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## Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council of Ashburnham with Penhurst held on Wednesday 22nd November 2023 at 7.30pm in the Ashburnham Sports Pavilion

- Parish Councillors present:** Cllrs Jay Ashworth, Nicci Gagel, Ron King  
Chris Sinden, Paul Spicer (Deputy Chairman) and  
Fraser Williamson.
- Parish Councillors absent:** Cllr Richard White (Chairman)
- District / County Councillors present:** ESCC Cllr Kathryn Field, RDC Cllr Chas Pearce
- In attendance:** Brian Holdstock, Clerk to the Council  
8 members of the public

The Deputy Chairman, Cllr Paul Spicer, took the chair.

### 1. Apologies for absence

Cllr Richard White

### 2. Disclosures of interest

None

### 3. Additional agenda items

None

### 4. Adoption of Minutes

The minutes of the ordinary meeting of the Council held on 27th September 2023 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

1. The County Council is facing a shortfall in its core budget of £64.7mil and of this Children's Services, a demand led service, accounts for £22mil. The County is due to know its settlement from Whitehall in December but often has to wait until January.
2. It has been observed that councils are now forced to employ agencies to cover gaps in their services to such an extent that hedge funds are buying agencies because of their profit potential.

#### b) RDC Cllr Chas Pearce reported as follows

- i) The District Council is facing a shortfall in its core budget for 2024/25 of £3.8mil. They may be able to find savings of £3.3mil but £500k will have to come from reserves. The Leader of the Council, Cllr Doug Oliver, has posted a budget presentation on YouTube where he urges the public to participate in the budget consultation ([www.rother.gov.uk/budget24](http://www.rother.gov.uk/budget24)).

#### c) Wilsons Farm. Two members of the public, Michael and Helen Saunders, advised the council that they have recently taken over the running of the farm from an elderly relative. The farm has become run down and they have lodged a planning application for significant developments. The application is not yet visible on the RDC portal but Mr and Mrs Saunders extended an invitation to councillors to visit the farm so that they could see the scope of the developments first hand. Members welcomed the initiative and a visit by members was agreed as 10am on Monday 11th December 2023.

#### d) Penhurst. A member of the public, Mr Bob Ruthven, made a slide presentation showing the developments at his Penhurst Estate for which he is preparing a number of planning applications to be submitted shortly. In general these consist of restoring dilapidated buildings plus one conversion to a holiday let. He is in close liaison with heritage organisations so that

all the work is done sensitively and in keeping with the nature of the surroundings. Informing the council, as a courtesy, is part of his wider consultation of immediate neighbours and the community. He is happy to take questions now and at any time in the future as applications are in process.

- e) Village hall library. Two members of the public, Paula Jones and Maggie Evans, asked for support for a project which they are leading on behalf of the Coffee Stop and the W.I. to set up an informal lending library at the village hall. Since the cessation of the Mobile Library local residents without a means of transport have been unable to access any library. The village book club has also ceased. The proposal is to fix some bookshelves to the wall of the small room and to open the library a couple of times a month plus some Saturday mornings during school holidays. Supporters would be encouraged to donate books. Refreshments would be available to generate some income to defray costs.

The Chairman thanked the presenters and members generally expressed support. However, as this is a village hall matter members agreed to confer separately in their role as Sole Managing Trustee and to give a formal response before Christmas.

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

### a) On-going applications *Current position*

- i) **RR/2023/1570/P** - Horseshoe Cottage, Brownbread Street, Ashburnham TN33 9NX - Revised scheme to previously refused permission RR/2022/849/P for the removal of existing timber clad addition to be rebuilt with increased footprint and dressing-room in roof; removal of modern internal partition wall.

*Councillors conferred by email and no objection was lodged.*

*Approved*

- ii) **RR/2023/1346/P** - Ashburnham Place, Ashburnham TN33 9NF - Installation of a Roof Based Solar Photovoltaic System.

*Councillors conferred by email and no objection was lodged.*

*Withdrawn*

- iii) **RR/2023/1862/P** - Burnt Barns Farm, Freckley Hollow, Ashburnham TN33 9LZ - Proposed Swimming Pool.

*Members have registered a neutral position.*

*Remains undecided*

### b) Applications new to a council meeting

No new applications

### c) Breaches and Enforcement

No new or unresolved breaches

## 7. RFO Report

### a) Receipts and payments

Members received the tabled schedule of receipts and payments for the period 20th September to 8th November 2023. It was noted that the bank payment to Rother Rural Trust was returned by the bank. Cllr Kathryn Field, a trustee of RRT, will contact the treasurer to identify the problem. It was also noted that the payment to Rother CAB could not be made as their bank account has changed and such limited means of contacting them (leaving a message for a call back) do not work. However, on their website there is a donate button and the RFO will use this.

### b) Bank reconciliation

Members received the bank reconciliation (on file) as of 8th November 2023. The Chairman confirmed that he had been online and can verify the account balance at that date.

### c) Income and expenditure against budget.

The RFO tabled a report as of 8th November 2023 (on file). There were no new significant variations to note.

### d) Earmarked reserves

The RFO tabled a report on movements in earmarked reserves for the year to 8th November 2023.

e) Payments to authorise

On the motion of Cllr Sinden seconded by Cllr Gagel members resolved to authorise the following payments:

| Details                       | Payee             | Budget head                             | Total £ |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|---|---------|
| Magazine support              | PCC               | Community                               | 330.00  |
| Custodian first half year fee | Paul Harmer       | Pavilion & grounds: maintenance         | 225.00  |
| Custodian first half year fee | Jo Fowler         | Pavilion & grounds: maintenance         | 325.00  |
| Annual sub incl Geo mapping   | RALC              | General administration: Subscriptions   | 80.00   |
| PA system, Remem Sunday       | James Harris Hire | General administration: Office expenses | 75.00   |
| Recharge for smoke detec      | Ash village hall  | Pavilion & grounds: maintenance         | 85.00   |
| Notice board for The Pound    | Greenbarnes       | Reserves: Community                     | 959.33  |
| Remembrance wreaths           | Poppy Shop        | General administration: Office expenses | 87.98   |
| Deposit on marquee C'y Fair   | Main Event Co     | Reserves: Community                     | 750.00  |
| Remembrance service sheets    | Hello Print       | General administration: Office expenses | 63.38   |

f) Pavilion hire charges.

The RFO tabled a chart showing how hire charges have increased since a base date of April 2019. The chart also showed inflation as the CPI number month by month. Keeping hire fees broadly in line with inflation would suggest that the fee for a session be increased from £70 to £72 (50% reduction for village residents) and the session fee for village organisations be increased from £20 to £21. Members decided to defer a decision until the January meeting when the full budget is due for adoption with the setting of the precept.

g) The RFO asked members to confirm the policy of paying the clerk according to SCP point 12 on the scale set by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services in view of the scales for 2023/24 having just been published some eight months into the financial year. On the motion of the Chairman seconded by Cllr Sinden members resolved to adopt the new scales retrospective to April 2023.

h) The RFO tabled the first draft of the council budget for 2024/25 reminding members of their resolve to defer adoption of the budget including setting the precept until the tax base for the year is known. The tax base is the number of Band D equivalent households in both parishes. The figure is usually published by RDC in the first week in December. For the purposes of drafting a budget illustration a precept increase of 4.4% produced a broadly neutral budget.

## 8. Governance

- a) The Clerk invited members to suggest topics for the parish council section of the monthly parish magazine. This might align with their area of lead responsibilities and provide a focus for the parish council contribution. Currently it is the Clerk who writes something of a general nature.

## 9. Community - Lead Responsibilities

a) The human world and society

- i) Communications - Cllr Ashworth has added more to the village website including a past events page. She has also posted highlights of the SLR meeting with ESCC Highways yesterday.

ii) Village events -

1. Cllr Sinden noted that the bonfire night had to be cancelled as it was just too wet. However, Remembrance Sunday was a great success as was the art exhibition. He

- lamented that it is always the same people who do the work on organising events and the village really needs to find more people willing to help.
2. He advised members of a Beatles tribute band who play locally in aid of charity fund raising events and they waive all payment. He suggested they could be engaged for an evening event in the marquee on the day of the Country Fair. Members were enthusiastic and so he will contact them to make a booking.
  - iii) Police liaison - Cllr Williamson reported that there has been a spate of stealing of quad bikes throughout the district and not just in our parishes.
  - iv) Phone box - Cllr Gagel advised that the erection of the new notice board for The Pound has commenced and John French found that one of the existing posts is rotten. He intends, therefore, to install one new post in a new position which will suit the size of the new board. Cllr Gagel advised that there are two keys for the new board and she intends to obtain a third. She will retain one and so that spares are close by Tina and John French will have one and Paul Spicer will have the other.
  - v) Public transport - the Clerk showed members copies of promotional flyers and posters with which he has been supplied. Some are already on display on notice boards and several members took more to distribute.
  - vi) Public health: defibrillator - Cllr Sinden reported that the defibrillator was inspected recently and the pads will not need replacing until 2025.
- b) The natural world
- (i) Verges - Cllr Spicer said that he had received no meaningful response to the complaint he relayed about the poor standard of workmanship of the cutting of the verges in the autumn but he will continue to pursue it.
  - (ii) Rights of Way- Cllr Spicer had nothing to report.
  - (iii) Environment: Litter -
    - (1) Cllr Ashworth advised that litter picking is on hold until the weather improves.
    - (2) She noted that there are discarded plastic containers in the hedge opposite the pavilion. Members advised that waste cooking oil containers had been stolen from outside The Ash Tree Inn where there are more discarded empties near by. RDC fly tipping team will be contacted to arrange for the collection of the containers.
- c) The built environment
- i) Highways - Cllr King reported on the SLR meeting with ESCC Highways yesterday (minutes have been circulated to members). He updated them with information about bridge repairs in Farthing Lane, the request for improvements to drainage at the bottom of Brays Hill and the bridge parapet repairs possibly needed at The Forge.
  - ii) Premises: Village Hall -
    - (1) The Clerk tabled a document shown to village hall trustees setting out the income and expenditure for the past few years. It was suggested at that meeting of trustees that a similar document for the pavilion would be useful so he has prepared one which he now tabled.
    - (2) The comparison showed that the economics are broadly similar except that the pavilion rental income is augmented by the allocation from the parish council each year as part of earmarked reserves.
    - (3) Comparison of insurance costs raised some questions. The sum insured for buildings for the village hall is £663k and for the pavilion £163k. As an initial investigative step the Clerk will trace back the changes in sums insured and compare the changes with those in the CPI.
    - (4) Trustees of the village hall requested that the parish council consider providing funding for the village hall by means of a regular grant rather than on an ad hoc basis as and when village funds are used up in a few years time. Members agreed that a sum of £1500 should be allocated to the Hall earmarked reserve for the purposes of developing the draft budget. The actual allocation will be confirmed at the January '24 meeting when the budget is adopted and the precept set.
    - (5) The W.I. and the Coffee Stop hope to establish a lending library at the hall 5. e) above.
  - iii) Premises: Pavilion - The Clerk had nothing to report.

**10. Correspondence**

- a) Dr Lucy Bolton, RDC's Environment Strategy Officer, has supplied a copy of Crowhurst's biodiversity audit as a model for other parishes.
- b) Countryman have contacted all parish councils asking if they would be interested in employing Countryman directly (they are the previous contractors) for their urban mowing. As we only have rural cuts the offer has been declined.
- c) Thanks for donations have been received from BACT, The Chapel, St.Michaels's PCC and St. Peter's PCC

**11. Information for Councillors / Future Agenda Items**

None

**12. Date of Next Meeting**

The next ordinary meeting of the parish council will be on Wednesday 24th January 2024.

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Signed (Chair)

Date .....