



MINUTES

Meeting: PARISH COUNCIL

Date: 3rd March 2025

Time: 7.30PM

Venue: PARISH HALL, THORNWOOD COMMON

PRESENT:

Councillors (11) Cllr Buckley (Chairman), Cllr Mrs Hawkins, Cllr Irvine, Cllr Blanks, Cllr Clegg, Cllr Spearman, Cllr Mrs Jackman, Cllr Born, Cllr Ms Wood, Cllr Kinnear, Cllr Mrs Etherington

Officers in Attendance (2)

Susan De Luca, Parish Clerk

Adriana Jones – Principal Finance Officer

Members of the Public (6)

Members of the Press (0)

C24.163 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (2)

Apologies from Cllr Bedford and Cllr Tyler.

C24.164 OTHER ABSENCES (1)

Cllr Stroud.

C24.165 MINUTES

Councillors **AGREED** the Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 3rd February 2025.

C24.166 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

C24.167 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Chairman asked Councillors if they were happy to move agenda item 9 forward to this part of the meeting given there were members of the public present regarding this item – this was **AGREED**.

C24.168 NORTH WEALD MODEL FLYING CLUB

Councillors noted that the Clerk had received an email from the North Weald Model Flying Club, which was currently situated on the Old Golf Range, North Weald Airfield, a full copy of which was reproduced in the agenda. The Clerk also advised that Cllr Clegg had visited the Model Flying Club and also had a brief resume of the club. The Chairman invited Dr Lewis (a member of the Flying Club) to address the Council.

Dr Lewis thanked the Chairman, and provided a brief summary of the club stating they had been sited on the airfield for at least the last 50 years with permission, and possibly up to 10 years before that without permission. There were around 30 club members, ranging from aged 17 to much older. Last year, the club signed a 10-year lease with EFDC for the current location at Merlin Field, and this was as a result of the police service operating out the airfield. Dr Lewis advised there had been discussion at the time regarding the police service offering relocation costs, however this was never followed up. Dr Lewis stated he was looking for any advice from the Parish Council, a mechanism for any recompense, or help to find a new field. There would be a cost to make any such field suitable for the flying club, with the

preparation for the current location costing around £20,000. The model planes are around 40-50lb in weight, and the ground needs preparation to manage this. Dr Lewis advised the club had been given 6 months notice by EFDC to look for another flying field.

The Clerk confirmed she had spoken with EFDC Cllrs Balcombe and Bedford, and was aware that Cllr Bedford had visited Darren Goodey at the Airfield to discuss the matter, and he thinks there may be a possibility that an alternative location on the airfield could still be found, although this is not guaranteed. The Clerk and Chairman had spoken regarding this matter, and reminded Councillors that when EFDC originally purchased the airfield it was bought for leisure purposes for the people of Epping Forest. Whilst the Parish Council could not offer any legal advice, or advice on recompense, they could support the Model Flying Club by writing a letter to EFDC asking them to find an alternative space on the airfield.

Cllr Clegg stated that if they signed a 10 year lease, there was still 9 months to go, however Dr Lewis advised that within the lease they could be given 6 months notice of termination, which is what had happened. Cllr Etherington suggested this council should be strongly supportive of the club, and that the community was passionate about the airfield and that EFDC had already given lots away for industrial use. Leisure use on the airfield should remain. Cllr Blanks asked if there was any provision within the lease in case of an early departure for a compensation payment, to which the answer was no. Dr Lewis did state that the club had been given a reduction in rent, and that his dealings with Darren Goodey were friendly. Cllr Blanks stated that for EFDC, the Airfield is a big cash cow, and the market is a money spinner, but that both negatively affect the parish residents, especially on a Saturday with the market traffic. He continued stating that Google had been EFDCs saviour last year as it allows them to use the interest from the millions of pounds Google paid for the site.

After further discussion, it was **AGREED** this Council would offer as much support as it could to the Model Flying Club remaining at a location on the airfield, with a letter being sent to EFDC to include the Acting Chief Executive Andrew Small. Cllr Clegg stated that this Council should keep on top of the comment made by Cllr Bedford with regard to a possible alternative location on the airfield.

The Chairman thanked the Model Flying Club representatives for attending.

C24.169 REPORT OF THE CLERK

The Clerk provided an update on current matters, which included confirmation that the bid for grant funding via 'Love your Bus' grant stream had been submitted, with acknowledgement of receipt being received. It was noted that a survey was completed of local residents to provide evidence to back up the grant application, and that a response had been received from the Ongar Academy but not St Johns. The Clerk also advised that she had been working on the office move to the Queens Hall, a Wayleave agreement over Thornwood Common, the annual meeting and civic awards. The Annual Report had now been completed, and would be delivered to each home in the Parish in the coming 3 weeks.

C24.170 REPORTS & MEMBERS REPORTS

- a) **Chairman's Report** – The Chairman reminded councillors that 12 months ago a local contractor had been appointed to manage and maintain the garden outside the shops in North Weald, and he also got involved with maintaining the Sensory Garden, however notice had been received that he would not be continuing. As such, the Chairman and Clerk had been trying to source an alternative contractor, and a meeting would be taking place the following Saturday with a potential individual. The Chairman also reported he had attended the funeral of Arthur Moreton, which was extremely well supported and well co-ordinated with representatives from the

Norwegian Embassy and Airforce present, along with a fly past of two single propeller planes taking place.

- b) **Vice Chairman's Report** – Cllr Hawkins advised that herself and Cllr Spearman would start monthly allotment inspections early April. She was also speaking to somebody about possibly being the new Warden for Thornwood Allotments. Cllr Hawkins advised councillors that this year marked the 50th Anniversary of the building of Thornwood Common Parish Hall, and that she was hoping to arrange a celebratory event.
- c) **District & County Councillors Reports** – The Clerk provided a written update from EFDC Cllr Burrows, who wanted to thank this Council for providing the hall free of charge to him for the EFDC Chairmans Charity event which raised £1,170 for the Air Ambulance Charity. He also thanked the Council for the two bottles wine for the raffle, and use of the PA system. Cllr Burrows also mentioned that every EFDC Councillor in attendance at the Civic Offices on the night of the relevant meeting had passed the EFDC budget.
- d) **Parish Councillors Reports** – Cllr Clegg advised that a community speedwatch event took place the previous Friday with 200 vehicles recorded in one hour, 12% of which were speeding, and 25 recorded and sent to the police. 47MPH was the top speed recorded. The next event would be in Weald Bridge Road in the middle of March.

Cllr Blanks asked if Council meetings would now be held at the Queens Hall, to which the Clerk advised that some smaller meetings and committee meetings would be, but that it was likely full Parish Council meetings would need to be held in the Thornwood Hall due to the size of room needed. Cllr Blanks stated he was concerned about loss of income for the hall, to which the Clerk advised this was not an issue as hires were not turned away if at all possible.
- e) **Queens Hall Charity Report** – Cllr Ms Wood advised that following a recent complaint, an asbestos survey was needed, however she would elaborate under the relevant agenda item.
- f) **Highways** – The Chairman advised there had been various reports of road closures, with one planned for May at the Plain in Epping, which would be closed for 11 days. It was suggested this should be placed on the Parish Councils Facebook page nearer the time, as dates could change. Cllr Hawkins advised of a police chase through the Thornwood High Road the previous Friday.

C24.171 FINANCIAL REPORTS

- a) Councillors **NOTED** the monthly cheque lists for February which had been emailed to Councillors.
- b) Members noted the CCLA investment report for February.

C24.172 ARTHUR MORETON

Members were advised that the Clerk had received an email from the family of Arthur Moreton advising that he had passed away on the 5th February 2025 following an illness. Arthur Moreton was a remarkable individual who moved to North Weald in 1995, however his association with the Airfield goes back much longer, to the times of the Fighter Meets. He dedicated much of that time to serving his community with unwavering commitment. Arthur was a loyal Ambassador for North Weald Airfield and a devoted parish councillor who exemplified the true spirit of community service and leadership. He had a passion for aviation that was evident in his tireless efforts to promote and support North Weald Airfield. He embraced his love for the 'Norwegian Connection' – keeping this alive and to the forefront. His advocacy not only helped to preserve this vital piece of our heritage but also inspired countless individuals to explore this

to the full. Through his work, Arthur ensured that the airfield remained a beacon of opportunity for generations to come. As a parish councillor he was a pillar of strength and integrity. His dedication to the well-being of our community was unparalleled, and he addressed the concerns of residents. His leadership was marked by a deep understanding of the needs of our community and an unwavering commitment to making it a better place for all. The Chairman confirmed he will very much be missed, and that the flowers from the funeral had been placed in front of the Debt of Honour.

C24.173 HASTINGWOOD VILLAGE HALL

Members were reminded that the Clerk had assisted the Hastingwood Village Hall in applying for Grant Funding from the Shared Rural Prosperity Fund to completely replace their wooden hall floor. The Parish Council also given a contribution of £5,400 (which was budgeted for and came out of the S106 fund held for Hastingwood Community Fund) as a contribution to the remaining 20% balance that was needed. Attached to the agenda was a letter that had been received from the Hastingwood Village Hall committee advising that following the replacement of the floor (which was the original floor that had been in situ for well over 100 years since the hall was built), it was now necessary to carry out some other essential repairs which only became apparent during the works to replace the floor. The main concerns are the drainage around the hall and the problems with the guttering around the roof which, if left unresolved, would undoubtedly damage the newly laid floor.

The Hall Committee were seeking additional funding to install an outside drainage system for the hall, which is over 100 years old and has had little or no maintenance up until the present committee and the Parish Council took such an active interest in the hall for the people of Hastingwood. Unfortunately due to the age of the building, the lack of proper drainage has led to water damage and erosion, threatening the structural integrity of this important community building. Installing this drainage system will prevent further deterioration, protect the hall's foundations, protect the new floor, and ensure it remains a safe and functional space for community events and activities.

The Clerk confirmed she had looked for funding for such works, but had so far been unsuccessful. The Chairman stated that this seemed critical, and that works were clearly urgent. Cllr Mrs Jackman agreed. The Clerk advised that the Council still held an earmarked reserve for Hastingwood. Cllr Irvine stated that there was no point in ruining £35,000 of works to make a saving, and that a few years ago the Hastingwood Councillors were tasked with looking at different projects in Hastingwood to benefit the community, however this had been somewhat challenging. Cllr Irvine continued, stating that in light of this he felt that although the earmarked reserve budget may have been for other Hastingwood works, this Council should step up and support the village hall. Cllr Etherington agreed, stating that we could look for other funds next year if necessary.

Cllr Ms Wood asked if this was the best quote they had received, or if they had looked at other organisations. Cllr Born stated that he thought some years back this Council was going to complete a stock condition survey of all the halls so we know what problems would be coming, however the Clerk stated that she could not recall this being agreed, but in any case this hall was not owned by the Parish Council. Cllr Born proposed that a surveyor should be contracted to complete a stock condition survey, who could prioritise repairs.

Cllr Blanks asked if the Parish Council could reclaim the VAT if it paid for the works, to which the PFO advised they could not.

The Chairman invited a representative of the Hastingwood Village Hall Committee to address the Council, who stated that there is a gully that goes around the hall around 1ft deep, and that the hall was

set on sand without any footings, meaning the water drains away extremely slowly. In essence, it is like a ditch that just holds water. It was noted that there was a specialist in North Weald who completed such works. Cllr Spearman took a brief look at the proposals, and stated that as somebody who has been a builder for most of his life, on face value the works seemed reasonable.

It was noted that the land on which the village hall sits was left to the people of Hastingwood as a community asset, after which time the hall was built, then a further extension. The farmer who donated the land left it in trust to St Andrews Church, with the trustees coming from the village of Hastingwood.

After further discussion, it was **AGREED** that the Parish Council would fully fund the necessary works to the Hastingwood Village Hall drainage up to a cap of £7,800 (including VAT), and that Cllr Spearman would meet with the hall committee and contractor to look over the proposed works and ascertain if the specification seemed reasonable. In addition, the Hall Committee should be advised to look into and consider the general maintenance of the pipes around the hall to ensure on an annual basis to ensure the pipes, gutters, drains, etc do not become blocked and a further issue occur in the future.

C24.174 NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Councillors noted that throughout February, questionnaires had been delivered to each and every home in the Parish asking residents to provide an update on matters of importance to them, and to establish if the community still felt the same as it did at the time of last survey. This information will be fed into the Regulation 14 Draft Neighbourhood Plan consultation. The current response statistics were as follows:

- 199 responses uploaded so far, representing views of 442 residents.
- 6,446 resident population, meaning current response rate is just under 7%.
- 84% from north weald, 8% Thornwood and 8% Hastingwood
- Remains a clear love of the airfield and that it should be retained
- 98.5% of respondents use the open spaces
- 45% of households have only 1 car, with 36% having 2 cars
- Clear desire to reinstate the EOR to Epping, and improved cycled links to Epping
- Clear issue about traffic and speeding through North Weald being major concern
- 49% of respondents added extra comments
- 60% of respondents want to be kept updated and left their email address.

Analysis of the responses would take place throughout April and May.

C24.175 RURAL HOUSING NEEDS

Councillors noted that the Clerk had received a communication from the RCCE - a Rural Housing Needs provider - with regards to possible local needs for affordable housing within Thornwood Common, for providing affordable housing under the Rural Exception Site (RES) policy. It is understood that the average house price in North Weald Bassett over the last year was £648,000 and the RES policy ensures that any affordable housing delivered remains affordable in perpetuity, and also with a priority for those with a strong local connection to the local ward. The housing providers work closely with EFDC on such projects, and they are supportive of RES delivery to support affordable housing in rural areas. It is understood there had been an approach by the Church Commissioners who are willing to work together on a site they own in Thornwood, with the community and rural specialist housing association Hastoe Housing (preferred supplier of rural housing in Epping Forest District), to develop some affordable housing to benefit the residents of Thornwood ward. This process usually begins with a Housing Needs Survey. This survey goes to all the households in the ward and gives residents the opportunity to state if they have a housing need in the next 5 years. A RES will be guided (in size, number and tenure) by the

housing need identified in a Housing Needs Survey. It is a community led process designed to ensure the community are involved extensively in the process.

There was some detailed discussion about affordable housing, with an explanation as to what ‘in perpetuity’ meant. Cllr Clegg advised he had looked at the site earlier that morning, and the area is around the size of 3 football pitches, meaning that based on an average dwellings per hectare it could be around 40-60 houses. Cllr Clegg suggested that the affordable housing spaces could be accommodated on the numerous other developments in Thornwood. There was a general concern as to where the entrance / exit would be, and that it would in effect be ribbon development. Cllr Blanks advised that he was generally not supportive of this idea given the site location and the number of homes already being built. It was noted that the Section 106 agreement for the Tudor House development had a strong local criteria for eligible households for affordable housing on that site. Cllr Irvine **PROPOSED** this Council responds to the Rural Housing provider stating that the Council has looked at the proposal, and whilst as a general principle affordable housing is positive for a community, this village and the surrounding areas already has a significant amount of development currently taking place and planned, all of which is providing affordable housing which will more than sufficiently meet the needs of Thornwood Village for the next 5 years and possibly beyond. In addition, the proposed site location is not deemed appropriate. This was **SECONDED** by Cllr Blanks. Unanimous vote in support.

C24.176 QUEENS HALL

The Queens Hall Community Centre was built in the mid 1980s, and the Charity has been asked by a local resident to view the Asbestos Register. It was the understanding of the Queens Hall Charity that as the Community Centre was built in the 1980s there is no asbestos present, and that an Asbestos Register was therefore not required. However, having looked at the regulations it is now understood that any building prior to 2000 does need to have an Asbestos Register whether the organisation believe there to be asbestos present or not.

Then Queens Hall Charity has written to the Parish Council to see if they are able to assist the Charity with funding and sourcing a supplier to carry out an asbestos survey at the Queens Hall as this now needs to be carried out as a matter of urgency. Asbestos can be a hazardous material that poses significant health risks if disturbed, including lung cancer, mesothelioma, and asbestosis. Conducting an asbestos survey is crucial to identify and manage any asbestos-containing materials in our community, ensuring the safety and well-being of all residents.

The Parish Council Financial Officer has been in contact with a company who can have one of their operatives carry this out as soon as possible. The estimated cost of the asbestos survey is £650, which will include a full report if there is any asbestos, and where it is located. Councillors **AGREED** to fund this report.

C24.177 FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THORNWOOD VILLAGE HALL –TUESDAY 28TH OCTOBER ‘25

Members were advised that the 50th Anniversary of Thornwood Village Hall will be celebrated on Tuesday 28th October. Cllr Shirley Hawkins is liaising with local Thornwood resident Jimmy Waters and they will organise the event between them, with Jimmy Waters providing a display of local items.

C24.178 COUNCILLORS SURGERY

Members recalled that Councillors surgeries have been hosted in the Parish Hall in Thornwood for District/County Councillors who requested this facility. The only group to have requested to use this facility so far have been the Conservative Councillors. We have now had a request from the Independent

Councillor for the use of Parish Council premises (new offices in Queens Hall) for this facility. The Clerk has been given three dates for this use:

- **March 29th 10:00 - 12:00, July 12th 10:00 - 12:00, October 11th 10:00 - 11:30**

Members **AGREED** to permit this use. The Clerk advised she could cover 29th March, however she needed Councillors to cover the last two dates. Cllrs Born and Spearman advised they would be willing to sit with Cllr Bromwich on these last two dates, which could be agreed nearer the time

C24.179 ANNUAL ALLOTMENT MEETING

Members were reminded that the Annual Allotment Holders Meeting would be held in the Parish Hall on Sunday 6th April at 11 am. The relevant documentation will be sent out to all tenants. Cllrs Spearman and Mrs Hawkins confirmed their availability.

C24.180 REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Councillors undertook a review of this Council's policies and procedures, which included updating the Financial Regulations following the NALC update in 2024, Standing Orders, Financial Risk Assessment, and other general policies. A separate email had been sent to all Councillors with full details of the documents to be considered. Cllr Born asked if a members remuneration scheme was being reviewed, to which the clerk confirmed this would be on the May agenda. Councillors **AGREED** the updated documents as submitted.

C24.181 ATTENDANCE AT EFDC PLANS MEETINGS

Councillors noted that the Clerk attended the EFDC Plans A Committee Meeting on Wednesday 19th February to make representation on two planning applications on the agenda, one being Rear of Avenue House, London Road Hastingwood, Erection of 6 Dwellings and Associated Parking, the other being Methodist Church North Weald, Change of use from Class F1 (place of worship) to Class E (g)(i) (offices) (Revised Scheme to EPF/1202/24). The Clerk explained that judging by this meeting it now seemed that due to the new Government policies including those of Grey Belt, the Parish Council's representations hold very little weight, even in a public forum. Members were encouraged to view the meeting and to question whether they felt it was in the best interest of residents to continue to represent them at this forum, or to solely send in the council's comments when the application is discussed at the Parish Council Planning Committee. It was noted that it was a requirement of EFDC that the Council confirmed its intention to speak at an EFDC committee meeting in the consultation response in order for it to go to committee.

Cllr Blanks agreed, stating that he was extremely disappointed, and he felt it was pointless this Council representing its residents at such a forum, stating it was degrading. However, he felt that the Council should still respond to planning applications but state in each response that the Council would not be attending planning committee meetings because of the stupidity or pointlessness of doing so. He stated it was important we made this statement as without it, it may suggest the Council agreed with the application. It should be made clear why the Council would not be attending.

Cllr Irvine stated that the planning committee of the Parish council used to carry some weight, but with all the Government changes he questioned if they actually carry any weight now. Cllr Clegg stated that when this Council sends in an objection to a planning application which is a householder application, the EFDC Planning Officer can decide the application no matter what, however full planning applications do have the option for the Council to refer this to a committee. Cllr Born asked if we were getting the support of District Councillors attending our meeting, to which the Clerk stated they did however they were not permitted to vote at an EFDC Planning Committee meeting on any application in their ward, albeit they can address the committee.

It was noted that there are certainly occasions where an objection of the Parish Council seemed to be the same objections as the planning officers. Cllr Ms Wood stated that everybody around the table was present to support the community, and that if the Parish council stopped responding to planning application residents would feel they were not being represented. Cllr Wood suggested that perhaps the planning committees could be made smaller, perhaps only 6 councillors, but stated she felt the Council had a duty to do whatever it could to represent its residents, even if the powers that be did not listen. We should not give up the fight. Cllr Clegg stated that he would not like to see the planning committee watered down. After further discussion, it was **AGREED** to continue as at present, albeit there being remaining frustration about the system.

Meeting closed 21.07

Signed

Date