



ELSTON

PARISH COUNCIL

Est: 1894



MINUTES OF PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

THURSDAY 16 July 2020

Held at 7.00pm remotely by Video link

Present: Cllrs Bertie Pinchera (in the Chair), Rev Liz Murray, Matt Dyer, Sandra Wright, Michael Key and Andy Biddlecombe

In attendance: Lynda Ogilvie, Temp Clerk, Ivor Walker, NSDC and 15 members of the public

1. Apologies for Absence

Cllr Peter Clerk submitted apologies, but was able to listen in to the meeting from 7.15. He was not able to vote.

2. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Murray declared an interest in Agenda Item 11. She has been advised by the Monitoring Officer at NSDC that she could explain the position and answer questions but not vote on the matter.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 June 2020

It was noted that the Item on Declarations of Interest had been inadvertently left off the minutes, and Members agreed that this should be added, and noted that there had been no declarations of interest made.

Members agreed the removal of the paragraph commencing 'Cllr Pinchera remindedin an open meeting.' under Item 9.

With these amendments the minutes were approved and will be signed by the Chairman when it is possible to do so.

4. District and County Councillors' Report

Cllr Saddington was not present as she is about to undergo an operation, and Chairman recorded the good wishes of the Council for a speedy recovery.

Cllr Walker (NSDC) said that he was embargoed from making any announcements until the weekend, but he urged residents to listen out for news about exciting new developments which are anticipated in Newark Town Centre.

5. Correspondence

Correspondence which has been received will be dealt with under the appropriate Agenda Item.

6. Public Questions Time

Chairman opened the meeting for members of the public in attendance to comment
4 people spoke about overgrown hedges in the village, and the manner in which it had been reported on the Parish Council's facebook site. Concerns expressed included that some of the

people affected were elderly and infirm, and had been isolating during lockdown, and also another family are key NHS workers who have been at the front line during the Covid-19 pandemic. The gist of comments were that this should have been dealt with more sensitively and with consideration for the personal circumstances of householders.

7. Report from the Steering Group on the Sports Field Development

Cllr Wright reported that consultation questionnaires have been sent to all households with a request that they are returned by the end of July. Once this information is collated, another meeting of the steering group will be arranged to consider the results of the consultation.

The football club is requesting further financial support for grass cutting, fertilisation and line marking. It was agreed that this should be a formal request made using the Parish Council's grant application form.

Members raised concerns regarding the costs, and felt that there should be a variety of options, including consideration of the provision of portacabins. It was also felt that that implications of costs on the parish precept should be clearly spelt out for residents.

Chairman permitted Leonie Brown, a member of the Sports Association, to speak on this matter for clarification. Ms Brown said that the brief given to the architect was based on the Football Association requirements, which would need to be met in order to obtain funding from that body. If there is limited support, then other options will be explored.

Chairman noted that it might be necessary to have an additional meeting in early September to consider this project.

At this point, before moving on to the next Agenda Item, Chairman invited Mick Baker to speak because his request to speak had not been noted during Agenda Item 6.

Cllr Baker introduced himself as Chairman of Farndon Parish Council, and also Chairman of Nottinghamshire Association of Local Councils. It was in the latter capacity that he wished to address Councillors. He said that amendments to the NALC Constitution had been circulated to member councils, and urged the Council to consider these and send any comments to Notts ALC. He also said that papers for the Notts ALC AGM will be distributed shortly and asked that anyone interested in joining the Executive Committee should submit their application form.

8. Hiring out the Sports Field to Elston FC - Terms and Conditions

Chairman spoke on the proposed Terms and Conditions for the hire of the sports field, on which he had prepared a briefing note which had been circulated to members. Members discuss the proposed Short Term Hire Agreement. It was agreed that the Council should be shown a copy of the risk assessment, and insurance cover, and also that the agreement should include a requirement that the hirer has a child protection and vulnerable adults policy in place. With these amendments, Chairman proposed the adoption of the Terms and Conditions of Use to be applied to the field, seconded by Cllr Biddlecombe and all in favour.

Chairman reported that the Agreement between Elston Football Club and the Football Association presented at the last Council meeting, and which Council had agreed to countersign, had been withdrawn.

9. Update on Plans for an Elston Festival

Chairman referred to an email which had been received stating that it would be impossible for this Festival to go ahead this year. The organiser was keen that it be considered next year, but members felt that there should be more consultation with residents as there had been some negative feedback from previous events.

10. External Communications - delegated authority

Chairman referred to a briefing note he had prepared and circulated, and explained the background to this, which included a proposal for delegating authority for the managing of external

communication. Currently Chairman alone administers the Parish Council's facebook pages, although this had been shared with the recently resigned Clerk.

Members expressed the view that this was an effective means of communicating with residents, but concerns were raised that items and comments purporting to come from the Parish Council were being posted without full Parish Council knowledge or involvement. There is a need for a process of ensuring that any posts coming from the Parish Council have PC approval and follow agreed principles. The delegation of authority was not approved, and Chairman will continue to post items, but will do so in his own name (if possible) until a formal communication policy can be agreed.

11. Grant Application - Churchyard Grass Mowing

Cllr Murray reminded members that she had declared an interest in this item, but could explain the background and answer questions. She would not vote on the issue. Cllr Murray said that Parish Council financial support by way of paying for grasscutting in the churchyard had been a long standing arrangement, and the PCC has submitted a grant application for this to continue. Cllr Biddlecombe proposed that the Council approve the grant application, Cllr Key seconded, all in favour.

12. Elston Amenities

a. Security matters

Cllr Key said he has spoken to Paul Macey, and it was agreed that the re-invigoration of the Neighbourhood Watch (NW) Scheme – perhaps under another, more modern name – would be beneficial in helping to combat crime in the village.

The NW scheme could be linked to other villages, and if it is successful it could result in police crime surveillance cameras being installed.

Currently, crimes being committed include theft of dogs, dumping or rubbish, money extortion. There have also been incidents of people driving around the area with a passenger videoing homes and property, and this video information is apparently supplied to other criminal gangs who will target vulnerable property. Keyless vehicles are also vulnerable, and advice is that the key is protected by a leaded pouch.

Cllr Wright will approach the former Neighbourhood Watch coordinator to see if he can advise how to start the scheme up again.

b. Playground re-opening

Cllr Wright has produced a risk assessment for the playground. It was noted that the recent RoSPA report on the playground highlighted some items which need attention, but all are amber and therefore not a barrier to re-opening. It was proposed by Cllr Wright, seconded by Cllr Murray that the playground will re-open, 5 members in favour, 1 abstention. A quote will be obtained for the repairs.

c. Dog Fouling

Council has already agreed that it will consult through the Parish Plan what restrictions should be placed on the exercise of dogs in the parish. Members discussed the position of existing dog bins, and it was proposed by Cllr Murray, seconded Cllr Biddlecombe that another bin should be purchased.

A poster on dog fouling had been circulated to members. It was proposed by Cllr Pinchera, seconded by Cllr Murray, that this be displayed in the village and on the website. All in favour.

d. Overgrown Hedges

Cllr Pinchera read out a personal statement. This is attached to these minutes as Appendix A.

Lengthy discussion took place on this topic. Criticism was recorded about the manner in which this matter had been handled, without the knowledge of all councillors, and which had resulted in considerable comment on social media criticizing the Chairman of the Council, and the Council itself.

Chairman said he took full responsibility for this matter, and did not think criticism was justified. He stated that he had been thanked by many people in the village for raising the issue.

13. Planning Applications, Appeals and related matters

There were no planning matters for discussion.

14. NALC Code of Conduct Consultation

Members agreed to support the National Association's initiative to support changes to the Code of Conduct as it applies to parish and town councils. Proposed by Cllr Biddlecombe, seconded Cllr Murray, and all in favour.

15. Finances

a. Approval of Payment Sheet 4 – July 2020

This was approved, and will be signed by Chairman

b. Other Finance matters – Expenditure to date

Chairman presented a budget comparison paper to show the current position. It was noted that monies set aside for the purchase of The Chequers Inn are unlikely to be needed but that additional funds will be needed for improvements to the sports field.

16. To consider resolving that under section 100 A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the basis it would likely disclose exempt information

It was so resolved

a. Correspondence

A letter has been received regarding proposals for the sports field. Members approved a response. A letter has been received regarding the process for declaring an interest at parish council meetings, and in particular details appertaining to the Parish Council meeting on 18 July. A response was approved.

b. Parish Clerk

Cathryn Crane has resigned from the position of parish council clerk, having been in post since 1 May 2020. Cllrs Murray, Biddlecombe and Wright conducted an exit interview. Cllr Murray will write this up fully, but some key points which emerged were time management, the expectations of Council, difficulty in getting on top of the work required especially during this lockdown period, and the intrusiveness of zoom meetings into people's homes, especially where young children are being home schooled.

It was agreed that the requirements of the Council will need to be reviewed before trying to appoint a new clerk, especially the number and spread of the hours to be worked.

It was further agreed that Ms Crane will be paid fully for the additional hours she worked,

17. Date of next meeting:

Thursday 17 September 2020

Council agreed that Chairman should keep the Zoom contract going so that additional meetings could be held in August if required.

The meeting closed at 10.40 pm

Appendix 1

Overgrown hedges – Statement made by Cllr Pinchera

I would make the following points in response to questions and comments :

1. When a resident approaches a Councillor and makes a complaint, our job is to try to resolve it as best we can. It was not a complaint to the Parish Council but to an individual Councillor
2. Several complaints had been made directly to me, by those not wishing to be identified for fear of being rounded on. I have no such concerns. Overgrown hedges blocking public footpaths on the public highways, forcing people into the road, is more than a nuisance it can be dangerous for everyone, but particularly for children, the elderly, those with disabilities, and those pushing buggies
3. This is a serious matter and needed to be brought to resident's attention as quickly as possible as there are several locations where this occurred.
4. Residents were reminded on social media what the policy of Notts County Council is on this matter. It is not new Policy or a policy of the Parish Council. A statement from the Parish Council has subsequently been posted on social media
5. Anyone can report defects on the highways to Notts CC and they will deal with it as they consider necessary
6. Ordinarily this may have been handled more sensitively but with the current lockdown, a post on social media, was the best way to get the message out quickly and safely. And it worked
7. However, some in the village treated this as a joke or considered it an intrusion or quite unnecessary, and even posted rude and abusive comments.
8. Well it is not a joke. It is a serious matter and therefore there is no apology as to how I dealt with it. It was clear the original advice was largely ignored
9. When contacted a Highways Officer considered the matter sufficiently serious to quickly investigate and visited Elston on Friday 10th July to objectively review the position.
10. It was found there were 15 properties which were in breach of the law. They were contacted on Monday 13th July.
11. Some who were infringing have been contacted. Unfortunately, it seems some have not taken it well. If they have any concerns or feel they have been unfairly treated they should contact our local County Councillor Sue Saddington who is aware of the situation
12. They now know they were potentially putting people at risk of serious injury, and that is totally unacceptable and won't simply be overlooked, by me.
13. The fact that those infringing have the effrontery to complain makes me not just angry, but furious. Why should people have to put it up with it?

14. So, after years of doing nothing something has happened and those affected are thankful.

The matter was been dealt with by me, not the Parish Council, and is now considered closed.

Bertie Pinchera
Chairman, Elston Parish Council

16th July 2020

DRAFT