

**Wokingham Without Parish Council
Minutes of the Council Meeting
Held on Monday 11th January 2021**

Via Zoom Video Conference

Commencing 7:30pm and concluding at 10.00pm

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

20/138 WELCOME

Cllr Newland welcomed everyone to the meeting.

20/139 ACCEPTANCE OF APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Foxwell, Gough and Latimer, and Borough Councillor Bowring.

20/140 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

20/141 MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

- a) Cllr Newland invited comments on the minutes of the meetings held on Monday 7th December 2020. No comments were made.

Following a proposal from Cllr Turtle and seconded by Cllr Lancaster it was:

RESOLVED: Minutes of Monday 7th December were AGREED

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

20/142 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None.

20/143 BOROUGH COUNCILLORS BRIEFING

Borough Cllr Helliars-Symons stated that vaccinations had been carried out over the previous weekend at the Bradbury Centre. Approximately 14000 vaccinations are expected to be carried out each week in the borough and all over 70s are expected to be vaccinated by the end of March.

Cllr Helliar-Symons thanked WWPC for posting information regarding the delay to the brown bin collection on Facebook, and asked whether a post could be added requesting that the public sanitise the handles of boxes and bins before and after collection.

WBC finances are in great shape following careful management over many years and £1.2m is available from reserves which can be distributed to those in need.

Cllr Newland reminded members that a meeting of borough / parish councillors will be held on 21st January.

Borough Councillor Ross stated that it is expected that the SDL/SDR planning applications will come to the March planning committee. Regarding Bigshotte Park, Cllr Ross stated that the officers and TVP are meeting in a week's time and Cllr Ross will come back to WWPC with a report. Cllr Ross has received a list of the site receiving resurfacing works early in the New Year, which includes New Wokingham Road.

Cllr Plume referred to the recent flooding at the roundabout near to the Memorial Hall and asked whether anything could be done with the drainage system in this area at the same time as the works on new Wokingham Road. Cllr Ross was not aware that this flooding had recurred and requested further information of the extent of the new flooding.

20/144 CLERKS REPORT

The Clerk stated that in the current lockdown the Memorial Hall remains closed and Pinewood Hall is being used two-days per week by the nursery. Security and the grounds team are making regular checks on the buildings.

The new tractor was delivered on 16th December 2020.

The Clerk confirmed that a contractor has been appointed to carry out repairs to replace the damaged gate post and replace fencing panels along the exit lane. The work is expected to be carried out at the end of January.

A contractor has also been appointed to complete the playground surfacing repairs in the toddler play area (slide area) and adventure play area (tunnel mound). Work is expected to be carried out this week for the slide surface repair and week commencing 18th January for the tunnel mound.

The Clerk met with Ian Gough, WBC energy manager, on 17th December to discuss potential energy improvements at the Memorial Hall. Members will be informed of further developments in due course.

Following discussions at the last meeting regarding the banner policy, it was agreed to arrange a meeting with the football club to discuss the concerns that they had. However due to Christmas and the latest lockdown the meeting has not happened yet.

The Clerk stated that EBOS has asked for permission to site a shipping container next to their building for storage. The Clerk will liaise with the PS&A working group to see whether a suitable solution can be found.

The scouts have requested to erect a marquee between the scout buildings for outdoor meetings, from Christmas until Easter. This request has been superseded by the lockdown, but the Clerk will bring it back for discussion if the request is remade at the end of lockdown.

Cllr Plume requested that the Clerk ascertain the current situation of the EBOS and scout's requests. The Clerk noted that EBOS's request was still current, but the scout's marquee request had been deferred due to the current conditions of lockdown.

The Clerk noted that there had been complaints on social media about unauthorised fishing at Heath Lake. WBC Countryside Services have plans to net and remove the large fish to deter fishing, which should be done soon.

Signage is now in place at the Heath Lake car park to notify residents of the parish council's involvement in the resurfacing of the car park.

The Clerk circulated the WBC equalities plan survey to members via email on Friday 8th January.

A new battery has been ordered for the defibrillator at Pinewood, to keep it in a 'ready / usable' state.

The parish office team are ensuring that, whilst the parish office is closed, Roger's Hardware store is kept well stocked with bin bags / garden bags and food waste bags

The Clerk noted that the temporary closure of Old Wokingham Road between Nine Mile Ride and Easthampstead Road is expected to run until Friday.

Regarding upcoming meetings, the Clerk noted that a cycling infrastructure meeting will be held with Finchampstead PC on Friday 15th Jan at 2pm, and a Ward member meeting will be held on Thursday 21st Jan at 2pm.

Cllr Lancaster requested that a member of grounds staff collect the Christmas tree from the front of Rogers Hardware store. The Clerk agreed to action this request.

20/145 REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE / OTHER MEETINGS

- A) Public spaces and amenities working group (10th December 2020). Cllr Newland stated that notes had been distributed to members and requested comments. Cllr Plume noted that the report includes a proposal for the purchase of additional benches and bins for the Pinewood Site (see Appendix 8A of the agenda).

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

RESOLVED: The proposal for the purchase of additional benches and bins for the Pinewood Site was AGREED.

- B) Memorial Hall land working group (15th December 2020). Cllr Newland stated that notes of the meeting had been included with the agenda and invited comments and questions from members, none were received. Cllr Newland then referred to the decision paper included as Appendix 8B of the agenda, noting that late changes had been made and circulated to members. He asked whether members wished this item to be deferred to the February meeting. Cllr Newland summarised the changes following a request from Cllr Turtle.

Given the comments received by members Cllr Newland proposed to defer the decision to the February meeting and requested that the Clerk organise a working group meeting to prepare a revised decision paper and to invite members who are not on the working group to attend.

- C) Crowthorne Carnival meeting (4th January 2021). Cllr Cannon reported that the carnival is likely to be cancelled due to the latest lockdown.

20/146 FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Cllr Newland referenced the financial information given in appendix 9 of the agenda listing payments made to 31st December 2020.

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

RESOLVED: The payments made to 31st December 2020 were AGREED.

20/147 BUDGET 2021-22

The Clerk outlined the major variances between expenditure and income. The net income position is significantly lower than budget due to loss of income from hall lettings, car parking and Pinewood rents. Expenditure has also been lower than budget due to several reasons including lower staff costs, utilities costs and cleaning costs.

The Clerk outlined the key points for the 2021/22 budget. In terms of income, the Clerk noted the small growth in the tax base, and that a conservative assumption had been made for the recovery of hall hire income. The Clerk also discussed income from Pinewood rent and the car park. In terms of expenditure capital projects are anticipated to be funded from existing CIL balances. The budget 'gap' between income and expenditure is proposed to be met through a precept increase and a sum taken from general reserves.

The Clerk presented the budget / outturn for 2020/21 and the proposed budget for 2021/22, showing the proposed increase in precept and the proposed transfer from the general fund reserves. Cllr Fenny asked how the split between increased precept and transfer from general reserves had been determined. The Clerk stated that the split was approximately 60% and 40% from general reserves and precept respectively, on the basis that the increase in precept should be less than 10%. Cllr Plume noted that WWPC are recommended to hold a minimum of 3 months expenditure in general reserves. Cllr Newland noted that the recommendation for minimum reserve was to deal with potential loss of income for three months due to unforeseen and exceptional circumstances, which is the current situation.

The Clerk provided a summary of the CIL balances split by expenditure at Pinewood, expenditure elsewhere and other expenditure to be formally approved by WWPC. The Clerk expected the CIL balance at the end of 2020/21 to be in excess of £400k.

The Clerk presented the projected reserve balances for 31st March 2021, noting that if income was impacted by the current lockdown this could be significantly less. The Clerk noted that WWPC held approximately £200k of earmarked reserves for specific projects. The Clerk stated that the predicted general fund balance for 31st March 2022 was approximately £96k, which is approximately 2.94 months of non-CIL related expenditure.

Cllr Stephens asked what mechanism was available to release CIL to provide relief to the operational budget. The Clerk stated that CIL can only be used for capital expenditure, however it may be possible to reallocate capital expenditure from the general budget to CIL and this would normally be carried out at the end of the financial year. Cllr Newland stated that WWPC's policy is for a balanced budget where expenditure is funded by income and also advised that CIL cannot be used to subsidise the operating budget.

The Clerk presented the recommended increase in lettings and service charges. Rental income has been revised down from 2020/21 budget level to allow for lower levels of hall hire, lettings charges are proposed to be increased by 2%, as are service charges.

The Clerk stated that it was proposed to raise the precept by 9% and take £28,077 from reserves to balance the budget for 2021/22. The WWPC precept was then compared to the current precept of nearby councils.

The Clerk presented the record of precept decisions since 2011/12. Cllr Newland noted that following a long period of no precept increases with income shortfall being made up from reserves, the decision was made in 2018 to run a balanced budget. At that time this required an increase of 30% in precept, which was nearly achieved over the next three 3 years. To avoid too steep a change in precept in the future it was proposed to raise the precept again this time.

The following decisions were made in relation to the WWPC budget briefing paper included as appendix 10E of the agenda:

Following a proposal from Cllr Rogers and seconded by Cllr Turtle it was:

RESOLVED: The proposed increases in lettings fees and tenant service charges applicable from 1st April 2021 were AGREED.

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

RESOLVED: The proposed capital expenditure programme for inclusion in the budget, if not being funded through CIL was AGREED.

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

RESOLVED: The planned expenditure to be funded through CIL in the year ending 31st March 2021 was AGREED.

A discussion was held on the proposed increase to the precept. Members of the finance working group emphasised that significant work had been undertaken by the finance working group in order to develop these proposals and that the working group had sought to ensure that WWPC were not placed at risk due to inaccurate predictions and that excessive increases to the precept are not required in subsequent years. Members noted the need for reserves due to the age of the Pinewood site and Memorial Hall site and expense of repairs. It would therefore be prudent for the council to retain sufficient funds in earmarked reserves.

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

RESOLVED: The proposed precept for the year commencing 1st April 2021 was AGREED by a majority vote.

20/148 PINEWOOD ASSISTANCE

Cllr Newland outlined the proposal, given in appendix 11 of the agenda, for waving rent for Pinewood Tenants and offering a reduced hire charge for Flying Start Nursery during the period of the current national lockdown.

Cllr Newland summarised a deferral option but stated his concern that building up a debt may generate fear in the debtors. Members discussed the need to understand the circumstances of the clubs and, on a volunteer basis, to sit with the clubs to discuss their options for funding / fundraising.

Members discussed the options for a rent reduction. The level and possible necessary period of the reduction was discussed. Some members objected to a blanket reduction and suggested that discussions should be held with individual clubs should they seek support.

The Clerk requested that a clear instruction be given by council. The Clerk noted that any decision on rents and payments can only be made by the council or via delegated authority to the Clerk and nominated councillors, and not by council officers alone.

Following further discussion, the clerk summarised the points of discussion for decision as follows:

- Invoices to be sent out as usual for the final quarter of the financial year.
- If feedback is received from the clubs, or in the course of discussions following non-payment, the Clerk and Finance Working Group are delegated the authority to agree to defer the last quarter rent, or part thereof, based on the circumstances of the individual tenant, to be repaid over a period of time to be agreed between the tenant, clerk and Finance Working Group, before the end of next financial year 2021-22.

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

RESOLVED: The approach to Pinewood rents for the final quarter of financial year 2020-21 as given in the decision summary above was AGREED.

Cllr Newland referred members to recommendation 2B of the decision paper, to offer a reduced hire charge for Flying Start Nursery during the period of the current national lockdown. Cllr Newland clarified that the proposal is to reduce the hourly rental rate to reflect the cost savings of not having the cleaning contract running during lockdown. The Clerk noted that the nursery is currently running two days a week accommodating children of keyworkers. The nursery staff will clean the hall themselves.

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

RESOLVED: The proposal to reduce the rental charge for Flying Start Nursery was AGREED.

20/149 BYWAY 28 IMPROVEMENTS AND SUPPORT FOR THE SLOW WAYS INITIATIVE – CIL FUNDING PROPOSAL

Cllr Newland referred members to the decision paper included as appendix 12 of the agenda.

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

RESOLVED: The proposals with respect to Byways 28 and the ‘Slow Ways’ initiative were AGREED.

20/150 PINEWOOD LEASES

Cllr Newland referred members to the email distributed earlier in the week, which provided an update on the current situation regarding the leases.

20/151 PLANNING

The content of appendix 14 of the agenda was noted. Cllr Newland invited members to provide further comments. Cllr Fenny stated that a recent SDR notice included a letter from WSP which refers to previous comments raised by the parish council, and that these comments had not been adequately addressed. Cllr Fenny will raise the issue with Cllr Lancaster.

20/152 CHAIRMAN’S COMMUNICATIONS

None.

20/153 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION AT FUTURE MEETINGS:

None.

20/154 MEETING CLOSED AT 10.00 PM

Date of next meeting – Meeting of the Parish Council at 7.30pm on Monday 1st February 2021

Signed:

Date: 1st February 2021