

HASSOCKS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the **Parish Council** held on 8th December 2020
at 7.30pm.

Attendees: Parish Councillors Ian Weir (Chair), Jane Baker, Bill Hatton, Alex Simmons, Sue Hatton, Kristian Berggreen, Frank Rylance, Frances Gaudencio, Bob Brewer. Claire Tester, Nick Owens, Leslie Campbell, Kate Bailey and Peter Gibbons

Parish Clerk: Ian Cumberworth

Visiting Member(s): County Councillor Kirsty Lord

MINUTES

PC20/73 APOLOGIES None

PC20/74 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

PC20/75 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 10th November 2020 were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting subject to the following amendments:

PC20/68.2 2nd to last paragraph to read '*Proposals for Woodlands Mead College will be considered in the next week and is expected to go onto planning for consideration in the next three to four months.*'

&

PC20/70.2 2nd last paragraph amend Five to read '*Four*' and delete reference to '*Frances Gaudencio*'.

PC20/76 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no Members of the public present.

PC20/77 MINUTES

To agree the Minutes of the Planning Committee 16th November 2020.

To note the minutes of the Policy Resources & Communications Committee 17th November 2020.

The Grounds & Environment Committee 3rd December 2020 will be held over for consideration in January as they have yet to be circulated.

PC20/78 FINANCE

Members considered the finance reports and the supporting bank statements and reviewed the payment list. The Finance report and payments totalling **£22,084.96** for the period ending 31st October 2020 were considered and **APPROVED**.

PC20/79 Reports

79.1 **District Councillors reports:** - Cllr Sue Hatton (SH) advised members that the judicial review concerning the acceptance of a commuted sum in lieu of a travellers' site being located on the Clayton Mills site had been concluded. The case was taken forward by Copthorne Residents Association. The outcome confirmed that MSDC were permitted to accept this contribution for this site in lieu of an actual traveller's site.

SH indicated that MSDC budget position remains challenging and in particular in relation to the leisure centres and its continued need to operate within Covid guidelines.

Although Claire Hall has closed this has been offered to the NHS as a potential Covid vaccination site.

SH also confirmed that Adastra Hall has also been put forward as a potential site which the NHS are considering.

SH informed members that the small electrical items recycling service had commenced. Some Parish Councillors expressed the view that the clarity over which collection (landfill or recycling) these items should be put out with should be improved.

79.2 **County Councillor** – Cllr Lord had notified the Clerk that she would be joining the meeting late therefore members agreed to defer this matter for consideration until later on in the agenda.

79.3 **Rail matters** – Cllr Gibbons advised members that in November there were 161 train cancellations of which 124 were cancelled outright and 37 ran but failed to stop at Hassocks.

79.4 **Youth Initiatives** - Cllr Gaudencio updated members on work of the Hassocks Youth Project group. The group had recently concluded a survey at Downlands School seeking views on the sort of youth provision pupils would like to see in the parish. A good response has been received and the data will be analysed to inform the development of future initiatives as and when lockdown measure are eased.

The Youth Club remain keen to resume delivery of initiatives once restrictions are eased and are looking at ways that they can continue to provide youth activities in the current climate.

79.5 **Police matters** – nothing to report.

79.6 **Report from Councillors on meetings of outside bodies where the Council is represented** – Cllr Gaudencio informed members that she was due to attend a Hassocks Community Organisation meeting later in the week as the Parish representative. Cllr Gaudencio drew member's attention that the parish had previously had two designated representatives although only one would attend at a time. However, the other designated representative is no longer a member of the Council therefore consideration should be given to appointing a replacement representative. The Chair requested any interested members in fulfilling this role to contact the Clerk.

PC20/80 CHAIRMANS REPORT –

The Chair (IW) informed members that at the recent Grounds and Environment Committee they approved the creation of a Flood Working Group. The Chair requested any members interested in joining this group to contact the Clerk.

Cllr Weir indicated that as this was the final Council meeting before Christmas he wished to place on record his appreciation to all the staff who have continued to work throughout the lockdown restrictions whether it be on site or remotely to continue to deliver services. This was often in the face of conflicting pressures.

The Chair indicated that he had a Chairs allowance and wished to obtain endorsement from members to make a small gift to the staff in a gesture of appreciation of the work they have undertaken in this challenging year.

Cllr Baker indicated that when she was required to stand in as acting Chair earlier in the year, she was truly grateful and appreciative of all the support the team provided. Cllr Baker went on to thank not only the office based staff but the groundsman for their efforts and dedication during these challenging times.

Cllr Owens also expressed his thanks and appreciation of the support provided to enable planning matters to be considered throughout this period.

All members were in agreement with the Chairs proposal.

PC20/81 CLERK'S REPORT –

- 81.1 The Clerk introduced the report set out in **Appendix 2** which provided members with a draft budget illustrating the projected out turn position for 2020/21 and a proposed budget for 2021/22.

Members were advised that the impact of the pandemic this year had been significant, impacting on the council miscellaneous income streams and revenue expenditure for the year.

Members were then taken through the report in detail and attention was drawn to the table set out on page 3 of the report which summarised the precept levels applied by the parish council in previous years.

Members were informed that the calculation of council tax payable on a band D property if the council chose to retain the current precept level for next year would reduce from £85.22 (20/21) to £84.68 as a result of the increase in the property base to 3490.

The clerk went onto say that he was awaiting final confirmation of this figure by Mid Sussex District Council.

Based on the figures at present this would equate to a reduction of around 0.63% on council tax paid compared to this year (20/21) due to the precept being spread over a larger number of properties.

The Clerk indicated that the budget had been prepared for illustrative purposes on the assumption that the council did not amend its overall precept requirement.

The budget table set out on page 4 (item 3) of the report summarised the projected/estimated revenue out turn for this year in the left hand column. In the right hand column this detailed the potential budget requirement for the forthcoming financial year to cover the operational costs of the council.

Members were advised that the budget had been prepared on the assumption that business activity will revert back to a more normal working pattern for the larger part of the next financial year.

On page 5 of the report this summarised the level of capital expenditure (e.g. the park works) for this year which has been significant.

The Clerk indicated that the budget had been prepared to illustrate the impact on the precept on the basis that no additional funds were to be allocated to earmarked reserves at this time during budget setting and the impact of the increase in the property tax base.

The Clerk invited members to consider the notes set out on pages 6 and 7 of the report which provided members with some context on the rationale behind some of the budget allocations and variances. The Clerk indicated that he would be happy to go through each of the items in detail if members wish.

At this point the Chair invited members to ask any questions.

Cllr Simmons indicated that if the council determined not to increase the precept in real terms it would not reflect the increase in inflation therefore the council should consider at least staying in line with inflation.

Cllr Simmons went on to say that he would be keen for the council to consider investing some of its reserves to generate an improved return, although it was acknowledged that rates are tight.

Members were supportive of this approach and asked Cllr Simmons to undertake further research on potential options.

Cllr Owens sought clarification on the impact of the pandemic on the financial activity in this financial year and potential of future s106 funding from the strategic site. The Clerk outlined the impact on activity of the pandemic and confirmed that no allocation had been provided for in relation to the strategic site *section 106* funds in 2021/22. The Clerk indicated that it was likely to be a number of years before these funds were realised and will be reliant on the trigger points MSDC has incorporated into the agreement with the developer as to when these would become collectable.

Further discussion focused on investments and the proposal to come back with some suggestions by the end of financial year. Cllr Simmons was encouraged to consider joining the Policy Resources and Communications committee where financial matters are normally considered.

Cllr Weir indicated that if members were minded to consider increasing the precept the % increase shown on the parish council tax bill is the percentage increase in band D charge, not just the % increase in the precept value.

The Chair then invited the Clerk to go through the remainder of the report.

The Clerk referred members to page 5 of the report that detailed the impact on the council's earmarked reserves in the event no specific additional funding was allocated as part of the current budget setting process. Based on the current proposals and known commitments it was anticipated that earmarked reserves would reduce from a balance of £93,652 (31/3/21) to a balance of £63,652 (31/3/22)

Members were advised that they may wish to consider allocating further funds as part of the budget setting process in light of the anticipated movement.

The Clerk also indicated that as a result of the pandemic this was likely to result in some underspends/savings this financial year therefore it may be prudent to allocate some specific funds from general reserves to earmarked reserves to support the ongoing priorities of the council.

However, the Clerk stated that due to the current uncertainties regarding the ongoing impact of the pandemic on the activities of the Council for the remainder of the year it may be more appropriate to revisit this towards the end of the financial year perhaps in February once the council has a clearer view on the final outturn position.

Members were advised that if they chose to take this approach this would not prevent the various committees considering options at this current time that they may wish to consider supporting/promoting going forward, however these should be informed by the business plan.

The Clerk then took members through Appendix A which summarised the impact on the Parish Council element of council tax across all property bands if the precept level were to remain unchanged. It was restated that the parish council tax element represents a small proportion of the overall council tax liability of households.

Based on the current calculation a band D property would pay 54 pence per annum less for next year if the precept remained unchanged due to the increase in property base.

If members chose to consider increasing the precept, for every £1,000 increase this would add 29 pence per annum on a band D property.

Members sought clarification from the Clerk as to whether he had a view on what the other authorities were likely to do with their council tax.

The Clerk indicated that in light of the significant budget pressures experienced this year by district and county it is anticipated they will seek to increase their council tax up to the maximum permitted in an attempt to assist closing their current budget gaps.

Having considered the report in detail and discussing various options there was a consensus amongst members that the Council should consider retaining the current precept level. It was acknowledged that this would only make a small saving against the total Council Tax bill, but that in light of the challenging year residents have experienced - not increasing the precept would send out a positive message.

After careful consideration Members **RESOLVED** to retain the precept at £295,545 which due to the increase in property base equates to reduction for a band D equivalent property from £85.22 per annum to £84.68 per annum which represents a 0.63% reduction. (12 members voted in favour, 1 against and 1 member abstained).

81.2 **Annual Return 2019/20**

The Clerk introduced the report from the District Auditor which summarised the work of the external auditor who has signed off the annual return without amendment.

Members were advised that the external auditors did raise one issue regarding the signing of the documents however this was partly influenced due to the council being in lockdown and the papers were being considered at the council's first virtual meeting therefore adjustments had to be made regarding the signing of documents. Members duly considered and **noted** the findings of the External Auditors report

81.3 Pension Pooling Agreement

Members were requested to note the actions agreed at Policy Resources & Communications Committee that the revised agreement be duly signed by the chair on behalf of the council. The actions were duly noted.

81.4 Adastra Park Ground Conditions

Grounds and Environment committee agreed in principle to request full council to consider allocating some of the funding from the general professional fees budget to support the commissioning of some work to explore the viability of drainage solutions to improve ground conditions within the park.

This recommendation was subject to confirmation from the Clerk that a detailed report had not previously been considered by council.

The Clerk indicated that since the Grounds & Environment Committee he had managed to locate a basic report dating back to 2010 re drainage which primarily focused on the north field and which included a suggestion for drainage at the side of the play area. The type of company's approached tended to be either groundworks companies or pitch drainage contractors rather than specialist drainage engineers. There was a lack of detail on file within the submission and only basic drawings had been provided.

At the time the council pursued the option to install drainage within the football pitches in the north field. This was concluded sometime in 2014 which has had mixed results.

Members were advised that since the report in 2010 the configuration of the park has changed. Based on known information the park had two football pitches in the north field and the cricket square in the south field and a small skate park area.

The park now has:

South field

- Cricket square and 2 junior football pitches
- Enlarged skate park with drainage soakaway
- Rain garden discharging water directly into the ground as opposed to into the main drainage system.

North field

- Revised play area with a French drain installed and soakaway.
- Football pitches – 1 x senior and 3-4 junior pitches.

The suggested approach if members were minded to support this proposal was to appoint suitable drainage engineers to assess the viability of any drainage solutions

Cllr Bill Hatton indicated he did recall the report in 2010 but this was very different to the approach being considered now. BH stated that from his recollection the 2010 report did not involve proper engineering report/assessments and that his understanding was we are now looking at a more technical assessment to determine whether there was a viable affordable solution to improve ground conditions therefore was a different piece of work.

The Clerk confirmed that this was the case and this review would look to use specialists to establish if viable solutions are available. This could include either an engineering solution or SUDS or a combination.

Clerk indicated that he had identified a number of potential companies that could be considered.

Other members were in support of the approach using appropriate professionals to generate technical reports to enable the Council to confirm whether the aspiration of improving ground conditions cost effectively within the park is viable.

Members **RESOLVED** to approve the release of funds from the General Professional Fees budget to support the appointment of a suitable specialist to undertake this study.

It was also agreed that the Clerk should obtain quotations and report back to Council for consideration.

81.5 **Committee Membership**

Members were requested to consider a request from Cllr Tester to join the Grounds & Environment committee. Member's views were sought.

Members **RESOLVED** to **AGREE** to Cllr Tester being appointed to the Grounds and Environment Committee

81.6 **Co-option of Members**

Members were informed that the Council had recently received confirmation from Mid Sussex District Council that there had been no call for election via the publication notice of vacancy. Therefore, the Council is permitted to co-opt onto the Council. In line with NALC best practice an advertisement has been placed inviting interested parties to apply.

The Clerk indicated that those individuals who had previously expressed an interest in joining the Council had been contacted and notified of the vacancy

The Chair then invited the County Cllr Kirsty Lord to introduce her report which had been deferred earlier in the meeting (79.2)

PC20/82 County Cllrs report:

Cllr Kirsty Lord (KL) advised members that she was still awaiting further clarification regarding the specific flooding instances in the last two years referred to at the last parish council meeting.

KL understood that the Surface Management Plan modelling out turn for this year had been delayed; however it was anticipated a piece of work will be undertaken on Hassocks in the next year.

KL confirmed that County have agreed to increase the financial support to assist in the delivery of the Hassocks Parking initiative after the quotes came in higher than anticipated which should enable the works to progress.

Woodlands Mead School planning application has gone in

KL indicated that, since Lockdown 2, Mill Road which is a single track road with passing points to the Jack and Jill windmills had recently become clogged with cars, particularly at weekends. Police have on occasions had to close the road due to the volume of cars parked on the road which has impacted on access. County are currently looking at options to alleviate these issues.

Cllr Weir also requested whether KL could take up similar issues with Cllr Joy Dennis regarding New Way Lane where vehicles are also parking in passing places. Cllr Lord agreed to do so.

Cllr Gaudencio requested KL to contact her regarding joining the Parish Council newly formed flood working group. KL confirmed she was happy to be contacted.

Members were informed that a number of drains had recently been cleaned /cleared including the B2112 at Halfway House and the area close to the Garden centre.

Cllr Tester and Owens informed members they recently attended a SDNP workshop where it was discussed how landowners could assist in flood management and the potential assistance that the SDNP could offer

PC20/83 URGENT MATTERS AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN - None

PC20/84 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the date of the next Council meeting is **Tuesday 12th January 2021 at 7.30pm.**

DRAFT