



MINUTES

Meeting: PARISH COUNCIL

Date: 5th June 2023

Time: 7.30PM

Venue: PARISH HALL, THORNWOOD COMMON

PRESENT:

Councillors (10) Cllr Buckley (Chairman), Cllr Spearman, Cllr Mrs Hawkins, Cllr Mrs S Jackman MBE, Cllr Clegg, Cllr Blanks, Cllr Ms Wood, Cllr Kinnear, Cllr Born, Cllr Irvine

Officers in Attendance (2)

Susan De Luca – Parish Clerk

Adriana Jones – Principal Financial Officer

Members of the Public (0)

Members of the Press (1)

C23.026 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (4)

Apologies received from Cllr Wood, Cllr Bedford, Cllr Stroud and Cllr Tyler.

C23.027 OTHER ABSENCES (0)

None.

C23.028 MINUTES

Councillors **AGREED** the Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 10th May 2023.

C23.029 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Spearman declared an interest in any item concerning the Local Plan.

C23.030 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None.

C23.031 REPORT OF THE CLERK

- **Coffee With Cops** – This event was held at the Parish Hall at Thornwood on Friday 12th May in the morning, however no more than 8 people attended (including Councillors). PC Cook had contacted the Clerk asking to hold another session in June, however Councillors felt this was too soon and **AGREED** the next session should be at the end of July.
- **Anti-Social Behaviour** – The Clerk advised she had received a number of complaints from local residents regarding anti-social behaviour, such as use of motorbikes on open spaces, dog fouling, parking and similar such matters. Each time she receives such a complaint she directs them to attend the Coffee with Cops meetings or to contact EFDC Safer Communities, however more often than not the residents just want the Parish Council to be a sounding board and to report these problems on their behalf. The Clerk suggested Councillors should direct residents to the same organisations if approached. With regard to the matter of vandalism and possible arson at the Radio Station Bowls Club, this would be covered in the closed session at the end of the meeting, however there had been some confusion regarding whether or not this had been reported as a formal arson incident with the police, however The Clerk had clarified this with PC Cook. Cllr Born advised that when he went up there, there were some youths on push bikes who were very chatty and stated

they had been talking to a police officer after the event and had given them a name and address of a person who they thought may have caused the fire. The Clerk advised she was aware that some individuals thought they knew who was responsible, however this matter was now in the hands of the police.

- **Meeting Regarding North Weald Bassett Housing Development** – Members of the Parish Council and the Clerk had been invited to attend a briefing on Wednesday 24th May on this matter. The meeting was very informative.
- **Weald Common** – The Clerk provided an update on the possibility of creating a dementia friendly area at Weald Common, and the possibility of £15,000 of funding being available to provide this by EFDC via the UK Prosperity Fund. The Clerk explained this would be to support those with dementia and carers, and would be an area of sensory familiarity with specific signage and seating. Further information was expected on this in the coming weeks. Cllr Born expressed concern that access on to Weald Common would be a problem because of the poor state of the access road by the village hall. The Clerk advised that the Parish Council did have 8 parking spaces at this location specifically for visitors to Weald Common. The Chairman suggested a location near the block of trees by the football pitch would be suitable. Cllr Born asked if the Council was going to develop the space next to the village hall, to which the Clerk advised this land wasn't owned by the Parish Council. The Clerk advised that if the dementia friendly area did happen, an ongoing maintenance programme would need to be agreed. The Clerk confirmed it would also be necessary for funds to be used to draw up a plan for the area, but it would be a worthwhile investment to make. Members agreed.
- **All other Administrative & Matters on the Agenda** – The Clerk and Office staff had been working on other matters within the Agenda. The Clerk reminded Councillors of the dates for both the Open Spaces and Environmental Committee meeting and the Parish Hall Liaison meeting.

C23.032 REPORTS AND MEMBER REPORTS

The following reports were **NOTED**:

- a) **Chairman's Report** – The Chairman advised Councillors that the Christmas Tree given to the Parish by EFDC and planted on the village green had taken a turn for the worst and needed replacing despite regular watering. The Chairman would speak to Cllr Bedford to see if he could replace. The Chairman also thanked the representatives from the now closed preservation society who continue to manage the garden box at the village sign.
- b) **Vice Chairman's Report** – Cllr Hawkins confirmed that the next District Councillor surgery would be on 30th June 2023, albeit just waiting for one more confirmation of attendance. It was expected to be at 10am, and Cllr Hawkins would manage any appointments.
- c) **District & County Councillors Reports** – No reports.
- d) **Parish Councillors** – Cllr Blanks had provided a written report which was included within the agenda pack. The Clerk confirmed a copy of the report would be appended to the minutes. Cllr Blanks provided an update on the report, stating that Qualis had lost another £450,000 since this time.

The Clerk tabled a written report from Cllr Born received too late to be included within the agenda. Cllr Etherington asked for clarification concerning the name change, to which Cllr Born responded stating some people had suggested to him that the name Weald Common should be changed to Weald Forest because it was no longer a common, but a forest, and that a lot of people had been showing some push back to the tree planting. The Clerk confirmed there were two stones confirming the name was Weald Common. Cllr Mrs Jackman asked for further information concerning the report about foreigners in the village, to which Cllr Born stated that he was simply reporting what members of the public had reported to him, and that there was a lot in the press about such matters at the current time and that this could have prompted people to raise the matter.

Cllr Mrs Jackman asked Cllr Blanks if he had received any further update from EFDC concerning the auditing of EFDC accounts, to which Cllr Blanks stated that the audited accounts for the year ended 20/21 had not been completed, and that it was understood they were hoping to do two years together but he suspected they were having difficulty because of the structure of Qualis and how their accounts get amalgamated with EFDCs. Cllr Mrs Jackman stated that the problem with Qualis was that we don't seem to get any answers, stating that the Chairman had stood down and she wondered who was now running Qualis. Cllr Blanks advised that Sacha Jevans was the person. The Chairman suggested that the District Councillor surgery at the end of June was a good opportunity to raise these matters. Cllr Born stated that he supported Cllr Blanks 100% concerning Qualis. Cllr Mrs Jackman stated that the public were not permitted to go to Qualis meetings so you cannot ask any questions. The Chairman again reiterated that any Councillors who were concerned could make an appointment to attend the District Councillor Surgery. The Clerk confirmed that other people were asking questions, to which Cllr Mrs Jackman stated rightly so, as people ought to know what the situation was. The Clerk suggested both Cllr Mrs Jackman and Cllr Blanks should make an appointment for the District surgery. The Clerk stated that the Parish Council did not have the power to do anything, but the Councillor surgeries are creating an opportunity to challenge District Councillors, but that questions could also be asked at District meetings. Cllr Blanks stated that you cannot ask questions about Qualis at these meetings, and that if you did the response is that it's 'under investigation' which is what the Chief Executive of EFDC said when Cllr Stephen Murray asked a question in January. Cllr Murray had also asked further questions at the last meeting as to when he would get a response.

Cllr Blanks stated that in June 2022 he had asked a question at a Councillor Surgery regarding the previous MD and COO of Qualis who had been rather naughty 7 months before, and that he had heard nothing. Then in January 2023 at a secret Council meeting it seemed this MD and COO disappeared, with no details or action for at least 6 months, and that he would not waste his time attending another Councillor Surgery. The Clerk stated that EFDC had just undergone an election, with the majority of District Councillors being re-elected, and that if the people in the district did not like how their money was being managed they would not have re-elected the members. The Clerk stated that it was the press who could get the message out about Qualis. The Chairman stated that again Qualis was taking up a considerable amount of time, and that Councillors should raise this matter at the surgery with District Councillors. Cllr Blanks stated that provided the minutes of this meeting were accurate and complete then the concern shown by a certain number of Councillors might filter back up the chain to those people who had just been re-elected. The Chairman confirmed that every member had the opportunity to challenge the minutes if they so wish. Cllr Etherington stated that as long as it was recorded that some Councillors had concerns about Qualis, it would be on the record. The Clerk confirmed that this was why the report would be appended to the minutes.

Cllr Kinnear advised that Cllr Wood had asked a question concerning Cunningham House, as it had been reported it was set to close. This would affect the whole village as a specialised facility in the community for those with dementia was going to be lost, as well as a local employer. It was also concerning as to what would happen with the land or building if it was sold off. It was **AGREED** the Clerk would write to the management of Cunningham House, and also ECC as they use it as part of their facility. Cllr Etherington stated that the draft Neighbourhood Plan emphasized the need for suitable housing for the aging population, and that this site was very precious in terms of the facilities it provided.

Cllr Clegg reported that Community Speedwatch had been extremely busy having been all over the parish, starting out on 23rd May in Upland Road at 7.56am to 9.15am, with approximately 14% of vehicles exceeding the speed limit, the highest of which was 51MPH in the 30MPH zone. He had submitted these details to the Speedwatch County Co-ordinator who was very concerned and advised that they would arrange for a police presence in June. In addition, speedwatch events took place in both Weald Bridge Road and Hastingwood Road, however the latter had just been resurfaced which automatically slowed vehicles down. They had also attended Mill Street and out of the 84 cars, 6 were speeding with speeds ranging from 49-54MPH in a 40MPH zone. On the request of Cllr Bedford, they had also attended Skipps Corner earlier in the day between 2.30pm and 3.35pm, resulting in recording a total of 653 vehicles, and out of those 2.9% were speeding, the highest being 41MPH. They had also completed a check on vehicles at this location coming from the Epping end, and out of 19 checked there were around 4 or 5 doing over 38MPH. The next event would be 27th June. The new volunteer had been with them earlier in the day. Cllr Clegg took this opportunity to state that he too felt let down by the Coffee with Cops events, and would not be attending again. The Chairman raised the matter of speeding along the B181 and that he felt the speeding was excessive and it was used as a rat run between the A414 and Epping. Cllr Clegg said with the new houses, this will be horrendous.

- e) **Queens Hall Charity Report** – Cllr Kinnear provided a report on behalf of Cllr Wood, advising that the Charity held their AGM the prior week, and there had been a number of changes in the Governing Document with UKA being removed as they had failed to attend any meetings over the last 12 months. This would allow other more pro-active groups to get involved. Three new Parish Council trustees were appointed – Liane Morgan, Penny White, and Holly Twitchet, and one new user Steve Hogg from the Football club. The Hall was doing very well with no major issues to report. The Clerk stated that the hall was almost bankrupt five years ago, however now it held around £22,000, and they were having to turn down bookings as they were fully booked 7 days a week.
- f) **Neighbourhood Plan Report** – The RFO reported that a response had been received from Navigus Planning who had been asked to undertake a further review of the draft Neighbourhood Plan policies against the now made Local Plan, and that a full review of the draft plan against this and EFDCs feedback would be conducted at a Neighbourhood Plan Committee meeting on 14th June at 7pm. Councillors were reminded that every Councillor was a member of this Committee. This would enable the Council to consider how it should move forward.
- h) **Highways Report** – The Clerk advised that she was concerned at the lack of action of ECC Highways, with Parish Council staff regularly reporting matters however very little action seems to happen and multiple reference numbers being recorded. Sometimes if a matter has two or three reports, the ECC system will not allow a further report to be made. The Clerk confirmed she would raise this matter with ECC Cllr Whitbread. The Clerk further advised

that the extremely large pothole in Bassett Gardens had been there for over 9 months, and that this matter would now be reported under the Members pothole scheme. There was an emergency number that can be used, but this should not be abused.

The Clerk advised that a Thornwood Resident had been trying to address the issue of parking on the corner of Upland Road, and that as a result of this parking the Parish Council notice board had been damaged. Cllr Clegg advised that there were many different hoops to jump through in order to try and get double yellow lines along this stretch, including getting 75% positive response from the houses in the road. Cllr Clegg asked if Councillors would support double yellow lines along the stretch of Upland Road from the notice board to the junction with the main road, to which Councillors **AGREED** they would.

C23.033 FINANCIAL

- a) **Payments** – Councillors formally **APPROVED** the list of Cheques & Monthly Statement of Accounts up to 31st May 2023.
- b) **Investments** – Councillors **NOTED** that £100,000 had been invested with CCLA on 5th May 2023, and that a total of £278.40 interest had been received up to the period 31st May. This interest would be paid into the Parish Councils Unity Deposit Account.
- c) **Internal Audit** – Members noted the Internal Audit was carried out on 25th May 2023 and that this would be on the July agenda.

C23.034 APPROVAL OF ACCOUNTS 2022/2023

Councillors **APPROVED** the 2022/2023 accounts. **PROPOSED** Cllr Mrs Hawkins, **SECONDED** Cllr Kinnear. Agreed by unanimous vote.

C23.035 EXTERNAL AUDIT (AGAR) 2022/2023

Each year the Councils Accounts and Practices (known as the Annual Governance and Accountability Return - AGAR) are reviewed by an external auditor appointed by the Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments Ltd. The following dates apply for this Council:

- The requirement for the public inspection period (to include the first 10 working days of July) will start 12th June and will end 21st July.
- The AGAR must be approved by 30th June 2023 and submitted to PKF Littlejohn by 3rd July 2023.

This Council is subject to an Intermediate Review as part of the limited assurance review. The Council:

- a) Reviewed the effectiveness of the system of internal control of this Council
- b) Considered the findings of this review
- c) Prepared the Annual Governance Statement (Section 1)
- d) Approved the Annual Governance Statement by way of **RESOLUTION**
- e) Considered the Accounting Statements (Section 2)
- f) Approved the Accounting Statements by way of **RESOLUTION**
- g) Ensured that both the Annual Governance Statement and Accounting Statements is signed and dated by the person presiding at the meeting.

C23.036 LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME

North Weald Bassett Parish Council's current resolution concerning access the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) does not allow any new members to join the scheme. Each year, this Parish Council is required to complete its re-enrolment duties with the pensions regulator. As part of this process, an employee of the Parish Council has expressed an interest

in joining the LGPS. As is stipulated by the regulations, the Parish Council needed to consider passing a new resolution allowing new members to join. In addition, a public notice had been displayed giving 7 days notice of the intention to pass such a resolution. It was **RESOLVED**, and subsequently **AGREED** by way of unanimous vote, to allow new members into the scheme as per the published notice.

**C23.037 NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD REPORT TO CABINET - NEXT STAGE:
DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH WEALD ALLOCATED EMPLOYMENT LAND**

Members noted the report from the EFDC Cabinet Agenda held on 30th May 2023 in relation to Development of North Weald Airfield, a full copy of which was attached to the agenda. Cllr Born asked when Qualis or any contractor in Qualis's position, were they obliged to consult with anyone, or does this Cabinet just rubber stamp it and it goes through. Cllr Born continued stating he was a little concerned about transport, health and safety, and the wellbeing of parishioners, and was wondering where in any consultation does Qualis or any contractor pick up on these issues and actually design them into their plan. Cllr Born stated that there were a set of rules – CDM - that contractors must abide by when they are doing certain work, and that he wondered how the information gets back to the designers so they can understand the needs of the people rather than pushing things through without any consultation. The Clerk stated that she was not quite sure how this fit into the design of Employment Land in this area. The RFO explained that the current position regarding the Airfield was that a Strategic Masterplan had been agreed which was the overall design of the strategic element of the site, and the detailed design elements would be considered further down the line. The RFO confirmed that just under half of the employment allocation in the local plan would be sold off, but that any development would still have to be designed with the strategic masterplan in mind. The smaller area of land that Qualis had just been appointed to look into, one would hope that Qualis would look at design matters in this area. The PFO suggested Cllr Born kept his eye out on the EFDC agendas. The Clerk referenced page 75 of the report which detailed the Qualis Proposal, and this mentioned design elements. Cllr Born asked if green issued would also be considered, to which the PFO confirmed they would.

Cllr Blanks stated that he was surprised there was no mention of the previous consultation conducted by Soundings, and the cost associated with it, and that it seemed to have disappeared with no record of it. In addition, he was concerned that instead of the Council dealing with it, it had been passed over to Qualis. Cllr Spearman stated that it seemed Qualis had their fingers in every pie, making them like their own check out. Qualis seem to be the main contractor for EFDC in almost everything he looked at, and that it didn't seem right to him and he could not understand why questions couldn't be asked about it. The Chairman stated that questions could be asked about the overall plan, and that it seemed to be in its infancy at the moment but that Cllr Bedford had provided a number of points of clarification to the Chairman and Clerk, including the fact that the control tower would remain in the ownership of EFDC. Cllr Spearman expressed concern that if you put all your eggs in one basket, they can then hold you to ransom. It was noted that the strip of land did not include the gymnasium. Cllr Spearman stated he supported Cllr Blanks with trying to find out further information.

The Chairman stated that he felt this was a slightly different matter, as the concern is usage of the land on the Airfield which is in our Parish interest, and not directed at the company doing the work. The Clerk confirmed she would write to Cllr Bedford and ask him to keep the Council updated.

Cllr Mrs Etherington suggested this Council should continue to do what it was doing, with Cllr Blanks looking into matters now that Cllr Spearman has supported what he was doing, as this kept Councillors involved, and that she felt somewhat uneasy about the situation as it was not clear what was going on. Cllr Mrs Etherington suggested this Council should keep an eye on this, and that she was not sure how much Cllr Bedford could assist the Parish Council on this matter as there was only so much he could tell us as he was a District Councillor. The Airfield Land could be sold to somebody we don't want. The Chairman stated that it was unclear if this Council would even have a say in the matter. Cllr Mrs Etherington suggested there was no harm to keep an eye on it, noting the comment made earlier in the meeting by Cllr Blanks that there had been a further £450,000 deficit on the Qualis Accounts since he did his report.

The Chairman suggested that everybody should read the minutes thoroughly before the next meeting. Cllr Spearman stated that a lot of the EFDC work used to be done in house, and was this a way of EFDC not taking responsibility if things went wrong. Cllr Born asked if Qualis had an open day or consultation day to encourage people to get involved, to which the Clerk suggested attendance at the District Councillor surgeries to ask questions about Qualis. Cllr Blanks stated he was more than happy to help his fellow Councillors understand the situation with Qualis, confirming that he had been forwarded a link to a recording from the EFDC Local Council Liaison Committee meeting, which included a presentation regarding Qualis, which included how Qualis would help the community, by a company which was actually dormant. Cllr Blanks requested this link was sent to all Councillors.

C23.038 NORTH WEALD BASSETT HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Attached to the agenda were the notes of the presentation to Councillors from Vistry. The Chairman stated that all houses in the Parish should have received a brochure from Vistry about the proposed development. Cllr Born asked if Vistry was a developer, to which the Chairman stated it was previously Countryside Homes but they had changed their name following a merger. The Clerk stated that it was understood there had been around 600 hits on the Masterplan website, and 25 people had been booked onto the walk round tours. The PFO confirmed the dates of the consultation events being run by Vistry for Councillors information, confirming they would be publicised on the Parish Council social media pages and website.

C23.039 FLAG DAYS

NOTED that Councillor Stroud will be doing the Armed Forces day flag later in June, but that this would also be on the agenda next month to agree who would raise the flags later in the year. The Clerk had sent a picture to the Norwegian Airforce of the Norwegian flag raised, for which they were very grateful.

C23.040 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

The public and press were excluded from the meeting, the Council believing that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business about to be discussed.

C23.041 GOING FORWARD PARISH COUNCIL PREMISES - NORTH WEALD METHODIST CHURCH

Councillors **NOTED** that the Clerk had received some responses from the Methodist Church, however it seemed to be a holding response. The Clerk had followed this up and spoken to a number of individuals, and had received confirmation that a particular representative had been allocated this Councils enquiry. Cllr Born suggested writing to the MP.

C23.042 NORTH WEALD RADIO STATION BOWLS CLUB

Councillors **NOTED** the recent incident of probable arson, resulting in most of the Bowls Club being destroyed. The Trustees of the Bowls Club were aware of the matter. The Clerk had been liaising with the Solicitor regarding this matter.

C23.043 GOING FORWARD PREMISES FOR PARISH COUNCIL OFFICES

The Clerk confirmed she had heard from Carolyn Peters, Service Development Manager for Libraries, confirming that the office space was vacant and available. There was some concern about the way the Parish Council had been treated. It was **AGREED** the Clerk would meet with ECC to discuss further and report back to Council.

Meeting closed 20.47

Signed

Date

Cllr Blanks Members Report:

Qualis Brief Results extracted from published accounts at Companies House from start to 30 09 2022

Profit/(Loss)	Qualis Group Ltd	Qualis Commercial Ltd	Qualis Living Ltd	Qualis Management Ltd	Total of all Qualis Companies
30/10/2020	£16,379	-£971,738	-£182,917	-£352,954	-£1,491,230
30/09/2021	£49,186	-£1,777,000	-£575,872	£182,311	-£2,121,375
30/09/2022	£131,936	£65,317	-£2,150,469	£107,010	-£1,846,206
Total Profit/ Loss for 3 years	£197,501	-£2,683,421	-£2,909,258	-£63,633	-£5,458,811

Value of Company Shown as Shareholders Funds	Qualis Group Ltd	Qualis Commercial Ltd	Qualis Living Ltd	Qualis Management Ltd	Total of all Qualis Companies
30/10/2020	£16,380	-£971,737	-£182,916	-£352,953	-£1,491,226
30/09/2021	£65,566	-£2,748,737	-£758,788	-£170,642	-£3,612,601
30/09/2022	£197,502	-£2,683,420	-£2,909,257	-£63,632	-£5,458,807
Value of all Qualis after 3 years	£197,502	-£2,683,420	-£2,909,257	-£63,632	-£5,458,807

Points of interest?

Wasn't Qualis set up to provide extra income for the council?

No dividends etc have yet been paid to EFDC.

Results do not include the cost of pensions for those transferred from EFDC who will have to pay the long term costs.

Strange that the only company that does not have a trading remit is the one reporting a profit. Ie Qualis Group Ltd

What does Qualis Group do?

Losing five and a half million in 3 years takes some doing.

How are overheads allocated from EFDC - if at all?

What do Deloitte's think of the published accounts?

How will Deloitte's produce a set of consolidated EFDC accounts with different year ends, if ever?

Is there a hope/reliance that Qualis Homes (presently dormant) will come to rescue by selling homes when built?