



MINUTES

Meeting: PARISH COUNCIL

Date: 5th February 2024

Time: 7.30PM

Venue: PARISH HALL, THORNWOOD COMMON

PRESENT:

Councillors (10) A Buckley (Chairman), B Clegg, R Spearman, Mrs S Jackman MBE, A Tyler, N Born, Cllr Mrs Hawkins, A Irvine, Ms D Wood, C Kinnear

* for part of meeting

Officers in Attendance (2)

Susan Deluca - Clerk

Adriana Jones – Principle Finance Officer

Members of the Public (2) – Inc PC Andy Cook*, and one resident

Members of the Press (1)

The Chairman confirmed the meeting would be audio recorded for the purposes of minutes taking.

C23.159 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (3)

Apologies from Cllr Mrs P Etherington, Cllr Blanks and Cllr Bedford.

C23.160 OTHER ABSENCES (1)

Cllr Stroud.

C23.161 MINUTES

Councillors **AGREED** the Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 8th January 2024.

C23.162 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Spearman declared an interest in the Local Plan.

C23.163 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Chairman welcomed the members of the public. PC Cook provided Councillors with an update on the crime statistics, confirming he had taken the figures from 4th December 2023. There had been two burglaries, one at Elm Close and one at Marconi Bungalows, an attempted burglary in Vicarage Lane, 2 theft of motor vehicles and 2 attempted theft of motor vehicles. There had also been theft from a motor vehicle of a work van with £10,000 of tools and equipment stolen. The Chairman advised he had reported some discarded registration plates under the railway bridge at Kiln Road, and asked if an update could be provided. PC Cook advised they pick up many discarded number plates, which are all run through the national computer with 90% coming back saying not stolen, however sometimes people don't realise their plates have been stolen and think they have just been lost. They can be used in a crime and are then discarded. PC Cook advised there are regular reports of issues at the top of Kiln Lane, and that he will pay some attention to that area.

Councillors advised PC Cook of the awful situation with traffic the previous Saturday as a result of the Carp Show and Market both running on the airfield which had caused gridlock in the area. If somebody had needed an ambulance, they simply would not have got through. It was

AGREED the Clerk would write to EFDC formally advising them of this issue. Cllr Born asked if there were other entrance and exits on the airfield, to which PC Cook advised there were but these were generally emergency use only. Cllr Tyler stated that EFDC make a lot of money from the Market and Carp Show and that they should use some of these funds to bring back the wardens to control the traffic.

[PC Cook Left]

The Chairman advised that the local resident who was present had written to the Clerk to ask a question regarding the Lower Forest / Wintry Wood, and asked the resident to address Council. The resident stated that her question had arisen following a report by the BBC earlier in the day which stated that Epping Forest was worth £19billion to society, and that as a large part of the Lower Forest / Wintry Wood was in Thornwood she wondered how much the Parish Council reflects on what this gives to the village. The resident asked all Councillors when they last walked in the forest. The Chairman asked if there was a specific question of Council she was asking, to which the resident advised she wanted to know how much this Council was reflecting on the forest and its worth to the village, as after looking at recent planning applications she couldn't see anywhere that objections were raised concerning the impact on the forest, in particular the recent application regarding Forest Cottage. Cllr Ms Wood stated that the Parish Council did object to this application, which the resident had already noted however stated it was on parking concerns and not about the effect it would have on the forest. Cllr Ms Wood stated that the Council had considered the sites proximity to the forest, and that it was quite a way away and wouldn't encroach onto forest land. The resident stated that the question was also about the allotments and what they were supposed to be, as well asking if these new properties would be permitted to extend onto the allotment land. Cllr Tyler advised that each and every application must be looked at in isolation, and that there cannot be a general inference regarding the forest.

The local resident stated that she therefore understood from what the Parish Council was saying was that it had no comments to make on the effect development would have on the forest. Cllr Ms Wood reiterated that the development the resident had referred to was not in the forest, and that the area around the site was quite adequate for additional parking, and that the resident was asking the Parish Council to comment on something that was outside the Corporation of London Land. The resident stated she was asking the Parish Council in the future to be aware of the effect development has on the forest and the amount of people who use the forest. The Chairman advised that the Clerk had in fact liaised with a representative of the Corporation of London who was Chairman of the Commons Committee, and was happy to pass these details on to the resident, however the resident advised she could find these details out herself. Cllr Clegg stated that the Parish Council does consider the impact of possible overdevelopment when an application comes in for something double the size of a current site, and that it should also be noted that you could not even erect a bird box in the forest without permission from the Corporation of London and that it was a sacrosanct situation.

The Chairman thanked the resident for attending, stating her points had been noted, and that whilst it may not be evident that the Parish Council considered the forest, she should rest assured that Council does consider these points as and when appropriate.

C23.164 REPORT OF THE CLERK

The Clerk provided the following reports:

- a) Use of Office at Queens Hall – Now open to the public Wednesday mornings 10am – 12 Noon. This has been publicised.
- b) North Weald Bassett Strategic Masterplan – response has been submitted.
- c) Position Statement – this is with the distributors. Some copies have started to be distributed in Hastingwood and North Weald. It was not clear if they had gone out in Thornwood yet, and the Clerk confirmed she would check. The Clerk advised she had received half a dozen calls and a couple of emails thanking the Parish Council for putting this out.
- d) Sale of North Weald Methodist Church – this was a separate item within the agenda.

C23.165 REPORTS & MEMBERS REPORTS

- a) **Chairman's Report** – The Chairman confirmed he had met with a couple of prospective gardeners regarding maintenance of the garden outside the shops in North Weald following confirmation received from the current gardener that he can no longer complete the work. The Clerk and Chairman will liaise regarding this.
- b) **Vice Chairman's Report** – Cllr Mrs Hawkins advised that monthly allotment visits would start in March.
- c) **District & County Councillors Reports** – No reports, however the Clerk advised she had sent an email to Cllr Mrs Hawkins regarding a future Councillor Surgery, stating that this would need to take place before the Purdah period which starts on 21st March. Cllr Hawkins confirmed she would liaise with the District Councillors regarding this.
- d) **Parish Councillors Reports** – Cllr Born had submitted a written report regarding possible speed restriction measures through the High Road in North Weald. The Chairman stated it was a very factual report, and that some years ago there was a speed survey conducted at the chicane section of the High Road near Elm Gardens, the results of which came in at an average speed of just over 30MPH. The Chairman stated that he had become more aware of a problem by the Zebra crossing near the shops, and that he agreed the Council needed to look at ways to try and improve safety along this stretch of road. He had asked ECC to look at installing a new sign from the northern approach advising of a zebra crossing outside the shops. Cllr Clegg stated that in the last 10 days or so the Police had conducted speed checks outside the vets, so this data was available somewhere. Cllr Clegg also reminded Councillors of the speed checks undertaken by the Community Speedwatch team on a number of occasions which suggested there was not a significant speeding issue along the High Road. The Clerk confirmed that she had asked ECC Cllr Whitbread that the zebra crossings in the village were repainted.

Cllr Irvine asked if the regular meetings between the Clerk, Chairman, members of ECC and occasionally other representatives still took place, to which the Chairman stated that these had not taken place for some time but that he would be happy to update the 'shopping list' of Highway works and raise this again with Cllr Whitbread. The Clerk confirmed she would try to arrange another meeting. The Chairman suggested that Cllr Born's report was also raised at this meeting. Cllr Tyler stated that all the recent pothole repairs seem to be failing with further holes appearing.

- e) **Queens Hall Charity Report** – Cllr Ms Wood reported that all was going well, with another user recently joining for a fitness class. In addition, Cllr Ms Wood confirmed she had met with representatives regarding the Youth Club, and that bookings were starting on 27th February for 7 weeks. Their hope is that if they secure funding, the event would morph into a youth club. Cllr Ms Wood had confirmed to the representatives that from the Parish Councils perspective, the cooking events were entirely separate to the possible Youth Club. The representatives had also confirmed that Councillors were welcome to pop along and see how the club was run. The Clerk confirmed that the Youth Club representatives had contacted her earlier that day, and that she would speak with the Chairman in the coming days.
- f) **Neighbourhood Plan Report** – A copy of the draft minutes from the Neighbourhood Plan Committee meeting held on 31st January were tabled. This matter would be a formal agenda item for consideration at the March Parish Council meeting.
- g) **Highways** – As reported earlier, the Clerk has requested the zebra crossings in North Weald be repainted, and confirmed that she had spoken with Cllr Bedford about the traffic in the village the prior Saturday after she had received complaints from residents. The Chairman advised that the current roadworks in the High Road through North Weald were frustrating, and that the Parish Council had been incorrectly informed that these works would be in Emberson Way. Cllr Mrs Hawkins advised that Thornwood seemed to also be having a lot of roadworks recently.

C23.166 PARISH HALL AT THORNWOOD HIRE FEES

Members noted that the hire fees for the Parish Hall at Thornwood needed to be considered for the municipal year 2024/2025. A sheet giving the current fees for the Parish Hall together with a number of other Halls in nearby locations was attached to the agenda. Councillors noted that the hall hire fees were not increased last year, and had remained the same for the last 2 years. After discussion, it was **AGREED** that the hall hire fees should increase by 4%, which was regarded in line with inflation as at December 2023, effective 1st April 2024.

C23.167 D DAY COMMEMORATIONS 6TH JUNE 2024

The Clerk updated Councillors on the D Day Commemorations which were taking place across the country, with communities asked to purchase a ‘Lamp of Peace’ at a cost of £55, to be displayed in a prominent position in the parish. Councillors **AGREED** to the purchase of the lamp, and to place this at the Debt of Honour.

C23.168 PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT

Councillors noted that the Annual Report was published every year in time for the Annual Assembly, however it had been suggested that the report could be updated to make it more parishioner friendly. Besides the usual news items, the focus would be much more on what Councillors are involved in, for example highlighting any volunteering within the parish, Battle of Britain, Weald Common official opening, Remembrance Day, Sensory Garden, Citizen of the Year, Kings Coronation, Norway House Children Party, Coffee with Cops, District Councillor surgeries, community speedwatch, councillors involvement in poppy appeal, promote the Queens Hall, etc. In addition, it has been several years since the Annual Report had been distributed door-to-door, the cost of which was expected to be around £350. Cllr Ms Wood stated she would fully support a renewed document going to every house in the Parish and put on the Parish Councils website. Cllr Irvine confirmed he too supported this, however suggested that it should also include some of the more challenging aspects of council business such as

campaigns, matters we fight for, issues with EFDC and ECC, potholes, etc. He stated the Councils frustrations should also be included to give a full overview for residents. Consideration should also be given to how it could be interactive, with the suggestion that perhaps people could leave feedback or comments / compliments / complaints via the website, thus giving people an opportunity to express their opinions. It was also suggested that the Lower Forest / Wintry Wood should also be included given the residents points raised at the meeting. Councillors **AGREED** to the change in format, and that a copy should be distributed to each home in the Parish.

C23.169 COFFEE WITH COPS

Members noted that there would be a Coffee with Cops at the Parish Councils new Wednesday Office at the Queens Hall on Wednesday 7th February between 10am and 12 Noon. Posters were now on the Noticeboards and social media.

C23.170 NORTH WEALD METHODIST CHURCH

Members recalled that the Parish Council had been engaged in correspondence with the Methodist Church administrators for well over 2 years with regard to the possible purchase of the now closed Methodist Church in High Road, North Weald to ensure it remained as a community asset/facility. Members recalled the administrative officers of the Church had undertaken to advise the Parish Council prior to any sale/auction taking place, however this never happened and the property has now been listed for sale with an Epping Estate Agent. The property is listed for F1 use which is Community Use. The Clerk attended an Open Afternoon and registered this Parish Council's interest in the possible purchase of the property. Attached to the agenda was the formal sale particulars which included that 'Best & Final Offers' would need to be placed with the Estate Agents by 12 noon on Friday 16th February, as well as providing details as to where funds were going to come from to enable the purchase to go ahead. The Clerk advised that if members wish to pursue this purchase, then it was likely that a PWLB or alternative funding will be necessary. The purchase price was listed as being £460,000.

The Chairman reminded Councillors of the fact that ECC had made it extremely difficult for the Parish Council to get back into the library which, before COVID, was a well known and used service. The current situation was that the Parish Council staff and records were scattered around different locations. The possible purchase of the church would be a great opportunity for the Parish Council and residents. The building is such that parts of it could be rented out to small community groups or organisations. Cllr Clegg advised that if a congregation falls below 12, the church automatically closes, however he understood that there was a worship group that met there every 4 weeks or so.

Cllr Irvine stated that this was quite a substantial matter to discuss in open forum, stating that it was quite a lot of money and he felt it could only be justified if the property remained as a community resource that would be over and above the other community facilities in the Parish. Cllr Tyler advised that he felt there wasn't that much interest in the site from a developers perspective, however Cllr Born stated that he too had attended the open day and saw at least two religious groups who seemed to be interested in its purchase. Cllr Tyler stated that if the Parish Council could purchase this, it would be a fantastic community resource which would be held by the Parish in 100 years time.

The PFO briefly ran through some examples of what the public works loan board costs would be, however there were a number of factors that would affect how much needed to be borrowed. Cllr Spearman stated that he disliked the sealed envelope approach. Cllr Born stated that it

would be a phenomenal opportunity for a community asset, supporting smaller community groups and organisations.

The Chairman stated that EFDC had recently sold off part of the North Weald Airfield for £88million, and felt that given the disruption and impact that development North Weald was expected to take in the future, an approach should be made to EFDC asking for a share of the £88m to fund the purchase of the Methodist church.

After further discussion, the following was **AGREED**:

- To write to the estate agent with a full and final offer of £460,000 for the purchase of the Methodist Church.
- Clerk to write urgent email to District and County Councillors asking them to support providing a share of the £88m for the purchase of the Methodist church.
- To start the process of looking at a Public Works Loan for the purchase, the starting figure being £400,000 of borrowing.
- That the PFO provides a more detailed breakdown of the Public Works loan options to Councillors.
- That it is made clear, and recorded in the minutes, that the Parish Council will strive to ensure the property remains in community use, regardless of who purchases it.

C23.171 ROYAL BRITISH LEGION – NORTH WEALD BRANCH

Member noted that Cllr Colin Kinnear had attended the RBL meeting on Friday 19th January 2024 and was pleased to report that a new committee was now in place and seems to be more settled than in 2023. A point raised in the meeting was a request if the Parish Council to help with printing and if the RBL can place their posters for events on the information boards around the village. Cllr Kinnear advised that the Parish Council had always offered help and assistance when needed. The Chairman stated that he was aware Stuart Poulton assisted another RBL group somewhere with printing, so this could be an option. Cllr Kinnear stated that the group were trying to drum up some events to increase membership. The Parish Council **AGREED** they would be more than happy to support the RBL with adverts on notice boards etc, and requested that some notice was given as there were roughly two notice boards rounds per month.

C23.172 PARISH COUNCIL CIVIC AWARDS

Members were advised that nominations were now open for the Parish Council Civic Awards which will be presented at the Annual Parish Meeting which is to be held on Monday 22nd April. Members were asked to consider nominations as per the Nomination Forms, which had been enclosed in Councillors packs. Details on how to nominate for the Civic Awards had been placed on the Parish Council Website and Noticeboards. The closing date for nominations is Monday 25th March.

C23.173 ANNUAL ALLOTMENT MEETING

Members noted that the Annual Meeting of Allotment Holders will be held on Sunday 24th March at 9.30am for 10 am start. This will be held at the Parish Hall in Thornwood Common, and all Councillors are welcome.

C23.174 EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL NOTIFICATION OF SALE OF PART OF THE AIRFIELD

Members were advised that Epping Forest District Council's finance and economic development portfolio holder, Cllr John Philip, told a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that

the sale of part of North Weald Airfield to Google had been completed. The land had been purchased for the "possible" development of a new data centre campus. Epping Forest District Council stated that 52 acres of North Weald Airfield had been allocated for employment use and that the airfield would "continue to function as an operational aerodrome", with a new combined control tower and fire station also planned. The council has further stated that this announcement has come after an "extensive consultation" among key local stakeholders and local residents which was carried out in light of the masterplan put together last March. The Clerk and the Chairman met with Darren Goodey, Service Manager Commercial Manager North Weald Airfield, on Thursday 25th February for a short update meeting with regards to the Airfield. It was understood that a Statement was expected from EFDC confirming details of the area purchased by Google in the next week or so. As soon as this statement is received the Clerk would forward on to Councillors. The Chairman advised that one of the concerns is what Google will do with it if they chose not to develop the land – could they sell it for housing.

Meeting closed: 8.53pm

Signed

Date