

CHARLOTTE COXE TRUST COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 28 April 2022 commencing at 2.00 pm and finishing at 3.10 pm

Present:

Voting Members:

Councillor Robin Bennett
Councillor Felix Bloomfield
Councillor Freddie van Mierlo
Councillor Geoff Saul
Councillor Nick Field-Johnson (In place of Councillor Jane Murphy)

Officers:

Whole of meeting Sukdave Ghuman (Head of Legal Services & Deputy Monitoring Officer), Richard Hodby (Solicitor (Legal Services)) and Colm Ó Caomhánaigh (Committee Officer)

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports are attached to the signed Minutes.

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE 2021/22 COUNCIL YEAR

(Agenda No. 1)

Councillor Robin Bennett nominated Councillor Geoff Saul.
Councillor Nick Field-Johnson nominated Councillor Felix Bloomfield.

Councillor Geoff Saul was elected by 3 votes to 2 and took the Chair.

2 ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIR FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE 2021/22 COUNCIL YEAR

(Agenda No. 2)

Councillor Felix Bloomfield was nominated by Councillor Nick Field-Johnson and elected Deputy Chair nem con.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 3)

Apologies were received from Councillor Jane Murphy (substituted by Councillor Nick Field-Johnson).

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Agenda No. 4)

There were no declarations of interest.

5 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda No. 5)

There were no petitions or requests to address the Committee.

6 EXEMPT ITEM

(Agenda No. 6)

RESOLVED: that the public be excluded for the part of the discussion of item 7 in the Agenda since it is likely that if they were present during the discussion there would be disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and specified in relation to the respective item in the Agenda and since it is considered that, in all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

7 BACKGROUND REPORT AND INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

(Agenda No. 7)

The Committee considered a report on the history of the Charlotte Coxe Trust and the key decisions the Committee will need to make, as well as recommending steps that should be taken before the next meeting of this Committee.

The public was excluded for part of the discussion on this item because discussion of the matters in public was likely to lead to the disclosure to members of the public present of information in the following prescribed category:

3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and since it is considered that, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.

Members questioned whether it was correct to seek payment for the time spent working on this by Council Officers as the work would have been part of their normal business. They also questioned whether it was appropriate to seek retrospective payments for currently unknown amounts.

Members asked if planning permission would be needed for work, given that the building was listed. Richard Hodby responded that the licence will specify that the Parish Council will have to comply with all building regulations and listed building

requirements. Any structural work will have to be done by professionals. Work by volunteers will be limited to tasks such as decorating and gardening.

The Chair emphasised that the Parish Council was being asked to make a presentation to enable the County Council to satisfy itself that the Parish Council has the capacity to take on the responsibilities involved.

Action: It was agreed to invite Watlington Parish Council to a meeting of this Committee to present their case and take questions on it. The questioning should include querying if they have taken their own legal advice.

RESOLVED to:

- (a) Request a written presentation from Watlington Parish Council (“the Parish Council”) in advance of the next meeting of the Committee explaining why it would be an appropriate manager of the Charlotte Coxe Trust and how it has the necessary technical capacity and resources (including legal, financial and surveying expertise) to deal with the management of the Trust.**
- (b) Request a written presentation from Oxfordshire County Council (“the County Council”) in its capacity as library authority in advance of the next meeting of the Committee with its proposals for the terms of the new lease of Watlington Library.**
- (c) Agree that consideration of matters in connection with 10 Davenport Place should be postponed in view of the recent rejection of the relevant planning application.**

8 REPORT ON RENOVATION AND LETTING OF 33 HIGH STREET, WATLINGTON
(Agenda No. 8)

The Committee had before it a report outlining the work proposed by Watlington Parish Council at 33 High Street, recent requests received by the County Council in connection with the work and proposals for letting the property.

Members discussed whether the proposed use – to provide accommodation for refugees from Ukraine – met the objective of the charity which was to benefit the people of Watlington. The following points were made:

- The refugees would become residents of Watlington – if only for a period of time.
- The building had been vacant for 12 years and this proposal would include the renovation of the building which would be of benefit to the people of the town.
- It was standard practice to make a temporary use of a building while seeking a longer-term use for the community.

The question was also raised as to whether one year would be long enough given the time taken to renovate and for it to be occupied.

RESOLVED to:

- (a) Permit Watlington Parish Council (“the Parish Council”) to use volunteers to carry out decorating and garden renovation work at 33 High Street, provided that other work is handled by professional contractors.**

- (b) Authorise Oxfordshire County Council (“the County Council”) to grant a 12 month tenancy of the property at a peppercorn rent to Watlington Parish Council which allows the Parish Council to sublet the property to refugees, provided that the Parish Council takes on full responsibility for repair during the term of the tenancy and any profit the Parish Council makes from subletting is returned to the Trust.**

..... in the Chair

Date of signing 200