

HIGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Virtual Parish Council Meeting held on Zoom on Tuesday, 12th January 2021 at 7.30 p.m.

Present: Cllr. J. Grey (Chairman)
Kent County Councillor: Bryan Sweetland
Councillors: A. Carroll, R.Gilby, P .Holmes, A. Howard,
E. Jeffery, D. Martin, A. Mendzil, L. Pearton (also Borough)
and S. Sparks.

In attendance: 8 Parishioners
Peter Leakey (Parish Advisor)

Apologies for absence: Borough Councillor, Harold Craske
Kent Community Warden Paul Hassell
PCSO Jo Hartley
Vikki Brooke (Parish Advisor)

The Chairman accepted apologies for absence.
There were no alterations to the Register of Members Interests and no declarations for the gifts and hospitality register.
Confirmation of weekly inspections of the Recreation Ground by the GBC Park Ranger for insurance purposes had been received.

Parishioners Matters

None were brought to the notice of the Meeting.

Community Reports

Higham Speedwatch

Peter Leakey reported that Speedwatch sessions had been suspended at the present time on the advice of the Police due to the lockdown and so only a total of 2 sessions had taken place since the last meeting over a period of 2 hours. Details of a total of 5 vehicles which had exceeded the speed limit had been forwarded to the Police. The highest speed observed was 46 mph outside Buckland Farm.

Kent Community Warden

The Clerk reported that Paul Hassell had advised her that he currently had no base in the village as Higham Library remained closed and that all Kent Community Wardens were not working in the evenings at the present time. He had nothing to report.

Kent Police

Jo Hartley advised that she had nothing to report at this time.

The Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting, held on Monday, 7th December 2020, were confirmed and signed

Matters arising from the Minutes (not appearing elsewhere)

The Clerk reported that:-

- a. P. 1376 General Update. A total of 508 individual objections to the Local Plan Core Strategy (Green Belt Grab) had been posted into the mailbox at the Civic Centre before the closing date for the consultation. She praised this excellent effort by those Parishioners who had responded over the Christmas period and also the help offered by those in the village who had provided “drop boxes” for the collection of these objections.

Highway Improvement Plan

Cllr. Sparks had distributed an update of this document to all Councillors prior to the meeting. Cllr. Sparks reported that although the new pub landlord at the Gardeners Arms was in agreement with the double yellow lines being installed around the curve and on the other side of the road, the Post Office was now unsure. The Clerk agreed to provide evidence that the cheque for £1385 for the TROs had been cashed by Kent Highways. Maps had now been produced for the “unsuitable for HGVs” signs for the junctions of both Forge Lane and Villa Road with the A226 and these would be paid for by KCC. Local farmers might need to be given an exemption to allow access for work. Nuralite planned a one-way system for the site development and may be required to provide the necessary signage for this. A redesign of the kerb area might solve the problems with parking on the verge near to the chicane to School Lane. Continuing problems to the Gads Hill lay-by would continue to be monitored in conjunction with PCSO Jo Hartley. The re-painting of the white lines to the Chequers Street junction could not take place until the GBC review of parking restrictions in the area was complete. Suggestions would be welcomed for improvements to the lay-by in Crutches Lane. The original TRO document for the cycle lane on the A226 could not be located. Although the disabled parking bay to Forge Lane outside the Library had now been installed there was insufficient width for those planned at Higham Primary School and the frontage outside the Parade of shops was privately owned.

Update on Nuralite Planning Application

Following the decision taken by the Borough Council at the recent Planning Board Meeting to grant permission for the Nuralite Planning application, the Parish Council had placed information on both the website and Facebook page including a statement provided by Borough Councillor Harold Craske and another from the Parish Council. Further updates would be given in due course. Cllr. Martin agreed to write to Network Rail regarding the shared use of Canal Road whilst the site development took place.

Village Grant application form

Cllr. Gilby had circulated the new Village Grant application form to all Members for consideration prior to the meeting. It was agreed to place it on the website but to be prepared to re-visit this issue if the form should prove to be too complicated.

Higham Memorial Hall – funding

The Clerk reported that the Parish Council had offered grant aid funding to the Memorial Hall Committee to cover outgoings and costs relating to the building whilst it remained closed due to the COVID regulations.

Dates for Parish Council meetings in 2021

The Clerk had circulated a list of dates for virtual Parish Council meetings on Zoom for the forthcoming year to all Members prior to the meeting. It was agreed that this would also be displayed on the website and placed in the forthcoming Annual Parish Newsletter for Parishioners.

No COVID vaccinations available at Higham Surgery

The Chairman reported that several Parishioners had told him that the COVID vaccination would not be offered at Higham Surgery. Adam Holloway M.P. had contacted the Clerk to discuss this matter having seen this agenda item on the website. It was understood that he had already visited Higham Surgery and was in the process of speaking to the local CCG in conjunction with the MP for Rochester and Strood, Kelly Tollhurst. As soon as further information was to hand it would be placed on the website.

Councillors' Matters.

County.

Cllr. Sweetland confirmed that Members grants for the new financial year were to be halved and, although the KCC elections would be held in May, they would not be available until October 2021. He understood that Kent Highways would not be holding any more meetings with Parish Councillors but would communicate by email and post only. The KCC budget increase this year would be 5% made up of 2% increase for Council Tax and 3% for Adult Social Care. In answer to a question from Cllr. Sparks he agreed to look into the question of grants for Community Village Halls and in particular the deadline for applications which it was believed had been at the end of December 2020.

Borough.

Cllr. Pearton reported that all meetings were now being held on Zoom. There was concern regarding the high level of COVID cases being recorded in Gravesham which was currently the highest in the County.

Parish.

Cllr. Howard raised the question of the silver car which was still parked to the Landway. The Clerk confirmed that it had already been reported to Paul Hassell. Cllr. Mendzil advised that she had to get the car removed so that the new play equipment could be delivered and that the vehicle belonged to the daughter of someone who lived in Gordon Villas.

The Chairman reported that more potholes had opened up on the railway bridge.. Cllr. Martin suggested adding this to the Highways Improvement Plan and confirmed that KCC had removed the expansion joints to the bridge many years ago and he believed that this was why the tarmac kept cracking.

Cllr. Pearton asked if there had been any progress with the repair to the wire netting on the railway bridge. The Clerk was given some suggestions of who to chase to resolve this matter.

Reports.

a. Planning.

The following planning applications had been received by the Planning Committee:-

Appln. no. 20201284 Sunnyside, Dillywood Lane

Erection of a balcony to rear and erection of a double garage.

Appln. no. 20201313 15, High View

Demolition of existing garage and erection of a single storey side extension with integrated garage.

Appln. no. 20201330 38, Walmers Avenue

Reconfiguration of roof with insertion of dormers in front, rear and side roof slopes and conversion of roof space.

Appln. no. 20201334 5, Fairview Drive

Retention of an outbuilding in rear garden for use as a summer house and for domestic storage.

Finance.

The Clerk asked for approval for the items shown below, this being proposed by Cllr. Pearton, seconded by Cllr. Holmes and agreed by all Members.

Clerks salary (December)	1159.71
KCC (LGPS December)	490.77
HMRC (PAYE/NI December)	202.06
GBC (business rates for Pavilion until March 21)	909.00

Emma Jeffrey (accountancy provision)	275.00
Clerk (payment for items inside Pavilion)	395.00
Elizabeth Jeffery (compost and plants)	125.86
Elizabeth Hart (distribution of objection letter)	272.00
MA Services (microsoft)	2250.00
Singlewell Stationery and Print Ltd. (objection letter)	199.00
Emma Jeffrey (accountancy provision - budget)	300.00
Playground Projects Ltd (2 benches to play area)	3300.00
Externiture Ltd. (green roof bus shelter)	6826.68

To agree a precept for the financial year 2021/2022

A copy of the updated budget figures agreed at the Meeting held on Monday, 4th January 2021 had been circulated to all Members prior to the Meeting. It was proposed by Cllr. Pearton, seconded by Cllr. Carroll, and agreed by all Members that this be accepted as a true record and a precept of £93,119.80 in cash terms would be requested for the financial year 2021/2022. The Clerk confirmed that the national average band D in England was £69.89 in 2020/2021 and this precept request for 2021/2022 would equate to £59.14 which was well below this figure. The new precept equated to a 2% increase over the precept for the preceding year.

Correspondence.

The Clerk drew Members' attention to the following items:-

1. The Borough Council had confirmed that as no By-Election had been requested the Parish Council would be able to co-opt for the vacancy created by the resignation of Stewart Mackie, The notices would be issued immediately with a closing date for four weeks time.
2. Members agreed the proposed date of 25/1/21 for the Future Hoo presentation by Zoom.
3. In the interests of transparency, Cllr. Gilby wished it recorded in the minutes that a Policy Working Group needed to be set up to review the existing Standing Orders which would ultimately determine the timescales to which the Parish Council should operate. In addition several other policy documents needed to be produced to be eventually ratified before a meeting in April.

To note the date of the next Parish Council Meeting on Zoom

This was given as being Monday, 22nd February 2021 at 7.30 p.m.

Any Other Business.

None was brought to the notice of the Meeting.

It was resolved that:-

“Pursuant to Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the business specified below on the grounds that if the public were present during this item, it is likely that there would be the disclosure to them of exempt information as indicated against the item”.

There being no other business, the Meeting was closed to members of the public at 9.11 p.m. by the Chairman.