

## **Minutes of the Annual Meetings of the Parishes of Ashburnham and Penhurst**

### **Thursday 21st April 2022 from 7.30 pm in the village hall**

28 electors including 4 members of the Parish Council and the parish clerk plus ESCC Cllr Kathryn Field and RDC Cllr Gary Curtis assembled from 7pm for a light buffet reception and to view the exhibits staged by the Art Club, Penhurst Retreat, the W.I and Coffee Stop plus the Parish Council. The business meeting commenced at approximately 7.30 pm. In accordance with Local Government Act 1972 (c.70), Sch 12, s.17, the Deputy Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr Richard White, presided in the absence of the Chairman.

#### **Introductions**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked if there were additional agenda items people would like to discuss. None came forward at this time.

Apologies for absence

Parish Cllr Andrew Hoad, Chairman, who is away on business.

#### **Penhurst Parish Meeting**

##### **1. Parish Council Report**

1.1 Planning - In the year 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 - 7 planning applications were decided.

All 7 were approved although the parish council objected to 2 of them.

1.2 Countryside –

1.2.1. The Penhurst Estate changed hands and the parish council have established a working relationship with the new owner.

1.2.2. Last summer Natural England discovered Isis beetle in 2 small plantations of Spruce trees on Penhurst estate. The new owner was directed to fell these trees by the end of February as it is the only way to control the spread of this non-native beetle. The lanes which were churned up by vehicles have been scraped level and will no doubt regrow

##### **2. AOB**

There being no other business the Chairman closed the Penhurst Parish meeting.

#### **Ashburnham Parish Meeting**

1. County Councillor report – ESCC Cllr Kathryn Field.

Once again I shall begin with the money. The County Council's portion of this year's Council Tax will rise by 4.49%. This is made up of 1.99% of "normal" tax rise plus an extra 1.5% for Adult Social Care from last year and 1% for this year. Unlike in previous years we are not allowed to be flexible about when we use the money. The council will also receive some extra government funding to help to mitigate the extra costs involved following the legislative changes to Adult Social Care. Local Government is expecting a funding review from central government.

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The County Council has a target to be carbon neutral by 2050 and is committed to reducing its carbon output by 13% a year. County Hall is to have a further 128 solar panels on its roof and it is estimated that these will generate all the electricity used in the building and save 11t of CO2. The County Council is keen to stress that all its climate change mitigation work is evidence based. Currently work is centred on those areas over which the council has direct control but the highways contract is being reprocured and this presents an ideal opportunity to influence the sustainability plans of a major supplier of services to the council.

Last year's wildlife verge trial will be repeated this year because last year was not a typical growing year.

The council is working on sustainable transport and has a Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan which aims to make these activities safer and therefore easier for us to leave our cars behind. All such schemes have to be compliant with Department for Transport rules. The council is also working with partners to improve bus accessibility.

The County Council has been judged outstanding for its children's social care and here I will put in a plea for foster carers: we need more! This rewarding work is well supported by the County Council and the East Sussex Foster Carers Association which has worked hard and successfully in spite of the pandemic to enrich the lives of both children and carers. The Children in Care Council which is made up of young people in care is an integral part of the service and provides valuable advice and insights. The council's residential homes are small and intimate and are real homes for the young people who live there; a new one is opening in the east of the county.

Locally plans are moving forward, slowly, to install a safe crossing point on Battle Hill; there have been considerable legal matters to resolve. Following the start of the building of 50 homes at Lillybank Farm the County Council proposes to move the 40mph north to protect the development. I am campaigning to have it extended even further so that it includes the junction with Canadia where, as many of you will know, there have been accidents and fatalities over the years.

The Highway Maintenance contract is being reprocured and 3 bidders have been shortlisted. It is to be hoped that the new contract will address sustainability and enable the mending of potholes which do not meet the criteria but are close to a hole which does.

The County is welcoming refugees from Ukraine. So far only a handful are coming through Newhaven. It is recognised that refugees will be traumatised and need help. The council will work hard to accommodate children in schools close to the communities in which the families are staying. It is acknowledged that many of the children will need the services of CAHMS which is a NHS service and already overstretched. Adults will be able to work in this country but it is not clear what language training will be available to facilitate this.

## 2. District Councillor report – RDC Cllr Gary Curtis

The Planning Department have lost many staff and Capita are provident agency staff as temporary cover.

There has been a move by some councillors to create a sub committee who will scrutinise planning applications and decide which of them should be decided by officers using delegated powers and which should go to full committee. Cllr Curtis actively opposed such a move and when it went to the full council it was defeated.

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SpeedWatch is being actively supported by Sussex Police.

Mr Clive O'Sullivan asked if Ashburnham is eligible to join SpeedWatch and Cllr Curtis promised to find details and pass them on.

Mr Colin Baker asked why rural crime is not being tackled, but Cllr Curtis said that the statistics showed that numbers are down. The Chairman promised that the parish council will engage with Sussex Police to make local feelings known.

### 3. Parish Council's Report (for April 2021 to March 2022)

Cllr Richard White showed some slides to support the items listed on the agenda.

#### 3.1 Governance - the council and its committees had the following number of meetings in the year:

Full council met 6 times in the last year

Planning Committee met once

New Hall Steering Group (Committee) met three times

New Finance & General Purposes Committee met twice

#### 3.2 Councillors

Leavers and joiners in the 12 mths April '21 to March '22 (some were reported in October last year at the delayed parish meeting)

Leavers:

Zoe O'Sullivan

Tina French

Andrew Hoad (Chairman)

Joiners welcomed:

Jay Ashworth

Fraser Williamson

#### 3.3 Planning applications in Ashburnham

In the year 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 there were 16 planning applications.

11 approved, 5 refused

Of the 5 refusals, one was supported by parish council but over ruled by RDC.

Of the 11 approvals, two were opposed by parish council.

Ongoing enforcement actions - 2 in progress at different stages.

#### 3.4 Financial report

At 31 March 2022 £17,000 in round numbers at bank of which half is in earmarked reserves and half in the general reserve.

Budget for 2022/23

Annual precept income was £12,600 last year. This year the precept is increased to £13,000.

This is not really sufficient if council is to continue its current level of community support. The Covid-19 Business Support Grant last year was a one-off.

End year balance will be down by £4,000; this will fall on the General Reserve and Ear Marked Reserves remain at a similar level.

Next year the precept is likely to increase with inflation.

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### 3.5 Questions from the floor

Mr Ron Ridley wanted to know why the Business Support Grant received had been diverted to support the new village hall. The Chairman replied that he was completely misinformed and there was no foundation for the implication in the question.

Mr Ron Ridley wanted to know if people on the new hall committee had a conflict of interest. The parish clerk assured him that the guidance from the Charity Commission is adhered to and no conflicts are known to exist.

### 3.6 Community

#### 3.6.1. **Highways pictures on screen** Cllr Ron King

- new initiative by Cllr Ron King identifying 5 areas beyond pot hole patching. 3 of these have been repaired and next week will be a fourth (Farthing Lane)
- KEEP ON REPORTING POTHOLES ONLINE - IT WORKS!

#### 3.6.2. **Rights of way, verges - wild flower pictures on screen**

- situation report, verges and Rights of Way Cllr Jay Ashworth

#### 3.6.3. **Village events -**

- Platinum Jubilee *pictures on screen*
- Remembrance Sunday service on the playing field - given up road closures
- programme report Cllr Chris Sinden

#### 3.6.4. **Wellbeing and play equipment pictures on screen**

- Football goals *pictures*
- Smaller children play equipment pictures on screen; parish council looking for local craftsman to make.

#### 3.6.5. **Rural broadband - Andrew Hoad continuing to coordinate pictures on screen**

We were combined with Ninfield for the Open Reach project ; not only a different parish but also in Wealden District.

Proving very hard to overcome their suspicion of a catch or to get them motivated to pledge vouchers. Their Parish Council not being helpful.

Pledging target only half way and without Ninfield not likely to happen.

## 4. New Village Hall

The Chairman gave a brief situation report.

A new 50 year lease has been negotiated with the Trustees of the Ashburnham Estate. Planning consent has been secured in perpetuity following the construction of some of the foundations.

The build cost is still being bottomed out. Charity Mentors Sussex are going to provide a mentor to work with the parish council on fund raising.

Before any major commitments are entered into there will be another referendum in the village.

Mr Ron Ridley asked why it would not be better to hold a referendum now.

The Chairman responded that the choices before the village would be likely to be:

Abandon the new hall project / Build a new hall / Invest in the old village hall. For the choices to be informed there needs to be more data.

Mr Colin Baker questioned why we need a new hall when there is such little usage of the existing one.

Mr Simon Hollett suggested that we might be further away from a new village hall now than we were in 2015, the time of the last referendum, and the Chairman did not disagree.

5. Other matters raised by meeting attendees.
  - 5.1 Jenny Miles asked if the Parish Council could think about how to calm the traffic flow, especially on the C18, Herrings Road and Church Road. For example, see if the “Quiet Road” criteria could be met and / or some slow signs signalling the presence of horses.
6. The Chairman declared the Ashburnham parish meeting to now be closed.