



**Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held remotely on the Zoom platform on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2021, commencing at 6.30 pm**

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

**In attendance:** County Cllr S Shing (Items C.328 – C.331); K Larkin (Parish Clerk); D Picknell (Admin Officer); and P Williamson (Tree Warden)

*There were six members of the public present.*

*Prior to the meeting there was a presentation on the 2021 Census by Mr Ben Phillips, Census Engagement Manager for the Wealden District, from the Office for National Statistics:*

### **Census 2021**

Households across the Wealden District will soon be asked to take part in Census 2021. The census is a once-in-a-decade survey that will give the most accurate estimate of all the people and households in England and Wales. It has been carried out every decade since 1801, with the exception of 1941. It will be the first run predominantly online, with households receiving a letter with a unique access code, allowing them to complete the questionnaire on their computers, phones or tablets. A successful census will ensure everyone from local government to charities can put services and funding in the places where they are most needed. This period will also be an important one to reflect on in future. That is why it is important everyone takes part and the ONS has made it easier for people to do so online on any device, with help and paper questionnaires for those that need them. Census day will be on March 21, but households across the country will receive letters with online codes allowing them to take part from early March. Results will be available within 12 months, although personal records will be locked away for 100 years, kept safe for future generations. Special provision will be made for communal establishments such as care homes, and Covid-secure protocols will be followed when and if personal contact is necessary. There is a link to Mr Phillips' presentation on the homepage of the parish council website: <http://www.edfparishcouncil.org.uk>.

### **Public Session**

In response to a request from a resident, the Chair asked all those present to identify themselves. The following topics were then raised for consideration by the council:

- Public participation – three residents jointly objected to the current restrictions on public participation at Zoom meetings, and to the exclusion of the public from two items at the December council meeting. The Chair drew attention to the Business in Progress report which set out the procedural framework and the reasons for it. The council was prohibited from disclosing personal information in public [SO 3(d)], and was permitted to exclude the public by resolution but without prior notice [SO

10(a)(xi)]. The draft minutes of the December meeting had not been sufficiently clear on these points, but correct procedure had been followed, and the Chair would move that the draft be clarified.

- Role of the Tree Warden – three residents commended the work of Mr Williamson as Tree Warden and thanked him for his efforts and achievements, questioning why the role should be re-allocated to a councillor. The Chair stated that the debate on this topic would be held in public [see item C.332 below] and that representations made by the Tree Warden regarding the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan (and recorded in the Correspondence report) would be discussed as a separate item at the February council meeting. Aside from the possible impact of changes in national planning policy on neighbourhood planning generally, the situation locally was that the council was short-handed, with only one member remaining on the Steering Group which should be run by the council, and three councillor vacancies required to be left unfilled until an election could be called.
- Covid-19 Vaccination programme – Maria Caulfield MP informed residents that vaccinations for residents over 80 would begin shortly and would be done in Eastbourne.

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

**C.328 Acceptance of apologies for absence:** - None

**C.329 Declarations of Interests:** - None

**C.330 Minutes:** - The Chair moved that the draft minutes of the council meeting held remotely on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020 should be amended on page 2 in the rubric preceding item C.316, as follows: **after the words 'members agreed that the vote should be taken in closed session' the following should be added:** 'RESOLVED – That the vote on item 4 on the agenda be taken in closed session'.

RESOLVED - That the amendment be approved and the minutes as amended be approved for signature by the Chair

**C.331 Report of the County Councillor**

County Cllr Shing reported on the following matters:

- a) Exceat Bridge – the planning application for the new bridge was still delayed but progress should be made in the spring.
- b) Seven Sisters Country Park – the transfer of ownership from the county council to the South Downs National Park Authority had been approved by the two Secretaries of State and the legalities should be complete by Easter.
- c) Flooding at Downs View Lane – the Highways department had agreed to do remedial work and residents would be advised of the date, when known.
- d) Felling of trees on the Twitten (Footpath 25) – the complaint made by a resident that some felling had taken place on private land had been investigated and found to be correct. However, the felling had been

essential to eradicate disease, and had been done without cost to the resident. Some further felling would unfortunately be required and the county Dutch Elm Disease officer would liaise with resident over this.

- e) Crossing on A259 between the East Dean bus stops – the parish had previously reported the problem of flooding and silting caused by the tegular paving of the crossing being lower than the level of the road or the drainage gully. No action had yet been taken. **ACTION: SS to investigate**
- f) County and parish liaison meeting (Strengthening Local Relationships) – Cllr Seeley (SLR Chair) would ask for a meeting in the near future **ACTION: KL**

RESOLVED - That the report of the County Councillor be noted with thanks, and action taken as discussed.

### **C.332 Appointments**

The Chair introduced Report 6 proposing to bring the role of Tree Warden in house. On behalf of the council he accepted the praise of Mr Williamson's work in the role, as stated in the Public Session, but set out the need for the holder of the position to be able to deal with outside bodies and individuals while having the full authority of the council and the legal protection of the council's liability insurance. Mr Williamson responded, reiterating procedural criticisms raised in the Public Session, and stating that the council should consider how better to relate to volunteers, and draw up an appropriate policy for the future. Regarding environmental matters, he would welcome the council taking a proactive stance e.g. by taking forward best practice in the council mowing contract; undertaking the digital mapping of land boundaries and ownership; doing a survey of, and management plan for, trees, shrubs and hedgerows; providing an information bulletin to all households; listing his achievements; and taking the Neighbourhood Plan forward. Mr Williamson then resigned from the volunteer role of Tree Warden. The council took note.

The Chair then proposed the motion that Cllr Thorogood be appointed as Lead Member for the Environment, to incorporate but also enlarge upon the previous role of the Tree Warden. It was noted that Cllr Thorogood had previous relevant experience and would be inducted into the role by Cllr Hill (previously Chair of the Rights of Way Committee). The motion was seconded by Cllr Hill, put to the meeting and declared carried (Cllr Thorogood abstaining).

RESOLVED – That Cllr Thorogood be appointed as Lead Member for the Environment, incorporating the role of Tree Warden

Cllr Thorogood declared his intention of working with all parties in the new role.

### **C.333 Business in Progress**

The council took note of Report 7 by the Clerk on progress made since the December meeting. The following points were discussed:

- a) Participation in the Public Session – the Chair acknowledged that the current arrangements at Zoom meetings were more restrictive than had been the norm in physical meetings, and should be reviewed at the February meeting.  
**ACTION: KL**
- b) East Dean bus shelter – residents had complimented the council on the rebuild. A quote of £150 had been obtained for the seats and window frames in all the shelters to be re-stained at a total cost of £150, and members agreed that this should be accepted [*Note by the clerk: virement will need to be approved to fund this item*]. **ACTION: PH/KL**
- c) Alterations to scorer's hut – full information had been supplied to the Gilbert Estate for consideration and a response was awaited
- d) Drive-in carol service – the feed-back had been very positive, and if necessary, the event would be held again. Some additional tree lights had been purchased from the event budget (£100) and this was approved. Members thanked Cllr Hill for helping to organise this event

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

### **C.334 Budget and Precept 2021/22**

The Chair introduced Report 8 setting out the Budget and Precept proposed for 2021/22, as amended at the December 2020 council meeting. No further amendments were proposed. The Chair proposed and Cllr Wild seconded the motion that the Budget and Precept for 2021/22 as set out in Report 8 be approved. The motion was put to the meeting and declared carried unanimously.

RESOLVED – That the Budget for 2021/22 as set out in Report 8 be approved

RESOLVED – That a precept demand of £61,245 for 2021/22 be approved (equivalent to £61.29 per Band D household)

### **C.335 Mowing contract 2021/2022/2023**

The Chair reported that three contractors had asked to tender, though one had withdrawn citing “unforeseen circumstances”. The quotations from the remaining two had been anonymised and circulated to councillors. Both were well qualified to carry out the specified works, both off-road and for East Sussex Highways which took overall responsibility for verge cutting. Members took note of a request from the Residents' Association that areas where new planting had recently been done or was planned to be done should only be trimmed by consultation with the respective landowners. There were two small areas at the upper and lower ends of the Greensward, and two more at the recreation ground (the existing Biodiversity Strip and the proposed wildflower strip behind the tennis court). Members accepted the request on the basis that it should not affect the quotations, due to involving marginally less work for the chosen contractor. Cllr Hill proposed and Cllr Bryant seconded the motion that contractor B should be awarded the contract, at a total cost of £7,680 per annum.

RESOLVED – That the mowing contract for 2021, 2022 and 2023 be awarded to contractor B, which was then revealed to be Grants (Eastbourne) Ltd.

**C.336 Wealden District Council Local Plan – Direction of Travel Consultation**

Cllr Wild reported that having studied the consultation proposals he considered the impact on this parish would be limited. However, any councillor would be welcome to comment, and the deadline for responses would be 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Members took note.

**C.337 Payments and Receipts**

The council considered Report 11 - the Schedule of Payments for January 2021 and receipts for December 2020. *[Note: the complete Schedule is appended to these Minutes]*. Members noted that the play area should remain open in the current lockdown and that the monthly sanitising of the play area at £100 plus VAT per month was likely to be needed for at least another 6 months, though the initial provision had been for 3 months. The tennis courts should, however, be closed

**ACTION: DW**

RESOLVED – That the payments totalling £2,379.16 be approved and the clerk be authorised to make the payments

**C.338 Urgent Items:** - The Chair reported that due to health problems the next edition of the Parish Magazine might appear in electronic form only.

**C.339 Reports:**

- a) Chair of the Council – the Community Watch currently lacked one of **their** coordinators due to health problems. However, few call-outs were being requested, due to current restrictions on the type of help that could be offered.
- b) Planning Committee – members took note of the draft minutes of the remote committee meeting held on 16 December 2020
- c) Finance – members took note of the Budget Monitoring report for the period ended 31 December 2020. The bank balance at the end of December 2020 was £78,251.66. The projected underspend had been reduced by work on the East Dean bus shelter etc.
- d) Traffic Management Working Group – the Chair of the Group reported that the Speedwatch initiative was unlikely to begin before April due to the lockdown. In the meantime, he would get prices for speed indicator signs of the portable type recommended by the Sussex Police, and investigate whether such signs could also be used for Speedwatch. The locations for Speedwatch checks must be those approved by the police.
- e) Rights of Way and Highways – (i) Footpath 8 – Cllr Seeley had cleared the obstruction caused by a fallen fence; (ii) Footpath 27a – this path which had been diverted from the driveway of Birling Manor had become a quagmire due to rainwater from a barn roof discharging onto the path, which did not have a tarmac surface. The problem had been reported to ESCC Rights of Way and should be reported to the Gilbert Estate **ACTION: KL**; (iii) Chipping of paths generally was now required due to bad weather. It was agreed that Climpsons should be requested to donate bark chips and a suitable contractor be employed to lay the chips due to social distancing requirements. **ACTION: PH.** (iv) Date for SLR meeting – a date should be fixed in March

**ACTION: KL.** The Admin Officer would attend and set up the Zoom meeting  
**ACTION: DP.**

- f) Recreation Ground – a resident had offered to donate wildflower seeds to boost biodiversity in the parish. This offer was gratefully accepted **ACTION: PH.** Members noted that some wildflower seed was already in stock awaiting planting in the spring by the Residents' Association, and that the council should liaise with the RA over the choice of locations.
- g) Cuckmere Community Bus – members took note of the minutes of the Stakeholder Meeting held on 30 November 2020, and of recent advice that from 12 January the Tuesday service on Route 41 would be suspended due to low passenger numbers. **ACTION: KL to check which service the council supports.**

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

### **C.340 Correspondence**

The council took note of Report 14 by the clerk on correspondence received, and the following points were discussed:

- a) Government drive to plant trees and hedgerows – Cllr Thorogood would lead on the council's contribution. However, for individual sites the final decision would always rest with the landowner.
- b) Neighbourhood Plan – the Chair had already undertaken to discuss future work on the Plan at the February meeting. The last set of Steering Group minutes would be re-circulated with the agenda **ACTION: KL.**
- c) The Friendly Bench initiative – it was noted that this initiative in fact envisaged community spaces being set aside, but that no space was available on council owned land. The information could be passed to the Residents' Association and the Village Hall Trust **ACTION: KL.**
- d) Footpath signage – members sympathised with this request for more informative signage for walkers, but noted that the type of signage preferred by the SDNPA and/or by the county council Rights of Way team would be relatively costly, and would require the approval of the relevant authority in each case. It was agreed that this could be raised at the next SLR meeting **ACTION: KL.**
- e) Fingerpost on A259 to Gilberts Drive – this sign had broken and signs of this type were no longer being maintained by the county council. The parish council was permitted to maintain them at its own expense, and it was agreed in principle that timber should be sourced **ACTION: PH.**

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

### **C.341 Complaint against the Clerk**

The Chair read out a request from the complainant that this item be deferred to the next meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021. The option to defer had been offered by the Chair following an objection by the complainant that insufficient notice of the hearing had

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been given, despite this being proposed in an email from the Chair on 15<sup>th</sup> December. This was agreed but there would be no further deferral.

**C.342 Date of next meeting: Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021 at 6.30 pm by remote means**

*There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.50 pm*

Signed..... (Chair)

Date.....