

FRANT PARISH COUNCIL

THE MINUTES OF A MEETING OF FRANT PARISH COUNCIL HELD AT ERIDGE VILLAGE HALL ON WEDNESDAY 15TH JANUARY 2019 AT 7.30PM

Present: Cllr Rutherford - Chairman
Cllrs Park, Crookshank, Howell, Wallis, Macdonald-Brown, Best

Cllr Obbard
Mrs R. Karim – Clerk

Mrs J. Steadman
Mr D. Huskisson
Mr J. Bee

1. To receive apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Standley and Cllr Luther. These were accepted.

2. To receive declarations of interests on items on the Agenda and changes to the Register of Interests

None.

3. To approve the Minutes of the meeting on 17th December 2019 as a true and accurate record

The Minutes were **approved**.

4. To determine matters arising from the previous Minutes for updating and noting:

- Cllr Howell to liaise with Cllr Standley about asking the Member responsible for Highways to attend a Parish Council meeting; **Action: JH**
- The Clerk said she had written to Highways about gully clearing and also to a local resident about making good a section of the green outside their property;
- Cllr Crookshank confirmed that the raised manhole by the green in Bells Yew Green appeared to be for drainage. Cllr Macdonald-Brown said he had informed East Sussex County Council that a repair was needed;
- Cllr Rutherford said he had arranged a meeting with a company who might be able to assist with creating a shallow bund on the green in Frant; unfortunately, the company did not attend so he will try to rearrange; **Action: WR**
- Cllr Howell said she was awaiting a response about introducing litter bins with anti-pest lids. With reference to the litter bin near Warren Farm Lane, the Clerk confirmed it does not appear on the Asset Register. Cllr Howell agreed to contact Wealden District Council about this. **Action: JH**
Referring to the planning application here for a new green, Cllr Best said he had been liaising with the planning officer and had agreed a slightly delayed decision date.
- Cllr Howell said she had received a response from Electoral Services about the cost imposed on the Parish Council for the local elections. She will circulate this to Councillors and the Clerk; **Action: JH**
- The Clerk confirmed she had submitted representations to the Draft Transport Strategy for the South East;
- The Clerk said she had written to Holy Trinity Church, declining their request for a grant this year;
- The Clerk confirmed that Treework will carry out the work to the oak on the green and she was awaiting a proposed date from them;

- Cllr Howell said she had spoken with Wealden District Council about the considerable amount of litter being deposited along Benhall Mill Lane since the Countryside Properties development had begun.

The public forum was considered after item 6.

6. To receive reports from County and District Councillors

County

The Chairman noted the Clerk had circulated a report from Cllr Standley; Councillors said they had read the report and did not raise any questions. The report is appended to the Draft Minutes.

District

Cllr Obbard raised the following:

- The Draft Local Plan, rejected by the Local Plan Inspector, was likely going to be withdrawn by agreement at the next Full Council meeting. A new Plan would now need to be prepared, a process that would take some two to three further years to complete, involving renewed calls for sites, strategic housing assessments, etc. It is expected that the new housing requirement will increase dramatically to approximately 1,200 dwellings per year, plus potentially accommodating unmet provision in neighbouring districts (Eastbourne, for example).

Cllr Howell said that a five-year land supply will be confirmed in a matter of months and it is the intention not to be developer-led. She said that Wealden District Council would now consult with Parish Councils. She noted that the NPPF was clear that the AONB must be protected. Cllr Howell suggested that questions would be asked of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council as to why their proposals involve building on AONB in the Parish but not on AONB in their Borough. Cllr Obbard said the status of the Ashdown Forest remains unchanged and Cllr Howell said that a key point in the Inspector's Report was that the District Council had not given enough weight to the possibility of more electric cars being in circulation in the future.

- Cllr Obbard said he was disappointed that Wealden District Council had not objected to the proposed 3-storey apartment block at Strawberry Hill. Cllr Rutherford noted that Frant Parish Council had objected.

Councillors confirmed they had read Cllr Howell's report, circulated via email prior to the meeting (appended to these Draft Minutes). Cllr Howell added to this with the following:

- The Draft Local Plans produced by both Sevenoaks and Mid Sussex District Councils have also been rejected; and
- Reflecting on the Inspector's basis for rejecting Wealden's Draft Local Plan, Cllr Howell said that the definition of the 'duty to cooperate' needed to be clarified and tightened up.

(Mr John Bee arrived at the meeting)

5. Public forum – time limit 15 minutes

Referring to the approved housing development opposite the Abergavenny PH, Mr Bee informed the Council that an application had been submitted to Wealden District Council for regrading the levels across the site to meet external disabled access standards. He noted that the overall design had not changed and ridge heights remained the same as approved, or indeed lower. Cllr Rutherford thanked Mr Bee for the update.

Cllr Crookshank enquired about progress with the feasibility study for a new pedestrian crossing over the A267. The Clerk said that Mr Johnson (East Sussex County Council) was putting her in touch with the relevant team to progress this.

7. Green Spaces

7.1 To consider revised quotes for consultancy work for the green in Frant

Mr Huskisson said he was concerned that the Parish Council was happy with the draft brief that he had produced as he had expected that there might be possible amendments to it prior to it being sent out. Cllr Rutherford said that the Parish Council had agreed the draft brief, deferring to Mr Huskisson's expertise in this area.

Turning to the two quotations received for the consultancy work (of four requested), Mr Huskisson said that, in his opinion, the quote from Enplan was comprehensive and appeared to offer better value for money. He was disappointed that the quote from Allen Scott had come in dearer than their previous quote. He suggested that the Clerk seek clarification from Enplan about any exclusions that ought to be included and noted that, beyond this work, there would still be the costs of a topographic survey and two further consultants.

Cllr Best queried whether this approach was the most appropriate, particularly given the costs involved. He said he had spoken with the Conservators of Tunbridge Wells who explained they undertake an experimental approach to mitigating measures at the Common. Cllr Rutherford said this approach was more feasible given the scale of the common, but might not be so effective on a smaller area such as the green.

Mrs Steadman considered that the process to date had been made somewhat difficult because of a lack of a defined budget from the outset. Cllr Park disagreed, noting that these quotes (and their predecessors) had allowed the Parish Council to understand the scope, nature and costs of the works involved and thus understand better what budget needed to be earmarked.

Mr Huskisson said that, while it may be cheaper to ask for sketch details to be produced and then approach a contractor, the overall result would be piecemeal, with a potential inconsistency in methodology and materials, resulting in a deleterious impact on the character of the area. He also said that a topographical survey was vital in establishing the baseline for all future works on the green in the years ahead. Cllr Rutherford agreed, noting that a robust survey would be helpful in any future grant applications and in the development of any plans (eg: a Neighbourhood Plan). He also said he could envisage calls in the future for widening the road from the A267 to Bells Yew Green (already suffering as a 'rat run') through pressure for increased housing. A baseline survey would be useful in defending the green against this prospect.

Cllr Best considered that, given the nature of the space in Frant as a *village green*, the approach did not need to be homogenous and could potentially set up considerable future costs for the Parish Council in terms of maintenance and replication of materials. He cautioned against raising expectations and the Parish Council inadvertently committing itself to an approach that would prove costly and long drawn out. He thus proposed a motion that entering into a contract with a consultant and taking on board the consultant's recommendations would not commit the Parish Council to necessarily undertaking all of the work identified, or in one go. A phased approach, within budget, would instead be taken. This motion was **unanimously agreed**.

Mrs Steadman noted that the Parish Council has a duty of care over the green as Trustees. Cllr Howell noted that the green in Frant is much beloved by local parishioners and it is incumbent on the Parish Council to ensure it is protected. This was agreed.

Subject to clarifying certain points, it was **unanimously agreed** to approve the quotation provided by Enplan.

Action: Clerk

(Mrs Steadman and Mr Huskisson left the meeting)

Turning to the proposed new green in Eridge, Cllr Best said that he had liaised with the planning officer dealing with the current application who said it would be determined by 22nd January. He said he had also contacted the Sussex Wildlife Trust but with no response to date. Cllr Rutherford said the Eridge Estate would be responding to him about

the principle of erecting bollards along Warren Farm Lane to improve safety. Cllr Best said he would chase Strutt and Parker on this. **Action: AB**

(Cllr Obbard left the meeting)

8. Finance

8.1 To approve the bank reconciliation and cash book

Both were **approved**.

8.2 To approve the accounts payable.

The accounts to be paid were **approved**.

8.3 To consider the forward budget and agree the precept for 2020

Cllr Rutherford said this had been considered in depth at the meeting in December but the final decision had been delayed to this meeting to allow remaining Councillors to express their view. He noted that the average Band D equivalent across Wealden District was £75. He went on to say that the Parish Council had to be realistic about rising costs and precept accordingly. This was acknowledged.

After further discussion, the precept amount of £52 400 for 2020/21 was **unanimously agreed**.

9. Communications

9.1 To agree next steps for the parish survey

Cllr Park said she was attempting to liaise with Mrs Kinley, editor of Parish News, about inserting copies of the survey in to the next edition. Cllr Crookshank offered to help in making contact with Mrs Kinley.

Cllr Park said that Lambs Larder had agreed to have a box in the shop for people to drop completed surveys in to. It was suggested that Frant Stores and Fullers might also do the same. **Action: DP**

In terms of distributing the surveys, it was agreed that the Clerk would approach Royal Mail in Tonbridge about including them alongside their door to door deliveries. **Action: Clerk**

It was further agreed that Councillors could hand-deliver a quantity of surveys through letterboxes.

Turning to the ongoing discussions with Open Reach about Broadband delivery in the Parish, Cllr Park said that their latest estimate had increased by some £100,000. This was as a result of Open Reach now including a host of properties that had not been included in the original proposal.

Cllr Park said that, notwithstanding this, Open Reach had suggested the Parish Council could act as a corporate entity. Cllr Rutherford said this may be possible, subject to any terms and conditions (eg: extent of any costs/commitments, guarantees, etc).

10. Highways and Lighting

10.1 Lighting in Rushlye Close, Bells Yew Green

The Clerk tabled a summary (previously circulated) about the costs and options involved with providing a new solar-powered light at the end of Rushlye Close. The Clerk noted that, because of the way in which the light projects, adjacent to the steps might not be the best location. It was **agreed** to purchase the light from TofCo and to liaise with East Sussex County Council about a licence, location and installation. **Action: Clerk**

11. Planning

11.1 In light of the Inspector's decision re: the Draft Local Plan, to revisit the following planning applications received and consider making further comments:

WD/2017/0143/MAJ – Land to the East of Benhall Mill Lane, Tunbridge Wells

Proposed erection of 159 no. dwellings, together with vehicular and pedestrian access, public open space, car parking and landscaping.

Cllr Rutherford read out the original comments submitted by the Parish Council about the above application and asked for comment. Cllr Crookshank raised his strong concerns about the ongoing development occurring in the north of the district. He said the local road network was already under significant and increasing pressure, with the roads being used as cut-throughs to the A21, often by HGVs and coaches, causing traffic jams and severe damage to the grass verges along these rural lanes. He said these roads would not be able to sustain any more development. Cllr Crookshank queried when the District Council would stop allowing development in this location. He opined that Bells Yew Green was at risk of being physically merged with Tunbridge Wells as development breached the boundaries between the two.

Cllr Crookshank expressed his grave concerns that this valley of not much more than a square mile was now dominated by housing, seriously harming its AONB character. Cllr Park noted that there were now some 300 houses along a half mile stretch.

Cllr Howell responded that, in her capacity as Chair of Planning North and also sitting on Planning South, the truth was that the south of the district was in fact taking the majority of new development, such as at Hailsham, Ninfield and Uckfield. Cllr Crookshank noted that the character of these towns was very different to the area around Dundale Road and Benhall Mill Lane. Cllr Park queried why the approach to meeting housing demand could not involve a series of smaller developments across a wider area. Cllr Howell agreed that such developments could readily contribute to housing targets; indeed, some areas, such as Nutley and Withyam, would actually welcome new housing.

Mr Bee commented that a tremendous amount of work had been put into preparing the Draft Local Plan but that the Inspector had deemed that Wealden District Council had not adequately listened to the concerns and issues raised by neighbouring authorities.

Cllr Best said that the District was suffering from the vacuum created by there being no Local Plan in place and there now being no prospect of one for years to come. He said that it was time that the Officers responsible at Wealden District Council were held to account. It was agreed that Cllr Rutherford would write to the Leader of the Council, Nus Ghani MP and Greg Clark MP expressing these concerns.

It was also agreed that Cllr Rutherford would write to the Leader of the Council, possibly in a separate letter, setting out the Parish Council's serious concerns with the pressure being imposed on the Parish, notably at Benhall Mill Lane and its environs. Further, it was agreed that the Clerk would submit additional representations about this major application. Cllr Rutherford noted that the Parish Council had rigorously objected to the proposal in 2017 and should now seek to reinforce that, particularly given the time that has elapsed and the change in circumstances since then, with new and ongoing development in the area already making its mark.

Action: WR/Clerk

The Clerk suggested that Cllr Crookshank should register to speak against this application at the relevant planning committee meeting.

Action: Clerk

(Mr Bee left the meeting)

WD/2018/1506/F – Brickhouse Farm Granary, Tangiers Lane, Tunbridge Wells

Conversion of granary into a single residential dwelling (Use Class C3) with associated garage and garden.

The Council raised no additional comment on this application.

WD/2018/0781/F - The Surgery, High Street, Frant, TN4 9DU

Change of use of the closed doctors' surgery to a two-bedroom, single residential dwelling.

The Council raised no additional comment on this application.

WD/2018/1419/F – Woodside, Down Lane, Frant, TN3 9HW

Demolition of existing summer house/games room, conversion of existing stable building and re-instatement of structures to the stable building to form one three bedroom, single-storey dwelling.

The Council raised no additional comment on this application.

WD/2017/0445/LDE – Wish Wood, Bells Yew Green, Frant, TN3 9AT

Use of part of storage building as a self-contained dwelling.

Cllr Howell expressed her ongoing concern about this site and noted that she has repeatedly raised the question of part of the site being used as dwelling for years, contrary to the original planning permission. It was agreed that the Clerk would submit further comments noting that, given the number of times Officers have visited the site, the Parish Council considers there must be sufficient evidence in hand that part of the site was unlawfully in residential use.

Action: Clerk

12. Horizon scanning

Cllr Macdonald-Brown said there was local support for the Council organising another First Aid course, this time for new parents and grandparents. He said the price for the Red Cross to deliver a paediatric First Aid course is £360. In addition, he suggested that while he did not anticipate adding any new members to the Dial2Drive scheme, a figure of £800 should be set aside for the next year for current members. Finally, he suggested that the Henry Smith funds again support the Parish's youth group with a sum of £500. These amounts were **unanimously agreed**.

13. Chairman's announcements & correspondence for noting

None.

14. Urgent issues at the discretion of the Chairman, for discussion only

Cllr Best told Councillors he was aware of a movement to create a separate parish for Eridge. He asked to be kept informed of any meetings taking place to this end that Councillors might become aware of.

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 9.35pm.

ACTION	BY WHOM
Request through Cllr Standley that the member responsible for Highways attends a Parish Council meeting. Carried forward.	JH
Liaise with Biffa about introducing litter bins with anti-pest lids.	JH
Liaise with contractor about options for a bund at the green in Frant. Carried forward.	WR
Liaise with Enplan about consultancy work on the green.	Clerk
Determine whether Biffa is able to attend to litter bins with anti-pest lids. Carried forward - response awaited.	JH
Liaise with Royal Mail about delivering the surveys with the post.	Clerk
Approach Frant Stores and Fullers about being a drop-off point for survey responses.	DP
Generate a list of contact details for First Aiders and councillors. Carried forward.	Clerk
Purchase TofCo solar light and liaise with ESCC.	Clerk
Write various letters re: Draft Local Plan and ongoing pressure for more housing in the north of the district.	WR
Register Cllr Crookshank to speak at Planning Committee North re: WD/2017/0143/MAJ.	Clerk
Submit further comments about planning applications to WDC.	Clerk
Liaise with Strutt and Parker about installing bollards at Warren Farm Lane.	AB

County Report January 2020

Firstly, Happy New Year to all

Highways

The recent wet weather has caused more problems than normal on many of the roads in the Parish.

Whilst appreciating that the amount of rain over a short period overwhelmed the drainage with more water was trying to get through the pipes than they were designed to carry.

The problem is not confined to Frant Parish but am aware from the e-mails the particular problems in parts of the Parish

I am concerned that not enough maintenance is carried out and have taken the matter up with officers and Lead Member for Highways.

Potholes

With the amount of rain the worst scenario would be a freeze which will cause more damage to the surface.

Please continue to report potholes to Highways through the website

West Sussex

West Sussex County Council have been having a significant number of problems. Their Childrens Services were judged as "Inadequate" by Ofsted (East Sussex are judged "Outstanding").

This and other factors led to the Chief Executive leaving and a new Leader of the Council being appointed. The reason for including this information in this report is that there will now be a Joint Chief Executive covering East and West Sussex. Becky Shaw, Chief Executive of East Sussex, will cover both Counties for a temporary period together with the Leader of East Sussex assisting the new Leader of West Sussex.

Finance

We continue to lobby Central Government for "fairer funding" and the one-off funding for 20-21 is welcome. I am confident that the one -off funding will either be repeated or the hoped-for longer term settlement announced. Local Govt needs certainty in the longer term.

RWS Jan 2020

District Report January 2020

Firstly I would like to take this opportunity to wish you a Happy New Year.

In the last decade Wealden has transformed the way it operates and provides services. They have revoked £4million from the annual running costs, but still provide a high level of service

We have embraced digital technology and provide 100 council services through our on line Wealden portal, this therefore frees our staff to spend more time helping vulnerable residents. We have created a number of shred services which keep cost down and provide a greater resilience when we need it.

In 2011 we started our New Build project, building council houses, one of the first to do so. We have built 199 new Council homes, adding to the 3000 homes we already provide. In 2018 we set up our stand alone housing company, which aims to meet the demand of first time buyers and older people who wish to down size. We have created new parks in Crowborough, and Uckfield.

This year the council unanimously declared a Climate Change emergency, with achievable goals. We seek to make the District carbon neutral by 2050.

Less than 1% of our waste goes to landfill and Wealden achieves the highest rate of recycling in East Sussex.

You will probably aware that there was a fire at Fazan Court over Christmas. Both Bob and I were kept informed, all residents were offered alternative accommodation, two went to respite care, several went to East Sussex National. One resident made their way back and one refused to leave. Everyone has now returned home and all seems settled.

Finally you will have seen that the Inspector has turned down Wealden's Local Plan. The Inspector cited a failure on the Duty to Cooperate and that Wealden were overly cautious on the interpretation of Habitats Regulations re the Ashdown Forest.

At this time I have little to add since I have not had any meetings with officers to discuss the way forward.