



MINUTES

Meeting: PARISH COUNCIL

Date: 24th January 2022

Time: 7.30PM

Venue: PARISH HALL, THORNWOOD COMMON

PRESENT:

Councillors (8) A Buckley (Chairman), T Blanks, R Spearman, A Tyler, Mrs S Jackman MBE
Cllr Mrs Hawkins, Cllr Ms Wood, M Stroud

Officers in Attendance (2)

Susan Deluca - Clerk
Adriana Jones – Principal Financial Officer

Members of the Public (0)

Members of the Press (1)

C21.108 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (5)

Apologies received from Cllrs Mrs Etherington, Mulliner, Bedford, Clegg and Mrs Grigg.

C21.109 OTHER ABSENCES (1)

Cllr Irvine.

C21.110 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held 9th November 2021, and the Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Meeting held on 6th December 2021 were **AGREED**. The Minutes of the environmental Committee Meeting held on 30th November 2021 were **NOTED**.

C21.111 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

C21.112 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Clerk advised that a representative of the Royal British Legion had initially advised he wanted to attend the meeting to ask the Council questions concerning the service at the Parish War Memorial and the Debt of Honour, however had further advised the Clerk he was unable to attend. The Clerk had tabled some background information for Councillors information concerning this subject matter.

C21.113 REPORT OF THE CLERK

Councillors **NOTED** the report of the Clerk as detailed in the agenda which included in addition to general updates the following:

- a) The Clerk has attended a Licensing Board, the result of which was that the application for Arun Barbers, 38 High Road, North Weald has been granted for On Sales only during the times of 12 noon to 4.30pm 7 days a week, subject to certain licensing conditions (yet to be received). The Clerk advised the Police were present at the meeting and had withdrawn their original comments.
- b) The Chairman and Clerk met with Cllrs Chris and Hollie Whitbread on Friday 14th January 2022 to discuss a long list of issues. The Clerk confirmed these would be circulated with the February Agenda.

Staff are also looking at arranging the following events during 2022:

- Annual Allotment Meeting Sunday 13th March 9am to 12pm – Cllr Hawkins confirmed she would arrange for refreshments.
- Citizen of the Year Awards – covering two years.
- Queens Platinum Jubilee
- Tree Planting
- Rededication of Norwegian Memorial & Parish War Memorial
- Hastingwood Village Hall also has its 100 year Centenary

All the above events will be covered in more detail at the February Parish Council Meeting.

C21.114 REPORTS & MEMBERS REPORTS

- a) **Chairman's Report** – The Chairman reminded members of the wet ground on Weald Common which makes the play area almost unusable for 3 months of year, and stating that work was still ongoing to try and find a solution to this. The water runs down the slope of the land and floods the lower areas, making the ground extremely boggy. The Chairman and Clerk have been liaising with Trevor Baker, and looking at the possibility of creating a ditch or swale running from the top area where the 50 trees were planted along to the small area near Tempest Mead. Trevor Baker feels this would help as running down this side of fields in this area is a ditch which doesn't take any water. The estimated cost of works is around £3,000, however Cllr Chris Whitbread advised there may be a possibility of matched funding. It is hoped works could start relatively quickly, but this is a work in progress. The Chairman also reported that one of the intentions of the tree project proposed for Weald Common is to put some more trees up where the 50 are planted.

The Chairman reminded members that there was a list of urgent road repairs that were needed covering all three villages which had been raised with Cllr Chris Whitbread, and that he was pleased to say that other than the area outside the shops, all works in North Weald Village had now been completed. There were some works needed up near the Talbot roundabout, but at this time the Chairman was unsure what this work was. The Chairman and Clerk would monitor the list for any further completed works. Councillors noted that for 5-6 days in March works would be taking place just before J7 of the M11 on the A414, and these were expected to cause some disruption.

The Chairman also provided an update on Cllr Mulliner.

- b) **Vice Chairman's Report** – Councillors *NOTED* the report of the Vice Chairman as attached to the agenda.
- c) **District & County Councillors Reports** – The Clerk advised that Cllr Whitbread had advised her of works to the A414 as previously reported by the Chairman, and that updates on the list as discussed during the meeting of 14th January are coming in and these will be collated for the February meeting.
- d) **Parish Councillors Reports** – Councillors *NOTED* the written report as submitted by Cllr Blanks as attached to the agenda. Cllr Blanks expanded, stating he was suspicious of the urgency by which EFDC were pushing the Airfield Consultation, and expected it was to do with them wanting other organisations / developers to get the blame for the extra traffic that will be generated in North Weald. He also expressed concern at the cost of EFDC employing different consultants to undertake the Airfield Masterplan which is EFDC's own scheme, suggesting they should be doing this themselves. The Chairman reminded Councillors that following an easing of COVID restrictions, a public event

was now being held on Saturday 29th January between 11am and 3pm in the Thornwood Common Parish Hall.

Cllr Tyler commented that the new partitions in the hall certainly made the acoustics much better for meetings. He further advised that with regard to the rededication of the Parish War Memorial on 19th June, he had been in touch with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and there were three names that needed to be added to the Parish War Memorial. The Commission had completed some research at the time the memorial was erected there were three parishioners who were noted as missing. Cllr Tyler suggested this issue is left with him to organise and stated that he believed the Commission would complete the lettering themselves however the Parish Council may need to arrange for the memorial to be cleaned. The Clerk advised this wouldn't be a problem as she was already arranging for the Norwegian stone to be cleaned. Cllr Tyler suggested that once the names had been established, it would be lovely if their living relatives could be located and invited to attend the rededication service. Councillors **AGREED** to leave this matter with Cllr Tyler and the Clerk, and that the invite to relatives should be pursued.

Cllr Hawkins advised she would like to arrange a village event one day over the Queens Jubilee extended weekend, and asked if the hall was free. The Clerk advised she had booked out all three larger halls for this weekend to ensure they could be used for community events, and advised she had already spoken to Cllr Wood about setting up a Jubilee Committee to manage the events over this weekend. Cllr Stroud advised there was a Member of Village Life who had expressed an interest in holding such events and that maybe he should be invited to sit on the committee, to which the Clerk confirmed she was aware of this. It was **AGREED** the Clerk would liaise with Councillors regarding setting up a working group / committee to look into events.

Cllr Tyler commented that the Parish Hall was extremely clean, and the Clerk thanked both new Caretakers for the great job they were doing.

Cllr Tyler raised the questions as to why there were so many street lights not working in the Parish, to which the Clerk advised that the Parish Lights were working but that she was aware of a number of EFDC owned street lights that were not working, and that these had been reported via the EFDC (or in some cases ECC) online reporting tool, however no action was being taken. This has been raised with EFDC Cllrs Chris and Hollie Whitbread, who are in turn meeting with ECC Cllr Scott to establish what the problem was. Cllr Tyler advised that the cost of components needed to repair street lights had gone through the roof, and enquired as to if EFDC / ECC had the budget to fix the lights. The Clerk asked Cllr Tyler to email this to her and she would enquire.

Cllr Blanks put forward a proposal that this Council should agree not to meet with any further developers at this stage as he felt they don't tell you the full facts and to all intents and purposes it was a waste of time. He further stated that in addition giving any opinion could in fact fetter the position of the Council and Councillors for any future decisions. The PFO advised that the Localism Act 2011 addressed the issue of predetermination, and that Councillors were able to give an opinion on planning matters however must ensure they maintain an open mind until the time when the Council considers the application. It was **AGREED** the PFO would send out information concerning this to all councillors.

Cllr Blanks asked if there was an update on the Taxi enforcement issue, to which the Clerk advised she had not heard, but that she would liaise with Cllr Bedford to obtain an update. Cllr Blanks stated that if she did not receive an update, he would be happy to contact Nick Dawe.

e) **Queens Hall Charity Report** – Cllr Mrs Wood advised that there had been a couple of issues at the hall, including that it had become apparent that the halls 5-year electrical inspection and annual fire risk assessment and inspections had not been conducted for some time. Cllr Mrs Wood advised that she could not source any paperwork that showed these had been completed, and it was essential these took place urgently. As such, she had managed to arrange for these to be completed during half term over a three day period after 3.30pm each day between 16-18th February. Cllr Mrs Wood confirmed she had tried to minimise the disruption to hall users, but that this would inevitably mean a number of users would have to cancel hires. This has caused a particular issue with one hirer, who in turn has sent offensive emails about how Cllr Mrs Wood operates and how awkward she was. Cllr Mrs Wood advised that as the Administrator for the Queens Hall Charity, which she does on an entirely voluntary basis, she has to make decisions that are right for the Charity. The backlash from the decision to ensure these essential health and safety matters were dealt with had been so upsetting she had considered resigning. The Clerk confirmed she had spoken with Cllr Mrs Wood to offer some support and confirmation that these checks should indeed be completed ASAP. Cllr Mrs Wood advised that a meeting of the trustees had been scheduled for 8th February to address these matters. Cllr Tyler advised that it is unacceptable that Cllr Mrs Wood should be subjected to abuse, stating that the hall wouldn't technically be insured without these checks having taken place. The Chairman agreed. Cllr Mrs Wood advised that the safety of every user is more important than the use itself. Cllr Mrs Wood advised that the hall is extremely busy, and that she was having to turn down bookings. The hall is financially very stable at this time, and she is always looking for grant funding. Active Essex were now also hiring out the hall for vulnerable children who would be guaranteed a meal. The Chairman thanked Cllr Mrs Wood for her selfless work with the charity, and asked that she keep this Council informed of the decisions made by the Trustees of the hall.

f) **Neighbourhood Plan Report** – No update.

g) **EFDC Local Plan Report** – The EFDC website states that the inspector will make a decision on the Local Plan in the first quarter of 2022.

h) **Highways Report** – None

C21.115 FINANCIAL REPORT

a) **List of Cheque & Monthly Statement of Accounts**

Members **APPROVED** the list of payments made up to 31st December 2021 (circulated prior to the meeting and tabled during the meeting) and **NOTED** the account balances at the end of the month. Cllr Blanks asked if an agreement had been reached concerning the Rialtas software and ending the contact early, to which it was confirmed the Clerk had liaised with the supplier and an agreement reached where the Council could exit both the Parish Hall and Cemetery software contract packages early.

b) **Internal Audit** - Members **NOTED** that the interim internal audit for 21/22 had been completed on Friday 12th November and that the full report would be included with the February Parish Council agenda.

C21.116 BUDGET / PRECEPT 2022/2023

On 6th December 2021, the Finance and General Purposes Committee met to consider the Budget and Precept for 2022/2023. It was agreed during the meeting to put a recommendation forward for ratification at the January 2022 Parish Council meeting that the Parish Council precept for 2022/2023 should be set at £229,766, resulting in the Parish Council element of the Council Tax

being £88.49/year for a Band D Property - an annual increase of just over 21p per month per band D property. Councillor Tyler **PROPOSED** this recommendation be accepted. This was **SECONDED** by Cllr Mrs Wood. It was **RESOLVED** that the Precept for 2022/2023 be set at £229,766.

C21.117 SCHEME OF DELEGATION

Due to the possibility of variants of Covid 19 continuing to be within the population for the foreseeable future, Members were asked if they wished to continue with the Scheme of Delegation which gives the Clerk Delegated Power to Act in conjunction with the Chairman for a further six months. Cllr Mrs Jackman expressed her concern, stating that she felt the public would be excluded from certain matters and that this raised an issue of transparency, and that the Government had told Councils not to delegate. The Clerk stated that this was not correct, and that many Councils had schemes of delegation in place to ensure the Council could function in times of lock down or Covid restrictions. The Clerk further stated that Town and Parish Councils were the only local government body who were still required to hold meetings in public, with District and County organisations able to hold zoom meetings. Cllr Mrs Hawkins asked for clarification that the scheme of delegation would only be used during times when Covid restrictions may prohibit meeting in person, to which the Clerk confirmed this was the case. The Chairman stated that this scheme has in the past allowed the Council to continue to function and make decisions when the full Council could not meet in person, and that the Clerk had **always** kept Councillors informed of any decisions made this way. Cllr Mrs Jackman stated that it was the public perception she was concerned about. The Clerk understood this, and advised that this was why it was on the agenda – for Councillors to decide. Cllr Blanks stated that EFDC had a scheme of delegation in place. Cllr Tyler **PROPOSED** the scheme of delegation continued for a further 6 month period. This was **SECONDED** by Cllr Mrs Hawkins. A vote was taken, the result of which was as follows:

- 6 – For
- 0 – Against
- 2 – Abstention

It was therefore **AGREED** to continue with the scheme of delegation for a further 6 month period.

C21.118 CONFIRMATION OF COMMENTS–NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN

As discussed at the Planning Committee Meeting on the 17th January 2022, and as per the document circulated by the Principal Financial Officer, Members were asked to confirm they were happy that this document is sent to Soundings to represent the views of this Parish Council. The PFO offered an explanation about the wording in the response which supported the access point off the High Road, stating that the access is already present and used by HGVs for Bookers. The Chairman stated the he believed these HGVs came in the rear entrance. Cllr Tyler explained that he had attended the second Zoom session, and that there was a lot of bad feeling about this development from those who attended. There was also concern raised as to how you can be the client, the developer, and the contractor, and how this was transparent and would ensure good value for money. Councillors could not understand how the Local Plan was putting so much emphasis on the damaged caused by the Epping Forest SAC by people driving their vehicles through it, yet EFDC was proposing this southern access point which would undoubtedly mean vehicles travelling through the lower forest creating pollution and congestion. Cllr Tyler stated he wanted to write to the London Mayor, and could not understand why EFDC could not see how London were now paying for the pollution they have created over the years, specifically relating to the ULEZ.

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Councillors discussed how the HGV access would be managed and monitored, with the Chairman advising that this was the issue that himself and the Clerk had worked so hard on explaining to EFDC during the IBF situation.

After further deliberation, it was **AGREED** to amend the wording concerning the southern access, expressing that there are lots of unanswered questions and that the Council was not satisfied at this stage that this proposed access would not lead to further traffic and congestion.

Meeting closed: 8.25pm

Signed

Date