

## HASSOCKS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Virtual Meeting of the **Parish Council** held on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2020  
at 2.30pm.

Attendees: Parish Councillors Ian Weir (Chair), Jane Baker ( Vice Chair), Bill Hatton, Sue Hatton, Frances Gaudencio, Kate Bailey, Nick Owens, David Hammond, Frank Rylance and Bob Brewer

Parish Clerk: Ian Cumberworth  
Deputy Clerk: Tracy Forte

### MINUTES

#### **PC20/01 APOLOGIES**

Cllr Peter Gibbons, Leslie Campbell, Alex Simmons, Kristian Berggreen

#### **PC20/02 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Disclosure by Councillors of personal interests in matters on the agenda, and whether the Councillor regards their interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct.

None.

#### **PC20/03 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020 were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

#### **PC20/04 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was two members of the public present (virtually) who observed proceedings but did not wish to speak.

#### **PC20/05 MINUTES**

To agree the following Minutes.

Planning Committee minutes for the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020

#### **PC20/06 FINANCE**

Members considered the finance reports and the supporting bank statements and reviewed the payment list. The Finance report and payments totalling **£20,858.64** for the period ending 28<sup>th</sup> February 2020 Appendix 1 and the payment list totalling **£23,772.21** for the period ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 Appendix 2 were considered and approved. (Note- during 2020 we should use 4 digits for the year).

## **PC20/07 Reports**

- 7.1 **District Councillors reports:** - Cllr Sue Hatton (SH) advised that most MSDC employees are now working remotely with some of senior management on site. MSDC are expecting that the current crisis will impact on their budget proposals for this year. The Council meetings have tended to be cancelled as the Council starts to move over to virtual meetings in the near future with a number scheduled for June. A number of practice training sessions have been set up for members.

Cllr Hatton also updated members that the Green waste collection service had resumed and that WSCC tips had now reopened.

- 7.2 **County Councillors report** – no report had been received

- 7.3 **Rail matters** – Nothing to report.

- 7.4 **Youth Initiatives** - Cllr Francis Gaudencio informed members that the youth group operating in Adastra Hall has ceased to run at present due to the pandemic but it was exploring the option of running some online sessions. With regard to the separate youth organisation being set up by Cllrs Gaudencio and Hammond (not in their capacity of Councillors) progress is being made but some aspects are proving to be complex.

- 7.5 **Police matters** – Members were advised that the police are regularly attending the park to ensure members of the public were complying with government guidelines. In addition it was noted that a number of burglaries have been occurring in the Hassocks area primarily to outbuildings. Speeding has also been an issue and in particular the use of motorbikes which police are proactively trying to address.

- 7.6 **Report from Councillors on meetings of outside bodies where the Council is represented** – Nothing to report

**PC20/8 CHAIRS REPORT** – Nothing to report

## **PC20/9 CLERK'S REPORT**

- 9.1 **Local Authorities & Police Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police & Crime Panel Meetings) Regulation 2202 and associated impacts.**

The Clerk advised members that with the introduction of the recent legislation it provides the Authority with additional flexibility in how it is able to manage its business going forward in light of the pandemic. Both the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Government advice is that all councils should cease to hold physical meetings or gatherings. This should include Full Council, Committee meetings, and Annual Parish Meeting or Council meetings with electors.

Member's attention was drawn to Appendix 3 in the agenda which set out the proposed meeting programme for the forthcoming year which

was drafted pre Covid 19 therefore members were invited to take this into consideration when determining the frequency of meetings going forward.

Members were taken through each category of meeting and were invited to consider a number of options for each one in turn:

- 9.2 **Annual Parish meeting:** Members were informed that this meeting is usually required to be held between the 1<sup>st</sup> April and 1<sup>st</sup> June each year.

This meeting is not a Council meeting but an opportunity for members of the public to hear about the work of the Council in the previous year and to raise questions to the Council.

The Clerk advised members that in light of previous attendance levels and in the current climate it was felt that this meeting was probably not critical at this time.

The new legislation provided authorities with the opportunity to consider how, if and when they wish to hold this meeting. Members were invited to consider 3 options:

- **Option 1** Cancel the Annual Parish Meeting altogether for 2020.
- **Option 2** Postpone the meeting for electors and seek to hold a remote version between now and June 2020.
- **Option 3** Postpone and seek to arrange later in the year

Members debated the merits of each option and **RESOLVED** to **APPROVE Option1** to cancel the Annual Parish Meeting for 2020

- 9.3 **Annual Statutory meeting:** The purpose of this meeting is to elect the Chair and Vice Chair of the Council and to appoint sub-committee memberships and representatives to outside bodies.

Regulation 4 (2) of the new act provides authorities with the opportunity to consider whether to continue with the existing arrangements/appointments until May 2021 without the need to convene an Annual Statutory meeting. Subject to members being happy to continue in their current roles:

Members were invited to consider two options:

- **Option 1** Cancel the Annual Statutory meeting altogether and continue to run with the existing appointment of Chair, Vice Chair as well as Committee membership and outside body representation.
- **Option 2** Hold the Statutory meeting but hold this remotely.

Members considered the available options and in light of the current position **RESOLVED** to **APPROVE Option 1** to cancel the Annual Statutory meeting and retain the current arrangements/positions for the forthcoming year.

- 9.4 **Standing Committees** – Members then gave consideration to potential options in relation to Standing Committees such as Grounds & Environment Committee and Policy Resources & Communications Committee.

The consensus from members was that the Council should work towards the frequency of meetings set out within (Appendix 3) to provide the Council with a framework, but a decision would be taken as to whether there is a need to hold a meeting each time in consultation with the respective Committee Chairs.

Members felt that it would be beneficial to have an agreed framework of meetings to work towards and that it could be adjusted if required at a later point.

With the additional flexibilities in respect of timings meetings introduced under the new legislation members preferred option was to convene all future meetings to commence at 14.30 hrs.

Members **AGREED** to continue with meetings based on the proposed meeting calendar and to amend/vary when required in consultation with the relevant chair.

Members also **AGREED** that in the current situation meetings should be convened at 2.30pm.

- 9.5 **Planning Committee** the Clerk proposed an alternative approach for members to consider the operation of the Planning Committee via email consultation to obtain a consensus from the members and enable the public to feed into the process. Member's preference was to move over to virtual meetings as soon as practical and that planning committee members would need to ensure they view the Planning portal prior to the meeting.

Members therefore **RESOLVED** to move over to virtual planning meetings as soon as practical.

- 9.6 **Banking Arrangements** the Council were informed that the Councils current bank accounts were operated as traditional accounts.

The Council were in the process of extending the number of authorised signatories prior to the lockdown to strengthen resilience, however due to the requirement of individuals having to attend the local branch in person to prove identity this process was not completed.

Members were advised that the local branch had significantly reduced its opening hours and for the Council to transact any faster electronic payments it is necessary for the Clerk to attend the bank in person.

Members were advised that although there does appear to be the potential to move over to on-line dual signatory authorisation with our existing provider but the issue still remains regarding adding additional signatories and proof of identity.

Members were requested to consider the option of looking at an alternative online bank provider subject to the required authorisation processes being put in place but without the need for individuals to prove identity in person when the account is first set up.

The Clerk indicated that if members were minded to consider this approach the intention would be to retain our current portfolio of accounts with Barclays and set up a new account with another provider to transact the Councils day to day business transactions. This would also enable the Council to spread funds across a wider number of financial institutions. The intention would be to transfer funds regularly to the new provider from the Councils existing accounts to enable the day to day transactions and to reduce the need to visit the bank in person.

Members considered the proposals and felt that at this current time it would be advantageous to change over to online banking for the Councils day to day business transactions subject to the Clerk identifying a suitable provider.

Members **APPROVED** the proposal to move to an alternate online banking provider as soon as practical to administer the Councils day to day business transactions.

All other accounts would remain with Barclays for the time being.

- 9.7 **Delegations** Members were requested to consider increasing the Clerks authority to incur additional expenditure (currently £750) in light of the current pandemic. Members were advised that if they were minded to approve the suggested increase to £2,500 any incurrence of expenditure would still be required to seek agreement from the Chairs, subject to funds being identified and subject to scrutiny as part of the financial control framework.

Members felt that in the current situation and to aid operational efficiency that they **AGREED** to increase the Clerks delegated authority to incur expenditure up to £2,500 subject to the control process referred to in the report being in place.

Standing Orders will be amended to reflect this approval

- 9.8 **Precept** Members were informed that the Council was in receipt of its first instalment from Mid Sussex District Council in the sum of £ 147,773. Members sought confirmation as to whether the pandemic would impact on the level of precept payable to the Parish Council.

The Clerk indicated that it may impact adversely on the District Councils budget as Government funding to support District Councils to meet the additional costs incurred in supporting the government initiatives is

unlikely to cover all costs and/or the potential shortfall in the District Councils revenue streams (e.g.: car park fees, leases, miscellaneous income etc.). However if households are experiencing financial difficulties in respect of Council Tax they may be able to access Council Tax benefit. Therefore on this basis it was not anticipated this would impact on the Parish Councils precept element.

- 9.9 **Talbot Field** Members considered a request to remove three trees and the reduction in height of another. The Council had received an arboriculture report recommending the said action.

The cost of these works if all works were completed at one time would be around £2,000.

Members were advised that the current tree budget for Talbot field stood at £750 therefore any shortfall would have to be met from General reserves.

Member's views were sought on the proposed works.

Members felt that it would be sad to see these trees removed however based on the report the Council should remove and prune the said trees.

Members expressed the view that the Council should replant some trees in Talbot field later in the year. All members supported this proposal.

After careful consideration members **RECOMMENDED** that the said three trees be removed and the fourth pruned to reduce its height and that the shortfall in funds be met from General Reserves.

- 9.10 **Insurance** Members were advised that the Councils insurance had been renewed automatically as part of a three year term contract. Noted

- 9.11 **Councillor Vacancy** Members were provided with an update that with the resignation of Georgia Cheshire the Council had one vacancy which had been duly advertised.

The Clerk indicated that a number of applications had been received from people interested in joining the Council. Members will therefore be invited to consider these applications at a future meeting. In the current climate this is likely to be via a remote meeting and consideration will need to be given as to how the Council completes the legalities from a logistical perspective re declaration of acceptance etc.

**PC20/10 URGENT MATTERS AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN** for noting and/or inclusion on a future agenda.

Cllr Gaudencio requested an item regarding Community Right to Bid/Community assets be included in the next agenda.

**PC20/11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To note that the date of the next Council meeting is **Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020 at 2.30pm.**

**PC20/12 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

In view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted Councillors will be referred to the Confidential Agenda. If any members of the public or press are in attendance they will be requested to withdraw from the meeting in the public interest.

Members of the public left the virtual meeting

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