrs Atkinson & Wegg to feedback on condition and advise if repair is preferable; **Clerk** to obtain cost.

11.4 Historic Building Alterations: e.g. Ex-Adam's Barbers Premises **Cllr Pybus** stated that the above alterations were not in keeping with the historic High Street and wants information as to why this has been allowed (noting that work has currently stopped). **Cllr Hardy** and the **Clerk** cannot find a related planning application on the SBC portal.

ACTION: **Clerk** to seek clarification on the matter and express YTC concern.

12.0 Adjournment and Final Questions from the Public

MP4 asked why 3 councillors, previously given a vote of no confidence, are still in office. **Cllr R Wegg** responded: he/they didn't have to leave, he'd done nothing wrong and had not brought YTC into disrepute. **The Clerk** advised Councillors could choose not to answer questions at the meeting and respond later in writing if they so wished. **MP4** asked how the 3 Councillors could interview potential co-opted candidates given their disregard for standards in public life. **MP1** asked whether the proposed parking spaces at Yarm cemetery are progressing; quotations were requested but no contractors have come forward currently. **MP5** suggested that SBC Green Waste Collections may help with the waste issue at the cemetery; it is thought that this service is not usable by what would be regarded as a business (**ACTION: CLERK** to check). **MP2** stated he felt YTC had missed the opportunity to position itself as a quality/professional council (*Clerk's Note post meeting: comment confirmed by MP2 as relating to issues "called out" at 10.8.23 EGM, perceived by MP2 as unresolved*). **MP6** requested that reflectors (or similar solution) might be placed

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at Leven Bank (bridge) as new ultra powerful headlights were causing a dangerous dazzle problem there for drivers. **MP7** voiced support for Cllr Coulson's suggestion as regards holding one meeting per year in the Town Hall to keep important civic history alive (and referenced the potential for people to join online if disabled). **MP1** asked which parts of the Town Hall were listed and advocated that only the exterior is (**ACTION: Clerk** to check out these definitions with the SBC Conservation Officer).

13.0 To agree any content for the YTC website and requests for Facebook features

13.1 Feedback on items to date & proposed new items - no further current items identified.

14.0 To receive items for information and consideration for the next agenda - none identified currently.

15.0 To confirm the date & time of the next YTC meeting: 7pm, 12th December 2023. The meeting closed at 20.55pm