
**Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council of Ashburnham with Penhurst
held on Wednesday 29th January 2020 at 7.30pm in the Ashburnham Sports Pavilion**

Parish Councillors present: Cllrs Tina French, Andrew Hoad (Chairman), Ron King, Zoe O’Sullivan and Richard White.

Parish Councillors absent: Cllr Paul Spicer

District / County Councillors present: ESCC Cllr Kathryn Field

In attendance: Brian Holdstock, Clerk to the Council
3 members of the public

1) Apologies for absence

RDC Cllr Gary Curtis, Parish Cllr Paul Spicer

2) Disclosures of interest

None

3) Additional agenda items

The Chairman decided the following items are urgent, due notice of which have been given to the clerk by 12 noon today (S.O. 10.2).

At 8) e) Additional invoice added to list.

4) Adoption of Minutes

The minutes of the Ordinary Meeting held on 27th November 2019 were circulated with the agenda. On the motion of the Chairman the minutes were adopted without amendment.

5) Open Forum

a) ESCC Cllr Kathryn Field reported as follows

- i) The school at Broad Oak is to close but the one at Fletching is to remain.
- ii) Cabinet recently signed off the budget and council tax is to rise by 1.99%.
- iii) Cllr O’Sullivan asked for information about the reported £5m removed from the cycling and walking budget. Cllr Field acknowledged and reported that there was an active protest movement.

b) Members of the public

Members of the cricket club committee were present wishing to discuss rental fees for the cricket ground. Accordingly, the Chairman moved agenda item 10) b) i) to be considered here.

There was open discussion between councillors and members of the cricket club and the Chairman set the scene by reiterating that the spirit of the discussion must be to try to find a middle ground that would appease all concerned.

The cricket club did not offer any evidence, which was requested at the previous parish council meeting, of any agreement on a fee for all time or for a fee reduction from the present one other than discussions many years ago with Mrs Bickersteth, now deceased. However, they made the point that the work they do enhances the amenity value for all users and that they were almost unique among users in removing their rubbish bags after matches. They also pointed out that they are the gateway to additional lettings to other clubs as the fee paid by

visitors is shared equally between the parish council and the cricket club as it is the latter who prepare the wicket.

Councillors pointed out that cricket club bookings involved a larger number of people than most bookings and created proportionally greater wear and tear. They also continue to struggle to understand why, having been paying £450 per year since 2015, a fee apparently volunteered by them, they should now find it unacceptable.

Cllr King noted that the difference between the current fee of £450 and the £360 offered by the cricket club is £90 and he proposed that the difference be split and that a fee of £405 be applicable for 2020 and be indexed linked to inflation thereafter. Other councillors supported the proposal and the cricket club agreed to take this back to its committee for due consideration and a decision as to whether to it would accept this.

6) **Planning** (*updates or decisions in italics*)

a) On-going applications

RR/2019/1498/P - Distant Holding For Olivers Hill Farm, Olivers Hill, Lakehurst Lane, TN33 9PE - Change of use of existing care farm facility into a school. *Approved with conditions.*

RR/2019/1648/P - Ash Tree Inn, Brownbread Street, Ashburnham, TN33 9NX - Remove two existing outbuildings and replace with one new store building. *Approved this day with conditions*

RR/2019/1694/P - Brays Hill Farm House, Brays Hill, Ashburnham TN33 9NZ - Two storey extension to rear of property and first floor side extension. Internal re modelling of kitchen and bedroom. Construction of detached double garage with storage space above. Alternative to RR/2018/1400/P. *Remains undecided.*

b) New applications

None

c) Breaches and Enforcement – to note updates and progress

Ongoing: **ENF/107/18/ASH** – Oak Bank Farm, Farthing Lane, Ashburnham – Notice of Breach of Condition of application RR/2012/1053/P served November 2018. *Breach continues. Those on whom notice served pleaded not guilty at Hastings Magistrates Court on 25 November 2019 and a hearing has been set for 13th March 2020.*

New: **ENF/40/19/ASH** Oak Bank Farm, Farthing Lane, Ashburnham – Unlawful extension of lawful development. *Enforcement report 30/5/19*

ENF/208/19/ASH – Old Chapel House, Red Barn, Ponds Green – Erection of building (waiting further information)

d) Appeals

No new information.

e) Rother site allocations policy update

To note the publication of the Development and Site Allocations Policy in December 2019. It was noted that 5 new traveler sites are identified, many in the Battle area, and Coldharbour Farm is not one of them.

7) **Community Matters**

a) Village Action Plan

i) Preservation of the rural character of our villages.

Cllr Zoe O’Sullivan requested information about responsibility for the upkeep of

hedges adjoining the carriageway and noted the deterioration over several years of the hedge in Brownbread Street opposite Reed Wood. **Action: Clerk to write to Strutt & Parker with a request that they discuss the upkeep of this boundary with their tenant.**

ii) Smooth and safe roads

Cllr Ron King reported that he has made contact with ‘finger post pamperers’ and most are in place. The Clerk reported that he had met the new Highways Steward at Ponds Green and as a result emergency patching had been requested plus a longer term bid of a ‘patch’ over the area.

iii) Communication and involvement

Cllr Zoe O’Sullivan reported that she has planned a programme of ‘drip feeds’ of news to the parish Face Book page so that there is a news items every couple of weeks.

iv) Community and Environment

Cllr Tina French reported on her investigation of the County Council’s healthy walks programme, details of which she has circulated to members before the meeting. However, it appears that ESCC have no funding at this stage to assist with the formation of local walks although some other areas have them in place. Furthermore, there are 9 key points to observe and she sensed great bureaucracy not to mention onerous insurance requirements. Her conclusion is that it is best if local healthy walks are organised by the community rather than formally by the Parish Council.

With regard to the environment, past Chair, Nicky Bishop has requested the opportunity to make a presentation, together with Richard Watson, chair of Energise Sussex, about a project to make Ashburnham and Penhurst carbon neutral parishes. Members agreed with the Chair’s proposal that they be given a 15 minute slot in the Open Forum but that they be asked to send some reading material beforehand.

Cllr French has an arrangement with the editor of the parish magazine to have a text box every month devoted to environmental news, including news from RDC, about recycling and renewing or just tips about the topic.

v) New village hall (Cllr Richard White) *see below at 10) a)*

vi) Superfast broadband connectivity for all

Cllr Andrew Hoad confirmed that an invitation to Katy Thomas (ESCC co-ordinator) to address the parish council was sent as agreed at the last council meeting. However, she has deferred a meeting until data on the next phase is available – hopefully by the time of the next PC meeting. Recent updates on eSussex.org show some additional postcodes have been connected though none have been in our Parish.

Brigden Hill Community Fibre Partnership is now fully funded by gigabit vouchers and the programme has been confirmed by Open Reach and is under way. Fibre to the premises for some 22 properties, mostly in Ashburnham parish, is expected to be available in autumn 2020.

vii) Rights of way *no report in the absence of Cllr Paul Spicer*

b) Affordable Housing

The Chairman initiated a discussion following his various researches and contacts with the Rural Housing Enabling Officer at RDC. One thing clear above all else is the need to provide evidence of need. The officer suggested that typically a scheme would consist of up to 10 affordable units plus 2 or 3 to be sold on the open market to help subsidise the other units. A Community Land Trust (CLT) is the vehicle by which schemes are enabled with planning being granted via RDC’s Rural Exception Site policy.

Cllr Hoad has done some preliminary financial modelling and has concluded that it is a potentially viable proposition. The question of how such a scheme might benefit the financing of the new village hall is something he was advised to park for now and revisit it at a later stage of any project when there are fewer unknowns.

After discussion members resolved to take measures to encourage people to register

their housing needs with RDC and to conduct a rural housing needs survey with the help of RDC. They also supported the Chairman's proposal to take up the offer to meet the RDC enabling team. **Action: Chairman to set up meeting with RDC and to circulate the paper published by the Rural Housing Alliance.**

8) RFO Report

a) Receipts and Payments

On the motion of the Chairman members resolved to approve the tabled schedule for the period 20 November 2019 to 20 January 2020.

b) Bank reconciliation

Members received the bank reconciliation (on file) as at 20 January 2020. **Action: Cllr French will verify and report back to the next council meeting.**

c) Income and expenditure against budget

The RFO tabled a report (on file) against budget to the 20 January 2020. There were no exceptional variances.

d) Earmarked Reserves

The RFO tabled a report on the movement of funds in earmarked reserves.

e) Payments to authorise

On the motion of the Chairman members resolved to authorise the schedule of payments to be made, previously circulated and attached to these minutes. **(Action: Clerk to execute)**

f) Charitable donations

On the motion of the Chairman members resolved to budget for the same donations as made in the current financial year, namely Battle Area Community Transport £100 and Rother Citizens Advice Bureau £100.

g) Salaries

On the motion of the Chairman members resolved to adhere to the NALC national pay scale for clerks for the next 12 months

h) Budget and precept

The final version of the budget was circulated with the agenda prior to the meeting. On the motion of Cllr King, seconded by Cllr White, members resolved unanimously to adopt the budget and to set the precept for 2020/21 at £12,607. This is an increase of 2.5% over the 2019/20 precept of £12,009.

9) Governance

a) Financial Regulations review

On 11th January 2020 the RFO circulated a draft revision of the financial regulations with proposed changes marked up and a supporting commentary paper. Members approved the changes in principle, but further work is needed in articulating the levels of authorisation for approving a commitment to spend. **Action: RFO to prepare and circulate draft authorisation wording.**

b) Annual meetings of the parishes

Members agreed that a presentation of the Village Action Plan be made and that a further three or four topics be picked to focus on. Suggestions included pot holes, the new village hall and affordable housing.

c) Accessibility Regulations

The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018 are now in force and apply to parish councils. The clerk reported that he is discussing with our web site provider the option of making links to documents download rather than opening in a new browser window as it gives the user the option to set their computer to automatically open downloads which will then give them the option to enlarge the text if they need to. The regulations offer public bodies a Disproportionate Burden test but they must publish an explanation if they choose not to improve accessibility. **Action: Clerk will liaise with Tim**

Wakeling and report back on provisions or explanations.

10) Premises

a) New village hall

The Master Planning Chart and Time Line, previously circulated, were viewed.

i) Planning and Design

Cllr White reported that all the Planning Conditions relating to approval of materials above ground have now been discharged following approval of the exterior lighting.

The Clerk drew members' attention to areas of non compliance, namely the entrance widening sign of by East Sussex Highways and the rubble and spoil over the roots of the tree within the root protection area. **Action: Cllr White will continue to liaise with highways to register the entrance widening as complete and will make arrangements to have the tree root area cleared as an additional task when a contractor is on site.**

ii) Construction

Cllr White opened a discussion about the works to be undertaken immediately in order to record a start on construction before 17th February 2020, the third anniversary of the granting of planning permission. The discussion focused on whether to dig foundation pads or just a simple trench for a service pipe, both being valid options and acceptable to RDC.

Cllr White asked members to approve a plan to construct as many foundation pads as can be achieved from a single load of ready mixed concrete. Ian Roberts has indicated the labour cost as some £300. This is similar to digging a service trench. Detailed costings for the pads are not available, but Cllr White suggested a figure of £1500 as being sufficient depending on how many cubic metres of concrete are poured.

The Chairman expressed reservations on the grounds of unnecessary short term spend and risk that the pads might be incorrectly sized or positioned if the decision after a tender was made to appoint a steel frame constructor other than Wealden AM. However, he accepted that members vote on the matter.

Cllr White proposed that we proceed with the construction of pads and the motion was carried by the support of two members and the abstention of the remaining two present.

Action: Cllr White to obtain confirmation that detailed costs are close to his estimate and accordingly to give instructions for the work to proceed.

iii) Funding

The NHSG had been working thus far towards a target for fund raising from grants of c.£400k. The Chairman made reference to a paper circulated prior to the meeting wherein he suggests that based on 2020 building indices, this figure should be increased to at least £500k given that the likely total building cost will be nearer to £750k.

iv) Landlord and Legal

The Chairman advised that new lease is close to being sealed. At present we are waiting to see if the parish council offer to pay 50% of the Adams & Remer legal fees is acceptable as an undertaking allowing final drafting of the lease to proceed.

If the situation arises where the construction of the foundation pads precedes the signing of the lease, Strutt & Parker foresee no problem provided that the work is reversible.

v) Commissioning and Handover

The estate trustees have ruled out any sub lease by the parish council to the CIO but are content with full operational delegation. **Action: Clerk to explore ways and means of delegation such as management contract.**

b) Pavilion and Sports Field

i) Lettings – see 5) b) above

ii) Pavilion maintenance

The clerk recommended that surface treatment of the exterior cladding be the planned

maintenance for this year and proposed a provision of £750 which would come from earmarked reserves. **Action: Clerk to obtain quotations.**

- c) Village Hall
 - i) Cllr White had nothing to report.

11) Highways and Byways

- a) Finger posts
 - i) The clerk has analysed the survey results reported to the last council meeting and suggested that the survey identified which posts need replacing and which need repainting this year and that next year's programme is also clear. This year it would be prudent to commit to one renewal and two repainting at a cost (net of ESCC subsidy) of £1,150 covering the following sign numbers -
 - #2 Kitchenham Road - repair in workshop - £693 gross
 - #9 Farthing Lane - repaint - £200 gross
 - #10 Old Thatch Lane upper - repaint - £200 gross
 - #11 Slivericks lower - new post - £757 grossOn the motion of the Chairman the proposals were accepted. **Action: Clerk liaise with Douglas Andrews to confirm prices, to report back to the next meeting and then issue the necessary purchase orders.**
- b) SLR meeting
 - i) Members noted that a new highways steward has been appointed and that actions highlighted at the last SLR have been completed.
- c) Street naming

The Street Naming Officer has now written to all affected properties to take a formal vote on whether to adopt our proposed changes. The survey is due to close by the end of January, with results available hopefully by the next PC meeting.

12) Correspondence

- a) The police are consulting on their powers regarding unauthorised encampments. Members had no comment to make.
- b) Rother Parish Conference 27 May 2020.

This was an annual event and is being reestablished by RDC following a lapse of some eight years. This year's agenda includes Climate Change emergency motion by RDC, BIFFA and the waste hierarchy, biodiversity, wildlife corridors, verges. **Action: Clerk to reserve 3 places and bring up at the next council meeting.**

13) Information for Councillors / Future Agenda items

- i) Delegation of operation of new village hall.

14) Dates of Next Meetings

- a) Council meetings are scheduled for the last Wednesday of alternate months at 7.30pm in the Sports Pavilion and the dates of the meetings for the remainder of the council year are 25th March and 27th May (Annual Meeting).

Annual Assembly Thursday 23rd April 2020.
- b) Planning committee meetings are scheduled for the last Wednesday of the alternate months in which there is no council meeting at 7.30pm in the Sports Pavilion.

If there are no planning matters to consider the meeting will not be called.

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Signed (Chair)

Date