



Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held remotely on the Zoom platform on Thursday 4th March 2021, commencing at 6.30 pm

Councillors present: Cllr M Keller (Chair), Cllr P Hill, Cllr P Seeley and Cllr S Thorogood

In attendance: County Cllr S Shing (Items C.361 - C.365)
K Larkin (Parish Clerk); and D Picknell (Admin Officer)

There were five members of the public present.

Public Session

The Chair stated that anyone attending the meeting was permitted to record the proceedings for their own personal use under SO3, but that the council would not supply recordings nor live stream the meeting.

Strimming of verges – a resident requested information as to whether verge strimming would be done according to Plantlife’s best practice guidance which would benefit habitat and biodiversity.

May local elections – the same resident stated that the parish council had not done enough to publicise the forthcoming by-elections to fill three vacancies on the parish council, including the opportunity to be involved in neighbourhood planning and to lead it.

Neighbourhood Planning – the resident also requested clarification of the fact that the council was not proceeding with a digital mapping exercise and a tree/shrub/hedgerow survey and management plan, despite having previously been in favour of these projects.

The Chair requested Cllr Thorogood and Cllr Hill to check the verge strimming arrangements for the coming season and liaise with the mowing contractor. Election publicity would be considered in relation to the Progress report [Minute C.366(a) below], and the Neighbourhood Plan would be considered under Correspondence [Minute C.372(a) below].

Nomination procedure for the May by-elections – a resident requested advice on who could nominate a candidate. The clerk stated that any registered elector of the parish could propose or second a candidate.

The Chair closed the Public Session and opened the meeting

C.361 Acceptance of apologies for absence: - Cllr T Bryant; Cllr D Wild

C.362 Declarations of Interests: - None

C.363 Minutes - The minutes of the ordinary council meeting held remotely on 04 February 2021 were approved for signature by the Chair.

C.364 Certificate of Recognition

The council congratulated the Community Watch on receiving a certificate from the Chairman of Wealden District Council in recognition of 'outstanding commitment and assistance to your local community during Covid 19 Lockdown'. This had been very well deserved, especially at the beginning of the first lockdown, before other agencies were sufficiently organised to assist. A copy of the certificate would be lodged in the County Record Office.

C.365 Report of the County Councillor

County Cllr Shing stated that he had no further matters to report following the Strengthening Local Relationships meeting on 2nd March 2021. He would be standing as a candidate for re-election to the county council on 6th May 2021.

C.366 Business in Progress

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

- a) Publicity for the May by-elections – it had not been possible to publicise the by-elections in the parish magazine issued for February/March due to insufficient space, but full use had been made of the Village Hall Trust's notice boards, the website, and the Residents' Alerts email system. It was hoped to place a notice in the next edition of the Parish Magazine due out at the end of March, although this was very near to the closing date for applications from candidates on 8th April. If more than three candidates were to stand for election, Wealden had enquired whether the parish council wanted to pay for optional poll cards at an additional cost of approx. £1,258 over and above other election costs. These were the cards sent to registered voters prior to the election giving them their current electoral register numbers, and they would be essentially the same as those to be issued for the county council elections and the Police and Crime Commissioner election also being held on 6th May. Members agreed that parish council by-election cards giving the same information would not be a good use of public money. It would be more informative to publish a list of candidates for the parish council seats as an insert to the May parish magazine, if this were acceptable to the editor.
- b) Donation of wildflower seeds – members noted with thanks the donation of a large quantity of seeds from the Rotary Club. Cllr Thorogood and Cllr Hill would liaise over a planting plan, probably centred on Friston Pond **ACTION: ST/PH**

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

C.367 Future Meeting Arrangements

The council considered Report 8 on the implications of the current emergency regulations for the holding of remote council meetings expiring before the emergency was over and physical meetings of more than six people indoors were able to take place. Contingency plans were recommended to cover meetings in May, June and

July 2021, including the Annual Parish Council Meeting and the Annual Village Meeting. The following were proposed:

- a) Payments - The clerk should have delegated power to pay invoices and salaries during the period when the council might not be able to meet formally (approx. from 7th May to 21st June 2021)
- b) The Annual Parish Council Meeting should go ahead remotely on 6th May as planned, due to the statutory requirement that the appointments of Chair and Vice Chair for the coming year be made in the month of May. However, it would be open to the persons appointed to resign once meetings could lawfully be held with the three newly elected members, giving all nine the opportunity to vote. Other appointments normally made at the APCM would be held over for the same reason.
- c) The Annual Village Meeting should not be summoned in 2021 unless central government changed the regulations which currently made it impossible.
- d) The council meeting scheduled for 3rd June should take place remotely but informally with the new members participating, though no decisions could lawfully be made unless the regulations were updated.
- e) Assuming physical meeting restrictions have been lifted from 21st June, the council meeting scheduled for 1st July should be cancelled and an Extraordinary Meeting called on Tuesday 29th June in the Main Village Hall to enable the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (= the annual audit) to be signed off by the council within the legally required timeframe, ending on 30th June. The meeting would be made Covid-secure.
- f) The Planning Committee would be obliged to meet informally in order to comment at all on current applications, all of which were time limited. The informal nature of the comments would be flagged up in the responses sent to the SDNPA.

Members expressed dissatisfaction with the failure of central government to make adequate provision for local government in the coming months, and hoped that this might be rectified before 6th May.

RESOLVED - That the above contingency plans a) to f) be implemented if required

C.368 Cricket Club Business

The council considered Report 9 and reviewed the Cricket Club Hire Agreement for 2021. Members agreed that the Club should sign a Hire Agreement for the coming season, but that the payment clause should be amended so that no payment would be due until the end of the season, when a fee should be calculated *pro rata* on the basis of the number of weeks the club had actually been able to function. **ACTION: KL to draft a suitable amendment.** The Club should still contribute to the water bill for usage in excess of 20 m³.

RESOLVED – That the Hire Agreement fee for 2021 be deferred for payment on a *pro rata* basis at the end of the season

The Club had requested permission to recycle a bench marked 'In memory of HP who loved the downs' (*to the left of the pavilion*). Councillors agreed to this in principle but decided that the proposal should first be publicised in the parish magazine so that any relatives could be consulted. If the bench were dismantled then the memorial section should be preserved and mounted e.g. on the pavilion.
ACTION: MK to publicise in parish magazine and website etc.

RESOLVED - That the recycling of memorial bench 'In memory of HP' be approved in principle subject to efforts being made to contact relatives

C.369 Signage for litter and dog waste bins

Members reviewed the discussion of this topic first raised under Urgent Business at the February meeting [Council Minutes, 4th February 2021, Item C.356], and subsequent discussions with the Residents' Association, and approved the provision of fresh signage for all litter and dog waste bins in the parish at a total cost of £76. It was further agreed in principle to rationalise the location of bins across the parish, with the aim of reducing dog fouling. Cllrs Keller, Seeley and Hill would liaise with the RA and report back to council at a future meeting with details of any proposed changes **ACTION: MK/PS/PH.** The current expectation was that no new bins would be needed now that litter bins could also be used for dog waste, but progress would be monitored and reviewed after one year. Any new locations would need to be approved by landowners (where appropriate), and by Wealden whose contractors would empty the bins. In the meantime, advice would be sought from Wealden's Dog Warden as to how best to combat signs of resistance from some members of the public to clearing up after their pets **ACTION: ST.**

RESOLVED – To approve the payment of £76.95 for bin stickers to promote the proper disposal of dog waste

RESOLVED – To discuss with the Residents' Association the rationalisation of bin distribution across the parish

C.370 Payments and Receipts

The council considered Report 11 - the Schedule of Payments for March 2021. There were no receipts in February 2021. [*Note: the complete Schedule is appended to these Minutes*]. An invoice of £1,058.50 (excl. VAT) had been received for laying bark chips on paths. This was over budget (as previously advised), due to the necessity of employing a contractor to do a job usually done by volunteers. [*Note by the clerk: the excess can be covered by the projected underspend for Other Services*]. The cost highlighted the value of the volunteers, who were much appreciated. In addition, Climpsons had supplied seven loads of bark chips, free of charge, and the council recorded their thanks to Climpsons and to Cllr Hill for organising the work.

RESOLVED – That the payments totalling £3,875.59 be approved and the clerk be authorised to make the payments

C.371 Reports:

- a) Planning Committee – the council took note of the draft minutes of the remote committee meeting held on 16 February 2021
- b) Finance – the council took note of the Budget Monitoring report for the period ended 28 February 2021 (Report Item 13(c)). The bank balance at the end of February was £69,308.67.
- c) Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group – see Correspondence [Item C.372 below]
- d) Traffic Management Working Group – (i) the Chair of the Group reported that arrangements were in hand for a Speedwatch physical training session to be held as soon as permitted, with the aim of being fully operational by 21st June.
- e) Rights of Way and Highways - a Strengthening Local Relationships meeting (county liaison) had been held on 2nd March. This overlapped to some extent with TMWG. The meeting discussed the purchase and placing of a speed reactive sign for use by the parish council; a speed survey to be done by ESCC Highways on the Birling Gap/Beachy Head roads in the summer; the need for better signage at the entrances to the Downlands Estate when Friston Hill was closed; the lack of advance warning from utility companies when road closures were planned for maintenance work; and the expectation that temporary traffic lights would, after all, be provided at Exceat Bridge until the new bridge was complete. Full details would appear in the minutes, and a follow-up report would be brought to the April council meeting. It was agreed that when the lockdown was sufficiently lifted, councillors should walk the parish to survey the state of the local environment and report on any problems.
- f) Recreation Ground – (i) the tennis court would be reopened on 29h March, in line with current government guidelines. (ii) it was noted that work had begun on the alterations to the pavilion requested by the Cricket Club.
- g) Environment – (i) Tree safety survey: the Lead Member advised that a tree safety survey should be done on all trees on parish council land, for insurance purposes. **ACTION: KL to check the policy details.** It was noted that tree safety on rights of way was a separate matter and that land ownership needed to be established in each case. (ii) Sowing wildflower seeds – the Residents' Association was standing by to send three teams of six volunteers to sow seeds on the Biodiversity Strip on the weekend of 16-18th April. It would be appreciated if the pavilion could be opened for their use, government guidelines permitting **ACTION: KL.** (iii) The Great British Spring Clean – the Residents' Association had also requested to use the litter picking equipment obtained by the parish council (stored in the pavilion). This was readily agreed. (iv) Water supply – members agreed that the water supply should be turned back on as soon as possible after the last frosts.

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

C.372 Correspondence

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

- a) Neighbourhood Plan – the council had been requested to clarify their discussion recorded in the February minutes, Item C.353, about how best to take this project forward. In particular, members agreed that as the project should be council led, work could not fully resume prior to the by-elections on 6th May 2021, and the appointment of new members to fill the three current vacancies on the council, and gaps in the Steering Group lay membership. In the meantime, the council was being urged to proceed with obtaining quotes for a digital mapping survey, followed by a tree, shrub and hedgerow management plan, which had been discussed and received support in June 2019 [Minute C.51]. Members noted that there had been no final approval of the expenditure, and were now concerned about the high cost and limited usability of the information, bearing in mind the limited amount of land controlled by the parish council, and the advice received from the planning authority in March 2020 that the level of detail proposed could not be incorporated in the finished Neighbourhood Plan. It was agreed that the SDNPA should be asked to clarify what information would be worth investing in **ACTION: DP**. It was also possible that the rejection of Wealden's Local Plan could indirectly affect the parish and change the circumstances of the project. On the positive side, members noted that the council's Traffic Management Working Group had in effect picked up the Traffic and Transport objectives of the Steering Group, and that the Environment objectives were being taken forward by lay members of the Steering Group through the planting of wildflowers and saplings. Work was therefore progressing so far as possible in the circumstances. Overall, however, when the Steering Group met again with newly appointed leaders and some new members it would be facing changed conditions, and the council would not commit to any expenditure until after the relaunch.
- b) Vehicle noise – a number of residents had complained about this nuisance which had become a feature of the lockdown. It had been raised at the SLR meeting on 2nd March, and with the Sussex Police who would periodically send out patrols. However, residents should be encouraged to report all incidents direct to the police Crackdown system to achieve the maximum attention and best results. Complainants should also be told about Speedwatch and invited to participate. **ACTION: DP**
- c) Mobile phone mast on the A259 – it was noted that the planning permission granted for the erection of this mast had now expired, and there seemed little hope that it would be provided after all.
- d) Cyclists riding down the tarmac at the end of Elven Lane – members sympathised with the resident who had complained of this safety hazard, but had no power or responsibility to intervene.

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- e) Offer of a memorial bench – a resident had kindly offered to donate a bench. No sites were currently available, but the offer would be borne in mind.
 - f) Chestnut tree overhanging Footpath 32 – members noted that residents wished to crown reduce this tree by 30% and lop two branches overhanging their property. There was no preservation order on the tree, and the residents were entitled to lop any part overhanging their garden. However, the parish council could not give permission for the reduction of the crown, as they did not own the tree. It was thought to stand on land which had lapsed into the ownership of the Treasury Solicitor, in which case no permission could be sought or obtained.
 - g) Refill scheme relaunch – members agreed that the principle of the Refill scheme (to permit members of the public to refill water bottles free of charge at cafes etc.) was valid, but doubted whether people would be willing to go back to re-usable containers for some time, owing to the pandemic. Local businesses would be advised of the re-launch on 16th June, which the council would support in principle.
 - h) Seven Sisters Country Park information meeting – it was agreed that the Chair and Vice Chair should attend this virtual meeting being hosted by the SDNPA on 26th March 2021.

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

C.373 Date of next meeting: Thursday 1st April 2021 at 6.30 pm by remote means

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.37 pm

Signed..... (Chair)

Date.....