



**Minutes of an informal virtual meeting of councillors and officers (Google Zoom) held during the coronavirus emergency when a formal meeting in person and in public could not be held: Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2020 commencing at 7.30 pm**

**Councillors present:** Cllr M Keller (Chair), Cllr T Bryant, Cllr L d'Urso, Cllr K Godden, Cllr P Hill, Cllr P Seeley, Cllr B Wheatley and Cllr D Wild

**In attendance:** K Larkin (Parish Clerk); D Picknell (Admin Officer)

*Under regulations in force at the time of this meeting, a formal meeting could only be held with councillors and members of the public physically present. This meeting therefore had to be informal, meaning that no new initiatives or expenditure could be authorised but reports could be noted and commented on. Subsequently the Coronavirus Act 2020 enabled temporary regulations to be brought in by the National Association of Local Councils enabling formal meetings to be held remotely and to take decisions. The emergency regulations took effect on 04 April 2020 and apply to all meetings required to be held before 7 May 2021.*

**Public Session:** There were no members of the public present, but councillors noted a representation from Mr P Williamson (supported by 32 households) for the council to pay for a mailshot to be delivered to the 840 private households in the parish, offering the opportunity to opt in to receiving communications from the parish council by email or by letter. The Chair stated that this would be considered in the discussion of the council's response to the Coronavirus Emergency [Item C.206 below].

**C.203 Acceptance of apologies for absence:** - Cllr N Day

**C.204 Declarations of Interests:** - None

**C.205 Minutes:** - The minutes of the council meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020 were noted for formal confirmation and signature on a future occasion.

*Note: The County Councillor and District Councillor were not able to be present but councillors agreed that they should be enabled to participate at any future virtual meeting*

**C.206 Parish Council Response to the Coronavirus Emergency**

Members commended the action taken by the Chair and detailed in Report 6 dated 15 March and updated on 1 April 2020. The community was now well served by volunteers organised by the Community Watch who were mainly delivering repeat prescriptions. The level of demand was variable. The two food outlets remaining open in the village were the Barn Stores and the Downland Butchers. Supplies were improving and social distancing being observed by customers. A further source of fresh produce was the weekly Village Market, run under the auspices of the Village

Hall Trust and exempt from compulsory closure insofar as it sold fresh food. The Market was currently the only source of fresh fish in the parish. The continuation of the Market through the emergency would depend on its insurance cover meeting the standard required by the Hall Trustees, and on social distancing being observed by shoppers.

Members then considered the mailshot proposed in the Public Session. It was noted that parish councils were obliged to follow the official line in publishing coronavirus advice, and that the daily briefings already supplied by central government on both TV and radio were accessible to all and widely accessed. The District Council and many other bodies already re-published this advice. A mailshot by the parish council would not be effective because of the prohibition on using the full register of electors for addressing purposes, due to GDPR restrictions. The council could only use the publicly available list of addresses held by Wealden Council and thus all material would have to be addressed to “The Occupier”. To many occupiers, this would reasonably place it in the “Junk Mail” category. The cost of just under £300 (on a minimal calculation) would not be justified. Members agreed that the council should continue with community liaison by all practical means, including the website, Residents’ Alerts emails, and personal contacts. No other action was currently needed.

### **C.207 Business in Progress**

The council noted Report 7 on progress since the March meeting, and the following points were discussed:

- a) Annual audit – the Internal Auditor had arranged to do a virtual inspection on 16 April 2020. **ACTION: KL/KG.** Thereafter, the complete Annual Governance and Accountability Return, with the final accounts, all supporting documents and the report of the Internal Auditor would be submitted to council for approval prior to submission to the External Auditor. The External Auditor was awaiting government direction on how to proceed whilst the normal schedule of meetings was disrupted.
- b) Annual Village Report – there was a statutory requirement for the Chair of the council to provide an annual report for the parish. However, as village clubs and societies were not currently meeting it was agreed that they should not be asked to provide reports for the year 2019/20.
- c) Parish council grant scheme – the scheme would still run but applications would be invited later in the year when clubs and societies were able to meet again. **ACTION: KL to notify clubs and societies**
- d) Annual Parish Council Meeting – in current circumstances it would not be feasible to hold this meeting. However, new regulations were expected to come into force during April enabling a formal meeting to take place in May. It was agreed that the date should be Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May.
- e) Cyber-crime insurance policy – the current policy would expire on 15 April 2020 and the broker had given notice that thereafter it would be withdrawn. He had offered to source a comparable product, and the Lead Member recommended that this be done **ACTION: KL to notify broker**

- f) Snowdrops – a large number of snowdrops had been planted at Friston Pond around the new memorial bench, and elsewhere in the parish. Members thanked Mrs Worsfold for supplying a large number of plants, and Cllr Hill for doing the planting.
- g) Friston build-out – the highway Safety Audit Team had approved the revised drawings which were now with the South Downs National Park Authority for approval. Councillors commended the revisions all of which were agreed to be improvements to a very promising scheme.
- h) County Liaison Meeting (Strengthening Local Relationships) – it would not be possible to hold the April meeting as planned, but an agenda would be compiled in consultation with councillors, and a virtual meeting would then be requested **ACTION: KL.** This would focus on numerous complaints received from residents regarding the lack of adequate signage and traffic management when the recent tree felling had been carried out on Friston Hill.
- i) Zoom account – it was agreed that the council should open a paid account so that members of the public could be invited to attend virtual meetings hosted by the clerk during the lockdown (£11.99 plus VAT per month). **ACTION: KL.** The Chair of Planning would host Planning Committee meetings.

### **C.208 Other Reports**

The following were discussed:

- a) Planning Committee – members took note of the summary of responses on current applications sent to the planning authority in March, and thanked the Admin Officer for devising the consultation procedure, which had worked well. It was agreed that for future virtual meetings members of the public should be invited to send any representations direct to the council rather than to the SDNPA in view of the impracticality of holding a normal Public Session.
- b) Finance – the Lead Member drew attention to the copy of the accounts package which had been circulated to members in full. Subject to checking of a small number of coding issues, the accounts for the year ending 31 March 2020 were now final. The outturn was that the council had underspent, as predicted at the March meeting. This was largely due to slippage on the capital programme, and all items affected would be carried forward with their funding. The bank balance as at 31 March 2020 was £65,760.91. Cllr Hill advised that following flooding at Friston Pond emergency works had been undertaken to diagnose and clear the problem (a blockage in the overflow pipe going under the A259 into Friston Forest). The cost would not exceed £1,000 but retrospective approval would be required in the new financial year and would appear in the 2020/21 accounts. Other items of expenditure within the new budget but not yet procured (e.g. interpretation boards; landscaping at the recreation ground) would similarly appear in the 2020/21 minutes and accounts. All such work was likely to be delayed until the autumn.
- c) Rights of Way and Highways – no additional items
- d) Recreation ground – there had briefly been a problem with visitors continuing to use the play area during the lockdown. However, the gates had been padlocked, and this plus the new fence had secured the area. The recreation ground was being maintained and was open for residents taking exercise subject to social distancing. Birling Gap and Crowlink had been closed

following government advice that people should not take their cars to congregate at beauty spots.

- e) Fund Raising – (i) Tree Planting: the Lead Member reported that the application made to the Woodland Trust had been successful and a free pack of hedgerow plants would be provided to the parish in the autumn. An arboriculturalist and Eastbourne Borough Council had both been consulted and advised that Downs View Lane was not a suitable location for planting trees, but that the hedgerow (which remained) should be maintained. The pack would be used to fill gaps in the Biodiversity strip at the recreation ground and to introduce some landscaping in the far south west corner. It was noted that the ash trees recently felled on Friston Hill should be replaced, and East Sussex County Council who owned the verge advised that elm cultivars resistant to Dutch Elm Disease should be sourced. The Lead Member advised that elms would not be available from the Woodland Trust but that other potential donors could be approached. This was agreed **ACTION: LD.**
- (ii) Interpretation Boards: the SDNPA had advised that planning permission would not be required to erect the structures but would be required for approval of the advertising content [this content was of course to be supplied by the SDNPA]. (iii) East Dean in Bloom: the shop owners in the Downlands Way precinct were willing to help with replanting the containers for summer if current restrictions were lifted.
- f) Village Events, Charities and Grants – the Lead Member reported that (i) the parish council grant scheme 2020/21 would run later in the year; (ii) Village Fete: the Residents' Association was about to decide whether this should be cancelled, postponed, or perhaps combined with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations planned for the village hall in October 2020. (iii) Charity of the Year: three organisations had asked to be considered, i.e. the Air Ambulance, the Wealden Citizens' Advice Bureau, and Care for the Carers (a local charity). Members were welcome to propose other organisations.
- g) Tree Warden – members took note of a written report submitted by the Tree Warden, following on from the visit of the arboricultural consultant to the parish on 13 March 2020. In discussion members also requested a copy of the consultant's original report, and it was agreed that Cllr Hill and Cllr Seeley should meet the Warden to discuss the specific matters raised by him.

### **C.209 Payments and Receipts**

The council considered Report 9 - the Schedule of Payments for April 2020 and receipts for March 2020. *[Note: the complete Schedule is appended to these Minutes].* Payments of £548.80 to Cuckmere Buses for the quarter January to March 2020; and £581.47 to ESALC Ltd covering council subscriptions to SALC and NALC for the coming year were added to the schedule. The clerk was authorised to make all these payments which were within budget for the current year.

### **C.210 Correspondence**

The clerk reported that all correspondence received in March had related either to the coronavirus emergency or to the road works on Friston Hill [see above].

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**C.211 Date of next meeting: Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2020 at 7.30 pm** – this would be a virtual meeting which residents would be invited to attend. Full details would be circulated in advance.

*There being no further business, the informal meeting closed at 9.16 pm.*

Signed..... (Chair)

Date.....