

HARPENDEN RURAL PARISH COUNCIL HERTFORDSHIRE

Minutes of a meeting of the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council held via Zoom, on Monday 13 July 2020 starting at 7.30pm

Present: Parish Councillors Barrett (Chairman), Mrs Ayres, Mrs Bell, Holder and Randall

Also in attendance: Andrew Reading (Parish Clerk)

1. Appointment of Chairman

It was RESOLVED that Councillor Barrett be appointed Chairman of the Parish Council for the ensuing year.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

It was RESOLVED that Councillor Mrs Ayres be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council for the ensuing year.

3. Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

4. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2020 were approved.

5. Matters Arising

Minute 4 - Matters Arising

The Clerk said that a schedule showing how dog waste collection costs had increased over recent years had been enclosed with the papers.

Minute 10 - Planning Application for an incinerator plant at East Hyde

It was noted that the proposal for an incinerator plant at East Hyde would no longer be pursued

6. Internal Audit Report 2019/20

The Internal audit report signed by Alex Sage was received. There were no issues of concern that had been raised during the audit of the 2019/20 financial statements. The work had been undertaken pro bono but as agreed in 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.

7. Annual Governance Statement 2019/20

The Parish Council considered the Annual Governance Statement 2019/20. 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 2019/20 be approved and signed by the Chairman and Parish Clerk

8. Accounting Statements 2019/20

The Parish Council considered the 2019/20 financial statements.

The Clerk said that income and expenditure in the financial statements closely matched the figures reported at the March meeting. Costs had been higher than at the time of the budget owing to tree work being undertaken and higher than expected dog waste collection costs.

It was RESOLVED that the Accounts of Harpenden Rural Parish Council for the year ended 31 March 2020 be approved and that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Receipts and Payments Accounts together with Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return.

9. 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 31 August 2020.

It was RESOLVED that the Chairman and Parish Clerk sign a Certificate of Exemption for submission to P K Littlejohn LLP, the External auditors.

10. Cheque Authorisations and review of expenditure

The Parish Council noted that expenditure to date during the financial year totalled £1,608 against projected income of £5,663. Dog waste collection costs were higher than budget owing to a price increase for £4 to £5 per bin. Income was higher due to a grant of £250 and a larger VAT rebate than anticipated. The following cheques were approved and authorised.

	Cheque	Description	£
(i)	100648	Amazon - PC security software	18.00
(ii)	100649	TBS Hygiene. Dog waste collection April to June	156.00
(iii)	100650	Open Spaces Society Annual subscription	45.00
(iv)	100651	Zurich Municipal - Annual Insurance	293.28
(v)	100652	HAPTC Annual subscription	293.28
(vi)	100653	Clerk salary March to June 2020	343.47
(vii)	100654	HMRC tax on salary	228.40
(viii)	100655	Townsend Nursery three grass cuts	169.20

11. St Albans District Plan Update

Following the suspension of the St Albans Local Plan in January 2020 amid concerns over its legal compliance and soundness, the Planning inspectorate had followed this up in April with a detailed letter to the District Council signalling the likely need to withdraw the document. The full letter was available on the District Council's website. Given the number and seriousness of the issues raised, the delay to the District Plan would be significant- probably a year or more. The District Council now had one of the oldest Local Plans in the country and the risk now was that it could lead to speculative planning applications, seeking to deliver housing ahead of the Local Plan process.

12. London Luton Airport expansion

The Clerk reported that the planning application to develop Luton Airport which was due to be submitted in June 2020, had been deferred in order to allow further consultation on environmental aspects. Overshadowing everything was the impact of Covid-19 on air travel and the unprecedented effect this was having on Luton Borough Council's revenues from London Luton airport. The Council had been obliged to make huge cuts to services and the future for expansion at Luton airport was now very uncertain.

Councillor Mrs Bell said there was an App that could be downloaded which allowed aeroplanes that deviated from their designated flight path to be identified. The airport would then act on information received. The App cost £2.99.

13. Provision of dog waste bin

The Clerk reported that Councillor Annie Brewster had supported an application for a grant of £250 from her locality budget, for the provision of a dog waste bin, and this application had subsequently been approved.

It was agreed that Councillor Mrs Ayres would liaise with the landowner over the precise siting of the bin and that the Clerk would obtain two quotes for purchase and installation. It was also agreed that the Clerk explore the possibility of a further grant to cover collection costs for the first year.

14. Planning applications and decisions to July 2020

The Parish Council considered a list of planning applications and decisions to July 2020. It was noted in particular that application 5/2020/1019 at Canley had been approved. It was further noted that the planning application for three bungalows at Brickfield Farm, Coles Lane, had been opposed by the Council for Protection of Rural England.

15. Witley Parish Council v Cavanagh

The Clerk reported on the case of Witley Parish Council v Cavanagh. In this case, a mature lime tree that was the responsibility of the Parish Council, and which was sited adjacent to a road, had fallen during a storm onto a bus, severely injuring the driver and damaging a house opposite. Although Witley Parish Council undertook three-year inspections of its trees, it was considered on appeal that this interval was insufficient in the case of individual mature trees in a high-risk location.

The Clerk said he had contacted the Parish Council's insurers for their view on how frequently the Parish Council should inspect the trees it was responsible for on the triangle of Common land, and had been advised that this should take place annually. Currently trees were inspected every three years, with remedial work being undertaken in accordance with any recommendations. The last inspection was in September 2019. The Clerk said he would forward the email exchange.

It was RESOLVED that the Clerk contact the Open Spaces Society for their view, but that in the absence of any further information, annual inspections be introduced.

16. Clerk's contract

The Chairman said that he had signed a new contract for the Clerk putting into effect the changes agreed by the Parish Council in January 2019.

17. Date of next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting be held on Monday 19th October 2020 at 7.30pm. This would be a face-to-face meeting, or by Zoom if restrictions had not been lifted by then.

There being no other business the meeting ended at 8.10 pm

Clerk to the Council

Chairman