



**Meeting of the Parish Council to be held
in the Village Hall, Northiam
at 7.00pm, Thursday 14 April 2022**

Members of the Public and Press are welcome and encouraged to attend.

The first 15 minutes of the meeting are set aside for questions from members of the public.

MINUTES

**ATTENDEES: Parish Councillors Jon Streatfeild, Penny Farmer, Tony Wadie, Robert Maltby, Sue Schlesinger, Ben Dallimore, Anthony Wontner-Smith and Tony Biggs
District Councillor Tony Ganly, the Clerk and approximately 30 members of the public**

1) Apologies had been sent from District Councillor Mooney, County Councillor Redstone and Councillor Johnson.

2) PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Brian Banks said that he is organizing a guided walk across Harlot's Woods and into one of the SFF fields on Sunday 24th April. He wanted to ask if the Parish Council had any objections? The Chairman confirmed there were none, and said she was looking forward to the event.

Steve Pratt asked when the grass on the playing fields was due to be cut? PF said that from memory it should be done in April, but the Clerk will check the schedule and confirm.

Jonathan Strong (JVS) then asked the purpose of the Parish Meeting that has been called for 28th April? The Chairman confirmed that a meeting had been called by at least 2 members, and she asked JS to explain the reason behind the request. He said that he'd been asked to supply information at the meeting on 3rd February, but as the documents could not be published on the parish council website, this was the best way for the public to hear his evidence. SS said that she understood JS was going to read out his evidence, which JS confirmed allowing for the fact that personal details etc. had to be redacted. In response, JVS said that reluctantly some CIC Directors will want to attend, and he hoped the evidence would include the private CIC emails that "fell into JS' hands". JS re-iterated that the emails were sent to the then Chairman of the parish council, Jacqui Harding. As soon as he was contacted, he referred the matter to her and was only copied in at a later date. He did not have surreptitious meetings with the former CIC Director concerned. JVS said that they were not shown the emails, and JS stated that in a meeting with the then Chair & Vice-Chair Cllr Biggs, when the subject of the leaked emails was raised, the CIC Directors were unhappy and left the meeting before they could be shown. JVS said the CIC will be interested to hear the written evidence that JS claims to have to support everything in his Open Letter, as the CIC have approximately 20 instances that they dispute and he forewarned JS that they would be challenging him at the meeting. JS further stated that all the emails together with the other evidential documents were sent to the CIC as requested the day after the 3rd February meeting.

He then moved on to make a statement regarding Item 10 on the agenda, the proposed lease for the stables: he felt it was worth noting that the proposal was unanimously recommended by the SFF Committee, and whilst members may not like every aspect of the proposal, it does achieve 2 critical objectives – it maintains an income for the loan repayment and allows time for the change of use planning consent. He was aware that one councillor felt that the Council had been “black-mailed” and “held to ransom” by the tenant, and JVS confirmed that the existing tenant had been in a stronger position than if it had been properly dealt with last autumn, when first suggested by the CIC. Instead, months were wasted looking into the completely impractical proposal of DIY livery and therefore the Parish Council finds itself in a situation of its own making. The letter of intent is just that – it is not legally binding. The Council can terminate the agreement if negotiations can’t be agreed upon after December 2023, but it does give the existing tenant 21 months of security of tenure. The CIC have negotiated on behalf of the PC and have done their best in the circumstances - there is no scope for further negotiations. He finished by saying that there were two choices: to take the deal, or leave it. If rejected the PC risk not only losing the rental income, but also would need to meet the stables’ outgoings. That would not be ‘best value’ and furthermore the PC would need to find someone else to negotiate on their behalf. The Chairman thanked him for his contribution.

3) DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4) MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chairman then proposed that the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 10 March 2022, & the SFF Committee meeting held on 31st March 2022 were true & correct records, and members all agreed. SS duly signed the minutes.

5) MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

a) No 1 St Francis Fields bungalow

Information had been received from both the former tenant and a report in response from Moloney’s. SS asked members how they wanted to proceed. AWS felt that it would be better to deal with it now, than let it drift on and it should be settled immediately. BD said he was inclined to agree with AWS and members should consider how to deal with these situations in the future. TB suggested a meeting with Moloney’s, the former tenant’s representative & a member of the council. SS agreed with that proposal and RM said that having read the report, he felt Moloney’s reply was robust and they were taking a hard line. He further stated that the claim is late but AWS confirmed that a tenant has up to 6 years to make a claim. The Clerk was asked to make the necessary arrangements for a 3-way meeting as soon as possible.

No 2 SFF: TB reported that after further investigations and moisture readings which confirmed that the DPC was fine, the property is suffering from condensation. He was arranging for the contractor who fitted the vents to make a visit next Wednesday, and if the recommendation is for more vents, that will need to be progressed.

b) Playground insurance claim

The clerk and PF updated members on behalf of DJ. A purchase order has now been sent to Kompan who have quoted a 6-week lead time for the equipment. Before installation, they will make an appointment for a site visit. BD asked why it had taken so long and PF said that obtaining the various quotes and dealing with the insurance company had been a slow process. TB asked the Clerk to let him know when the site visit is arranged.

- c) Sponsorship of the playground – PF reported that DJ was not having much luck having contacted Bourne’s and some other local companies. His latest plan was to approach Scott’s Scaffolding, but he didn’t hold out much hope. SS asked if any local individuals had been approached as well as commercial enterprises, but PF thought not.
- d) Storm Eunice insurance claim – The clerk was waiting for a final piece of information – a quote for the roof repairs. Jacky Broad (JB) updated members that she was struggling to get quotes, as some contractors were not interested in doing ALL the elements required. She could update next week once she’d received further information. The Clerk offered to speak to the insurance company about the necessary requirements.

6) REPORTS BY PARISH, COUNTY & DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

District Councillor Martin Mooney had previously submitted a report (attached as a supporting paper). In his absence, County Councillor Paul Redstone had not sent a report. District Councillor Tony Ganly reported that he had attended a Planning Committee meeting earlier: the proposal that a small panel from planning would decide if applications were put before the planning committee was soundly rejected. The other pertinent matter was a request for a deed of variation to the S106 agreement for a site in Hurst Green. The site has been bought by Optivo who propose altering the agreement to 100% affordable housing. TG doesn’t think this is ever a good idea, as it leads to a “them & us” situation, exemplified at Sedlescombe. The objection was not carried however and the variation was approved. PF felt sure that it is illegal to change an S106 agreement, and TG confirmed that all points were raised, but the motion went through anyway. As there is a similar site in Northiam, it is matter to be closely observed.

7) ANNUAL VILLAGE MEETING

SS confirmed that after two years without one, the Annual Parish Meeting would again be held and will take place on **Thursday 5th May at 7pm in the Village Hall**. It will be a friendly, informal affair with drinks and nibbles provided. The MP, Huw Merriman has been invited together with the school, the police and several clubs and societies. It provides a chance to meet other residents and she encouraged people to attend. BD asked how a club could have a table at the meeting, and he was informed that they should ask the Clerk.

8) SECTION 106 MONIES – Indemnity deed

A report had previously been circulated by the Interim clerk, with a recommendation for council to agree to enter into the Indemnity Agreement in the terms attached to this report, and that the Chairman and Vice Chairman be authorised to attest to the CommonSeal being affixed to the Indemnity Agreement. SS proposed that members accept the motion, and this was seconded by TB and carried unanimously.

9) CLLR STREATFEILD’S REQUEST TO PUBLISH INFORMATION ON THE PC WEBSITE

This item was withdrawn at the request of JS as the Parish Meeting had been called instead.

10) SFF MATTERS FOLLOWING THE COMMITTEE MEETING on 31st MARCH

- i) The CIC were awaiting formal council approval of their proposals for the hub detailed in the November report. BD proposed that the Chairman sign a letter of approval on behalf of the Council, and TW seconded the motion. All members agreed and SS signed the letter.
- ii) The Chairman asked if members had read the previously circulated draft from Gaby Hardwicke solicitors regarding the proposed interim lease for the stables? PF had objections based on the fact that change of use would not be required if the stables were rented to individuals, and that the Parish Council has a legal requirement to establish if there is a need in the village. Furthermore, that if the council is willingly entering into an agreement that doesn’t earn enough money as highlighted by the internal auditor who

pointed out the use of reserves to make up the shortfall of £13k, PF felt that it could lead to trouble with the internal audit. SS stated that in her opinion it represented best value, and was certainly better than no income at all. RM said it was clear from previous discussions that there is a difference of opinion and both sides have been heard before, but now a vote on the motion was required and the outcome should be respected. JS didn't agree that it was legally correct and felt that other avenues hadn't been explored. SS said that they have been explored at length and proposed the motion to offer the lease based on the drafted proposals. The majority of members were in favour and the motion was carried.

11) GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

The Clerk confirmed that John O'Conner had been the contractors for several years, and that the contract should therefore be put out to tender. However, it is a big task that she wasn't experienced in dealing with, and suggested that the new Clerk could look at it in the future. In the meantime, O'Connors have offered to maintain the previous year's prices, and the Clerk recommended to Council that they continue for the present. Members agreed.

12) FOOTBALL PAVILION

TB said that he had approached the football team about their increased rent, and the state of the pavilion came up in discussion. On inspection, TB confirmed that it is in urgent need of renovation, and he felt that it should be looked at in the coming year. He proposed making it a village pavilion rather than a football pavilion, and investigate using the S106 money. PF confirmed that there were funds of approximately £150k from the Persimmon development meant for recreational use, so some money could be used for a new pavilion, but the previous suggestions had been very costly, and plans needed to be scaled back. TB agreed and said the matter should be re-visited over the next 12 months JS reminded council that there had been a proposal to move the location of the pavilion which didn't seem to be a sensible idea, and members agreed.

13) FINANCES

- a) The payment report for April 2022 was approved. The Clerk has now organized for most payments to be made online by BACS.
- b) The interim clerk had previously circulated the end of year financial report.
- c) The time-sheet of the Clerk for the period 07/03/22-08/04/22 was approved.
- d) The proposed £10 increase in the RALC subscription from £35 to £45 for 2022/'23 was approved.
- e) The Financial Advisory Group (FAG) had met virtually on 11th April and confirmed that the precept now received from Rother District Council would be separated and paid into the newly opened Barclays account, together with rental incomes and all expenditure for SFF would be made from this account. In the future all spending on SFF would be clear to see and understand.

14) HIGHWAYS SLR MEETING

PF and DJ had attended a virtual meeting on 22nd March, having not had a meeting for two years. Topics included posts in the verge outside Jempson's, potholes & drainage, overgrown hedges and the non-working flashing signs. An engineer is due to inspect the sign and a request was made for a replacement from the Road Safety fund mentioned by Cllr Redstone at the previous council meeting. The Highways Steward will inspect various matters on his rounds, and the next meeting was arranged for 6th September. Furthermore, a resident had complained about an overgrown footpath where the brambles had scratched her neck. PF confirmed that it was a hedge owned by the parish council and

BD volunteered to deal with it. A member of the audience confirmed that they had cut sections of it back as it was very overgrown and the Chairman thanked them.

15) VILLAGE MATTERS

i) Correspondence

- a) SS read the request from the Bowls Club to use the parking area on the playing field when there is a home match which would help to reduce roadside parking. PF said it was a good idea and members unanimously approved the request. The Clerk will reply to the secretary of the Bowls Club.
- b) A letter from Hodge Bank stated that they were closing all business accounts and the Clerk was asked to find a new deposit account for the sewer reserve fund.
- c) A letter from Mr & Mrs Cole requesting the Parish Council's support of a complaint they had made to Optivo regarding the state of the public footpath access in and around Coplands Rise. PF confirmed that Optivo don't have a very good record of maintaining items that are their responsibility, and TB suggested that the council write to Optivo supporting the Cole's complaint.

ii) Clerk recruitment

The closing date for applications had passed, and the interview panel confirmed that w/c 28th April would be best for interviews. The Clerk was asked to make the necessary arrangements.

iii) Pavements

RM said that he had been contacted by a resident about the appalling state of the pavements. The resident had provided photographs of the verge outside Jempson's and also the path that floods from the Village Hall to Beales Lane. The verge outside the old pub is similarly used for parking and RM asked why can't posts be put in the verge? Beckley and Sandhurst have managed it. PF suggested that the photos be sent to Highways. A member of the audience suggested that the camera at Jempson's be used to name & shame those who park illegally on the highway causing the damage, and narrowing the path for people with pushchairs or mobility scooters. PF said that parking is no longer a police matter. TW asked if there is a difference between a verge & a pavement, and if that would make a difference to the measures that could be used to deter parking? The Clerk was asked to submit the photos to Highways, and ask again about the possibility of posts in the verge (this had been raised at the recent SLR meeting).

iv) Councillors' Reports

TW said that he was waiting to order the sheds for the bungalows from Jewson's, and asked if the Clerk had opened the account yet? The Clerk stated that she was still searching for some of the information required, and Jacky Broad offered to help. They arranged to meet the following week.

PF stated that a tree was down in Workhouse Field, and when grass cutting it was being cut around. TB offered to have a look with the tree surgeon.

TB said that the police had confirmed a payment of £1000 from the victim of crime fund, but that it had been sent to the Village Hall in error. This was in the process of being corrected. Trees that had been cut down in Dixter Road had been left lying on the verge. A member of the public had offered to look at Land Registry and see who owns the land – potentially the power company as there is a substation there. He also said that the police had confirmed their attendance at the village fete, and had also been invited to attend the Annual Parish Meeting on Thursday 5th May.

RM provided an update on the school crossing (Lolly). Moloney's are still fully on board with the agreement, but haven't actioned the publicity yet. Some monies are on account in readiness. The Clerk was asked to provide the bank details to Moloney's. He also highlighted the recent election confirmed costs of £3,564 and felt this was a shocking expense.

SS said that she had been contacted by someone who lives next to the playing field and would like to put a gate in at the bottom of his garden to access the fields. PF said that the Rights of Way agreement needed to be checked as existing dwellings with access pay a fee. The clerk was asked to verify that legally an access gate would be acceptable, and if so, then council granted permission.

i) PLANNING:

New Applications/Amendments to current applications:

- i) RR/2022/350/P – Three Candles, Station Road, Northiam
Proposal: Demolition of existing single storey dwelling and erection of 2no. single storey dwellings served by existing and proposed access.
There were 2 abstentions, and the remaining members all objected to this application on the grounds of the development being harmful to the AONB. The plot is small and very close to the neighbouring property. Rother's planning department have recently turned down a similar application to fit two properties into the space of one.

- ii) RR/2022/364/P – Spar Stores, Clematis Cottage, Station Road, Northiam
Proposed new roof over existing shop premises to create two self-contained flats with associated parking.
There were 2 abstentions, and the remaining members all objected to this application on the grounds of the size and design of the development not being in keeping with the local area. Also Highways have objected on the issue of cars pulling out and not having a clear line of sight. The design is not materially different to a previous design that was rejected by Rother's planning department.

- iii) RR/2022/473/P – Glebe Stables, Hastings Road, Northiam TN31 6NH
Proposal: Demolish existing garage & workshop. Build replacement Annex with ancillary accommodation to main house.
Having reduced the height of the proposed design, the Council now all supported this application.

All appeals, enforcements and decision notices have been previously circulated to Councillors.

Meeting closed at 8.35pm