



**MINUTES**

**Meeting:** PARISH COUNCIL

**Date:** 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023

**Time:** 7.30PM

**Venue:** PARISH HALL, THORNWOOD COMMON

**PRESENT:**

**Councillors (12)** A Buckley (Chairman), Mrs S Hawkins, T Blanks, B Clegg, R Spearman, Mrs S Jackman MBE, A Tyler, Mrs P Etherington, A Irvine, Ms D Wood, C Kinnear, N Born

**Officers in Attendance (2)**

Susan Deluca - Clerk

Joanna Tyler – Senior Administrative Officer

**Also in Attendance (1)**

EFDC District Councillor L Burrows

**Members of the Public (0)**

**Members of the Press (1)**

**C23.044 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (0)**

None.

**C23.045 OTHER ABSENCES (2)**

No apologies for absence had been received from Cllrs Bedford and Stroud

**C23.046 MINUTES**

Councillors **AGREED** the Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

Councillors **NOTED** the Minutes of the Neighbourhood Plan Meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> June and the Minutes of the Peer Group Meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> June.

**C23.047 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**C23.048 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

There were no members of the public present. The Chairman welcomed District Cllr Les Burrows to the meeting. Cllr Burrows informed Councillors of an EFDC Cabinet Meeting scheduled for Monday, 10<sup>th</sup> July, where Cabinet would be discussing Latton Priory. Cllr Burrows said that this is an important meeting and encouraged Councillors to join online.

**C23.049 REPORT OF THE CLERK**

- **Coffee with Cops** – Councillors **NOTED** that the next event is scheduled to be held on Monday, 24<sup>th</sup> July, 10am to 12 noon at the Parish Hall in Thornwood. The Clerk suggested that, in future, consideration could be given

to holding this in conjunction with the District Councillors Surgery, which in turn may increase attendance.

- **Weald Common** – Dementia Friendly Area. Councillors **NOTED** that plans are currently being drawn up, to be submitted to the Shared Prosperity Fund. Arrangements are currently being made for the Opening of the new Woodland Area for September. The Clerk advised that seating is to be installed, along with signage and way-markers (it may be possible to include these in the dementia friendly bid). The Clerk reminded Councillors that the North Weald Preservation Society had gifted just over £360.00 to put towards the purchase of a bench and a plaque will be engraved to acknowledge this.
- **Cemetery Matters** – Councillors **NOTED** that the Clerk had been dealing with an interment and memorials.
- **Planning Enforcement** – Councillors **NOTED** that the Clerk had been liaising with a local resident with regard to a planning and enforcement enquiry.
- **Audit, Financial and Accounting Matters** – Councillors **NOTED** that the Clerk had been dealing with financial matters and auditors requests.
- **All Other Administrative & Matters on the Agenda** – Councillors **NOTED** that the Clerk and Office Staff have been working on other matters within the Agenda.
- The Clerk informed Members of the sad news that Doris Holden had passed away at the age of 103 and advised that she had been given the details for the funeral if any Councillor wished to attend.
- **CCTV** – the Clerk referred to a recent item discussed on the television programme Panorama, regarding CCTV and the concerns of systems being hacked. The Clerk advised that she had been liaising with Essential who have in turn been liaising with the manufacturers with regard to vulnerability and the Clerk has been assured that the Parish Council's CCTV network system is secure, it cannot be hacked.
- The Chairman referred Members back to the report regarding the possibility of a Dementia Friendly Area and advised that the area being considered is the field where the play area is, not the newly planted Woodland area.

## C23.050 REPORTS & MEMBERS REPORTS

- a) **Chairman's Report** – The Chairman gave an update on the Weald Common Tree Project, which he said he would now refer to as North Weald Woodland. The Chairman reported that he had been in discussions with the Clerk and Senior Admin Officer and is hopeful that the Opening will take place mid-September. The Chairman advised that arrangements were in hand to install two benches near to the central area where there is a concrete anchor. Two information boards will also be installed, one giving a potted history of the surrounding area. The second board will depict a selection of the trees that have been planted. Cllr Mrs Etherington commented that there had been a few complaints about the long grass, with residents asking if this had been done on purpose. The Chairman confirmed that the well-trodden pathways are to be maintained and arrangements were in hand for the Parish Council's contractor to cut back the grass. The Chairman commented that people are being encouraged not to walk in the areas where the trees have been planted. The Chairman said that he had spent a number

of hours hammering the tree posts back in, more mulch had been added to protect the tree roots and to assist with preventing weeds from growing. Cllr Tyler commented that the Cooper Beech tree in the centre appeared to have taken well and praised the efforts of the Chairman and the Parish Council's contractor for the care they had given to this. The Chairman advised that a special plaque commemorating the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee is to be installed on a log next to the Copper Beech tree. Arrangements are also being made to install a small plaque to acknowledge where the children from St Andrew's Primary School Eco-Warrior Group planted the final 40 trees.

b) **Vice Chairman's Report** - The Vice Chairman reported that the recent District Councillors Surgery had been quite successful compared to previous ones. It was noted that 8 appointments had been booked, however 3 people had not turned up for their appointments.

c) **District & County Councillors Reports** – District Cllr Burrows referred to his earlier report and confirmed that the Cabinet Meeting is scheduled to start at 7pm and reiterated that it was a very important meeting and encouraged all to view online.

d) **Parish Councillors Reports**

The Chairman advised that Cllr Blanks had provided a written report which had been circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting. Councillors confirmed that there were no further questions on the content. Cllr Blanks gave a further update to the report and referred back to the previous Parish Council Meeting when he had asked the Clerk to advise him of the link regarding the performance of the Qualis Managing Director to the Local Council's Liaison Committee Meeting, the Clerk confirmed that she had done this. Cllr Blanks said that it wasn't terribly interesting, however it was a good demonstration of what they (Qualis) were supposed to be doing but were not doing. Cllr Blanks commented that at that time Qualis had not produced any accounts and low and behold the Managing Director had since resigned. Cllr Blanks said even worse than that, if you tried the link today, it has been taken down. The Clerk commented that the link to a webcast meeting should not have been taken down as it is a public meeting. The Clerk asked District Cllr Burrows if he would be able to find out why this had happened and confirmed that she would email details of the link. Cllr Blanks reported that the accounts for Qualis Community for the second year are overdue and said that he has reminded the Company Secretary, Pat Worth, and she is very grateful. The Chairman asked Cllr Blanks to include this information in his report for the next meeting.

Cllr Clegg reported that he had good news, with the Community Speedwatch team gaining another team member and advised that Mr Madden from North Weald had qualified and is going to be invited to join the next survey. Mr Madden had observed a previous survey at Weald Bridge Road. Cllr Clegg reported that he had been out twice in Upland Road, recording that 11% of drivers had been speeding, with the fastest being recorded at 64mph in a 30mph limit. Because of this 11%, which was in keeping with what has been happening over the last year or two, Cllr Clegg and Jimmy Waters decided to sit in their car watching the traffic go by

between 10.30 and 11.30 on Sunday morning. They recorded 81% of vehicles speeding, the highest was 56mph, with the others being high averages into the 40's. Cllr Clegg will be sending the stats off to Liam Collins, the Speedwatch Coordinator. Cllr Clegg reminded Members that at the last Parish Council Meeting, Councillors supported himself and Jimmy Waters for the parking restrictions in Upland Road. They have got the necessary 75% support from the council that they went to see and reported that Jimmy Waters had received a phone call from the officer that he had sent the information to, who had said that he was very impressed and called it an outstanding presentation. The officer has accepted that it is a very serious problem and is looking to upgrade double yellows to other colours. The officer has also said that the engineers survey is going to take place sometime in October or November, which both Cllr Clegg and Jimmy Waters will be invited to. Cllr Clegg reported that the officer is pretty confident that this will be accepted by the National Parking Association and will be implemented after Christmas if all goes well.

Cllr Clegg said that they will be carrying out the next Speedwatch survey in Weald Bridge Road within the next fortnight. Cllr Blanks asked Cllr Clegg if there was a possibility of getting a model in a High Viz vest being put at the junction. Cllr Clegg said that he believed this would be a waste of time and mentioned the new Deer Warning Signs along Thornwood High Road which illuminate when drivers reach 50mph and commented that drivers speed up just to illuminate them. Cllr Tyler commented that this could draw drivers' attention away from the road. Cllr Clegg said that he is now of the opinion that the only physical deterrent is the introduction of humps (which he doesn't agree with) or chicanes. Cllr Irvine commented that neither option is particularly favourable. The Chairman asked Cllr Clegg to report back at the next meeting. Cllr Clegg reminded Councillors that Police presence was promised for Upland Road, on the 27<sup>th</sup> June, however they did not show up or give an explanation as to why, which Cllr Clegg said was in keeping with his view of local Community Policing.

- e) **Queens Hall Charity Report** – Cllr Kinnear reported that the hall is ticking along nicely, however, there is an issue with large trees which require attention. Cllr Kinnear reported that there is one large tree overhanging the hall and the nursery play area and also they have an issue with dead wood falling from certain trees overhanging the car park. The Charity have received a quote for £1600 to £1800 by a tree surgeon, which also includes cutting back the alleyway from the hall to the school. Queens Hall are asking if there is any funding available from the Parish Council. The Clerk advised that the Parish Council had given money previously to the Queens Hall, which was match funding to cut back a large oak tree which was obscuring a neighbouring property. Cllr Clegg asked if the Clerk could check if there are any TPOs registered. Cllr Ms Wood reported that one of the trees is now touching the roof of the Queens Hall and is lifting the tiles. The Clerk said that she was not aware of any TPOs and advised Councillors that a precedent had been set before with helping. Cllr Ms Wood referred to the alleyway between the hall and the school and reported that despite trying to find out who the owner is, no one wanted to take responsibility. Cllr Wood had received complaints from parents using the pathway that their own and their children's clothes had got snagged on overhanging brambles etc., which are now making the pathway unusable. The Chairman asked Councillors if they would

be in agreement to match fund £800. All Councillors **AGREED** unanimously.

- f) **Neighbourhood Plan Report** – the Clerk reported that the PFO had advised that she is hoping to hear back from Navigus sometime during July. The Clerk said that the PFO had only had responses from three Councillors to the email she had sent out regarding looking at the policies and the PFO would appreciate any other comments. The Chairman said that he had asked the PFO to send the email to those Councillors who had not been able to attend the Neighbourhood Plan Meeting so that they would have a task to do, so that all Councillors could contribute if they could not physically attend the meeting.
- g) **Highways Report** – Councillors **NOTED** the latest report received from ECC Highways, which was attached to the Agenda.

### C23.051 FINANCIAL REPORTS

#### a) Payments

Cllr Blanks referred to the payment for N Power and asked what length of time this covered. The Clerk confirmed 1 month. Cllr Mrs Jackman MBE asked what the Professional fees for the Bowls Club referred to. The Clerk confirmed that this was the solicitors fees for the transfer of the Bowls Club to the Parish Council. The Chairman mentioned the payment to Zurich Insurance and said that he had asked the PFO to compare other providers. Cllr Tyler commented that the fee was not too bad when considering the assets that it covers. Cllr Ms Wood asked how often the Parish Council's contractor emptied the play area bins, reporting that the bins at the play area next to the Queens Hall are often found to be overflowing. The Clerk confirmed that they are emptied twice a week, however, would check if they could be emptied on a Monday morning. The Clerk asked Cllr Ms Wood if she thought the play area could benefit from an additional bin and if so, to send an email request to the Clerk.

Members **APPROVED** the list of Cheques & Monthly Statement of Accounts up to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023, which had been circulated prior to the meeting to Councillors via email.

- b) **Investments** - Councillors **NOTED** that there was no further information to report since the investment made in May to CCLA.
- c) **Internal Audit** – Councillors **NOTED** that the Internal Audit was carried out on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2023, a copy of the Report was attached to the Agenda. The Clerk referred Councillors to the Recommendations and talked through each point:

*R1 – To help ensure continuity of service provision in the event of any long-term sickness of key personnel in relation to financial procedures, such as payroll, invoice processing, etc, formal documented financial procedures, sometimes derogatorily referred to as “idiots’ guides”, should be prepared.*

The Clerk confirmed that this had been proven during her recent absence due to illness for 3 months at the beginning of the year and said that everyone had worked together and covered the Clerk's job.

R2 – *The previously in place, formal review and certification of invoices for payment by members should be re-implemented on a 100% basis.*

The Clerk advised that this was something that Cllr Blanks would look at, signing off the invoices when he was able to visit the office. Cllr Blanks corrected the Clerk and advised that he would sporadically check the bank reconciliations and said that the recommendation referred to the formal approval of invoices and that they should be formalised with Members initials.

R3 – *A suitably designed rubber certification stamp, as suggested in the body of the report, should be acquired and be affixed to every invoice / payment document.*

The Clerk confirmed that the PFO now puts a docket on each invoice and which is signed by two Councillors. The Chairman and Vice Chairman have verified the invoices for the whole of this year.

R5 – *The non-identified VAT on the TGM invoice should be adjusted Appropriately in the new financial year to ensure it is included in the next VAT Reclaim to be submitted to HMRC.*

The Clerk confirmed that this had now been claimed back.

#### **C23.052 NORTH WEALD BASSETT HOUSING DEVELOPMENT**

Councillors **NOTED** that Residents had been offered the opportunity to view the various presentations by Vistry. Residents and organisations have been given the opportunity to comment via a consultation. The Clerk advised that there is now a Planning Application for Land South of Vicarage Lane, which also covers the North Weald Bassett Housing Development. The Clerk said that the PFO would be looking at both the consultation and the planning application and would present some comments for the next Planning Committee Meeting, to look at the whole scenario. The Clerk advised that she had earlier printed information from the NHS, ECC Archaeology, Historic England, Trees and Landscapes, Safer Communities, and National Highways, all of which would need to be looked at as a whole. The Clerk confirmed that the PFO would be leading on this. The meeting date is to be confirmed.

#### **C23.053 FLAG DAYS**

Councillors recalled that they had previously noted a schedule of dates for when specific flags need to be flown from the Parish Council flagstaff. Cllr Stroud had agreed to undertake the task of raising the flags on the last two dates (Norway Day and Armed Forces Day). The Clerk advised that the next date in the calendar is Remembrance Sunday and asked if any Councillor would be available to assist. Following discussion, it was suggested that the Clerk contact Cllr Stroud to check if he would be available to raise the Norwegian Flag.

#### **C23.054 BATTLE OF BRITAIN SUNDAY & REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY**

Councillors **NOTED** the dates for these two events:

- Battle of Britain Sunday is on Sunday, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2023. The Clerk confirmed that the Chairman of the Parish Council will be laying a wreath at the Cross of Sacrifice in the grounds of St Andrew's Church. An invitation had also been sent to the Chairman of EFDC. The Clerk advised that she had spoken

with Mr Arthur Moreton earlier in the day, who had confirmed that RAFA would not be doing anything this year as he is not in the best of health.

- Remembrance Sunday is on Sunday, 12<sup>th</sup> November 2023. The Clerk Advised that a meeting is currently being organised to discuss the arrangements for the day, which will be held during July. It was noted that the Minister, Jaimee Summers, is leaving the parish and will therefore not be able to attend this year. The Bugler has confirmed his availability. The Clerk referred to the Community Luncheon and asked Members to confirm if their preference was for a hot meal or if they wished to have a change to a hot buffet. All Councillors **AGREED** to have the hot meal. The Clerk commented that, following last year's complaint, she would be contacting EFDC to request that they raise the Norwegian flag at the Debt of Honour on Remembrance Sunday. The Chairman asked if the Clerk would be liaising with the Royal British Legion representative, the Clerk confirmed that we would do the same as we do every year.

**C23.055 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

The public and press were excluded from the meeting, 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.

**C23.056 NORTH WEALD METHODIST CHURCH**

Councillors **NOTED** the contents of the Clerk's report included within the Agenda.

**C23.057 NORTH WEALD RADIO STATION BOWLS CLUB**

Councillors **NOTED** the contents of the Clerk's report included within the Agenda.

**C23.058 GOING FORWARD PREMISES FOR PARISH COUNCIL OFFICES**

Councillors **NOTED** the contents of the Clerk's report included within the Agenda.

Meeting closed: 8.24pm

Signed .....

Date .....

**REPORT FROM PARISH COUNCILLOR TERRY BLANKS**  
**Agenda Item 7(d)**

According to Companies House Paul Hewitt's resignation from Qualis Living Ltd , Qualis Commercial Ltd and Qualis Property Solutions Ltd plus Qualis Community CIC were recorded on 9 June. His resignation from Qualis Group Ltd was also on 9 June but not advised until today probably due to an error on the part of the Company Secretary who struggles to keep up.

As the £6 million losses by Qualis are revealed and are growing it is not surprising that there are disappointments as distinct from the appointments when money was no object.

The EFDC draft accounts for 2022/23 show that Nick Dawe was paid his salary to January 2023 despite being a naughty boy almost a year before, £111,000 during the year – he resigned in January without working one day during the year. Gravy train? He may have scored from the redundancy pot as well.

Nick's old mate Paul Ffolkes Davis, despite being described as independent, also resigned shortly after him in March 2023 after refusing to come to Epping to meet Councillors.

I have been trying to pin down Andrew Small, the section 151 officer who is now splitting his duties between EFDC and Colchester Council, (or as I would describe him 'part-time') on the 2020/21 accounts timetable. So far he has not responded. My question concerns the timetable for residents to examine the accounts for which there is a Constitutional commitment but which seems to have been 'forgotten'.

Strange that the three disappointments – Dawe, Ffolkes Davis and Hewitt are not newsworthy – we have heard a lot about how clever the Qualis team is.

I think that Councillors are right to pay more detailed attention to Qualis to avoid the same fate as a number of other Councils with Latcos.

Rgds  
Terry B