

## Bishop Auckland Town Council

### Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee

2<sup>nd</sup> December 2025 at 4.30pm

Held at 5.00pm in Town Council Offices, Kingsway Court, Bishop Auckland

**In attendance:** Cllr Harker (Chair), Gray, Siddle, Wilson, Wilkinson & Zair

**Also, In attendance:** Mrs Sarah Harris, Town Clerk & Mrs Vicki Booth, Assistant Town Clerk and Cllr Tom Redmond

**PRC046/25 - Apologies for Absence** – all present

**PRC047/25 - Declaration of Interests** - No declarations of interest were made.

**PRC048/25 - Action Log from Previous Meeting** – each action was reviewed and discussed as required.

**Resolved:** that members noted the update.

**PRC049/25 Presentation from Downing's – The Committee was joined on teams by Downings, regarding the proposed Toronto Solar Farm.**

60% of community in support of project, from initial consultation. 4 topics main topics were raised:

- agricultural land - Site all grade 3 agricultural land and independent survey confirms that. Sheep grazing can continue while panels in operation
- light and glare, No adverse impact to local residents, was suggestion road impact due to planting trees. Noise not in excess of baseline.
- visual impact on landscape - Gap for shrubs etc and to help eliminate direct viewing of panels. Move back from road slightly.
- noise – design scheme and survey has been undertaken and there is no major impact on the community.

Design informed from feedback received and some changes made. Now moving to second part of engagement and next public consultation is 9<sup>th</sup> Dec between 2 & 3.30pm at Escomb Village Hall.

40-year investment

**Community Benefit –**

Asked community what like to see

Financial contribution to local groups/projects

Provide 3 roof top solar schemes (pay for equipment installation) and promote by targeting those on benefits etc. Over 120 roof tops throughout this period.

£120,000 one off payment to local projects indicated by BATC where they can make long lasting impact. Funds held in trust by 3<sup>rd</sup> party for funds to be called upon.

Questions around the decommissioning of the panels and remaining landscape after the project ends. Bond put in place early on with money put aside with DCC should something happen to the company and the local authority can put the site back to its current state and is covered in the planning application.

A Community Benefit Package would come with the project it will offer solar to households, as well as a community fund which they would like to administer via the Town Council. More details of how this works would follow.

**Resolved:** Virtual briefing agreed after their next consultation prior to submitting application in full at the start of January.

**PRC050/25 Public Participation** – no members of the public were in attendance.

**Resolved:** that no members of the public were present.

**PRC051/25 – Finance**

a) **Bank Account Update** - the Clerk gave an overview of the account balances

**Resolved:** that members noted the account balances

b) **Budget Planning and Precept Preparation for 2026/27** the Clerk gave a presentation regarding the budget changes and proposes and how this reflects on the precept proposal for the 2026/27 year. That precept options were put to council for consideration.

**Resolved:** that members agreed that the paying off of the PWLB in full isn't a suitable option however looking to pay the loan off over a period of 3 years would be more comfortable and reduce the liability. They wish to propose 2 options to full council an option of 30% and 36% increase would achieve what the council needs to move forward successfully, and this would suitably cover the shortfall so that future smaller increases could be made. This will also ensure reserves will be held at the minimum recommended levels.

c) **Authorisation of Payments - the list was presented – copy attached in appendix1.**

**Resolved:** that members agreed the payment report.

**PRC052/25 – Audit Prep – Internal Auditor still being sourced.**

**Resolved:** that members noted that an internal auditor quotes are still being sourced.

**PRC053/25 – Corporate**

a) **DCC Consultation**

i) **Future of Open Spaces Consultation**

**Resolved:** that members agreed in principle and any updates to be with Clerk by Friday.

**PRC054/25 – Planning** – that members reviewed the applications

**Resolved:** that members noted there was no response required on the current applications.

*Exclusion of Press and Public In accordance with the provisions of Section 1 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, as amended by Section 100 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council do now exclude*

*the press and public for the remaining item on the agenda by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted since publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest.*

## **PRC055/25 – Asset Management**

- a) Sale of De-designated Land Update** – the Clerk gave an update on the offers that have been made and requested members to advise the next steps.

**Resolved:** that members requested a response be made on the agreed discussion, including accepting offers on plot 2, part of 4 and all of 5. The clerk to go back about plot 1 if 80% can be agreed then sale will go ahead, if not it will be offered to open market with plots 6,7 and 3.