

HARPENDEN RURAL PARISH COUNCIL HERTFORDSHIRE

Minutes of a meeting of the Parish Council held at St Mary's Church, Kinsbourne Green on Tuesday 16 January 2024 starting at 7.00pm

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

Also in attendance: Andrew Reading (Parish Clerk). District Councillors Allison Wren and Ed Moore and one member of the public (Peter Barrett).

1. Apology for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Holder.

2. Co-option to the Parish Council

It was RESOLVED that Philip Crispin be co-opted to the Parish Council with immediate effect and until the next Parish Council elections in 2027.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Sheffield declared an interest in Planning application 5/2023/2486, Proposed construction of menage with associated post and rail fencing at 1 The Old Dairy, and separately as a Trustee of the Friends of Kinsbourne Green.

4. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2023 were approved.

5. Matters Arising

Minute 4 - Tree Works

The Clerk said that the Priority two tree works had been undertaken and that a quote was awaited for the more substantial Category three works. Councillor Wren suggested that it might be worth contacting Ringway about the tree works and said she would pass on details to the Clerk.

Minute 5 - Schedule of cheques for payment and review of expenditure v budget

The Chair said that she had discussed with the Clerk his increasing workload, highlighted by the sale of Kinsbourne Green Common. It had been agreed that the situation be monitored over the forthcoming year.

Minute 14 - Bank Mandate changes

The arrangements for adding Councillor Ring as a bank signatory were underway.

6. Local Plan Update

Councillor Wren updated the Parish Council on progress with the draft Local Plan. This was being undertaken in a very thorough way, but the timescale has slipped a little and approval by the Secretary of State was still two and half years away.

Meanwhile, changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) had been announced by the Government in December 2023. This set out the Government's planning policies for England and how they were expected to be applied with the main focus being on housing delivery. The provision relating to the Green Belt had changed in that local authorities could choose to review and alter green belt boundaries in exceptional circumstances, with changes being made through the

Local Plan process. This was helpful although it also stated that density of houses could not be increased when it was out character with the neighbourhood. This was all in the context of an advisory target of 15000 houses for the District up to 2041 and the fact that much of the District was comprised of green belt land.

Councillor Wren said that she had recently been elected as a County Councillor and that for 2024/25, would control a locality budget of £17,500 and a Community budget of £5000 and that these were open to applications from local organisations in the Harpenden division. Councillor Wren said that she would also be able to provide the Clerk with local information that could be included in the Parish newsletter.

7. Schedule of Payments and review of expenditure v budget.

The Clerk said that budget v projected expenditure to 31 March 2024 were very much aligned. However, the outcome at the end of the year very much depended on whether the budgeted Category 3 tree works took place before 31 March or in the following financial year.

The Clerk also reported that his salary for the year would be over budget due to a higher than anticipated National Salary award which had been targeted at lower earners, together with the increasing demands on the Clerk's time, which had required additional hours to be worked.

The forecast had assumed a second Parish Council newsletter before 31 March 2023. However, Councillor Sheffield said the next newsletter would probably be in early summer 2024 and so the costs would fall in the next financial year.

Finally, the Clerk reminded the Parish Council that its dog waste collection contract with TBS Hygiene had been terminated in September 2022 on cost grounds and the Parish Council had switched to John O'Connor Grounds Maintenance as part of the District Council's own dog waste collection contract. However, with two months of the financial year remaining no invoice had yet been received from the District Council. Councillor Moore said that he hoped to meet the Chief Executive of Harpenden Town Council and would see what arrangements they used for dog waste collection.

The following payments were approved.

Description	£
(i) Clerk salary July to September 2023	393.34
(ii) HMRC tax on Clerk's salary	262.00
(iii) Townsend Nursery grass cuts 4 August, 25 August, 29 September 7 November and 17 November	282.00
(iv) D2D Print October newsletter (reimbursement of Councillor Sheffield)	138.18
(v) Royal British Legion - Remembrance Day Wreath	20.00
(vi) Clerk salary - October to December 2023. Includes National Pay award backdated to 1 April 2023 and 12 additional hours	612.79
(vii) HMRC tax on Clerk's salary	408.40
(viii) St Nicholas PCC room hire 16 January 2024	25.00
(ix) St Michael Parish Council. Shared mobile phone contract. September 2023 to January 2024	15.00

(x)	Transfer of £5000 from Parish Council current Account to Instant Access Account - October 2023	5000.00
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8. Appointment of Auditor

The Clerk said that Alex Sage had indicated that he would be willing to undertake the audit of the 2023/24 Accounts.

It was RESOLVED that Alex Sage be appointed to audit the 2023/24 Accounts.

9. Possible Grants Policy

The Clerk said that the Parish Council had not made grants to other organisations in the past, although it had been discussed as a possibility from time to time. With that in mind, the Clerk had prepared a policy that set out suggested criteria for making grants, together with an application form. The sum of £500 had been included in the draft 2024/25 budget for this purpose.

The Parish Council considered whether or not they wished to introduce a grants policy from 1 April 2024 and agreed that this would be a worthwhile development which could raise the profile of the Parish Council. The Clerk said if approved, the Policy and application form would be added to the Parish Council website and could be publicised in the next issue of the Parish Council newsletter.

It was RESOLVED that a Grants Policy be introduced from 1 April 2024 and that the draft Policy as circulated be approved.

10. Draft budget 2024/25 and approval of Parish Precept 2024/25

The Clerk said that the draft budget he had prepared showed projected expenditure of £8,221 for 2024/25, which was significantly less than expenditure of £13,076 budgeted for 2023/24. However, 2023/24 was unusual in that the significant uplift for that financial year was to cover the likely costs of the Priority three tree works on the triangle of Common land rented by the Parish Council.

The Clerk also reported that income for 2024/25 was likely to be around £425 and so a precept of £7,800 would be sufficient to cover projected expenditure. That saying, the Priority three works would also cause reserves to fall and so it would be prudent to start building these up again. The Reserves Policy would be submitted to the next meeting.

The Parish Council noted that the significant increase in the precept last year had not generated any reaction from the public, probably because it was such a tiny part of the overall Council tax bill. With that in mind, it was felt that the precept should remain unchanged for 2024/25. That in turn would allow for an increase of £500 for additional hours worked by the Clerk, with a similar increase in the amount for tree work.

Finally, the Clerk said that for 2024/25 and future years the District Council would pay the precept in two equals amounts on 1 April and 1 October, rather than paying the whole amount in April. This was not likely to be a problem for the Parish Council.

It was RESOLVED that

- (i) the Parish Council's precept for 2024/25 be set at £9,926 and that St Albans District Council be notified accordingly, and
- (ii) the Draft budget as circulated be approved subject to the additions as outlined above. The Clerk would submit the amended budget to the next meeting.

11. Update on Kinsbourne Green Common

Councillor Sheffield said that there had been substantial progress since the last meeting. The amount raised to date to purchase the main section of Kinsbourne Green Common by the Friends of Kinsbourne was now very close to target, and it was very likely that contracts would be exchanged by the end of January 2024 with completion the following month. With gift aid and matched funding being provided by the employers of some individuals, the aim was to build up a reserve to cover ongoing maintenance and insurance. There had been substantial help from Harpenden Town Council, the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and the Harpenden Trust. The latter had made a grant of £15,000 and there were options for other sources of grant funding going forward.

In reply to a question, the Chair said that she had decided not to proceed with Registering the Common as an Asset of Community Value. The fact that it would shortly become a charitable asset meant that the objective of securing the land in perpetuity for the public had been achieved.

In terms of other commons matters, the construction work outside Kinsbourne House was drawing to a conclusion and some of the Common had now been reinstated. In respect of Pollards Farm, an officer from the County Council would be making a further inspection of the common boundary following the planting of further trees.

Councillor Moore said that he was aware of a proposal to use Kinsbourne Green Common for a Park run. Councillor Sheffield said she would discuss with the Friends of Kinsbourne Green.

12. Update on fly tipping

Councillor Moore provided an update on the problem of fly tipping in the Parish and circulated some data that he had prepared. As expected, the worst affected areas were small lanes in the north of the Parish - Kennel Lane in particular, but also Kinsbourne Green Lane. Efforts were now concentrated on reporting the tips as soon as possible and then getting them cleared quickly and within two weeks. In reply to a question about the number of fixed notices issued, Councillor Moore said he would provide an update subsequent to the meeting.

13. London Luton Airport Update

The Clerk said that, as previously reported, the proposal from the airport operators was to increase the number of passengers from 18m to 32m pa by 2043.

A development consent order for expansion had been accepted for examination by The Planning Inspectorate. This process was necessary because of the environmental impacts, and the six-month examination phase was near its conclusion. At that point the Panel had three months to make a written recommendation to the Secretary of State, who was then required to make a decision within three months. There would be a further six-week window for any legal challenge.

14. Parish Council Newsletter

The Parish Council discussed the reaction to the first Parish Council newsletter and agreed that this had been well received and should be continued. Money for the two issues had been included in the 2024/25 budget.

In terms of distribution, the Parish Council discussed whether the newsletter should be delivered to some properties that were located just outside the Parish boundary given that those residents were quite likely to use Kinsbourne Green

Common. It was also noted that one resident had asked that some information about the Parish Council appear in the next issue.

It was RESOLVED that

- (i) The Parish newsletter be continued in 2024/25 and that this be published twice a year.
- (ii) A map be obtained in order for the Parish Council to identify properties outside of the Parish that should receive a newsletter. Councillor Moore to action.
- (iii) Issue two of the Parish newsletter include some background information about the Parish Council

15. Planning applications and decisions to 1 January 2024

The Parish Council considered applications and decisions between September and 1 January 2024.

In particular, it was noted that there were six applications relating to Pollards Farm and that these had been called in by District Councillors and so would be determined by the Planning Committee rather than Council officers. The deadline for objections had passed.

16. Meetings of the St Albans and District Association of Local Councils - 2 October 2023 and 8 January 2024.

The Clerk said that the Association met four times a year and comprised representatives of Parish Councils and the Town Council within the St Albans District. Meetings were also usually attended by a representative of the District Council. The meetings were primarily an opportunity to share information and experiences - for example there had been much interest in the proposed purchase of Kinsbourne Green Common by the Friends of Kinsbourne Green. Councillor Holder was Harpenden Rural's representative. The Clerk said that he would forward the minutes of the 8 January meeting when received.

17. Storage units on land north of Kinsbourne Green Common

Councillor Sheffield said that it had been brought to her attention that there had been storage units and caravans located on a field north of Kinsbourne Green Common for several years, which broke a covenant on that land. There was a perceived risk that this could become permanent through lack of objection.

This was likely to be a District Council enforcement issue but would be low priority due to more pressing matters. The Chair said she would reflect on this further.

18. Date of next meeting

It was RESOLVED that the next meeting be held on Tuesday 5 March 2024 at 7.00pm.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 9.30pm.

Clerk to the Council

Chair