

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON
THURSDAY 14TH MAY 2020

The meeting was held remotely using Zoom software.

Councillor Fletcher welcomed everyone to the meeting.

PRESENT: Cllr. Beck, Bunyan, Fairweather, Fermor, Fletcher, Gilbert, Hall, (in part) Hatcher, Kings, Meewezen, Pethurst, Smith and Warne. County and Borough Cllr. Holden.

Declaration of Interests, Dispensations, Predetermination or Lobbying:

Members are required to declare any interests, dispensations, predetermination or lobbying on items on this agenda. Members are reminded that changes to the Register of Interests should be notified to the Clerk. He notified those present that the meeting was being recorded as a Clerk's aid.

APOLOGIES: Cllrs. Hartley and Waters. Borough Cllr. Dawlings

1/20: Election of Chairman:

Cllr. K. Fletcher – Proposed by Cllr. Bunyan, seconded by Cllr. Fermor. There were no further nominations, all councillors voted in favour of the proposal. As the motion was carried, Cllr. Fletcher was elected Chairman. It was resolved to allow the Declaration of Acceptance of Office Register to be signed as soon as circumstances allowed.

2/20: Co-Option of Parish Councillor:

Cllr. Fletcher proposed that Carl Meewezen be co-opted on to the Parish Council, this was seconded by Cllr. Hall and agreed unanimously. It was resolved to allow Cllr. Meewezen to sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office Register as soon as circumstances allowed. Cllr. Meewezen was added to the list of those present at the meeting.

3/20: Election of Vice Chairman:

Cllr. C. Gilbert– Proposed by Cllr. Fletcher, seconded by Cllr. Bunyan and agreed.

4/20: Election of Chairman of Policy & Resources:

Cllr. R. Beck – Proposed by Cllr. Gilbert seconded by Cllr. Pethurst and agreed.

5/20: Appointment of members to committees and election of each Chairman:

Planning and Preservation Committee:

Committee: Cllrs. Bunyan, Fermor, Gilbert, Hall, Hatcher, Kings, Meewezen and Smith.

Chairman: Cllr. Smith – Proposed by Cllr. Bunyan seconded by Cllr. Hall and agreed.

Cllr. Smith accepted the role, however he stated he would require the assistance of the Vice Chairman to Chair meetings in his absence, when work commitments prevented his attendance at meetings.

Burials and Properties Committee:

Committee: Cllrs. Bunyan, Fairweather, Fermor and Gilbert and Kings

Chairman: Cllr. Gilbert – Proposed by Cllr. Bunyan, seconded by Cllr. Fermor and agreed.

Environmental Management Committee:

Committee: Cllrs. Fairweather, Fermor, Fletcher, Hall, Kings, Pethurst and Smith

Chairman: Cllr. Fairweather - Proposed by Cllr. Pethurst, seconded by Cllr. Fermor and agreed.

Neighbourhood Development Plan Committee:

Members: Cllrs. Fletcher, Hatcher, Kings, Meewezen, Pethurst, Smith, and Warne.

Chairman: Cllr. Warne – Proposed by Cllr. Pethurst seconded by Cllr. Hatcher and agreed.

The Chairmen of Policy and Resources, the Chairmen of the above Committees, and the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council are authorised to sign cheques. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman are ex-officio members of all committees. The Vice-Chairman of each committee will be elected at the first meeting of the said committee.

Councillors are also expected to volunteer to represent the Parish Council on other committees or agencies.

Delegates to the Kent Association of Local Councils:

Cllr. Fletcher – Reserve Cllr. Fermor.

Delegates to the Cranbrook Conservation Area Advisory Committee:

Cllrs. Bunyan and Hatcher.

Delegate to the Cranbrook Tourism Group:

Cllr. Hatcher.

Delegates to Cranbrook Museum:

Cllr. Pethurst. Cllr. Hall would continue to attend meetings as a representative of the Borough Council

Delegate to the Citizens Advice:

Cllr. Smith.

Delegate to Age Concern:

Cllr. Warne.

Delegate to the Transport Accessibility Group:

As no councillors volunteered, Graham Holmes would be asked to continue as our representative and to report the group's activities to the Parish Council.

Delegate to The Hop Pickers Line:

As no councillors volunteered, Graham Holmes would be asked to continue as our representative and to report the group's activities to the Parish Council.

Tree Warden:

Cllr. Fermor.

Councillors were asked to confirm their representation on various charities as follows:

Katherine Elizabeth Wood Charity – Cllr. Hatcher.

King George V Playing Field - Cllrs. Beck, Fermor and Smith.

John Spicer's Apprenticing Trust – Cllr. Fermor.

Thomas Adrian Veitch Memorial Fund – Cllr. Fletcher.

St. George's Institute – Cllr. Smith.

6/20: Confirmation of next year's Parish Council Meetings.

Parish Council meetings will continue to be held on the second Thursday of each month at 7.30p.m. This was proposed by Cllr. Fletcher, seconded by Cllr. Gilbert and agreed. Meeting cards will be supplied to Members as soon as possible.

7/20: Minutes of the Previous Meeting:

The Chairman, Cllr. Fletcher proposed that the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 12th March be adopted as a true record. This was seconded by Cllr. Gilbert and agreed.

There was a brief pause in the meeting to allow Members to clap for carer's

8/20: Review of Standing Orders/Financial Regs/Procedures/Policies/Risk Management Arrangements:

A link to our existing Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and existing policies had been circulated to all Members with the agenda for this meeting. The Chairman explained that the Parish Council has a duty to review these on an annual basis. Cllr. Fletcher proposed that the Investment Policy, as approved by Policy & Resources on Tuesday evening be accepted, this was seconded by Cllr. Beck and agreed. The majority of the remaining policies, procedures, internal finance controls and risk managements arrangements were still relevant and acceptable, although it was agreed that some could benefit from updating and those no longer relevant should be removed from the website. Cllrs. Pethurst, Gilbert and Hall agreed to undertake this task and provide updated documents to Full Council for approval as soon as possible.

9/20: Confirmation of Banking Arrangements:

Cllr. Beck reported that at the Policy & Resources meeting it was agreed to open a Unity Trust Bank account to facilitate more online payments. As Unity Trust is set up to deliver these services to Parish Councils, it was expected that this would make it easier for the Clerks to manage changes to signatories and any day to day banking issues. The Parish Council would also continue to hold accounts with HSBC and Lloyds, this would allow cover from the Financial Service Compensation scheme over three separate financial institutions. Variable direct debits would continue to be the payment method for items such as the business rates and BACS would be used for the payment of salaries and their associated costs. This was proposed by Cllr. Beck, seconded by Cllr. Fletcher and agreed.

10/20: Approval of the Annual Governance Statement 2019/2020

The document had been circulated to all Members prior to the meeting so they would understand what they are approving, the Chairman reiterated the importance of the document which forms part of our Annual Return and is sent to our external auditors. Cllr. Fletcher proposed that the Annual Governance Statement be approved.

This was seconded by Cllr. Bunyan and agreed. Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2019/20 Part 3 was signed by the Chairman.

11/20: Approval of the Accounting Statements 2019/2020

The Clerk explained this document also formed part of our Annual Return; copies had been circulated to all Members prior to the meeting. No questions were raised. The Chairman proposed that the Accounting Statement for the Annual Return as presented to Members, be approved, this was seconded by Cllr. Beck and agreed. Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2019/20 Part 3 was signed by the Chairman.

12/20: Chairman's Report:

Cllr. Fletcher advised Members his first email about Covid was on March 16th, since then the world had changed.

He thanked the councillors and volunteers who have stepped up to manage the immediate issues arising from lockdown, shielding, vulnerable, and self isolators - all terms unheard of at our last full Parish Council Meeting.

Councillors Pethurst and Fairweather have organised, engaged and delivered a service through volunteers that he hopes will last as a valuable resource arising from this virus.

We have all managed to Zoom, and this has enabled the ongoing work of the Parish to continue. He also thanked the Clerks who have worked to facilitate the changes, and congratulated the technophobes who have taken the plunge and got their PCs working.

In spite of lockdown, the Parish has been incredibly busy; two very large planning applications have been discussed, he had chased up getting the Jockey Lane Clinic on the Community Asset register, however he expressed concern, it may be too late. The VE Day celebrations were somewhat muted from those that were originally intended. A summer edition of Parish Cake is in production. And conversations about the future of the medical services in Cranbrook and the Community Centre had been ongoing.

He felt from listening carefully to the Covid news, we had so far got off lightly. The Tomlin Murton Playing Trust had received a grant from the central Government fund for Business support. The shops that have stayed open have supported the community greatly, and the metal NHS Doctor outside the Vestry Hall, made by Cranbrook Iron, is a fitting tribute to our carers.

Finally, most councillors have been meeting by Zoom every week as an unofficial catchup, to try to ensure all councillors have been able to keep in touch. He thanked everyone for their support.

Cllr. Hall asked if there were any figures available showing if there had been any deaths contributed to COVID 19 in the Parish? Cllr. Pethurst advised he believed there had been approximately twenty deaths from the disease that had occurred in the Borough of Tunbridge Wells.

Reports from Committees:

13/20: Policy & Resources:

Cllr. Beck referred to the Minutes of the meetings held on 21st April and 12th May and invited questions. Cllr. Hall raised concern at the reinforcement of the commitment to progress with the Tanyard Dental Surgery purchase and felt it should be delayed until the lockdown is over, as the purchase value may decrease in the current circumstances and as a Parish Council, we have a moral responsibility to obtain value for money. Cllr. Pethurst commented that as so many people were now successfully working home, it could have the opposite effect and push prices in the area up. Cllr. Fletcher advised that he had spoken to the vendor and another buyer had come forward and offered a higher price, however the vendor confirmed his acceptance of our offer, he reiterated his desire to sell to the Parish Council. Cllr. Meewezzen pointed out that in proceeding with the purchase we were swapping a liquid asset to a capital asset. The Chairman stated the importance of the purchase in that it increases the footprint of the land we own and also gives us the access rights to Wilkes Field from the Tanyard Car Park.

Following the discussion, Cllr. Beck proposed the minutes of the meetings held on the 21st April and the 2th May be adopted. This was seconded by Cllr Fairweather and agreed. Cllr. Hall voted against adopting the minutes.

14/20: Planning & Preservation Management:

Cllr. Bunyan referred to the Minutes of all the meeting held since 17th March and invited questions. None were raised. Cllr. Fletcher thanked Cllr. Bunyan and the Planning Committee for all the work they had undertaken in recent weeks. Cllr. Bunyan felt that the whole team had worked incredibly hard of late and extended those thanks to Liz Daley and her team for their help.

15/20: Burials & Properties:

Cllr. Gilbert advised that we had missed the April meeting due to the lockdown, the next scheduled meeting would be in July.

16:20: Environmental Management:

Cllr. Fairweather referred to the minutes of the meeting held on 17th March and invited questions. Cllr. Warne asked if there had been a policy change in allowing polytunnels on the allotments. The Clerk confirmed that the rules have not been changed, however applications to erect polytunnels were now being looked at more favourably.

Prior to the meeting members had been received details of a quote totalling £13,980 from our regular streetlight maintenance contractor for urgent and priority repairs to the Parish's streetlights, A service inspection report had accompanied the quote detailing the necessary work. After a full discussion it was proposed by Cllr. Fairweather, seconded by Cllr. Fletcher and agreed to accept the quote as presented.

17:20 Neighbourhood Development Plan:

Cllr. Warne advised that none of the scheduled meetings had taken place due to current circumstances. It was also the case that many of the NDP group were working on the Cranbrook community response to the virus. She would be speaking to Richard Eastham tomorrow and was hopeful we would reach Regulation 14 by the Autumn.

18/20: Discussion on Development within the Crane Valley:

The Chairman had listed this as an agenda item due to the fear that developers were wanting to develop within the Crane Valley. Cllr Bunyan stated that on plans released by Persimmon Homes for the Brick Kiln Farm site, there were arrows expressing their desire to cross the Crane Valley. County Cllr Holden was invited to speak from a highway prospective as Cllr. Meewezen pointed out that this would be a significant factor on deciding the application. If KCC were to object on the grounds of safety, both the Planning Authority and subsequently, the Inspectorate, should it go to appeal, could potentially have reasonable grounds on which to refuse the application. He stated there was a great deal of concern locally regarding the increase of traffic that will be generated and access points to and from the site. Cllr. Holden recognised the importance of highway matters in relation to this planning application and confirmed that he had raised these concerns with the Highway Department on behalf of residents and had urged the department to object to the current application on the grounds of safety.

19/20: Clerk's Report:

The Clerk advised the Kent's Household Waste and Recycling Centres were reopening on 15th May. There is an online booking system in place.

20/19: Correspondence:

There was no correspondence to report.

21/20: Reports from County and Borough Councillors:

a) Cllr. Holden reported that he had spoken to many residents that are protesting against the draft Tunbridge Wells Local Plan. In his opinion it does nothing for the residents of Cranbrook or Hawkhurst. However, having no plan carries a risk as the lack of a five-year housing supply is an open door to developers. He felt that it would be more appropriate to fulfil the requirement by adding to the allocation of Paddock Wood, Tudeley and Tunbridge Wells Town. He expressed a desire to see the plan reworked.

He stated that since the online booking process for the Household Waste and Recycling Centres has been implemented it has had in excess of 99,000 views. He continues to lobby for the return of the Civic Amenity Vehicle.

The great effort from the County Council during this pandemic has been to supply PPE to care workers in adult social care, some private care homes in the county have also been given a supply. He highlighted the difficulties in obtaining supplies.

He also advised he had written to Helen Grant MP asking her to bring to the attention of the Roads Minister, the lack of any requirement for tractor drivers to pass anything other than a normal driving test. Being such large vehicles, sometimes carrying large trailer loads, he felt that driving them is more akin to driving an HGV and there should be some form of governance on who can drive them.

b) Cllr. Fairweather reported that safer urban and green urban spaces and environments have been encouraged to reopen, these include tennis courts, multi-use games areas and bowling greens, although as yet there has been no specific instructions in relation to children's play areas. Community and sports centres remain closed, so the Weald Sports Centre will remain closed.

The green waste collections begin again in our area from 18th May, which has been advertised on various platforms such as Facebook.

There are fewer people working in the Town Hall, many employees are now able to work from home and some non-essential workers have been drafted into other roles.

c) Cllr. Warne advised that last week's Full Council meeting had been cancelled. The first Planning Committee meeting had taken place yesterday and although a great deal of preparation had been undertaken, it did not go without incident. It took a great deal longer than anticipated, to get through the three applications being discussed. In response to Cllr. Bunyan who had heard that none of the large planning applications would be heard until after lockdown, Cllr. Warne stated she was not aware that was the case, but would try to obtain some clarification from the Head of Planning. Cllr Bunyan also asked about the Borough's plans to go carbon neutral as she remained disappointed that the planning department were not passing on our Eco Design Guide to developers at the pre application stage which they had previously committed to doing.

d) In the absence of Cllr. Dawlings, Cllr Fletcher read out the following report which had been received by email:

Government has assured local authorities it will provide finance to cover the costs incurred in the Covid-19 emergency. From the 3.2bn of Government assistance, TWBC has received £1.4m. The balanced budget agreed in February will need to be extensively revised and this will be looked at in more detail after the first quarter.

In the last few weeks, TWBC seemed about to encounter a significant cash-flow crisis. Council Tax from the domestic side continues to be collected although there are greater difficulties with Business Rates which TWBC collects but has to pass on to Government. Collection of Business Rates this year is difficult but the Government has agreed a 3 month deferral for on-payment.

Pre-Covid 19, TWBC's finances were in a strong position they had about £20m in reserves. So TWBC is in a better position than most other councils but large losses cannot be sustained for very long. They are lobbying hard through Kent Finance Officers, Greg Clark and Helen Grant and the Secretary of State at MHCLG.

He has a continuing email dialogue with the new Governor of the Bank of England to explain about the impact of Covid-19 on local authority finance.

The major exercise for the Finance Dept (in addition to closing accounts to end March and getting information to the Auditors) has been grants to small businesses, mainly in the hospitality sector

which have been unable to trade because of the Covid-19 lockdown. We received £27m from Government and have paid out grants of £24m. About 200 eligible firms have yet to apply - all continue to be encouraged to apply by email and telephone. One firm applied, qualified and was paid a grant of £25,000 but returned it, advising it was not needed. Government has announced that further help is to be made available to be distributed at the discretion of councils. They await further details.

He has also been involved in a large number of emails and phone calls on Turnden. He stated his passion for protecting the AONB which is why he is also involved with Benenden's NDP and why he first thought about becoming a Borough Councillor and is totally behind us in terms of our approach to Turnden and Brick Kiln.

22/20: Items for Information:

Cllr. Bunyan advised the planning meeting scheduled for 19th May had been cancelled, the next one would take place on the 2nd June.

Cllr. Smith reported on the Sissinghurst VE Day celebrations. The Sissinghurst Fete Committee and the local shop had sponsored gifts for the elderly and vulnerable residents who received a cream tea. Many hand written thank you letters had been received, in response to the gifts. It cheered people up and he thanked everyone that had been involved. Cllr. Fletcher added his congratulations to all those involved and suggested that photos of the celebrations could be sent to the new website, TW Social.

The meeting was closed.

There were no questions from members of the public attending.