

**Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council of Ashburnham with Penhurst held on
Wednesday 27th March 2024 at 7.30pm in the Ashburnham Sports Pavilion**

Parish Councillors present: Cllrs Ron King, Chris Sinden, Paul Spicer, Richard White (Chairman), Fraser Williamson.

Parish Councillors absent: Cllr Jay Ashworth

District / County Councillors present: ESCC Cllr Kathryn Field, RDC Cllr Chas Pearce

In attendance: Brian Holdstock, Clerk to the Council
1 member of the public

1. Apologies for absence
Cllr Jay Ashworth

2. Disclosures of interest
None

3. Additional agenda items
6) b) RR/2024/430/P Oak Bank Farm

4. Adoption of Minutes
The minutes of the annual / ordinary meeting of the Council held on 24th January 2024 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 Director of Children's Services is retiring and a permanent replacement has yet to be appointed.
 - ii) OFSTED have inspected Children's Services and judged them to be Outstanding in respect of looked after children. On the other hand they criticised the handling of children on the Risk Register and recommended that they be taken into care more quickly. ESCC do not agree with OFSTED on this point.
- b) RDC Cllr Chas Pearce reported as follows
 - i) Public consultations are currently taking place on Public Space Protection and on the Local Plan and in connection with the latter there will be a series of local event.
 - ii) Government have granted RDC £20mn from the Levelling Up fund. Of this, £17.3mil is going to Bexhill and £2.1mn to Sidley. There is no money for rural areas.

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

a) On-going applications *Current position*

- i) **RR/2023/2324/P** - Wilsons Farm, Brays Hill, Ashburnham TN33 9NZ - Demolition of all existing dilapidated farm buildings and the erection of two cattle housing buildings and a straw, hay and general purpose farm store, installation of an earth banked farmyard manure store and new slurry lagoon, water attenuation pond, together with all associated surrounding engineering operations.
Members have been advised by the planning officer that there would be a site meeting on 18th March 2024 at which a decision would be made to either refuse the application or allow the applicant to withdraw it. Remains undecided.
- ii) **RR/2024/42/P** - Brays Hill Cottage, Brays Hill, Ashburnham TN33 9NZ - Existing rear extension to be extended, proposed new garage and front porch.
Members viewed the application and resolved to give it their support. Application withdrawn

- iii) **RR/2023/2600/P** - Brays Hill Farmhouse, Brays Hill, Ashburnham TN33 9N - Proposed rear extension incorporating internal alterations to a previously approved and extant permission and the provision of new staircase to attic, access to an existing roof void to form tank room and insertion of en-suite bathroom to attic bedroom. *Council supported Approved conditional*

b) Applications new to a council meeting *To determine or record the Council's response*

- i) **RR/2023/2635/P** - The Storage Barn, Penhurst Lane, Penhurst, TN33 9QP - Replacement of the existing implement barn with a newly built, traditionally designed holiday let.
Parish Council has posted comment: Whilst the Parish Council supports this application it is mindful of the limitations of the water supply as noted by others. If permission is granted might it be appropriate to add a Condition relating to water supply?
- ii) **RR/2024/300/P** - Church Farm, Penhurst Lane, Penhurst, TN33 9QP - Renovation of existing Grade II Listed barn. Removal of 2no. existing steel-framed barns, and erection of 2no. replacement steel-framed barns. Associated landscape works.
Members viewed the application online and unanimously resolved to support it.
- iii) **RR/2024/50/P** - Brownbread Stud, Ashburnham, TN33 9NX - Erection of a residential dwelling house to replace lawful caravan and redundant barn with associated change of use of land to residential.
Council has posted a neutral position comment.
- iv) **RR/2023/2637/P** - Ash Tree Inn, Brownbread Street, Ashburnham TN33 9NX - Blocking off existing carpark entrance and erecting of picket fence. New relocated entrance into car park
Council has posted objection (Resolution at Planning Committee.)
- v) **RR/2024/6/P** - Honeyland Farm - Land at, Honey Lane, Ashburnham TN33 9FA - Erection of replacement barn for agricultural use. *Council has objected. Application approved.*
- vi) **RR/2024/430/P** - Oak Bank Farm, Ashburnham, Battle, TN33 9PB - Relocation of a building and use as a permanent agricultural workers dwelling, together with the demolition of a lawful residential dwelling (revised resubmission of application RR/2023/668/P).
Members viewed the application online and unanimously resolved to support it.

- g) Breaches and Enforcement *Record of updates and progress*
None

g) **RFO Report**

- a) Receipts and payments
Members received the tabled schedule of receipts and payments for the period 17th January to 20th March 2024.
- b) Bank reconciliation
Members received the bank reconciliation (on file) as of 20th March 2024.
- c) Income and expenditure against budget.
The RFO tabled a report as of 20th March 2024 (on file). Significant variations were noted.
- d) Earmarked reserves
The RFO tabled a report on movements in earmarked reserves for the year to 20th March 2024. It was noted that the end of year balances in the earmarked reserves for the Pavilion and Fingerposts have increased significantly. but that for Community is nearly exhausted. The reserve for the Village Hall is unchanged as there has been no expenditure on the new village hall and the annual grant to the old village hall does not start until April 2024.
- e) Payments to authorise
On the motion of the Cllr Sinden seconded by Cllr Spicer members resolved to authorise the following payments:

Details	Payee	Budget head	Total £
Defibrillator	London Hearts	Reserves: Community	750.00
Election expenses	RDC	Governance	139.97
Electricals for defib	Guy Corbin	Reserves: Community	255.00
Defibrillator backboard	MDF Direct	Reserves: Community	38.96
Key for defibrillator cabinet	Borg Locks	Reserves: Community	7.20
Uncoded lock for defib ca	Spearwood Holdings	Reserves: Community	44.40

f) Direct debits and standing orders

On the motion of Cllr Spicer seconded by Cllr Fraser members authorised the continuance for the next 12 months of periodic payments to Castle Water and Pozoitive Energy (pavilion utilities), Tim Wakeling (website hosting and maintenance) and Microsoft (Office 365).

8. Governance

a) Filling the casual vacancy

Members discussed a range of options regarding selection of a person to fill a casual vacancy. They rejected the notion of an application form and resolved that the best way forward is to arrange to meet people interested. It only needs a small group of councillors who should agree between themselves beforehand what questions they would ask. Members agreed that what is most relevant is the person's life experience and what skill set or experience they would bring to the Council.

The clerk asked if members would like persons interested to receive a short summary of what being a parish councillor involves. Members agreed to look at one which the Clerk has prepared.

9. Community - Lead Responsibilities

a) The human world and society

- i) Communications - Cllr Ashworth (not present) continues to post news items.
- ii) Village events - Cllr Sinden noted that there is momentum in the village at the moment and a steady stream of events.
- iii) Police liaison - Cllr Williamson reported that there is the usual background of petty crime but generally things are quiet.
- iv) Phone box - no report;
- v) Public transport - those with first hand knowledge of Flexibus reported that it is used more and more widely and there is anecdotal evidence that for a number of users Flexibus has been transformational. However, it is known that it starting to come up against capacity limitations.
- vi) Public health: defibrillator - The Clerk reported that the installation of the cabinet for the new defibrillator at the pavilion is complete, but there are delays arising from the Council's decision that no code should be needed in order to access the device. The change of the lock is complete, but the signage on the door needs to be changed. He hopes that he and Cllr Sinden will be able to change the signage next week when the unit can be completed. Cllr Sinden will then take steps to have it added to the national database of public access AEDs.
- vii) Rural broadband - a further communication has been received from John Banks with an update on the position plus drafts of letters which people may wish to send expressing dissatisfaction with the slowness of rollout. Members took the view that as the support for the proposed scheme was so low it was unlikely that support could be mobilised for further action.

b) The natural world

- (i) Verges - Cllr Spicer reported that he has confirmation from Kirsty Jenner at ESCC that our parishes will only have one cut of the verges and it will be in the autumn after the wild flowers have seeded, If visibility becomes an issue anywhere then a cut can be invoked.
- (ii) Rights of Way- Cllr Spicer had nothing to report.
- (iii) Environment: Litter - Cllr Ashworth (not present) sent a written report. A successful litter pick was held on Saturday 23rd March. The routes picked on the day and those pledged by villagers have been put onto a map & shared on facebook. The litter pickers have covered most of the two villages which is great. They also raised £100 at the coffee morning to be split between Out of the Blue and the play equipment fund.

c) The built environment

- i) Highways - Cllr King noted that potholes continue to be a problem and although there is much repair activity it does not keep pace with the rate of occurrence of new holes. The Clerk asked if members had any particular issues for the agenda of the next SLR scheduled for 9th April and urged that a review of future clearance of the culvert under the bridge on the eastern half of Farthing Lane be given prominence. Following the failure to

clear it, water overflowed the road, eroded the ground leading to the collapse of the retaining wall and the closure of the road since last November.
A schedule of all the planned engineering works for the next 12 months has just been released.

- ii) Housing - no report
- iii) Premises: Village Hall - The Clerk reported that hirings continue to increase and that a body of supporters is emerging willing to either fund raise or assist with maintenance. Many are likely to attend the annual meeting of the village hall charity on 13th April and the Clerk suggested that members, in their role as trustee, might like to meet before the annual meeting in order to plan the agenda and an approach to liaising with supporters. Members agreed to a trustee meeting on Wednesday 10th April at 7.30pm at the pavilion.
- iv) Premises: Pavilion - The Clerk reported that a smart electricity meter has been fitted. Members noted with regret the death of Bob Parsons who for many years has spent many hours a week in the cricket season preparing the wicket. Members expressed their gratitude for many years of service to the cricket club.
- v) Premises: New village hall
Cllr White made a statement reviewing the position and concluding that it was time to pause further engagement with the new hall plan for a period of 3 to 5 years. He recalled that a referendum in 2015 found a high level of support for a new hall at the cricket ground and planning permission was granted in 2017. Since then there has been an exit of key supporters of the project who have moved away and since the Covid pandemic people have become more risk averse and construction costs have spiralled. He noted that local successful new hall projects all had a significant element of development gain from housing developments and a hurdle with grant applications is that we already have a village hall. Furthermore, he does not see any prospect of gaining the support necessary in the village for the substantial borrowing likely to be necessary.

Cllr King asked what the latest estimate is of the cost of the new hall and Cllr White suggested £600k at least. Cllr King noted that some other halls struggle financially and Cllr White reflected that the scale of the new hall was probably over ambitious. Members agreed with Cllr King's suggestion that it was best to discontinue the involvement of the Parish Council until such time as a new team with new drive emerges.

Cllr White advised members that he has discussed the future with the group of activists most involved with fund raising for the new hall and they are in agreement with his conclusions. It is also their wish that the funds raised to date be deposited in a high interest bearing account or bond for a few years. If the time comes when they feel there is no prospect of the funds being used for the purpose for which they were raised, then they would wish that they be spent on improvements at the pavilion but not the current village hall. The group will continue with the organisation of the Country Fair in 2024 and plan to split the proceeds between the new hall and St.Michael's Hospice. After that they will step back. They will be happy to assist any new group that steps up to organise a Country Fair in 2025, but do not plan to play a leading role in the organisation of it.

10. Correspondence

- a) John Banks - at 9) vii)

11. Information for Councillors / Future Agenda Items

- a) Cllr White advised members that with the winding down of the new hall project he is resigning the Chairmanship of the Parish Council with immediate effect. Until the election of a new Chairman at the Annual Meeting of the Council on 29th May Cllr Spicer, Deputy Chairman, will perform any duties which fall to the Chairman including chair of the Annual Village Meeting on 25th April.

12. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the parish council is the Annual Meeting and will be on Wednesday 29th May 2024.

**The Parish Council of
Ashburnham with Penhurst**

**Chair
Cllr Richard White**

**Clerk to the Council
Dr Brian Holdstock**
clerk@ashburnham-penhurst.net

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Signed (Chair)

Date