

**Wokingham Without Parish Council
Minutes of the Council Meeting
Held on Monday 2nd November 2020**

Via Zoom Video Conference

Commencing 7:30pm and concluding at 9:37pm

- Present:** Councillors J Cannon, D Dye, R Fenny, L Foxwell, C Lancaster, N Martin, K Newland, A Plume, J Rogers, P Stephens and S Turtle. Katy Hughes - Clerk, Sharon Way – Assistant Clerk. Borough Cllrs A Ross and P Helliars-Symons
- Apologies:** Councillors B Gough and D Latimer. Borough Councillor C Bowring.

At the time of this meeting both NALC and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) have asked local councils to stop holding any physical meetings or gatherings. This includes full council, committee meetings, annual parish or council meetings. In order to comply with NALC guidance, this meeting was undertaken using Zoom video conferencing.

In line with The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meeting) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, Part 2, item 5: 5.—(1) A reference in any enactment to a meeting of a local authority is not limited to a meeting of persons all of whom, or any of whom, are present in the same place and any reference to a “place” where a meeting is held, or to be held, includes reference to more than one place including electronic, digital or virtual locations such as internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers.

20/103 WELCOME

Cllr Newland welcomed everyone to the meeting.

20/104 ACCEPTANCE OF APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllrs Gough, Latimer and Borough Cllr Bowring.

20/105 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

20/106 MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

- a) Cllr Newland invited comments on the minutes of the meetings held on Monday 5th October 2020. No comments were made.

Following a proposal from Cllr Cannon and seconded by Cllr Martin it was:

RESOLVED: Minutes of Monday 5th October were AGREED

- b) Matters arising from the minutes of the above meeting.
None.

20/107 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None

20/108 BOROUGH COUNCILLORS BRIEFING

Cllr Ross stated that the planning applications for the SDR and SDL have been pushed back to March 2021.

Cllr Stephens requested an update on the development at Grays Farm. Cllr Ross advised that since the South Wokingham development is on hold, the work at Grays farm is also on hold. Cllr Ross will be holding a further meeting with the planners to ensure that the planning applications that don't include Grays Farm are not prejudicial to the planned developments there. Cllr Dye stated that the Grays Farm should have been left as a farm for food production. Cllr Stephens stated that he hoped that WWPC will be closely involved in the development at Grays Farm.

20/109 CLERKS REPORT

The Clerk stated that a grant application had been received from the St Sebastian's Playing Field Trust (SSPFT), looking for circa £25K towards the cost of their new tennis clubhouse /pavilion and storage units. The Clerk asked members whether there was an appetite to consider funding from CIL, and if so whether any members would be willing to form a working group to review the application, meet with SSPFT and make a recommendation to council.

Following a discussion, Cllr Newland stated that he would try to find a statement of the additional information required, which had been prepared in response to the 2018 application. It was agreed that no further action would be taken until Cllr Newland reported back.

Cllr Cannon and the Clerk are currently looking at an opportunity to apply for funding for expert advice and capital funding to improve energy efficiency within public buildings. The Clerk confirmed that information had been shared with the Halls Working Group, and a meeting has been organised with Ian Gough, the WBC energy manager, for some advice to help make the Memorial Hall more energy efficient, and with a view to putting together an application for capital funding should a suitable project be viable.

The Clerk advised members that following the reintroduction of Pinewood rents after the period of rent breaks due to lockdown, WWPC has been approached for additional help. The Clerk anticipated that due to the second lockdown further requests may be received. WWPC has previously agreed that individual requests will be considered and the Clerk suggested that a formal approach should be created for clubs to use and has therefore drafted a grant form, with assistance from Cllr Rogers. This will require a formal decision, so the draft application and proposal will be circulated to members prior to the December meeting.

With respect to the second lockdown, the Clerk confirmed that the Memorial Hall will close from Thursday 5th November, but that Pinewood Hall will remain open for the nursery. The children's play areas will not close, and it is not intended to open the office to the public.

The Clerk stated that a Pinewood car park post was damaged on 20th October and that a repair has already been carried out.

With respect to the Pond project, the Clerk has received the paperwork from the contractor which has been forwarded to the company responsible for the management of the pipeline. The Clerk is awaiting confirmation on when the works can commence.

The Clerk has circulated an email regarding 'shop local' signage. It appears that funding for this is covered, so, please forward your thoughts on the signage to the Clerk.

20/110 REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE / OTHER MEETINGS

- A) Pinewood lease update meetings (9th Oct, 22nd Oct). Cllr Newland discussed the recent meetings held with the solicitor representing the Pinewood clubs. Progress is being made – there are three different types of lease, and the solicitor is trying to standardise these leases, following conversations with the clubs. A spreadsheet has been created which can be used to monitor progress, which to date has been very slow.

- B) Public Spaces and Amenities Working Group (20th Oct). Cllr Plume referred to the notes appended to the agenda and asked whether members had any questions. No questions were asked.
- C) Byway 28 site visit (21st Oct). The Clerk stated that a good job has been made improving the byway. Cllr Stephens noted that some residents had complained that vehicles are now using the byway, turning it into a 'rat run'. The Clerk noted that the route is classified as a byway and this use is legally permitted. Cllr Rogers stated that this issue is being monitored.
- D) Parish Office Working Group (22 Oct). Cllr Newland stated that the main action from this meeting was to find out more about the construction options for the new office building (relating to the foundations). Cllr Foxwell added that it was agreed that the Clerk would review the requirements for the office, given the changes in working practices over the last year. Cllr Plume stated that he had started to review the internal layout.
- E) Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (22nd Oct). Cllr Plume referred to the minutes appended to the agenda. The next step is to seek the advice of O'Neil Homer regarding the creation of questionnaires to obtain public input into the plan.
- F) Wokingham Borough Council Parish Liaison Meeting (19th Oct). Cllr Cannon stated that Michael Firmager had been elected as Chairman. Following this a presentation was given on the Climate Emergency and the actions being proposed to address it at a local level. John Halsall gave a presentation on the planning system update. The last item was about Covid, which has resulted in an increase in fly tipping, antisocial behaviour and domestic abuse and a decrease in burglary.
- G) Circle Hill Trustees' Meeting. Cllr Cannon stated Cllr Dye's input was greatly missed. She reported that Phil Metcalf was elected as Chairman. The trust is overbudget due to the required tree works – they may seek funding from WWPC in January.

20/111 TRACTOR REPLACEMENT

The Clerk presented the proposal for tractor replacement given in the decision paper, included as appendix 9 of the agenda. The current tractor is regularly breaking down and it cannot be used unless there are two groundsmen on site. The replacement tractor would ideally be future proofed, e.g. it should be able to mow the land at the Memorial Hall. The options were presented, with the preferred option being the larger John Deere tractor, although a final decision has not been made. The Clerk is therefore seeking delegated authority to decide which make and model to purchase up to a budget of £20,700. This budget does not include the trade-in value of the Kubota.

Cllr Turtle asked how often the 'quick hitch' facility would be used. The Clerk advised this would be at least weekly for car park cleaning. Cllr Plume stated that this facility allowed one person to change the units, rather than two. He also stated that it may be possible to fund this proposal from CIL and that the expenditure should be considered over the expected life of the vehicle.

Cllr Martin noted that members should be guided by the groundsmen who are expert in the use of the machinery. Cllr Newland emphasised the importance of the groundsmen physically testing the machinery.

Following a proposal from Cllr Plume and seconded by Cllr Martin it was:

RESOLVED: The proposal for authority for the decision on which make and model to purchase to be delegated to the Clerk and Cllr Plume up to a budget of £20,700.

20/112 OPERATION BRIDGE

The Clerk provided a brief overview of the updated protocol included as appendix 10 of the agenda and invited questions and comments. No comments were received.

Following a proposal from Cllr Newland and seconded by Cllr Foxwell it was:

RESOLVED: The updated protocol was AGREED.

20/113 FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The Clerk presented the detailed income and expenditure report, included as appendix 11 of the agenda. The Clerk stated that hall hire income was likely to be 20-25% of the budgeted figure. Pinewood rents are also likely to fall far short of the budget figure. In terms of expenditure there is an overspend on the website development, legal fees relating to the leases, and insurance costs (due to the new reinstatement valuation). It is likely that income will be at least £100,000 less than budget this year and it's currently unclear how to plan for next year's budget given the uncertainties associated with Covid.

Cllr Foxwell noted that many other parishes and towns will be in the same position as WWPC and asked whether the precept increase will be capped. The Clerk stated that there is no legal basis to cap the precept and noted that Woodley Town Council are undertaking a consultation exercise with their residents regarding the precept.

Cllr Newland stated that it was necessary to take a deeper look at the potential variance with the budget. The Clerk agreed, and proposed to review different scenarios regarding income, e.g. a 'not improving' scenario and a more optimistic scenario.

Cllr Stephens stated that in the current circumstances a precept increase should be the last option considered, and WWPC should look at taking costs out of the organisation. Cllr Fenny stated that an increase in precept would be viewed poorly by the public in the context of the overspend compared to budget on several items of expenditure.

The Clerk stated that the purpose of this agenda item was to update members on the current situation and the Finance Working Group would review the financial position and potential budget variance in more detail.

20/114 WILDFLOWER AREAS AT PINEWOOD

Cllr Turtle referred to the proposal to lay a wildflower 'meadow' on the grass verge adjacent to the entrance road into Pinewood, as included in appendix 12 of the agenda.

Cllr Turtle noted that the costs had been considerably more than initially anticipated as she had been advised that in order to grow wildflowers successfully, seed matting would need to be used rather than seed alone.

Cllr Turtle also stated that the presence of electrical cables in this area meant that the proposed location was less than ideal and if we were to go ahead, we may need to look for an alternative location. Given the current financial circumstances relating to Covid-19 the council may be minded not to progress this further at this time.

Cllr Stephens stated in his view, that given the current financial situation now was not the time to undertake expenditure of this type.

Cllr Newland asked members to indicate if they wished to undertake this work at this time – none did and on this basis the proposal was withdrawn and no further work will be undertaken for the time-being. Cllr Foxwell thanked Cllr Turtle for her work on this proposal.

20/115 PLANNING

The content of Appendix 13 of the Agenda was noted.

The Clerk confirmed that the letter responding to the planning white paper had been sent, and that no feedback had been received to date.

20/116 PINWOOD LEASES / CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

Cllr Newland referred to the email circulated to members from John Kaiser in response to the efforts being made by Cllr Newland and Cllr Ross to obtain a respected WBC view on the head lease. The response was measured, considered and clear, with the exception of the error regarding the efforts made by Cllr Newland to get information on bids that have been turned down because of the lease conditions, which has now been clarified in Cllr Newland's response to Cllr Kaiser. In summary Wokingham's policy is not to give any of its assets any shortcomings, and this will not change.

Cllr Newland stated that Cllr Kaiser had written that the lease can be returned to WBC who will then manage the sub-tenants, and also that if the leases are not resolved by the end of November the existing head lease offer will be withdrawn. Cllr Newland stated that these are matters which WWPC must consider, in particular whether it is in WWPC's best interest to return the lease to WBC or continue in its current role and support the clubs.

Additionally, in Cllr Newland's response to Cllr Kaiser, he stated that WBC should consider transferring ownership of the site to WWPC which can then provide support to the site and clubs that it deserves. Cllr Kaiser has stated he will respond, but this response has not been received to date.

Cllr Newland stated that he would like any decisions on the above issues to be made with all members recognition and understanding of these issues, and to have the mandate of the full council for the agreed course of action.

Cllr Stephens stated that the issue should be looked at objectively and that WWPC should be sympathetic to WBC which has been clear about its position. . The matter should be viewed from an objective financial standpoint and considering the perception of parishioners in the stewardship of budgets and management of Wokingham Without.

Cllr Newland stated that WWPC has already advised WBC that the heads of terms shall be accepted, but that this cannot be put into force unless all sub-tenants sign-up on the same day. Cllr Newland proposed that because of the many views that have been expressed at this meeting and in writing it would be necessary to call a meeting to enable all members to give their views and to enable all options to be considered.

Cllr Plume stated that the legal fees for the clubs is currently being paid by WWPC, and questioned whether the leave being taken by the legal team would cause a problem with completing the legal work within the required timescale. Cllr Plume also stated that these issues need to be discussed with the clubs. Cllr Newland agreed and confirmed that Cllr Kaiser's email had been forwarded to the clubs and that he will write to the clubs in the next few days.

A discussion followed regarding a suitable date for the meeting, and it was concluded that the Clerk would send out a poll (and separately contact those members who cannot use the polling tool) to determine the best date.

Cllr Stephens requested that a summary document is prepared, and it is made clear what is going to be discussed and what is hoped to be achieved. This was supported by Cllr Rogers, who also noted that consideration should be given to the implications of any decision. It was agreed that the meeting would be held under Part 2.

Cllr Newland stated that he would meet with the Clerk to discuss the issues raised.

Cllr Turtle stated that the option to maintain the status quo should be given serious consideration.

20/117 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION AT FUTURE MEETINGS:

The Clerk asked whether the hardship grant application process should be discussed at the Pinewood lease meeting. The consensus of members was that this matter should be discussed at the December meeting.

20/118 MEETING CLOSED AT 9:37 PM

Date of next meeting – Meeting of the Parish Council at 7.30pm on Monday 7th December 2020

Signed:

Date: 7th December 2020