



MINUTES

Meeting: PARISH COUNCIL

Date: 4th November 2024

Time: 7.30PM

Venue: PARISH HALL, THORNWOOD COMMON

PRESENT:

Councillors (7) Cllr Buckley (Chairman), Cllr Spearman, Cllr Irvine, Cllr Blanks, Cllr Clegg, Cllr Tyler
Cllr Mrs Jackman

Officers in Attendance (2)

Susan Deluca - Clerk

Adriana Jones – Principal Finance Officer

Members of the Public (5) – inc EFDC Cllr Burrows

Members of the Press (1)

C24.114 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (6)

Apologies from Cllrs Bedford, Ms Wood, Kinnear, Mrs Hawkins, Cllr Mrs Etherington and Cllr Born.
EFDC Cllr Bromwich had also given apologies.

C24.115 OTHER ABSENCES (1)

Cllr Stroud.

C24.116 MINUTES

Councillors **AGREED** the Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 2nd October. Cllr Clegg queried the accuracy of the statement in minutes number C24.109 with regard to the Air Ambulance as this was not what he understood. It was confirmed that the Air Ambulance runs the same as the RNLI, operating by way of charitable donations which gives them more flexibility than if funded via Government.

C24.117 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Spearman declared an interest in the Local Plan.

C24.118 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Chairman welcomed the members of public present, and invited them to address the Council. A representative advised they were present to raise concerns about the process regarding planning application EPF/1985/24. He introduced other members of the public who were mostly neighbours of the property in question, and provided a summary as to how the building had been erected entirely differently to the approved plans, and that this new retrospective application had been submitted as a result of a visit from Enforcement. He stated that the new building was considerably larger, taller, and wider than the coach house that was originally there, as well as being entirely different from an architectural perspective. It also now included a basement, which involved a lot of material being excavated from the garden. This has the potential to disrupt the drainage flow for other properties, as well as any structural elements that adjoin this property such as walls or fencing. He advised that all the trees had been removed from the bottom of the property in question which meant that he could now see into both this, and the neighbouring properties. The new building had not been finished externally, and there was a deep void leaving the potential for gardens to slump into their neighbours properties.

He stated that 5 adjoining neighbours had objected to the application, albeit only 4 went to EFDC, and he was extremely concerned that the application had been decided both prior to the NWBPC planning committee meeting of 31st October, and in light of the number of objections received. The member of the public stated that as residents they felt completely ignored, with the system running roughshod over them, setting a very poor precedent. The member of the public stated that residents had concerns about noise, lack of completion, subsidence of land and walls, the trees being removed, lack of privacy and amenity, and that the property will be used as a dwelling.

Cllr Clegg asked if the resident was aware of the number of elements from the original planning application which had been contravened, to which the resident replied that it was entirely different to what had been given permission. Cllr Clegg stated that he had in fact looked, and there were numerous contraventions, and that he simply could not understand how an exuberant, overzealous planning officer could pass this application without any consideration for the neighbours, or before hearing from the Parish Council. He felt this was the main issue to be addressed, stating that EFDC employ professionals to deal with planning, but who is responsible if something goes wrong. Cllr Mrs Jackman stated that she was extremely disappointed that permission had been granted, stating that EFDC should take action against the officer who decided this application.

The Clerk asked if the decision was made before the objections had been sent to EFDC, to which the resident advised that all the objections went in before the 29th October cut off date. The Clerk reminded this Council that according to the EFDC weekly list, this Council had until 4th November to comment on this application.

The PFO provided a summary of the issue, stating that the recently introduced changes to planning at EFDC included the fact that Householder decisions do not routinely go to a Committee to decide if the Parish Council or 5 residents object, and that it would be an officer delegated decision unless the Planning Portfolio Holder or Head of planning decides otherwise. The Clerk advised she had concerns that this wasn't well known amongst Parish and Town Councillors, or even District Councillors, and as such this Council had raised this matter with local councils earlier in the day. Cllr Burrows advised he was not aware. Cllr Burrows advised that he was present at the meeting in his capacity as a District Councillor and not Chairman of EFDC, and suggested that perhaps this matter should be raised with the EFDC Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Cllr Tyler asked if there was any point in this Parish Council having planning committee meetings if we were being completely ignored, further stating that each successive Government will be relaxing planning laws and that people were taking advantage of this. Cllr Tyler stated that EFDC should intervene. Cllr Irvine stated that the new building bears no resemblance to what was a very attractive garden building, and that this decision effectively says it's ok to build a two storey structure in your garden, it now seemingly being a free for all.

One other member of the public asked why EFDC would send them a consultation letter if they had no interest in listening to neighbours views. Why did they ask for their opinion? Cllr Irvine commented that the Parish Council was a statutory consultee on planning matters, and asked if the law had changed regarding this. Cllr Mrs Jackman suggested that the residents may wish to approach the Local Government Ombudsman regarding this matter.

Cllr Blanks provided a summary of issues with the previous application to this one, where the Parish Council responded stating the plans were insufficient as this Council could not clearly establish the height of the proposed new building and thus the impact on neighbouring residents, and EFDC stated that they

had reconsulted the Parish Council with new plans, but this had not happened. He further stated that anybody in their right mind would object to a 2-storey building going into a neighbouring garden, especially if it was replacing an old English garden room. Cllr Blanks stated that there was definitely something wrong here, and although it was understood EFDC planning officers were under pressure that does not excuse this error, especially if this error could technically be deemed illegal. Cllr Blanks suggested the matter should be referred to the EFDC Monitoring Officer. Cllr Clegg asked Cllr Burrows how many planning officers there were at EFDC, however Cllr Burrows did not have those figures to hand. Cllr Clegg suggested that if you assumed there were 20 Officers, he would have massive concerns about the ability of these officers to decide planning applications in a reasonable manner without consulting anybody. Cllr Clegg reminded those present that generally EFDCs decisions tended to run parallel with the comments of this Council, and that it was fairly rare that this council objects to an application and this is not a valid objection – the councils seemed to run fairly in alignment.

Cllr Irvine summarised, stating that he saw there were two issues. The first is about the process between EFDC and this Council, and the second being that the residents are now stuck with a rather ugly problem in their back yards. In terms of the first issue, this Council should raise the matter with EFDC and give them a chance to respond. With regard to the second issue, what options were there for residents to challenge the decision, and what could we do to support them. It was noted that the only way to challenge it was via a judicial review which would be extremely expensive, and could end up with the same outcome in any case. There was discussion about residents having the option of going to the press or submitting and FOI to EFDC. The Clerk advised that the office staff needed in the first instance to go through due process and check they have their facts correct.

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

1. The Clerk writes to the Director of Planning EFDC expressing this Councils concern
2. The Clerk writes to the three District Ward Councillors asking them to attend the next Meeting so they can hear the immediate concern of Members of this Council
3. Ensure that the Objectors to this Planning Application are aware of these points letter.

C24.119 REPORT OF THE CLERK

The Clerk provided the following reports:

- a) Planning Matters – Various
- b) Consultation for developments in the Parish
- c) Cemetery matters
- d) Remembrance Sunday – covered in agenda

C24.120 REPORTS & MEMBERS REPORTS

- a) **Chairman's Report** – The Chairman advised he had met with Cllr Chris Whitbread at the recent Councillor surgery, and had raised the following points with him:
 - **Zebra crossing kings head** – needs painting – they have put a covering on the road but you simply cannot see belisha beacons, and he has asked for them to be replaced. The anti skid surface has been completed.
 - **Vicarage Lane West** – We had asked for this to be cleared of foliage and debris going down towards the church, with debris going over the pavement. St Andrews church has regular services and this needs to be addressed.
 - **B181 road surface in front of parade of shops** – all of sudden the area had deteriorated near the cinnamon, and it is like a flood plain when there is heavy rain. The camber of the road causes problems at this location, and it needs to be looked at.

- **The black coating** – The recent black coating on pavements is a mixture of tar and rubber, and this is the final coating and is looking good, and seems to be quite durable. Cllr Tyler stated that some people were saying it is sticking to dogs paws, but it was felt this could possibly have been before the surface had dried.
 - **Zebra crossing by shops** – remains invisible to motorists and asked to try and replace the sign with a flashing one.
 - **Guardrail outside Stuart Poultons** – fence has now been taken away, and Cllr Whitbread asked to chase up when the replacement will be installed. Without the rail, you could park an extra three cars on that pavement outside the chemist which would cause problems.
 - **Traffic Market problems** – we had chased up Gary Saunders previously, and because of the time of year traffic was now starting to build up again, and this will continue for some time. EFDC need to arrange to get some officers out to get traffic sorted. Cllr Irvine advised that the M11 J7 roundabout was almost impassable for 4 – 5 hours the prior Saturday, and people who lived in Hastingwood simply could not get out. Cllr Tyler advised he had previously raised this, and he still has major concerns about what would happen if anybody was in need of an ambulance, stating that he has video of vehicles being bumper to bumper along Wellington Road. The owners of the airfield - EFDC – have a duty of care to address this issue.
- b) **Vice Chairman’s Report** – Cllr Hawkins has advised she will be replacing the plants outside the front door of the hall for the winter months. This was agreed.
- c) **District & County Councillors Reports** – Cllr Bromwich had sent over a written report which was tabled for members.
- d) **Parish Councillors Reports** – Cllr Clegg advised that the CSW team had been out on both 16th and 31st October, with the results being broadly similar to normal with around 10% of people speeding. Weald Bridge Road had about 16 speeders in the hour, more than half of which were doing over 40mph. The CSW received verbal abuse at this location. Cllr Clegg also advised that the fly tipped rubbish in the ditch that was originally reported 21st August had been removed today.
- e) **Queens Hall Charity Report** – The Clerk was aware that a quad bike had been active on the field, causing issues with the grass surface.
- f) **Highways** – no report.

C24.121 FINANCIAL REPORTS

- a) Councillors **AGREED** the monthly cheque lists for October 2024, and noted the bank balances as at 31st October 2024. Cllr Blanks queried why there were two Fusion payments in one month.
- b) Members noted that the CCLA investment report had not been received at this time.

C24.122 REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY COMMERMORATIVE EVENTS 2024

Members were advised of the following:

- Two adverts placed in Village Life regarding the Lunch & Service
- Advertising has been carried out on social media since early September
- Posters were placed on the Noticeboards
- Royal British Legion have been informed
- Invitations have gone out, together with reminders

- Lunch has been arranged
- Vicar has been booked
- Bugler has been booked
- Royal Norwegian Embassy & Royal Norwegian Airforce have been contacted regarding attendance at the event or laying a wreath

The Clerk further advised that there would be 33 wreath layers, 2 Norwegians from 132 Airwing, the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Essex, Wing Commander Podmore with 4 RAF personal, Mike Power the Arch Deacon of West Ham and 68 people for lunch. All arrangements were well in hand.

C24.123 COUNCILLORS SURGERY

The Parish Council had facilitated a Surgery on behalf of District and County Councillors (Conservative Party) on the 18th & 25th October at the Parish Hall in Thornwood. Appointments for local residents were arranged with relatively good attendance. The Chairman of the Parish Council attended and put forward a number of concerns he had which were outstanding, and reported earlier in this meeting. District and County Councillors of other different political affiliations should be reminded that the hall is available to facilitate Surgeries if they wish to hold them, free of charge. They just need to contact the parish council staff to arrange this.

C24.124 NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

At the October Parish Council meeting, it was agreed that a cost benefit analysis would be completed to enable councillors to make a decision about whether or not to restart its Neighbourhood Plan. This had now been completed with clear evidence shown that the residents of the Parish would benefit greatly by way of funding via the EFDC Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) if it had a Neighbourhood Plan. This would be way in excess of the cost to create the plan (over the coming years). Councillors were reminded that EFDC was currently consulting on whether to introduce a CIL, and that Councils with a neighbourhood plan would receive 25% of any CIL monies received. There was currently £18,593.92 in an EMR to continue with a neighbourhood plan. The PFO had also contacted the previous consultant who has assisted this Council with the plan, and he advised that a light touch re-consultation was needed. It was noted that in terms of distributing information to residents, this should be done by way of the external distributors recently used by this Council, and that more of the PFO's time would be taken up with NP work and that additional administrative support would be needed on a temporary basis, perhaps one day per week.

Councillors considered this matter, and **AGREED** this Council should progress completion of their NP as soon as possible.

C24.125 DEVELOPER WORKING GROUP MEETING

Councillors noted that a number of Councillors attended a meeting of the Developer Working Group on Thursday 17th October 2024 in the Thornwood Common Parish Hall. A copy of the notes from this meeting were attached to the agenda.

C24.126 BUDGET / PRECEPT MEETING

This years Budget and Precept meeting will take place on Monday 16th December. Councillors were asked to advise the Clerk if they would like any matter included for consideration under the budget / precept, and if so to provide full details of the subject including costings. So far, the PFO has a list of items agreed throughout the year, and the Clerk has one item from the Hastingwood Councillors for inclusion.

C14.127 INTERIM INTERNAL AUDIT 2024/2025

Councillors noted that this years Interim Internal Audit will take place on 4th and 5th December, and will be conducted remotely.

C24.128 PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY – JOINING UP OF TWO FOOTPATHS WEALD COMMON

The Clerk advised she was still awaiting a formal response from ECC on this matter, however she would be meeting with ECC Cllr Whitbread in the near future and will raise this matter with him. In addition, the Senior Administrative Officer would be attending a PRoW course on 13th November, which may help.

C24.129 MEETING WITH CHAIRMAN OF QUALIS

Unfortunately, due to the re-organisation of Qualis, Simon Rutter is no longer in post, however after liaising with Cllr Whitbread a meeting has been arranged for Friday with Jen Gould, the temporary Chief Exec at EFDC.

C24.130 CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR CLOSURE

Members noted that the Parish Council Office will close at 12 noon on Friday 20th December 2024 and re-open 9.15am on Monday 6th January 2025. Staff will be taking any appropriate annual leave on necessary days. The Clerk will provide emergency cover during the Christmas and New Year closure, and the office mobile phone will be on to cover Emergency and Cemetery Matters. Notices will be placed on Noticeboards and information on Social media. There will be a short Parish Council meeting on the evening of the 6th January 2025 to ratify the Precept.

C24.131 FUTURE OF EFD/EALC LOCAL LIAISON COMMITTEE

On 21st October a number of Clerks from Parish and Town Councils in the EFDC district met to discuss the current situation regarding both the EFDC Local Council Liaison Committee (LCLC) meetings, and the future of the EALC Epping Forest Branch Meetings. Councillors may recall that the local Branch meetings started again a couple of years ago, however its secretary stepped down after the 21st September 2023, mainly due to frustration with EFDC and their failure to value the sector. This led to many clerks agreeing that for some time now the LCLC meetings have been questionable in terms of their benefit to Parish and Town Councils, with many Clerks who represent councils becoming frustrated and disenfranchised with the outcomes. As such, Clerks from Epping, North Weald Bassett, Ongar, Chigwell, Loughton, Epping Upland, Moreton Bobbingworth and the Lavers, and Stanford Rivers, met on the 27th to discuss if we could see a better way forward.

All present felt that there was definitely a ‘space’ for Clerks to meet and discuss matters of common interest or concern, and that perhaps a better way forward rather than the EALC Branch Meetings would be to hold 3 Clerks meetings a year (or meet at short notice if there is an urgent matter that needs addressing), and any collectively agreed outcomes, issues or queries to be put directly to EFDC via one or two of our District Councillors (the District Councillors agreed between clerk based on the subject matter or issue). EFDC has historically stated that as clerks no longer have access to individual officers at EFDC, we should raise our issues with our district Councillors.

It was suggesting that the LCLC is perhaps a forum where Councillors meet with EFDC, and not necessarily Clerks. Therefore, Councils would appoint a Councillor to attend and not a Clerk. For some time it has been noted that very few Parish and Town councillors ever attended the LCLC Meetings, and that whilst you can bring matters to the attention of District Council via the LCLC platform, action rarely got taken. Clerks in attendance felt that the LCLC was not the suitable forum that they were missing to assist them with day to day functions. Adriana Jones, this councils PFO, is the appointed clerk who

will be writing to Gary Woodall, Team Manager EFDC Democratic & Electoral Services, in the next few days on behalf of the Clerks in the Epping Forest District to put a proposal on the agenda for the 21st November 2024 LCLC meeting.

It is worth noting that the above meeting of Clerks and subsequent proposal was borne out of the absolute frustration and anger that many Clerks felt regarding the change in relationship between EFDC and Parish and Town Councils. It was noted that the PFO spoke to Cllr Chris Whitbread at the Surgery on Friday 25th October and explained the above, and it is understood that Cllr Whitbread would be happy to be a ‘designated’ Councillor who would be willing to meet with Clerks at these forums.

Councillors fully supported this action.

Meeting closed:

Signed

Date