

Minutes of an informal meeting of councillors held remotely on the Zoom platform on Thursday 3rd June 2021, commencing at 6.30 pm

Under regulations in force at the time, a formal Parish Council meeting could only be held with councillors and members of the public physically present. This remote meeting, therefore, had to be deemed “informal”, meaning that no new initiatives or expenditure could be authorised but reports could be noted and commented on.

Councillors present: Cllr M Keller (Chair), Cllr G Fowler, Cllr P Hill, Cllr C Lees, Cllr H Milligan, Cllr P Seeley, and Cllr S Thorogood

In attendance: Maria Caulfield MP (Items C.410 – C.408); County Cllr S Shing (Items C.406 – C.408); District Cllr M Lunn (Items C.406 – C.409); K Larkin (Parish Clerk); and D Picknell (Admin Officer)

There was one member of the public present.

C.401 Acceptance of apologies for absence: - Cllr D Wild

C.402 Signing of Declarations of Acceptance of Office

Cllr Fowler and Cllr Lees signed their Declarations of Acceptance of Office in sight of their fellow councillors and the clerk, and were then welcomed by the Chair as full members.

C.403 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Milligan declared a personal interest in Cricket Club business as their safeguarding and welfare officer

C.404 Minutes

Members took note of the draft minutes of the Annual Parish Council Meeting held on 6th May 2021 and a correction was noted: in para. C.398(d), line 8, *delete* ‘350m’ and *insert* ‘35m’. Formal approval and signature would take place at the next formal meeting.

C.405 Report of Maria Caulfield MP

Ms Caulfield reported on the following matters:

- a) Exceat Bridge – the planning application for the new bridge was with the SDNPA Planning Committee. The temporary traffic lights would remain until work commenced and feedback on their operation would be welcome.
- b) Seven Sisters Country Park – Cuckmere Valley parish council had concerns about future parking provision and visitor overload. The SDNPA was being urged to engage locally, but had not yet taken ownership.

-
- c) GP Surgery provision – the situation was deteriorating with the loss not only of the East Dean surgery, but also with the opening times of the Alfriston surgery becoming restricted and even the Old School surgery in Seaford being affected (and doing virtual appointments). Ms Caulfield would take this matter up.
 - d) Covid-19 – infections were rising but hospitalisations and deaths remained low, with 90% of cases among patients who had not been vaccinated. Vaccinations remained a priority.
 - e) Yellow lines – East Sussex Highways had reiterated that no more yellow lines would be provided whilst there was very little police enforcement, and Wealden District Council had reiterated that enforcement by them would not be practical. Ms Caulfield was in discussions with Chief Inspector Habib to see whether the Sussex Police could offer any community support to selected parishes. It was acknowledged that East Dean had been ‘discovered’ during the lockdown and visitor numbers had become overwhelming. Ms Caulfield was working to coordinate all the interested parties to take remedial action.
 - f) Traffic Management – councillors emphasised that over the recent Bank Holiday cars had parked on both verges of the Birling Gap Road, even against steep banks, eliminating any space for pedestrians and causing a health and safety hazard. **ACTION: members to send any photos to DP/KL**

Members thanked Ms Caulfield for her report and her input. The Chair directed that Traffic Management be taken as the next item of business.

C.406 Traffic Management Working Group

Cllr Seeley as Chair of the Group reported on the following matters:

- a) ESCC traffic count – a first count had been done over seven days including the late May Bank Holiday weekend, on the A259, the Birling Gap Road, and onwards towards Eastbourne. Analysis was awaited
- b) Speed Watch – the core group (Cllr Seeley; Cllr Thorogood; Mrs Picknell; plus any available volunteers) would complete training on 29th June and thereafter be able to train others. Cllr Fowler offered to join when available. A fresh advert for volunteers would be placed in the parish magazine **ACTION: MK**. This exercise would yield valuable data as well as enforcement action.
- c) Speed reactive signs – members took note of Report 9(d) which mapped the spots in Gilberts Drive where East Sussex Highways would consent to the placement of signs. Quotes would now be sought (ESCC among them) and licence applications lodged for use of the highway verge. It was hoped to have the signs in place for August.
- d) Danger to pedestrians – the point was made that even local people accustomed to walking could not safely access Birling Gap on foot whilst a quarter to a third of a mile stretch of the narrow coastal road was parked on both verges with no regulations in force.
- e) Disruption of bus services – buses of the 13X Brighton & Hove service which ran both ways in Gilberts Drive had been unable to cross during the Bank Holiday due to parked cars narrowing the road. Services would have been disrupted over a wide area. Emergency vehicles could not have obtained access.

Ms Caulfield summarised the problems and noted that if it were possible to restrict parking on verges some extra back-up car park sites would be needed. The parish could consider applying for Match Funding from East Sussex Highways and/or for CIL funding for a traffic management scheme, whose scale would depend on whether an overall approach or a piecemeal approach was preferred. County Cllr Shing endorsed the Community Match approach and stated that he would support an application.

In discussion there was support for joint action with Eastbourne Borough Council, which was also collecting data, and where parking problems and policies would inevitably affect East Dean. Ms Caulfield agreed to work with a team including ESCC, County Cllr Shing, and the Eastbourne MP (Caroline Ansell) to work up a local scheme offering some solutions, and to report back. It was noted that during the annual Airbourne event in Eastbourne temporary parking restrictions were routinely put in place and that the methods used might be copied in East Dean at peak periods. Ms Caulfield also agreed to look into this. **ACTION: MC/SS.**

C.407 Report of the County Councillor

County Cllr Shing, having been re-elected in May 2021 was welcomed to the meeting. He reported on the following matters:

- a) Traffic Management – Cllr Shing emphasised the importance of data collection and would support any local initiatives. However, he cautioned that placement of cones etc. on the verges should be left to county operatives for safety reasons.
- b) Exceat Bridge/ Seven Sisters – previous updates were reiterated
- c) County election results – there were now 23 new county councillors out of a total of 49, and two key positions (Vice Chair; and Chair of Scrutiny) had gone to councillors from Wealden wards. The Conservative party was still the largest group but was no longer so dominant.

Members thanked Cllr Shing for his report.

C.408 Report of the District Councillor

District Cllr Lunn reported on the following matters:

- a) Wealden Local Plan – the current lack of a Plan had placed a massive strain on the District, as housing developers were seizing the opportunity to put in large planning applications on unplanned locations. The numbers could overwhelm local infrastructure with overspill effects on neighbouring areas. This was a cross-party concern, and all local MPs were being lobbied.
- b) Seven Sisters Country Park – the SDNPA's future plans would now also involve the Forestry Commission.
- c) Cuckmere shingle dredging – the Environment Agency would shortly meet to determine whether the local Water Board could take over this maintenance task.
- d) Recycling update – the new contractor, Biffa, was providing an improved service. Larger amounts of waste were being recycled due to home working during the lockdown, but the contractor was keeping up and there had been no local complaints.

- e) Enforcement of yellow lines – members requested that Wealden’s decision not to undertake enforcement in the district should be reviewed. Cllr Lunn responded by referring back to a large independent study carried out into the likely effects of a variety of new scenarios, which had predicted such negative and/or costly outcomes that a large majority of district councillors had voted for no change. If parking offences were decriminalised, so that responsibility for enforcement became a council responsibility rather than a police responsibility, the cost of providing meters across the district, plus wardens to monitor them, would be enormous, and the infrastructure in rural areas would look incongruous. The hourly rates would have to be very high to pay for it all. However, it was recognised that ‘honeypot’ sites like East Dean were suffering, and Wealden had offered the police a fee to step up their activity in these areas. So far, the offer had been declined. The police would only enforce illegal parking if there was a danger to the public. County Cllr Shing stated that there was more scope for action in individual parishes than had yet been acknowledged. It was noted that the new PCSO had already been deployed to Birling Gap over the Bank Holiday, but could not issue tickets. In summary, parish councillors were insistent that the situation had become untenable locally and that some parking controls must be provided for safety reasons.

Members thanked District Cllr Lunn for his report and for his warnings prior to the Bank Holiday weekend.

C.409 Business in Progress

Members took note of Report 7 on progress made since the meeting on 6th May 2021. The following points were discussed:

- a) Barclays mandate change – the Admin Officer was making progress
- b) Defibrillator handover – this would take place on 23 June and the event should be publicised if possible
- c) Labour cost for repair of play area rope-bridge – the quote was £360 plus VAT, and had been accepted. The next year’s budget should include a sinking fund for play area maintenance **ACTION: KL**
- d) Trees on Friston Green – enquiries continued as to future maintenance north of the A259 **ACTION: ST/KL**
- e) Pedestrian sign for the Twitten (Footpath 25, Lower Street to Friston Church) – this enquiry fell between ESCC Highways and Rights of Way, but had now been allocated a case number. Members noted a growing danger from mountain bikes being ridden down the path
- f) Council assets – members took note of a summary report prepared by the clerk, and in particular of the council’s ownership of land comprising Footpath 19 (Peak Dean Lane to the top of the Michel Dene Road); and part of Bridleway 33 (northwards from The Link). These were historic rights of way.

Members noted that one-off hires of the pavilion could normally be authorised by the clerk under ordinary delegated powers, and agreed that such a hire should be permitted for a local band wishing to try out the pavilion for rehearsal space on a weekday afternoon. **ACTION: KL to notify the enquirer.** If this proved mutually

satisfactory, further hires might be requested. Cllr Hill would report on the trial
ACTION: PH.

Members also noted a number of items of business to be transacted when normal meetings resumed, and the following were discussed:

- 1) Hybrid Meetings – the Chair had drafted proposed amendments to Standing Orders to govern future hybridised (combination of physical and remote) meetings. The purpose of these proposals was to allow full meetings to take place with limited numbers in the meeting room. Under the proposals, Councillors would only be able to join in debate and to vote if present in person (if attending remotely they would be on the same footing as members of the public and could only speak at the discretion of the Chair). However, other official participants, including the MP, County Councillor, District Councillor, or lay advisers, who could normally speak in closed session (but not vote) would be able to attend and speak remotely. Members of the public would be encouraged to attend the meetings remotely so as to avoid too many people in the meeting room. The proposals had been shown to the National Association of Local Councils and had been accepted with the proviso that no changes could be made to the statutory attendance requirements for parish councillors. Technically the set-up would require purchase of a wide-angle camera for the meeting room, and this, together with the proposed changes to Standing Orders, would be on the 29th June meeting agenda for consideration and approval. If restrictions on meeting indoors in person were not lifted before 29th June, the council would move the meeting venue to the veranda of the cricket pavilion. Members took note.
- 2) Waiver of pavilion hire fee – the council at its meeting on 29th June would be asked to waive the hire fee for use of the pavilion by Micheldene WI for a fundraising picnic in support of the NHS. No objections were foreseen.
- 3) Relocation of dog bins – Cllr Seeley reported that arrangements were nearly agreed with Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council, and would be on the June agenda for final approval from the parish council. It had emerged that the concrete vase-shaped bin at the back of Friston Pond was not on the collection or payment schedules and would be removed. The proposed three new bin locations previously discussed had all been agreed and the only remaining issue was how they should be affixed. Cllr Seeley was dealing with this.
- 4) Police Community Support Action Group – the parish had been invited to send a representative to a virtual meeting on 10th September. This would be added to the list of appointments to be considered at the August council meeting.
- 5) New PCSO – members welcomed the news that Scott McCallum was newly appointed to the area, and had been active at Birling Gap over the Bank Holiday weekend. District Cllr Lunn supported a proposal that an informal meeting should be offered at Birling Gap and that the minutes of the informal council meeting on 3rd June should be supplied to PCSO McCallum with an introduction to the parish's Traffic Management Working Group **ACTION: PS/DP.**
- 6) SDNPA Parishes Planning Workshop – Cllr Milligan and Cllr Seeley would represent the parish at this meeting on 22nd June 2021 and report back.

C.410 Payments and Receipts

Members took note of Report 8 detailing invoices for payment in June, and receipts received in May 2021. Two additional items were noted: £31.25 + VAT for fire extinguisher maintenance at the pavilion; and £260+ VAT for bin emptying in the first quarter. The latter had increased from £250 + VAT per bin per year to £260 + VAT per bin per year. The clerk would make the payments totalling £5,935.81.

C.411 Reports:

- a) Chair of the Council – the Chair noted that there would be a four-day bank holiday from 2-5 June inclusive in 2022 to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee. He had approached the Village Hall Trust, the Residents' Association and the Parochial Church Council regarding possible local celebrations, and would report further.
- b) Planning Committee – members took note of the draft minutes of the informal remote committee meeting held on 18 May 2021. A report on local enforcement cases was in preparation for Cllr Rowlands (**ACTION: MK/DP.**)
- c) Finance – members took note of Report 9(c), the Budget Monitoring Report for Month 2, 2021/22. The clerk apologised that although the individual budget heads were correctly reported, the Summary section had not updated fully and a corrected version would be issued **ACTION: KL.** The bank balance at the end of May was £88,566.27.
- d) Recreation Ground – (i) the Cricket Club had requested permission to store new sight screens and a wicket cover at the recreation ground, to meet England Cricket Board requirements. There were congratulations for the current vibrancy of the Club but a query was raised about the prominence that might be given to a sponsorship logo, and a caution that the equipment should be able to remain if sponsorship was withdrawn. Storage of the sight screens should also be clarified as the location could be very windy. Further information and photos should be requested **ACTION: DW/KL.** (ii) A resident had reported that the tennis net posts had come loose. Cllr Milligan kindly offered to inspect and report back, and advised that a sinking fund should be in place to provide for the court to be resurfaced every 10 years. **ACTION: HM to inspect; KL to make a note for the next budget.** (iii) The Cricket club had also reported that the exterior cladding of the pavilion was in a poor state and required maintenance before the winter. *[Cllr Fowler declared an interest as a member of the club and as a possible contractor for the maintenance work].* Members requested Cllr Fowler to inspect the cladding and report to the next meeting **ACTION: GF.**
- e) Restrictive covenants on the pavilion – it was noted that if more substantial work were proposed, legal advice would be required on the effect of the restrictive covenants claimed by the Gilbert Estate.
- f) Sanitising the pavilion – full access needed to be provided for the council's contractor. Cllr Hill kindly offered to meet him on site **ACTION: PH/KL.**
- g) Environment – (i) Cllr Thorogood proposed to replace the brackets for the hanging baskets in the shopping precinct. It was noted that this would be within budget, and there were no objections. (ii) A request had come in for the parish council to apply for Tree Preservation Orders on the trees on the left-hand side of Micheldene Road, up from the A259 junction. The trees were thought to be privately owned and it was agreed that further information should be sought

ACTION: ST/KL. The Robinia trees on the opposite side of the road were in poor condition but were thought to be effectively ownerless, and the council would be reluctant to undertake management.

C.412 Correspondence

Members considered Report 10 on correspondence received since the last meeting, and the following were discussed:

- a) Request for a bike rack in the village hall car park – some funding had been provided locally from the government’s Emergency Active Travel Fund, but East Dean had not been included. It might be included when a second tranche of the funding was released.
- b) Residential parking in the shopping precinct – pressure on parking was increasing as patterns of usage changed, and residential parking should be discouraged. However, the signage was currently not clear on this point. The Chair would investigate and propose suitable signage **ACTION: MK**
- c) Overhanging hedge – the property owner had been approached and was willing to cut back the hedge
- d) Watering the hanging baskets – Cllr Hill requested volunteers for a watering rota **ACTION: all members to volunteer if possible.**

C.413 Date of next meeting: Parish Council meeting - Tuesday 29th June 2021 at 6.30 pm in the Main Hall – please note the change of day and venue. [The council meeting previously scheduled for Thursday 1st July is CANCELLED].

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.00 pm

Signed..... (Chair)

Date.....