



**MINUTES**

**Meeting:** PARISH COUNCIL

**Date:** 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020

**Time:** 7.30PM

**Venue:** IN LINE WITH CURRENT GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES, THE MEETING WAS CONDUCTED ELECTRONICALLY VIA VIDEO CONFERENCING

**PRESENT:**

**Councillors (12)** A Buckley (Chairman), Mrs A Grigg (Vice Chairman), T Blanks, B Clegg, G Mulliner, Mrs S Hawkins, A Irvine, Mrs S Jackman MBE, R Spearman, M Stroud, A Tyler, Ms D Wood\*

\*Apologies received for lateness

**Officers in Attendance (3)**

Susan Deluca - Clerk

Adriana Jones – Principal Financial Officer

Joanna Tyler – Senior Administrative Officer

**Members of the Public (0)**

**Members of the Press (1)**

**C20.021 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (1)**

Apologies received from Cllr N Bedford.

**C20.022 OTHER ABSENCES (0)**

None.

**C20.023 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Annual Parish Council Meeting held on the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020 were **APPROVED**.

**C20.024 VACANCY – HASTINGWOOD WARD**

Councillors **NOTED** that with reference to the details previously given in relation to the Vacancy for the Hastingwood Ward, it is understood that no election had been called for. The Clerk had sourced information that confirmed that the Parish Council could co-opt. Members stated that, in the past, they have always had a preference to interview, in person, any individual who put themselves forward as a candidate. It was reported that the Clerk had received a couple of enquiries and had spoken to the Chairman with regard to this matter. The Chairman advised Members it was for them to decide if they wished to hold this matter in abeyance until the September Meeting, when the Government Guidance on small gatherings or indeed holding Council Meetings in public may have changed, alternatively, Council may be able to look at other ways of interviewing candidates which could be considered. It was noted that if there were no changes to Government Guidance by that date, then candidates would need to submit a CV and maybe consideration be given to holding interviews via ZOOM. All Members **AGREED** that the matter should be reviewed in September.

**C20.025 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**C20.026 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

There were no members of the public present.

**C20.027 REPORT OF THE CLERK**

Councillors *NOTED* that the Clerk and Staff had all been working on the items within the Agenda.

The Clerk referred to an email that she had circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting from June at North Weald Village Life Volunteers Group. The email advised that June wanted to use the initial grant funding of £250.00 to put together small packs containing gloves, face mask and hand sanitiser, to be distributed to people who had been shielding. The pack would also contain a 'friendly note' to remind people of social distancing measures and to advise them of what to expect when visiting shops. The Clerk advised that Cllr Tyler had expressed a concern that it would not be right for the Parish Council to endorse the packs. Cllr Tyler stated that before agreeing to this, Members would need to be satisfied that the products being distributed comply with current regulations. He stated that an assessment would need to be completed for every individual to ensure that the products would not cause any allergies or reactions and potentially cause any impairment to their health. Cllr Tyler stated that he was concerned that should the Council endorse the packs, it could be seen to take legal responsibility for them. Cllr Tyler stated that although it was a great idea, he believed that the Council should give it a wide berth. Cllr Mrs Jackman, MBE, stated that she agreed with what Cllr Tyler had said. The Chairman stated that he agreed that it could leave the Council in a vulnerable position, however, he asked if the packs were distributed was there a disclaimer that could be included with them. Cllr Tyler stated that he did not believe that there was and said that if the packs had been put together and distributed by a health authority that would be a different scenario as they would underwrite those packs. Cllr Mrs Jackman MBE, said that it was not worth the risk. Cllr Mrs Hawkins agreed and added that June must be informed. The Clerk confirmed that she would contact June and advise that if she wanted to distribute packs that would be her decision, however the Parish Council would not endorse it. Cllr Stroud stated that the email read as though June intended to use the grant monies. The Clerk confirmed that she would ask her not to use the grant funding.

Cllr Mrs Grigg suggested that perhaps June could look at doing something else that the Parish Council may find appropriate. The Clerk stated that she would need to ask her. Cllr Blanks referred to a news programme that he had watched, which had mentioned the use of non-medical face masks. He stated that the non-medical face masks do not save lives and it would be at your own risk if you used them. Cllr Clegg asked if it could be recorded in the minutes that, in principal, he thinks it is a great notion, but the pitfalls are too much for it to be handled. Cllr Clegg stated that he agreed with what Cllr Tyler had said and that the Council had to be extremely careful with the materials that were handed out, adding that we cannot control it and we do not know enough about it. Cllr Irvine stated that it was pointless to hand out one face

mask. Cllr Mulliner suggested that hand sanitisers could be purchased from supermarkets, which would not pose the same risk. Cllr Mrs Jackman MBE, asked whether the Council should be involved with purchasing items such as this, which is not an expensive item for anybody in the community to buy. Cllr Clegg referred to the email and said that it clearly stated that none of the grant money had been used, therefore this is an additional thing. He stated that he had some sympathy for what June is trying to do as there are a large number of people who are scared to go out and he agreed with the sentiments, however, he added that the Council had to be careful. Cllr Tyler stated that he also agreed with the sentiment and that it is a very nice idea, however to execute it efficiently and to safeguard the Council, it is an impossible dream. He stated that the packs are not an easy answer and said that it is not just a question of getting hold of a face mask and a set of latex or pvc disposable gloves.

The Chairman asked Members if they were in agreement for the Clerk to contact June to advise that although the Parish Council liked the idea, Members felt uncomfortable with the current suggestion and would like to know if there is an alternative that could be considered. All Members **AGREED**.

#### **C20.028 REPORTS AND MEMBERS REPORTS**

**a) Chairman's Report** – The Chairman reported that six 'Thank You' banners had been purchased and erected around the Parish (4 in North Weald, 1 in Thornwood and 1 in Hastingwood), which he thought was a nice gesture to the NHS from the Parish Council.

The Chairman reported that Norway House was still under isolation, therefore the raised beds project cannot proceed at the current time. The Chairman advised that the Sunflower project may still be able to go ahead and he would contact the managers regarding that.

The Chairman reported that the garden in front of the parade of shops in North Weald required attention, however the ground was too hard to work at the moment. The Chairman, together with Cllr Mulliner, may try to water the garden then they may be able to put in some new plants. The Chairman stated that sponsorship of the garden would be deferred until September, rather than June or July. New plaques would then be purchased. The Clerk stated that the PFO had mentioned that the flower bed on the village green looked very nice and asked if the Preservation Society could be thanked. The Chairman confirmed that he would arrange for an article to be placed in Village Life Magazine later in the year thanking the sponsors and the Preservation Society.

**b) Vice Chairman's Report** – The Vice Chairman stated that she had a late report regarding a Transport Meeting that she had attended at Epping Town Hall on 10<sup>th</sup> March. The Vice Chairman said that she found it very interesting, in particular an item regarding ECC who were able to bid for money from Government for improvement of services. ECC are unable to do anything about new services that might be the outcome from housing developments as they would expect that to be from Section 106 agreements, however, they are keen to try and get money for existing services and improve them. The Vice Chairman stated that her suggestion was that they try and get those services improved close to the new developments.

**c) District Councillors Reports** – The Clerk reported that although no reports had been received, she did keep in constant contact with Cllr Bedford. Cllr Blanks mentioned that Cllr Bedford is now Deputy Leader of Epping Forest District Council. The Clerk confirmed that she had sent congratulations on behalf of the Parish Council. The Clerk stated that Cllr Bedford had been very good at keeping the Parish Council informed as to what is happening at EFDC at the moment.

**d) County Councillor Reports** – No reports.

**e) Parish Councillors Reports** – Cllr Spearman reported that he had carried out two Legionella tests at the Parish Hall in May, however there is no hot water. The Clerk advised that she would contact the Parish Council's contractor regarding this as arrangements had been made for a plumber to visit.

**f) Queens Hall Report** – Cllr Ms Wood reported that she had been undertaking Risk Assessments in line with Government Guidance and advised that the Cleaner had returned to work. The Red School had also re-opened and were very pleased that the hall was lovely and clean. The Red School would report back to Cllr Ms Wood if the cleaning does not stay at a high standard. One of the regular users is keen to get back in the hall, however, the Red School is the current priority until the Government lifts restrictions and then it will be looked at again. The Legionella Testing had been carried out and was fine. The Clerk asked Councillors if they would agree to a thank you being recorded in the minutes. The Clerk stated that Cllr Ms Wood had worked tirelessly in getting everything ready for the Red School and the Cleaner to go back. Cllr Blanks supported the request. All Councillors **AGREED**.

**g) Neighbourhood Plan** – Members **NOTED** that the Neighbourhood Plan is currently on hold.

**h) EFDC Local Plan Report** – The Principal Financial Officer reported that there would be a delay with the Local Plan, EFDC were hoping to have their modifications ready by the end of June, beginning of July, however it is expected that this will now be at the earliest October, with the possibility of more delays. The PFO reported that EFDC would very soon be going to consultation on a draft Green Infrastructure Strategy. The PFO advised that this will be a very important document which will set out where the open spaces will be, how much of it will be in the Parish and what kind of facilities they are looking to introduce. The PFO stated that she believed the consultation would be available to everyone, with the community being able to comment and said that the Clerk would let Members know as soon as it is available.

**i) Highways Report** – The Clerk advised that a copy of the report had been circulated to all Councillors via email prior to the meeting. The Clerk referred to the Glovers Lane sign and advised that she had received notification that this would be erected very soon. The Clerk thanked the Senior Administrative Officer for putting the report in order. The Chairman stated that it was good to see that Sarah Alcock had got some funding in place for most if not all of the projects. The Clerk stated that she believed the input from Cllr Whitbread had helped.

## **C20.029 FINANCIAL REPORTS**

### **a) List of Cheques & Monthly Statement of Accounts**

Members **APPROVED** the lists of payments (these were emailed to Councillors prior to the meeting) which were made up to the 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020. Members **NOTED** the account balances at the end of the month.

## **C20.030 PARISH COUNCIL GOING FORWARD**

Councillors **NOTED** the contents of the report, together with other documentation enclosed with the Agenda, which related to the use of the Parish Office 'Going Forward'. A number of concerns had been raised with regard to the use of the current office within the Library premises and the ability to Socially Distance and to adhere to the relevant Government Guideline in relation to new Cleaning regimes.

Councillors **NOTED** that neither the Clerk nor the staff (the Clerk had consulted with the staff as she is legally obliged to do) have confidence that Social Distancing or adequate cleaning could be carried out within the setting of the ECC Library premises at the current time. Therefore, there is a real concern that this building would not be a safe building to return to for any work. The current Government Guidelines are that employees should work from home if it is possible. Whilst the staff can fulfil the job working from home, there does need to be some sort of front line service for the public going forward and once the Government says it is safe to do so with the appropriate measures in place. After looking at all of the options, as detailed in the report, the safest option would be to 'Offer a Service to the Public' out of the Parish Hall in Thornwood. There would be minimal cost to this Council and the service could be easily offered with Social Distancing and appropriate cleaning easily maintained. This option would keep the hall used and the Caretaker employed.

Councillors **NOTED** that EFDC would be reducing its service to customers. EFDC is to close some of its Receptions, with over 400 staff working from home for a considerable time due to the Civic Offices being partially closed and renovated. The service to the public which the Parish Council may be able to offer from a base in Thornwood may be of benefit to many local parish residents.

Councillors **NOTED** that the main difference that there would be in the Parish Council service is that it would be based in Thornwood, however, we must remember that we are a Parish Council and as such North Weald Bassett does cover the whole of the Parish. Looking to the future it may be possible to negotiate a premises for the Parish Council within the terms of any property building that is proposed within the Local Plan.

Councillors **NOTED** that despite numerous requests, ECC had been unable to advise when they would be offering a Library service. However, ECC have stated that they will not be making any changes to the current cleaning schedule for the Library.

The Clerk stated that she believed the only way a face to face service could be offered, whilst adhering to Government Guidelines, is out of the Parish Hall. The Clerk added that this may only be for one, three or six months. Cllr Mrs Hawkins agreed that the most logical thing would be is to use the hall as a way forward. Cllr

Mrs Grigg stated that she thought the Clerk's report was quite comprehensive and explained the difficulties very well and said that she agreed entirely that the staff cannot operate out of the Library. She said that it is far too small and cannot fulfil the social distancing which is absolutely essential at the current time. Cllr Mrs Grigg stated that the hall is available, the Parish Council owns the hall and should use the facility on a temporary basis. Cllr Mrs Grigg stated that she is fully supportive of the idea and said that once it is established, the Council will have the opportunity to look around and see what is available. This would give the Library and ECC time to say what they are going put into operation and Councillors will then be able to take a view on that as to whether the Parish Council associates itself back with the Library. Cllr Mrs Grigg stated that she is also conscious of the fact that the longer the Library is closed, it is a small Library and ECC wanted it closed originally so there could be problems in relation to that. Cllr Tyler stated that the Parish Council had a duty and a legal obligation to ensure that the staff work in a clean and safe environment. He stated that this could not be guaranteed in the Library. Cllr Clegg stated that he totally endorsed what both Cllr Mrs Grigg and Cllr Tyler had said and stated that he believed that the Library Services do not understand the ramifications of trying to open the Library. Cllr Clegg stated that the Parish Council staff have completed a massive amount of research as to what would be best and confirmed that he totally endorsed the recommendation put forward. Cllr Blanks stated that he believed that there was no other option without spending a large amount of money. The Chairman asked Members if they were in agreement to a temporary front line Service being offered from the Parish Hall in Thornwood, when Government Guidelines suggest it is appropriate. All Members **AGREED**.

#### **C20.031 PARISH HALL GOING FORWARD**

Councillors **NOTED** that as of 4<sup>th</sup> July, the Government Guidance is that Halls may be able to re-open subject to the 'R' Rate being at an appropriate level. The Parish Council is also guided by RCCE / EALC who also circulate their interpretation of Government Guidance. The Clerk has been sending this to the relevant Councillors when she has felt this to be appropriate. Due to the inordinate abundance of documentation the Clerk has only sent the relevant documents to avoid 'document overload' to Members. Councillors **NOTED** that Clerk had copied the Parish Council Chairman and Vice Chairman, the Parish Hall Chairman and Vice Chairman, together with the relevant Ward Councillors, into any emails sent with regard to communications with groups who use the Hall.

Councillors **NOTED** that the Caretaker is still maintaining and completing other regular jobs around the hall. The Caretaker has received an additional list of jobs to do to ensure that any additional time is kept to good use. This had included clearing up after socially unacceptable gatherings which had resulted in detritus being left and strewn all over the field and broken glass in the car park. The Clerk had drawn up some schedules called 'Restart for Hall & Caretaker' and 'Draft Cleaning Schedule' (it was noted that some amendments may be necessary dependent on Government Guidance before any opening – however, they are the current appropriate documents to work from in the absence of any other documents). The Clerk confirmed that the Caretaker is happy with the schedule and had added a couple of extra things that needed to be done. The Clerk stated that the Caretaker felt that, at the current time, it would be better to have only one event per day, which had been suggested on the

schedule.

Councillors **NOTED** that the Clerk had contacted all Hall users and it seemed highly unlikely that any of the usual groups would return before September and some may not even return then. It was noted that it is expected that the Hall may lose around £7,000 in Hall users income between the start of the lockdown period and the 1<sup>st</sup> September. Members **NOTED** that Hall would not benefit from the £10,000 EFDC Business Rates Grant (unlike other halls such as Queens Hall, North Weald Village Hall and Hastingwood Village Hall) as it is owned by a Precepting Authority, i.e., the Parish Council. The Clerk stated that the Parish Council should not let the Hall be at the detriment of not benefitting from the grant funding and suggested that Members may wish to bear this in mind when it comes to the Precept later in the year. The Principal Financial Officer stated that income could be potentially down by as much as £7,300 by September which will be significant. The Clerk stated that she would like Councillors agreement to put an item on the Finance and General Purposes Meeting which will clearly state how much income the Parish Hall would have lost and to look to add some funding for the Hall. The Clerk advised that there is money which could be put towards it and could look at either the Section 106 monies from the community funding from Brent House Farm or the £50k.

Councillor Mrs Jackman MBE, suggested that the £50k would be the obvious place to take the monies from. The Chairman said that this could be considered when it comes to the Precept. The Clerk confirmed that Parish Council did not need to do anything now, she just needed Councillors agreement to include it as an item on the Finance & General Purposes agenda later in the year. All Members **AGREED**.

#### **C20.032 OPEN SPACES SIGNAGE**

Councillors **NOTED** that following an in depth review of the Government Guidance – Coronavirus (COVID-19): Safer Public Places – Urban Centres and Green Spaces, a copy of which was circulated to all Members on 13 May 2020, the Clerk and the Principal Finance Officer have reviewed the Parish Council Open Spaces that they are liable and responsible for and appropriate signage had been ordered accordingly. The Parish Council's contractor had undertaken erection of the signs in line with this guidance. The PFO reported that one of the signs erected in Thornwood had already been damaged.

#### **C20.033 CEMETERY**

Councillors **NOTED** that, since lockdown, there had been 4 Interments, 3 Memorial Applications and 1 application for a seat. However, the Clerk is aware of a number of people who have passed away within the parish who have plots in the cemetery. It is understood that their families may wish to have their loved ones Ashes interred once the rigorous rules in relation to interments at cemeteries and the numbers that can attend services have been relaxed. The Clerk reported that since preparing the agenda, she had received a request for a Cremated Remains plot purchase and another bench. Cllr Wood asked the Clerk if she had relaxed the numbers attending a grave yard service. The Clerk advised that she is following Government Guidance with regard to this and it is her understanding that, at the current time, the numbers attending should be no more than 25 to 30 people.

**C20.034 GDPR FILING**

Councillors **NOTED** that good progress continues, with inroads into the filing from the storage container by the Clerk and into two of the large filing cabinets from the staff room (which had been delivered to the Senior Administrative Officer). One large filing cabinet is left to sort from the staff room and 15 plastic boxes from the container.

**C20.035 AUDIT**

Councillors **NOTED** that the Internal Audit is being carried out remotely. The Clerk had received notification from the internal auditor that due to staffing resources within his company, he may be a couple of weeks behind schedule.

**C20.036 ALLOTMENTS**

Councillors **NOTED** that there had been a large uptake of Allotments on the Wheelers Farm Gardens site. A new temporary warden had been appointed who had done an extremely good job in raising awareness of the allotments. Adriana reported that in two weeks the warden had got ten new tenants. As a result of this, Adriana stated that a lot of her work had been allotment based. An amount of £1500 had been agreed for plot clearance. The Clerk stated that some of the expenditure was made available from grant funding received from EALC and there are still some monies left in the fund for future use.

**C20.037 CCTV PARISH HALL AT THORNWOOD**

The Chairman reminded Members that this matter had been discussed at a previous meeting. Two quotes had been received and the Chairman had asked Cllr Irvine to use his expertise to look at both of them. A decision had been made to go with Essential and the Chairman confirmed that the CCTV was to be installed on the Saturday following this meeting. Cllr Blanks mentioned that he had recently been involved with obtaining a CCTV image for a parishioner and the quality of the image had been brought into question due to the lighting. Cllr Blanks asked if the CCTV system for hall would be good enough. The Clerk stated that it should be better as the one at the parade of shops relied on street lighting. The Chairman confirmed that the cameras would be of a better quality.

**C20.038 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS:  
QUEENS HALL**

Due to the nature of the item to be discussed, the press and public were asked to leave the meeting and were excluded, 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.

Following a report received from Cllr Ms D Wood who is the Administrator for the Queens Hall Charity. Councillors **AGREED** that the Principal Financial Officer would undertake the payroll for the Charity on a temporary basis. The decision will be reviewed in May 2021.

Meeting closed: 8.38pm

Signed .....



**MINUTES**

Date .....