

## HARPENDEN RURAL PARISH COUNCIL

### HERTFORDSHIRE

Minutes of a meeting of the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council held on Thursday 11 May 2023 starting at 6.50pm

Present: Parish Councillors Holder, Randall and Sheffield.

Also in attendance: District Councillors Ed Moore and Allison Wren. Mr Bob Ring.  
Andrew Reading (Parish Clerk)

1. Acceptance of Office

The Clerk circulated Acceptance of Office forms after the recent election, and would collect them in due course.

2. Appointment of Chair

It was RESOLVED that Councillor Sheffield be appointed Chair of the Parish Council for the ensuing year. Her Acceptance of Office as Chair was received.

3. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

It was RESOLVED that Councillor Holder be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council for the ensuing year. His Acceptance of Office as Vice-Chairman would be collected by the Clerk in due course.

4. Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

5. Minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2023 were approved.

6. Matters Arising

Minute 4 of 27th March, Matters Arising - Work at Kinsbourne House

It was noted that the works at Kinsbourne House were still continuing and that part of the adjacent cottage had just been demolished. It was noted that work was due to be completed by November 2023 and so it was agreed to keep a watching brief.

7. Internal Audit Report 2022/23

The Internal audit report, as prepared and signed by Alex Sage, was received and it was noted that there were no issues of concern that had been raised during the audit of the 2022/23 financial statements.

The audit work had been undertaken pro bono, but as per the budget a gift of wine had been made in lieu of payment. The audit report together with other financial information would be published on the Parish Council's website in the coming weeks.

8. Summary Receipt and Payments Accounts 2022/23

The Clerk said that the summary Receipts and Payments Accounts for 2022/23 showed, as indicated in March that there was only a £50 difference between expenditure and income. The outstanding VAT payment for 2021/22 had been

received at the end of March 2023. Waste collection costs had been significantly lower than budget as a result of changing the provider of this service. Common maintenance costs had increased due to urgent tree work being undertaken and staff costs had increased mainly as a consequence of the Clerk having to work additional hours. The workload and cost involved in running the Parish Council, reflected in the Clerk's time, was increasing and this trend was likely to continue.

It was RESOLVED that the Accounts of Harpenden Rural Parish Council for the year ended 31 March 2023 be approved and that the Chair be authorised to sign the Summary Receipts and Payments Accounts 2022/23.

9. Annual Governance Statement 2022/23

The Parish Council considered the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 contained in Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). Each section of the Statement was considered and it was agreed that each point had been met apart from point 9 which was not applicable.

It was RESOLVED that the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 be approved and signed by the Chair and Parish Clerk

10. Accounting Statements 2022/23

The Parish Council considered Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) - Accounting Statements 2022/23. It was noted that the amounts set out in this document had been extracted from the Receipts and Payments Accounts as discussed under Minute 7.

It was RESOLVED that the Accounting Statements 2021/22 be approved and that the Chair be authorised to sign Section 2 of the 2022/23 AGAR.

11. Certificate of Exemption from Internal Audit

The Clerk said that it was not necessary for the Parish Council to undergo a limited assurance review by P K Littlejohn LLP, external auditors, as long as the Parish Council certified itself as exempt. There were a number of requirements for exemption, the main one being that both income and expenditure in year were less than £25,000. In addition, the Parish Council had to comply with the Transparency Code for Small Authorities by publishing certain financial information, including the Certificate of Exemption, on the Parish Council website by 1 July 2023.

It was RESOLVED that the Chair and Parish Clerk sign a Certificate of Exemption, AGAR 2022/23 Part 2 for submission to P K Littlejohn LLP, the External auditors.

12. Insurance Renewal 2023/24

The Clerk said that the renewal quote from Zurich Municipal for 2023/24 had come in at £347.22, a small increase of £8.54 on the previous year. It had been the intention to obtain quotes from other insurers to make sure Zurich were still competitive. However, Zurich had very recently launched a web policy for small parish councils, with a premium based on the parish precept. For Harpenden Rural, the web policy premium was £264.00 and an unchanged level of cover. It was less flexible than the previous policy, but the Parish council had not submitted a claim for many years. The Clerk said he had taken the opportunity,

given the possibility of switching to a web-based policy, to seek reassurance about the public liability risks associated with the trees on the triangle of common land and the process the Parish Council undertook to manage those risks.

It was RESOLVED that Parish Council switch to a web-based insurance policy with Zurich Municipal for 2023/24 at a premium of £264.00

13. Schedule of payments and review of expenditure v budget

The Clerk said that as the Parish Council was only six weeks into the new financial year, there was very little to report, although to date expenditure was under budget, mainly as a result of a new Parish Council laptop being purchased at a very competitive price, and now a reduction in the annual insurance premium.

The following payments were approved

Description	£
(i) HAPTC subscription 2023/24	296.61
(ii) Open spaces Society subscription 2023/24	45.00
(iii) Zurich Insurance Web Policy 2023/24	264.00
(iv) Clerk expenses April to May 2023 (Primarily laptop computer £304.98, audit costs £58.72 and print cartridge £32.98)	410.63
(v) Elders Consultancy	350.00
(vi) St Nicholas PCC Room hire May 2023	20.00

14. No Mow May

The Clerk said that this matter had moved on since the agenda had been published following the discussion on email about the extra costs of delaying mowing the triangle of common. The Parish Council considered options for 2024 and the Clerk said he would discuss these with Councillor Sheffield.

15. Survey report of trees on the triangle of Common land

The Clerk circulated hard copies of the 2023 Tree Condition and Arboricultural Assessment of trees on the triangle of common land, prepared by Elders Consultancy. It was noted that there had not been any significant deterioration in the condition of the trees in the previous year and no urgent work was required.

Mr Ring said that he had noticed one of the smaller trees, adjacent to the right of way was leaning at an acute angle. He would have a closer look on his way home

It was RESOLVED that

- (i) quotes be obtained to carry out the tree works shown as priority two, tree work that was recommended within twelve months. Category three work was less urgent and would follow on from the next tree report.
- (ii) Harpenden Town Council and the landowner be approached for advice/support and a locality grant be investigated

16. Planning application and decisions 15 March to 30 April 2023

The Parish Council considered the list of planning applications and decisions. For the benefit of Mr Ring it was explained that not many applications affected the Parish, and of those that did, many were minor. However, the Parish Council had the right to lodge objections to individual applications with the District Council, although this right was only rarely exercised. More significant applications tended to be notified directly to the Clerk and these were forwarded to parish Councillors when received.

Councillor Holder said that the information circulated to Parish Councillors on some applications was rather limited. The Clerk explained that he extracted the information produced from the District Council's website. Where individual Parish Councillors wanted to look at updates, plans or see objections received, the best option was to log on to District Council's website where details of individual applications could be viewed.

17. Unity Trust Bank Account

It was RESOLVED that Peter Barrett and Penny Ayres be removed as signatories from the District Council's bank account.

18. St Albans and District Association of Local Councils (SADALC)

The Clerk said that Peter Barrett had previously attended meetings of the SADALC. This body, comprising representatives of all the Parish Council plus the Town Council in the St Albans District, and met four times a year to consider matters of mutual concern. It was attended by a representative from the District Council. Most of the meetings were held online and the Clerk said that he attended from time to time.

It was RESOLVED that Councillor Holder be appointed as the Parish Council's representative on the St Albans and District Association of Local Councils.

19. Harpenden Town Council

Councillor Wren said that following the recent elections, a number of new councillors had been elected to the Town Council for the Harpenden North ward. Councillor Wren suggested it would be helpful if one or two of these town councillors could be invited to future meetings of the Parish Council. This would enable greater engagement and was supported by the Parish Council. Councillor Wren said she would provide contact details to the Clerk.

Councillor Wren also said she would forward details of a consultation being undertaken by Affinity Water.

20. Co-options to the Parish Council

With two outstanding vacancies following the recent local election, Mr Ring said that he would be willing to serve on the Parish Council by co-option. It was noted

that Councillor Randall had a candidate in mind for the second vacancy and any further applications would be considered at a future meeting.

It was RESOLVED that Bob Ring be co-opted to the Parish Council until the next Parish Council elections in 2027, the appointment to be effective from the conclusion of the meeting.

21. Police Priority Setting Forum

Councillor Moore said the next meeting was scheduled for 30 June 2023 at Park Hall, Harpenden.

22. Date of next meeting

It was RESOLVED that the next meeting be held on Tuesday 12 September 2023.

There being no other business the meeting ended at 8.22 pm

Clerk to the Council

Chair