

Minutes of Meeting held 25th September 2019

Present: Coun O Poulter (Chairman), Coun M Baker, Coun F Farndale, Coun J Sanderson, Coun K Weston, R Dale (Clerk), Cllr B Phillips (HDC), Cllr A Wilkinson plus 7 members of the public

The Chairman, Coun. Poulter, opened the meeting, and, on behalf of Council, offered condolences to Mr Philip Ridley, a former Councillor and Council Chairman, who had sadly lost his wife 10 days previously.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Declarations of Interest

None

3. Minutes of meeting held 31st July 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 31st July 2019, having previously been circulated to Council Members, were agreed as a true record proposed by Coun. Baker and seconded by Coun. Sanderson. No dissensions. The minutes were signed off by the Chairman.

4. Matters Arising from Previous Meetings

1) Village Green Open Space

Linden Homes had engaged a new sub-contractor to tidy up the open space. The weeds in the paddock had also been cut down, but concern was expressed that, unless further action was taken, the thistles which had previously filled the area, would re-appear next year even more profusely. The Chairman had expressed Council's concerns over this matter to Linden Homes and HDC Planning (Enforcement) and would be pursuing discussions with both until a satisfactory agreement was reached on the way forward with regard to the maintenance of this area. It was suggested that, instead of meadow flowers the paddock could possibly be changed to grass, which, instead of twice-yearly attention, would be cut down with the same frequency as the rest of the Meadowfields open space. The Chairman undertook to continue negotiations with both parties.;

2) Strip of Land bordering "Hammer-head" at end of St Helen's Close

No progress had been made with regard to identifying ownership of and responsibility for the maintenance of this strip of land. This matter would be progressed in conjunction with continuing discussions over maintenance of the Open Space/Paddock.

5. Police Report

There was no Police representative at the meeting. However PCSO Laws had previously indicated to the Clerk that she hoped to be able to attend the November meeting (subject, as always, to urgent unscheduled operational demands).

The bi-monthly Police Report indicated that there had been six incidents in the Parish during the preceding 2 months (1 of ASB, 1 commercial burglary, 1 instance of "violence against the person", and three "other crimes (including drugs)". However, there was no supporting detail for any of these incidents, so it was unclear as to whether or not any of the "other crimes" may have related to complaints brought to Council's attention by residents of St Helen's Close regarding speeding vehicles in the cul-de-sac and allegations of possible drug-dealing activity in that area.

6. Public Forum

A Parishioner, having previously written to the Clerk on this matter in advance of the meeting, expressed his concerns about overgrown hedges on private land obstructing pavements and also restricting the view of motorists of certain 30 mph repeater signs. He also pointed out that the 30 mph repeater sign affixed to a pole on the southern side of the A684 close to the end of Back Lane was completely obstructed for east-bound drivers by a telegraph pole sited immediately in front of it. The Clerk was asked to draw this latter issue to the attention of Highways Area 2. The Chairman undertook to contact farmers who were responsible for hedge-trimming on the west-bound approach to Morton bridge and also for the land adjacent to Danville where one of the 30mph repeater signs was rendered invisible to east-bound drivers by overgrown hedges.

No prior notification had been received from parishioners wishing to make any other statements or ask any other questions relating to matters not included elsewhere on the agenda.

7. Planning Matters

No new Planning Applications had been received during the preceding two months. Notification had been received for the property addresses for the 5 new dwellings being constructed at Hatch End in a development to be known as Orchard Gardens.

8. Replacement of the existing VAS system

It was understood that the contract for the current Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS), which were deployed at either end of the Parish for a six-week period every 3 months over a 4-year period which began in 2016, was due to expire in mid-2020. Council would need to consider whether or not it was generally perceived that the use of the VAS system had had a beneficial effect in terms of reducing vehicle speeds through the village, and therefore whether this system

should be continued beyond this date, or whether perhaps an alternative solution should be sought.

It was noted that the annual cost of the VAS system during the initial 4 years of the contract had been £1350 plus VAT. The Chairman reported that he believed that the cost of continuing the use of the system beyond 2020 if agreed by Council would be charged at a slightly reduced £1000 pa.

Coun. Farndale undertook to investigate and report back on the possible alternative options, including also the option of participating in the Community Speed Watch programme.

9. Play Park Issues

- 1) The Clerk advised that the Annual RoSPA investigation was now due. He had received a quotation from Playforce of £114 for carrying this out, which also included the wider option of carrying out quarterly inspections and minor equipment servicing (£376.50). The quoted cost of the Annual Inspection itself was less than had previously been charged by Enviroplay who had carried out this inspection in the past two years (£150 in 2018). Coun. Weston undertook to obtain an alternative quotation from Streetscape, the company which had recently supplied new Sensory equipment for the play park.

There was a brief discussion about whether or not it was feasible to organise regular (weekly?) inspections of the Park equipment in order to check for defects and/or the need for maintenance/servicing without resorting to paying an external organisation to carry this out. The issues of the creation of a check-list of what should be checked (and by whom – would it be possible to establish a rota of volunteers?) and of the logging of the findings of such inspections (possibly required in order to satisfy the insurance company) would require further consideration. Warranties on the equipment supplied by Image Playgrounds when the Play Park was created in 2017 have now expired, such that any remedial work required to service/repair this equipment would have to be paid for by the Parish. A provision of approximately £700 had been included for the cost of such work in the draft expenditure budget for 2020/21 (see item 10.4 below) but the Clerk suggested that, in his opinion, this might not be sufficient and that an uplift may need to be considered.

- 2) HDC had been contacted about the wasp infestation at the willow tunnel. Advice had been received that, despite the alarming appearance, this was not serious, and that the wasps would probably “move on”.
- 3) It was noted that there had been a small number of incidents of “vandalism” in the park in recent weeks, including the removal of felt roofing from the windmill. It was agreed that, since covering this was more decorative than protective, replacement of the missing felt need not be carried out. Coun. Baker indicated that he would continue to maintain a “watching brief” over the Park and seek to deter this type of behaviour, which he believed was being carried out by a small number of “known” culprits from within the Parish.

10. Finance

- 1) The Clerk reported that the balance of funds, including a sum of £3.16 in petty cash, was £5,912.71 including £2,924.51 remaining from the CIL funding and a further £175 remaining from the previously “ring-fenced” sum of £1,925 (being the refund received from Image Playgrounds following the removal of the trampoline). The reported balance takes account of two cheques totalling £260.80 which have not yet been presented.

The Clerk reported that the second tranche of the Annual Precept (£3,600) was expected to be received before the end of September. A claim for reimbursement of £850.77 VAT incurred on expenditures since the start of the year would be submitted at the end of the half year, and payment of this was expected to be received in October. Gross expenditure of £2,600 was forecast for the remainder of the financial year, resulting in a forecast “working balance” of £4,664 at the end of the year (subsequently revised downwards to £3,900, to take account of donations to the Village Hall and St Helen’s Church – see item 11 below)

- 2) Outgoings during the preceding two months had been two payments totalling £441.60 (including VAT) to Walkers for grass cutting in July and August; a payment of £56.48 (including VAT) to HDC for Pest Control Treatment (re investigation of a reported wasp infestation at the willow tunnel in the Play Park); £40 to the Information Commissioner’s Office for renewal of the GDPR registration fee; £38.28 for office stationery and postage; and the second quarterly payment of £375 (including £75 PAYE) being the Clerk’s remuneration for the period July to September 2019.
- 3) The original application to update the HSBC Bank Mandate had unfortunately “timed out” (the Bank sets a maximum timescale of 45 days from the initiation of the request). The Clerk will now be restarting the process.
- 4) The Clerk submitted a first draft of the expenditure budget for 2020/21, which suggested a requirement for the provision of an annual nett total (ie excluding VAT) of £8010, an increase of 11.25% over the budget of £7200 for 2019/20. Although the most recent forecast of operating expenditure for 2019/20 was only £5513, this did not include two major items of expenditure, totalling £1,585, which related to 2019/20 but which had been invoiced early and paid at the end of the previous financial year. Taking these into account, the effective revised forecast of expenditure for the full year was within approximately £100 of the budgeted amount. (NB This does not take into account the implications of decisions taken later in the meeting – see item 16).

The Clerk also noted that the first draft of the budget for 2020/21 did not include any provision for the costs of a possible replacement for the VAS system (see item 8 above). Depending on a decision by Council as to whether to continue with the present VAS system, or to replace it with an alternative solution, it was therefore currently uncertain as to whether this would be paid for out of revenue expenditure or would involve capital expenditure paid for using the balance of CIL funding. If the latter, there would possibly be little or no impact on the annual operating expenditure budget. It was reported by the Chairman that he understood that a continuation of the present VAS system for a further year might be possible for a reduced annual cost in the region of £1000. In the light of this, it was suggested that the Clerk should update the first draft to include this potential additional cost. The Clerk also advised that, since producing

the first draft, his attention had been drawn to the fact that the battery installed in the Community Defibrillator had an expiry date in June 2020; a replacement will cost £155, and this would also need to be included in the next draft.

These adjustments would suggest a total expenditure budget of around £9,000, which in turn would mean an increase of 25% over the current year.

The Clerk pointed out that the November Council meeting would be the last opportunity for Council to consider and agree on the budget for next year, since this in turn determines the Precept for 2020/21 the demand for which has to be submitted to HDC by no later than the end of the calendar year.

11. Donations to Village Hall and St Helen's Church

In keeping with past practice, recommendations were unanimously approved for donations of £500 to the Village Hall and of £250 to St Helen's Church. As previously agreed by Council, the donation to the Village Hall was to be made nett of any charges levied on the Council by the Village Hall Trustees for hire of the Hall for Council fund-raising events, which, under their terms of reference they are obliged to levy. In the current year, the only such charge was of £36 for use of the Hall for the Easter Egg Hunt, such that the actual donation to be made for 2019/20 would therefore be £464.

12. Attendance by Councillors at other meetings

There had been no other meetings taking place which have been attended by Council members during the preceding two months.

13. Correspondence

There had been no correspondence of note during the preceding two months other than as dealt with under other agenda items.

14. AOB

The Clerk expressed his disappointment at the lack of support from Parishioners for the monthly organised litter picking sessions. The next such session would be on Saturday 5th October starting at 11.00am. However, it was understood that Saturday mornings were inconvenient for many Parishioners, particularly those with younger families who often had School and sports clubs and other activities to attend. Coun. Weston offered to conduct a survey via the next edition of the Community Newsletter to try and establish if there was a consensus over the preferred day/time for this activity that would attract more support.

There was no other competent business.

15. Exclusion of members of the press and public for the final agenda item due to confidential/sensitive nature

This was proposed by Coun. Weston, seconded by Coun. Baker and approved nem con.

16. Resignation of Parish Clerk

The Clerk had previously notified the Chairman of his wish to retire from the post of Clerk/RFO at the end of September, in order that he could devote more time to his family. However, he had also indicated a willingness to continue if required at a reduced level of involvement during a transitional period following appointment of his replacement, but hoped that this period would not extend beyond the end of the current calendar year. Having confirmed that this was the case, the Clerk left the meeting at this juncture in order that Councillors could discuss freely how they wished to proceed.

There follows a summary of the discussions which then took place, as reported by the Chairman:-

Council has decided to offer the post of Clerk/RFO to Mrs Amanda Lambert on a trial basis for an initial period of 6 months, and based on a nominal working week of 4 hours. Mrs Lambert is an experienced Parish Clerk, being already the Clerk to both Romanby and Kirby Wiske Parish Councils, and it was felt that this circumstance would allow her to become more quickly productive in the role of Clerk to Morton-on-Swale than if the post was to be offered to someone with no previous Local Government experience. It was further agreed that, in recognition of this, her remuneration would be based on the official NALC rate of £13.68 per hour, equating to a gross quarterly payment of just over £700, to be reviewed after six months if workload was shown to be consistently in excess of the estimated 4 hours per week (Mrs Lambert will complete weekly time sheets to confirm her actual workload). It was appreciated that this level of remuneration was almost twice that paid to the current Clerk, and that this was therefore not provided for within the 2019/20 budget, and that it would also have an impact on the recommended budget/Precept for 2020/21. However, it was deemed justified on the basis of the additional expertise that Mrs Lambert could be expected to bring to the role.

The present Clerk would be asked to continue partial involvement in the capacity of acting RFO until the date of the next Council meeting in November and/or until the requisite updates to the Bank Mandate to include Mrs Lambert had been completed and responsibility as the Primary Account Holder with the Bank had been successfully transferred.

17. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 26th November 2019, commencing at 7.00pm.

Please note change from usual day, which is for this meeting only, and also the earlier start time to allow for an Open Meeting with residents from Meadowfields ("The Dales") to follow the Council Meeting regarding the maintenance of the Open Space and Paddock areas

The main meeting closed at 20.30pm