

HARPENDEN RURAL PARISH COUNCIL

HERTFORDSHIRE

Minutes of a meeting of the Parish Council held at St Mary's Church, Kinsbourne Green on Tuesday 12 September 2023 starting at 7.00pm

Present: Parish Councillors Sheffield (Chair), Holder, Randall and Ring.

Also in attendance: District Councillor Ed Moore. Andrew Reading (Parish Clerk) Carl Cheevers (Town Clerk and Chief Executive, Harpenden Town Council) Mr Philip Crispin and some 25 members of the public.

1. Parish Council Meeting attendance

The Chair welcomed members of the public to the meeting of the Parish Council, recognising that the reason for the large attendance was the recent announcement that Kinsbourne Green Common was to be put up for auction on 21 September 2023. The Chair said that a lot of work was underway to try and put together a community bid that if accepted by the landowner, would likely lead to the land being removed from the auction, an outcome the Parish Council supported. Two local residents leading on the community bid were in attendance and later in the meeting would talk about their work to date and answer questions. The Chair said that she would also answer questions from the floor addressed to the Parish Council.

2. Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2023 were approved.

4. Matters Arising

a) Minute 15 Survey report of trees on the triangle of common land

The Clerk said that at the last meeting it had been agreed to carry out of the priority two works set out in the 2023 Tree condition and Arboricultural Assessment report of trees on the triangle of common land. A quote for these works had been received from Browns Landscapes for the sum of £480 including VAT.

Given that there was still £5470 left in the 2023/24 budget for tree work the Clerk asked whether the Parish Council wanted to bring forward the lower risk, but more expensive tree work, into the current financial year rather than delay to 2024/25 as previously agreed.

It was RESOLVED that

- i. The quote from Browns Landscapes for the priority two works be accepted
- ii. The Clerk obtain quotes for the priority three works with a view to bringing this work forward to the current financial year

b) Minute 19 Harpenden Town Council elections 2023

The Clerk said that he would follow up the suggestion made at the last meeting that a town councillor be invited to future meetings of the Parish Council.

- c) Minutes 7-12. The Clerk said that all the financial information specified by the Annual Governance and Accountability return had been added to the Parish Council website by the deadline of 1 July 2023.

5. Schedule of cheques for payment and review of expenditure v budget

The Clerk drew the Parish Council's attention to two items on the schedule of income and expenditure v budget. The first was the balance of the tree work expenditure, which it had now been agreed would be spent on the priority three works. The second was the Parish Clerk's salary. While this was currently tracking the budget, it assumed that hours worked would be 13 hours net a month for the remainder of the financial year. However, the work falling out of the sale of Kinsbourne Green Common in the previous fortnight had been exceptional. The Clerk said that he would be discussing this situation with the Chair who would report back in time for the next meeting,

The following payments were approved.

Description	£
(i) Clerk salary April to June 2023 (including 48 budgeted additional hours)	802.00
(ii) HMRC tax on salary	534.00
(iii) Elders Consultancy Tree Condition Report 2023	350.00
(iv) St Albans District Council election expenses	56.00
(v) SADALC subscription 2023/24	10.00
(vi) Townsend Nursery grass cuts 10 May, 26 June, 21 July, 4 August and 25 August	281.80
(vii) St Nicholas PCC room hire 12 September 2023	20.00
(viii) Browns Landscapes	480.00

6. Kinsbourne Green Common

Prior to focussing on this issue, the Chair said there were two other matters relating to the Common that she wanted to report back on.

The first was the construction work outside Kinsbourne House and the hardstanding that had been created on common land together with temporary safety fencing that had been erected which restricted access. This situation had been discussed with the owner of several occasions and the Parish Council had arranged for an enforcement officer from the County Council to visit the site. A second visit was scheduled and assurance had been received that building work would end soon and the Common would be reinstated.

The second was the clearing of common land at the junction with Kinsbourne Green Lane together with new fencing and the construction of a new access across common land near Pollards Farm. Again, an enforcement officer had visited the site and confirmed that the new fencing did not encroach on common land and that any permissions required for the new access had been obtained.

Councillor Sheffield then invited Sue Archer and Tim Wright, who were leading the Community bid to purchase the Common, to report on their proposal which, if accepted by the landowner would enable it removed from the auction on 21 September.

The meeting was advised that community ownership would ensure the Common remained as a public asset in perpetuity. That would avoid the risk of purchase by a private owner who might not be local or maintain the current high standards of management. The plan was to manage the Common via a Charitable Incorporated Organisation or similar and indications were that the landowner was amenable to this approach. Negotiations were currently at a critical stage and involved the provision of a non-returnable deposit.

If the purchase went ahead, then it would be necessary to raise some public money as there would be ongoing maintenance costs of at least £10k a year. There had not been time to commission a tree condition survey, so costs could be higher.

Members of the public were then invited to ask questions on the proposal. At the conclusion of questions, there was general agreement that the proposal outlined was the best solution.

On behalf of the Parish Council, the Chair said that the Parish Council very much supported keeping Kinsbourne Green Common within the hands of the local community. It was a valued asset and important space for residents of Harpenden Rural and Harpenden North that had been well maintained over many years. The Community ownership bid as outlined would ensure that this would continue.

7. Fly tipping update

Councillor Moore updated the Parish Council on the problem of flytipping. It was noted from the information circulated that tips were concentrated in quieter areas such as Kennel Lane and Kinsbourne Green Lane. It was noticeable that Veolia were much more proactive than in the past and that flytipping was removed more speedily, which in turn helped to discourage others,

8. St Albans District Council Local Plan

The Clerk said that he had sent the link to the District Council's Draft Local Plan to all Parish Councillors. Due to limitations on time and the focus on the sale of Kinsbourne Green Common, it was not possible to put together a Parish Council submission by the deadline of 26 September 2023. It was suggested that Parish Councillors make individual submissions. It was noted that an exhibition on the Local Plan was being held at Rothamsted on 13 September.

9. London Luton Airport

Councillor Holder updated the Parish Council on the proposals to increase the number of passengers at Luton Airport to 32m per year. Luton Rising had to obtain a Development Consent Order for its airport expansion plan because of the environmental Impacts it would have.

A preliminary meeting had been held on 10 August and a six-month examination stage had now begun during which written representations by interested parties would be taken into account. There would be three specific hearings in September. Following the Examination process, the Panel had to make a written recommendation to the Secretary of State who then had to make a decision in three months.

10. Parish Council Newsletter

Councillor Sheffield proposed that the Parish Council produce a newsletter for local residents, possibly on a biannual basis and suggested that this would cover topics such as forthcoming litter picks, Kinsbourne Green Common, wildlife watch and the Local Plan, and supplemented by reports from the scouts and the Police. An outline of possible content was circulated.

The Parish Council supported this proposal and Councillor Sheffield agreed to work up the proposal.

11. Planning Applications and decisions to 1 September 2023

The Parish Council considered the schedule of planning applications and decisions to 1 September 2023. These were all relatively minor.

Councillor Moore noted that because Kinsbourne Green fell within the Chilterns Beechwood Special Area of Conservation, as discussed at previous meetings, there was a significant cost attached to any development. This could in turn have the effect of lowering the number of planning applications.

12. Code of Conduct

The Clerk said that the Code of Conduct arose out of the Localism Act 2011 and was a code that anyone who was a parish councillor had to comply with, The Local Government Association had recently updated and expanded the Code and a revised version had been adopted by St Albans District Council earlier in the year. The Clerk said that he had circulated this version by email,

It was RESOLVED that the updated Code of Conduct, as previously circulated by email be approved and substituted for the 2012 version currently shown on the Parish Council website.

13. Meeting of St Albans and District Association of Parish Councils

It was noted that the next meeting of the Association was scheduled for 2 October 2023 and that Councillor Holder would attend on behalf of the Parish Council.

14. Bank Mandate Changes

The Clerk said that as agreed at the May meeting, Peter Barrett and Penny Ayres had been removed as signatories from the Parish Council's Bank Account, and he suggested that Councillor Ring be added. The process of changing the mandate had been relatively straightforward.

It was RESOLVED that Councillor Ring be added as a signatory to the Parish Council's bank account.

15. Waste bin on the triangle of Common land

The Chair said that now it was permissible to put dog waste into ordinary litter bins, it would be better if the litter bin, that was adjacent to the bench on the triangle of common, was moved a bit further away. It was agreed that this was a sound proposal, but that consideration be deferred until the future ownership of the Common became clear.

In reply to a question from a member of the public about the existing dog waste bins being permanently full, it was agreed that the Clerk make inquiries as to increasing the frequency of collection.

16. Co-option to the Parish Council.

Mr Crispin said that he was not yet in a position to take a decision on being co-opted to the Parish Council.

The Chair said that it would be helpful if Mr Crispin could email the Parish Councillors before the next meeting with a couple of paragraphs on why he would like to join the Parish Council and the skills he would bring to the proceedings.

17. Asset of Community Value

The Parish Council gave consideration to the submission of a Nomination form to the District Council to nominate the part of Kinsbourne Green Common that was up for auction, as an Asset of Community Value, something that was permitted under the Localism Act 2011. If supported by the District Council, then this would require the owner to allow six weeks for a community organisation to submit an expression of interest during a six-week sale moratorium, and six months to prepare a bid.

The Parish Council discussed the merits of this, noting that the community ownership that the Council wanted and that the landowner supported could well be achieved in the next few days. In that case the need to submit a Nomination would fall away. It was only if the community bid failed that the ACV Nomination would become much more significant.

It was RESOLVED that the Chair be delegated authority to take a final decision on the submission of ACV nomination and that her decision be guided by whether or not the Community bid outlined earlier in the meeting was successful.

18. Parish Council mobile phone

The Clerk said that he had arranged for the Parish Council to have a mobile phone which would be shared with St Michael Parish Council. This current cost would be £6.00 a month, shared 50/50 i.e. £3 a month each.

19. Date of Next meeting

It was RESOLVED that the next meeting be held on Tuesday 16 January 2024 at 7.00pm.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 8.50pm

Clerk to the Council

Chair