



MINUTES

Meeting: PARISH COUNCIL

Date: 2nd October 2023

Time: 7.30PM

Venue: PARISH HALL, THORNWOOD COMMON

PRESENT:

Councillors (10) A Buckley (Chairman), T Blanks, B Clegg, R Spearman, Mrs S Jackman MBE, A Tyler*, Mrs P Etherington, Ms D Wood, C Kinnear, N Born

* for part of meeting

Officers in Attendance (2)

Susan Deluca - Clerk

Adriana Jones – Principle Finance Officer

Members of the Public (1) – EFDC Cllr Burrows

Members of the Press (1)

C23.076 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (2)

Apologies from Cllr Irvine and Cllr Mrs Hawkins. Apologies for lateness from Cllr Tyler.

C23.077 OTHER ABSENCES (2)

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

C23.078 MINUTES

Councillors **AGREED** the Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 4th September 2023.

C23.079 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Spearman declared an interest in the Local Plan.

C23.080 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Burrows, and advised that his report would be given under the District Councillors report item on the agenda.

C23.081 REPORT OF THE CLERK

The Clerk provided the following reports:

Weald Common – Interpretation Boards and seats scheduled to be installed this week, the grass has been cut, and invitations have been sent out for the opening which is scheduled for Monday 9th October at 10.30am. All Councillors are invited to attend. There will be a small gazebo with some refreshments, the St Andrews School Eco Warriors will be present, as will Roger Anthony who donated the oaks. Councillors were asked to meet at 10.15am at the Village Hall.

[Cllr Tyler arrived]

It was noted that the new Village Hall parking charges were due to start today, however arrangements had been made with the Chairman of the Village Hall for the gate to be open and parking to be available on the small field. Cllr Born asked for clarification as to the new parking situation at the Village Hall. The Chairman advised that those spaces which have newly laid

stone chippings are owned by the North Weald Village Hall and are for hall users only, not for people visiting the shops. There are 8 Parish Council owned spaces which are marked with signage, and these are for visitors to Weald Common. The Chairman further advised that it was his understanding that people would have 30 minutes free parking only. Hall users will be able to key in their registration number into a system inside the village hall to allow extended parking.

Cllr Born also asked for an update on the substantial work that was mentioned by Peer Group concerning the resurfacing of the access road up and around Weald Common, as he has not seen any work. The Chairman advised that some resurfacing work was completed by Peer Group on the small section between the main road and the vets, although this does not belong to Peer Group, and some of the main potholes were also filled. Cllr Born advised that some of the resident who live up the top were up in arms about the access road, to which the Chairman advised that this was the responsibility of Essex County Council due to it being a public right of way.

Cllr Born advised that with regard to vehicles parking on the small field adjacent to the Village Hall, there were planning restrictions on the number of days vehicles could be parked there and that this was needed to ensure no damage to the topsoil of the field. The Clerk advised it was her understanding this could be used 24 times per year, and that it was up to the Village Hall Committee to manage this.

Sensory Garden – The Clerk advised that £15,000 of funding had been received to provide a sensory garden on Weald Common, which will include 1 recording bench, some planters, and specimen tree, 2 regular benches, wayfinding markers and an information lectern. Once finalised the Clerk will provide a full plan of the area. Cllr Born reminded the Council it could not go near one specific tree, to which the Clerk confirmed it would not. Cllr Born also enquired as to the specific disability or need for which the sensory garden was being provided, to which the Clerk advised that broadly this would be a dementia garden, however naming it a sensory garden removed the restriction and any perceived negative connotations. It would be a garden for all, to sit and be calm.

Cemetery Matters – The Clerk reminded Councillors of the previous change from a soil Garden of Remembrance to the area now being grassed over and ashes actually buried in this area, however work is needed to provide a kerbed definition to this new grassed area. This is being worked on, and will be progressed in the next month or two, and will go to the Environmental committee.

Battle of Britain Sunday – Wreaths were laid at the event on 17th September at the Cross of Sacrifice in the grounds of St Andrews Church. The Parish Council undertook the organisation of this event as RAFA were unable to. The Chairman attended the event and confirmed it was very well attended, with 9 wreaths laid include one by the Chairman of EFDC, as well as representatives from the RBL NW branch, 56 squadron, ECC, RAFA, the ATC, NWAM, and the Parish Council laying a wreath in memory of Doris Holden and on behalf of the Royal Norwegian Airforce. The Chairman thanked Cllr Tyler and Cllr Bedford, as well as the Senior Admin Officer for organising the event.

Remembrance Sunday Preparations – Sunday 12th November – Organisation for the event was well underway, the lunch has been organised, a Bugler and a Vicar have also now been secured for the event at the Debt of Honour /Norwegian Stone. There is uncertainty at present

concerning the RBL service at the Church. Cllr Tyler confirmed he and a group of friends would be raising funds for the RBL by way of selling Poppies, and had arranged for a tank and weapons carrier to be present to encourage people to donate to the RBL. Cllr Blanks confirmed he too would be assisting with the poppy appeal. Cllr Kinnear advised that he was in regular contact with the Chairman of the RBL, and that there was uncertainty as to the future of the North Weald Branch at this stage, being that the Vice Chair and Treasurer had moved away, there was no access to the branch accounts, and there was very limited support for the group. A post had been made on social media to try and drum up support, and providing two options – either the North Weald Branch continues, or people go elsewhere. Cllr Ms Wood advised that many RBL groups were closing. Cllr Kinnear advised that the next meeting would be in the Kings Head, however concern was expressed at the suitability of this location. It was suggested that perhaps the Village Hall bar would be better. There was lengthy discussion as to whether or not it made sense for the RBL NW Branch to continue, or if it was better that it closed. It was **AGREED** that Cllr Kinnear would liaise with the Chairman of the RBL regarding the suggestion of moving the meeting venue, and also the Chairman of the Village Hall to obtain a price for the Village Hall Bar.

Parish Hall Matters –RAAC – A survey to ascertain the construction the hall was conducted on Friday 19th September. It is understood that the Hall was actually constructed in the early 1970's using Marley Preformed Concrete Panels, and that the extension was built in 1999. A verbal report was received advising that the hall did not have RAAC, however the full written confirmation was still awaited.

EFDC Waste & Recycling Depot – The Clerk confirmed that a meeting took place on 25th September with two representatives from EFDC, herself, the Chairman and the RFO, concerning the new waste depot proposed for the old HMRC site on the Airfield. The RFO showed on the screen a copy of the presentation and summarised some of the main points from the meeting, including the fact that no waste would be stored on site, and that the site was for vehicles and staff. It was noted pre-application discussions had taken place, and that a planning application was expected to be submitted by the end of October 2023, with work starting early next year. It was expected work would be finished by November 2024. Cllr Etherington asked about timings of the site, to which it was confirmed that the early start would be around 5.30am, and then there would be clusters of activity around 8am and 4pm. Councillors expressed concern at the number of vehicles that would be going to this site and on the road during rush hour times, and the example was given of the previous Saturday when some people waited over 20 minutes in the traffic along the A414 going to the roundabout because of the market. Councillors noted that the presentation was broadly the same as that given previously, and that this was simply an update meeting on progress. Cllr Blanks asked if Qualis would be providing the waste service, to which it was stated that the question had not been asked of EFDC.

EFDC Shared Prosperity Fund – Sensory Garden reported earlier in the meeting.

EFDC Local Liaison Meeting – The Clerk provided an update on the Liaison Committee meeting held on 21st September, stating that she felt Parish and Town Councils were treated with disdain by both the Chairman and the officers. The Clerk confirmed she had raised this matter with Cllr Burrows, and that he would review the webcast. The Clerk advised all Councillors to view the webcast of this meeting. Cllr Blanks confirmed he had already watched it, and felt it was insulting.

All other Administrative & Matters on the Agenda – The Clerk and Office staff have been working on other matters, some of which are not included within the Agenda.

C23.082 REPORTS & MEMBERS REPORTS

- a) **Chairman's Report** – The Chairman added regarding Weald Common that the cutting and strimming of the grass would be taking place on 4th October, and that they would be concentrating on the central focal point around the Copper Beach. In addition, Councillors were advised that £1,500 was raised at the MacMillian charity morning on 29th September.
- b) **Vice Chairman's Report** – No report.
- c) **District & County Councillors Reports** – Cllr Burrows advised that Councillors may wish to look at the statement of a possible combined authority for Essex which would include Thurrock, Southend and Essex. Details were on the District Council website. Cllr Burrows advised this may be the future of what will happen with ECC. Cllr Tyler asked if Cllr Burrows knew why the new Cottis Lane car park had astroturf, given today's eco friendly approach, to which Cllr Burrows advised he did not know, but that this matter had also been raised elsewhere.
- d) **Parish Councillors Reports** – Councillors **NOTED** the report of Cllr Blanks, as attached to the agenda. Cllr Tyler offered this thanks to Cllr Blanks for all his hard work and effort with sourcing the facts concerning Qualis, especially when you take into account that a number of Councils have already gone bust because there were not sufficient checks on what they were doing. Cllr Tyler also stated that there never seems to be any transparency when it comes to Qualis and that residents could find themselves in the same position. The Chairman advised that if any Councillors had concerns they should make an appointment to attend the District Councillor surgery on 20th October, and speak with either Cllr Burrows, Cllr Holly Whitbread or Cllr Chris Whitbread. Cllr Born asked for an appointment with Cllr Holly Whitbread concerning housing matters.

Cllr Mrs Etherington also asked that thanks be recorded to Cllr Blanks for his work, stating that Councillors should ensure this information is brought out in to the open. Cllr Blanks advised that you cannot get any answers concerning Qualis as they are a private company and thus not subject to public scrutiny, and if you ask questions of EFDC they simply say it's a private company.

Cllr Blanks provided a further update, stating that at the 18th September meeting, Cllr John Phillip announced that EFDC would have a £1.5million overspend by March 2024, mainly because of spending on staff salaries. In addition, EFDC had only half the reserves it had 12 months ago, and that this was very interesting considering a total of 12 local authorities had gone broke. Cllr Blanks suspected that these funds were in the hands of Qualis, whom have lost £6.5million in 4 years. EFDC has still not published audited accounts for 2021, and we are about to enter 2024, and have given the excuse of a shortage of audit Clerks, which may be partially true but not for this length of time.

There was further discussion regarding Qualis and their need to report accounts, as well as how the Qualis and EFDC accounts were aligned. Cllr Tyler stated that he felt so strongly about this matter that he felt a working group should be set up to look into this

and hammer up to the top about residents concerns. He stated that if he was wrong, then would happily accept this. The Clerk advised that she had previously given out information about setting up a working group, which can be done but it could not be Parish Council led.

Cllr Born stated that he had a conversation with Cllr Bedford about the historic set up of Qualis, and that most of the executives came over from Chelsea and Kensington borough, with Cllr Bedford stating that Qualis were doing fantastic work.

Cllr Blanks advised that he would not make an appointment with his District Councillor as he had already done so about a year ago, specifically discussing a member of EFDC staff who had been particularly naughty, and whom had been suspended on full pay for over a year at a cost of about £150k, and that he had not yet received a response.

The Chairman felt there had been considerable and sufficient discussion concerning Qualis, and drew the discussion to a close.

Cllr Clegg advised that as reported at the previous meeting, the community speedwatch team had attended both venues and overall between 10-15% of vehicles were speeding. There had also been a visit from Liam Collins who arrived at 8am in Upland Road with the latest speed gun, however this did not work. The Speedwatch team would be out again between 10am and 11am tomorrow.

Cllr Blanks raised concern about the cumulative traffic impact on the Parish as a result of the 2,500 new homes and now the Waste Depot lorries, stating that he too was caught in the previous Saturday traffic. Cllr Blanks stated that surely traffic consideration must take place on the whole collective developments, but that they don't seem to talk about more than one development at a time. Cllr Blanks stated that this council should try and insist or bring to the attention of ECC that there must be some sort of plan for all these bits of development in the next few years because its an issue now. Unless it's a combined effort, it cannot be pieced together. Cllr Blanks said a Traffic Masterplan was needed. It was **AGREED** to write to ECC to ask about what work was being done to look at this cumulative traffic effect. Cllr Tyler advised that a traffic survey was recently completed in Church Lane as asked if this Parish Council could have sight of the results.

- e) **Queens Hall Charity Report** – Cllr Wood advised that the hall was ticking along well, with there being a meeting the following evening. She also advised that one of the trustees was unfortunately in hospital, and all wished her well.
- e) **Neighbourhood Plan Report** – Councillors noted the date of the next meeting was Thursday 12th October, and that their agenda was in their packs. The RFO emphasised the importance of reading all the supporting documentation. This meeting would be held in the Thornwood Common Parish Hall. This would be a committee meeting and as such is open to the public and press.

C23.083 FINANCIAL REPORTS

- a) Payment - Members **APPROVED** the list of Cheques & Monthly Statement of Accounts up 30th September 2023, which had been circulated prior to the meeting to Councillors via email.

- b) The interest received on the CCLA account for August was £433.19p.

C23.084 EXTERNAL AUDIT

Councillors **NOTED** that the Limited Assurance review of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR – External Audit) for 2022/2023 had been concluded. In accordance with the regulations, a copy of the Notice of Conclusion of Audit had been placed on notice boards in the Parish and on the Councils website, together with a copy of the certified AGAR sections 1, 2 and 3. Councillors **NOTED** the content of the external auditors report.

C23.085 DEFIBRILLATOR

Members were advised that North Weald Village Hall had verbally advised that they would be happy for the Defibrillator to be placed on the external wall of the Village Hall. However, they will not accept any responsibility for any damage if it is vandalised due to there being no external lighting in that location. The Clerk will now conduct the necessary procedure for having this relocated from the Methodist Church to the Village Hall. Cllr Tyler suggested that a solar light could be installed at a cost to the PC, to which the Clerk advised she would speak with the village hall Chairman. There was some concern that this was a very dark location.

C23.086 OFFENSIVE SMELLS FROM THE BIOGEN SITE AT ASHLYNS

Councillors noted that the Clerk had been copied into a number of emails regarding the offensive smells which seem to be emanating from the Ashlyn's Biogen Site on a regular basis. Whilst this site is not within the Parish of North Weald, but in the Neighbouring parish of Moreton Bobbingworth and the Lavers, it does seem to be affecting some residents who live on the cusp of both parishes. This Council had therefore been asked if it would back the residents in their letter to Alex Burghart, MP, to ask if he could take up this matter with the Biogen. Cllr Born advised that he recalled Biogen had agreed to put a deodoriser in the mix about 4-5 years ago, to which the Clerk advised she would look into this. Cllr Wood advised that she regularly smelled this, and that everybody was encouraged to go online and report it to the Environment Agency.

C23.087 INTERNAL AUDIT

Councillors **NOTED** that the Interim Internal Audit would be taking place on 11th October, and that Councillors were asked to contact the Clerk if they wished to speak with the internal auditor.

C23.088 LEASES

Councillors **NOTED** that the Parish Council holds a number of leases on land that it leases. These areas of land have simply been held on leases with documents held by us in a safe. The have never had to be registered. However the Clerk has now been advised that leases of more than 7 years have to be registered with the Land Registry. These are:

1. Bluemans End – Lease from 7 January 2020 for **10 YEARS**, ending 6th January 2030
2. Pike Way – Lease from 4 August 2008 for **25 YEARS**, ending 3rd August 2033
3. Queens Road Allotments – Lease from 2017 - for a period **99 YEARS**, ending 2117.
4. Village Green with the flagpole in North Weald – We believe this is a Wayleave

Councillors noted that professional services would be needed in order to register the leases, and it was **AGREED** that this needed to be completed.

C23.089 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.

C23.090 NORTH WEALD METHODIST CHURCH

Councillors **NOTED** the contents of the Clerk's report. Cllr Tyler advised that people seemed to be using the methodist church car park more often, however noted this was not the responsibility of the Parish Council to manage.

C23.091 GOING FORWARD PREMISES FOR THE PARISH COUNCIL OFFICES

Councillors **NOTED** the Clerk had written to ECC advising that the content of the proposed lease was unacceptable, and advised on the response from ECC regarding this. Councillors **AGREED** that in order to provide a presence in North Weald Village itself, they would like to have a presence in the Queens Hall for a minimum of one day per week (Wednesday) from 9th October 2023, which had been provisionally agreed by the Queens Hall Charity.

C23.092 FUTURE PREMISES FOR PARISH COUNCIL OFFICES

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

Meeting closed: 9.10pm

Signed

Date