

**Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held remotely on the Zoom platform on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020, commencing at 6.30 pm**

**Councillors present:** Cllr M Keller (Chair), Cllr T Bryant, Cllr P Hill, Cllr P Seeley, and Cllr D Wild

**In attendance:** County Cllr S Shing (Items C.296-C.299); K Larkin (Parish Clerk); and D Picknell (Admin Officer)

*There were four members of the public present.*

### **Public Session**

The following topics were raised for consideration by the council:

- Responsibility for Maintenance of Trees in Went Lane – a resident requested information on the findings of the council’s investigation into ownership of the verges.
- Mowing Contract – the Tree Warden recommended revising when, where and how many times different grass-covered areas of land are mown in order to improve biodiversity and habitat in particular for pollinators; and to ensure strimming and mowing equipment would be kept safely away from tree trunks, especially those of young saplings including ones in situ for hedges.
- Tree Warden Service - the Warden also requested clarification of his role going forward.

*The Chair closed the Public Session and opened the meeting*

**C.296 Acceptance of apologies for absence:** - P Williamson (Tree Warden)

**C.297 Declarations of Interests:** - None

**C.298 Minutes:** - The minutes of the council meeting held remotely on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Chair

### **C.299 Report of the County Councillor**

County Cllr Shing reported on the following matters:

- a) Covid-19 second lockdown – it was noted that the latest advice from ESCC had been publicised on the parish council’s Residents Alerts system
- b) East Dean Surgery – no response had been received to the further points raised by Cllr Shing with the new director of the CCG. The surgery had now closed.
- c) Exceat Bridge – work on the new bridge would be delayed due to planning objections but should recommence in the spring.

- d) Temporary traffic lights – ESCC had supported the parish’s request for temporary lights at the bridge whilst the roadworks on the A27 were affecting traffic volumes on the A259. No response had been received from Highways England but traffic lights had recently appeared. Councillors would check if they remained.
- e) Repairs to safety barrier etc. on Footpath 24 (across the Horsefield) – ESCC had completed these outstanding repairs. Councillors recorded their thanks.

RESOLVED - That the report of the County Councillor be noted with thanks

### C.300 Business in Progress

The council took note of Report 6 by the Clerk on progress made since the October meeting. The following points were discussed:

- a) Donation to Eastbourne Silver Band – a donation of £25 would be made to the Band for kindly supplying a cornet player for Remembrance Day **ACTION: KL**
- b) Fish and chip van – there would be a delay as the potential vendor was not yet fully equipped. An appropriate licence would be drawn up by the Hon. Solicitor, specifying e.g. the hours and location of the pitch (on level ground).

RESOLVED - That the Chair and Vice Chair should have delegated authority to sign the licence on behalf of the council

- c) Councillor vacancy – the council hoped to co-opt a new member at the December meeting. Applicants were requested to contact the clerk by 19<sup>th</sup> November.
- d) Election costs – members queried the high cost projected even if an election were not contested (approx. £1,000). The clerk would circulate the breakdown of cost supplied by Wealden District Council **ACTION: KL**
- e) Cyber insurance – carried forward
- f) Play area – the repair of the fence was in hand and new self-closures would be fitted. The equipment maintenance costs which would be over budget would be met by virement from the underspent pavilion budget. **ACTON: KL to note virement.**
- g) Tennis court – a closure notice had been posted and a padlock would be fitted **ACTION: DW**
- h) Licence for works to scorer’s hut – the Hon. Solicitor would draw up suitable documentation in consultation with the Gilbert Estate. The works would be *de minimis*. Members thanked the Hon. Solicitor for his help.
- i) Tidying the Twitten (Footpath 25) – ESCC’s contractor had felled diseased trees, and a tidy up of the verges was now needed **ACTION: PS/PH to arrange with the mowing contractor**
- j) Maintenance of trees in Went Lane – a Land Registry search (public documentation) showed that the Lane and its verges were in the ownership of No.1 Went Lane from the junction with Micheldene Road onwards. **ACTION: KL to respond to residents**

- k) Signing/checking of council documents – during the current lockdown this would be done by post **ACTION: KL/MK/PH**

RESOLVED - That the Progress Report be noted and action taken as discussed

### **C.301 Rebuilding East Dean Bus Shelter (South Side)**

Members considered Report 7. It was noted that although the floor of the shelter had been replaced the wooden walls were rotting at the base. It was agreed that a brick replacement should be built (as at Friston) and the same contractor be appointed at a cost of £3,550.

RESOLVED – That the rebuilding of East Dean bus shelter (south side) be approved at a cost of £3,550

### **C.302 Preliminary consideration of Budget and Precept 2021/22**

Members took note of Report 8 and Appendix 8a containing the Budget Monitoring Report for the first half of the financial year, with analysis and projected out-turn. Expenditure had been skewed downwards by the Covid-19 lockdown, and the continuation of emergency arrangements made it very difficult to forecast the end-of-year figures or to forecast for 2021/22. The council's core activities should in normal times have stable budgets but were currently underspent, e.g. there had been no hire fees payable to the village hall for meetings, and no events. Capital expenditure was even more under budget: the principal item affected was the Neighbourhood Plan which was still on hold and underspent by £15,924. The government was currently consulting on changes to national planning policy to increase the provision of housing, and if these changes were approved they could necessitate the revision of the South Downs National Park Authority's Local Plan, and compromise the value of a comprehensive Neighbourhood Plan. The council could only wait for these matters to be resolved nationally, and meantime keep the NP project on hold. Members agreed in principle to let the core budget roll on as planned in 2021/22 but not to produce any new plans for capital projects. Any underspend at the end of the financial year should be accrued and carried forward, and the precept for 2021/22 should if possible be reduced accordingly. All members were invited to review the budget heads and send proposals for revision to the clerk by Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> November for consideration at the December meeting. **ACTION: all members.**

### **C.303 Mowing Contract 2021, 2022, 2023**

Members took note of Report 9 and reviewed the current contract documentation. The following revisions were discussed:

- Sanitising the play area – to be added as an extra, renewable on a six-monthly basis
- Clearance of footpaths – some additional maintenance would be desirable and proposals should be brought to the next meeting
- Strimming of verges – the comments made in the Public Session regarding the timing and extent of strimming were noted. The parish's own contractor was only authorised by ESCC to work on verges within the 30mph zone

which were typically mown grass, with some trees. Here, the specification could say that a 30 cm zone should be left un-trimmed around trees, including those planted for hedges. Strimming in the rural zone where speed limits were in excess of 30 mph were undertaken by ESCC's own contractor, and subject to their requirements, which would prioritise safety and budgetary concerns.

- The strimming of the Downs View Lane verge should be added to the specification and maps.
- The parish council would continue to do more cuts than the minimum required by ESCC within the 30 mph zone, for public amenity reasons. ESCC would continue to contribute £341pa towards this work.

It was agreed that Cllr Seeley and Cllr Hill should review the whole contract and return it to the council for final approval in December. Tenders should be received in time for the January meeting and a new contract awarded at that meeting. The current contract would expire in February 2021. **ACTION: PS/PH**

### **C.304 Parish Council Grants**

Members considered Report 10. It was noted that only £490 remained in the donations budget. However, the projected underspend of £1,000 on councillor allowances could be vired to this budget head. **ACTION: KL.**

An application had been received from the Cricket Club for assistance in the purchase of a new roller. Members did not agree to grant this request at the present time, as the council had already paid £5,000 towards moving the cricket square, and would not be able to reclaim the VAT on that project (£2,829). Money should be held in reserve in case requests for assistance were received from other local organisations before the end of the financial year. The position could be reviewed at the end of the year.

An application for £250 had been received from the Wealden branch of the Citizens' Advice Bureau. It was noted that the CAB had worked exceptionally hard during the pandemic and fully deserved to receive this help.

RESOLVED - That a grant of £250 be paid to the Wealden Citizens' Advice Bureau

Members noted that a grant of £1,000 would be payable for churchyard maintenance under a separate budget head, and should be paid on the anniversary of the previous payment. The money would be ring-fenced for churchyard maintenance and all residents of any faith or none were entitled to be buried there. **ACTION: KL**

### **C.305 Payments and Receipts**

The council considered Report 11 - the Schedule of Payments for November and receipts for October 2020. *[Note: the complete Schedule is appended to these Minutes]*. It was noted that the clearance works being undertaken at Friston Pond might take longer than anticipated, with a corresponding increase in cost. Extra clearance had been necessary to restore sight lines for motorists. Virement would be arranged at the December meeting when the final cost was known **ACTION: KL**

RESOLVED – That the payments totalling £4,919.78 be approved and the clerk be authorised to make the payments

**C.306 Urgent Items:** - None

**C.307 Reports:**

- a) Chair of the council – (i) the chair read the following statement:  
*“Councillors will be aware that there have been complaints against individual members, which have been referred to the Monitoring Officer at Wealden District Council. The Monitoring Officer has considered these and has now reported back to those concerned, but has requested that the adjudication remains confidential. However, I can report that the main part of the complaints was not upheld and secondary recommendations have already been put in hand by the Parish Council. I therefore consider this matter to be closed.”*  
(ii) the Chair requested the Admin Officer to write to all members of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to explain that the Plan had not been abandoned but would remain suspended until the national planning policy framework had been clarified **ACTION: DP/MK**
- b) Planning Committee – the council took note of the draft minutes of the committee meeting held on 20 October 2020.
- c) Finance – the council took note of the Budget Monitoring Report 13c for the period ended 31 October 2020. The bank balance was currently £88,709.68.
- d) Traffic Management Working Group – the Chair of the Group reported that following a meeting with the local police Speedwatch coordinator, the Group had been registered with Speedwatch and a number of suitable check sites had also been agreed and registered. Training had begun but involved some face to face sessions which had now been suspended due to the second lockdown. It was therefore unlikely that there would be further progress before March 2021. Eleven residents had expressed an interest in Group membership and three had so far signed up for Speedwatch training. These contacts would be maintained and kept informed during the suspension period.
- e) Rights of Way and Highways – (i) Footpath tidying programme – the mowing contractor had agreed to do an autumnal clear-up; (ii) Christmas Tree – it was agreed that although there could be no tree lighting event this December, a tree should still be provided **ACTION: MK/PS/PH.** The Village Hall Trust would provide the power. (iii) Crocus bulbs – more bulbs had been donated for planting in the parish.
- f) Recreation Ground – (i) the Cricket Club had requested permission to dismantle a dilapidated bench and use the wood for a cricket bat stand. Councillors requested clarification of which bench this referred to. (ii) Socially distanced carol singing – it was proposed that the church, the Residents’ Association and the parish council might combine to organise drive-in carol singing on the recreation ground. There was concern that the cars could churn up the field, but it was agreed in principle that the idea could be explored further **ACTION: PH.**

RESOLVED - That the above reports a) – f) be noted and action taken as discussed.

### **C.308 Correspondence**

The council took note of Report 14 on correspondence received since the October meeting, and the following points were discussed:

- a) Fly tipping in Downs View Lane – this would be reported to Eastbourne Borough Council for enforcement.
- b) Maintenance of War Memorial enclosure – a resident had very kindly offered to maintain the War Memorial enclosure on a voluntary basis. This offer was accepted with gratitude. Councillors would clear the enclosure prior to Remembrance Sunday, obtain a key to the enclosure and hand it to the volunteer for ongoing maintenance. **ACTION: PH**
- c) Dene Close proposed entrance sign – residents of the Close had requested permission to install a sign advising drivers of large vehicles to reverse into the Close, where there was little turning space. It was agreed that if the residents were willing to pay for the sign and supply an illustration of it the council would consider the matter further.
- d) Wealden District Council: Reopening High Streets Safely Fund – the Vice Chair reported that this initiative had been placed on hold due to the second lockdown.

*Under Standing Order 3(d) the public were excluded from the meeting for the following item of business, by reason of its confidential nature. The Admin Officer also left the meeting*

### **C.309 Administrative Officer's Annual Appraisal**

Councillors considered a confidential appraisal prepared by the clerk in consultation with the Admin Officer, and approved by the Chair.

Members agreed that the Admin Officer had performed extremely well in her first year, especially considering the difficult circumstances that had occurred during this time. It was unanimously agreed that her salary grade should be increased from national scale point 14 to 15. There was some concern that she had had to work more than her normal allotted hours during the past year and it was therefore agreed to increase the permanent hours from 5 to 10 per week. The additional 5 "project" hours, intended to service the requirements of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group have now been transferred to the Traffic Management Working Group while NPSG activities remain suspended and will therefore continue unchanged.

*[The above paragraph written by the chair]*

RESOLVED - That the Admin Officer's salary be raised from national scale point 14 to scale point 15 with effect from 01 November 2020.

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RSOLVED - That the Admin Officer's permanent weekly hours be increased from 5 to 10 per week with effect from 01 November 2020

**C.310 Date of next meeting: Thursday 3rd December 2020 at 6.30 pm by remote means.**

*There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.45 pm*

Signed..... (Chair)

Date.....