

FRANT PARISH COUNCIL

THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL STATUTORY MEETING OF FRANT PARISH COUNCIL, HELD ONLINE VIA ZOOM ON WEDNESDAY 20th MAY 2020 AT 6.30PM

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

County and District Cllr Standley
District Cllr Obbard
Mrs R. Karim – Clerk

Cllr Rutherford noted that the meeting was being audio-recorded via Zoom and the recording would be destroyed once the draft Minutes had been produced. Cllrs recorded their agreement with this.

1. To receive apologies

None.

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

None.

3. To agree to defer the election of the Chairman to a future meeting (under Regulation 4 [2] of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels [Coronavirus] [Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings] [England and Wales] Regulations 2020)

Agreed unanimously.

4. To approve the Minutes of the meeting on 18th March 2020 as a true and accurate record

Cllr Standley noted that he was both a County and District Councillor. Cllr Rutherford amended the Minutes accordingly. The Minutes were subsequently **approved** unanimously and signed by Cllr Rutherford.

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

None.

6. Public Forum

None.

(Cllr Obbard joined the meeting at 6.40pm)

7. To receive reports from County and District Councillors

Cllr Standley reported that the current Covid-19 crisis had dominated the work of the councils and that the Community Hub and Shield were working well, with the former having dealt with some 900 calls to date, providing reassurance, signposting and practical help to residents in the district. He noted also that grants had been made available to support small businesses.

Turning to refuse collection, Cllr Standley said that the number of missed collections was down on last year and that only two garden waste collections were missed recently, owing to reduced staff numbers at Biffa.

Cllr Standley reported that certain year groups in schools across East Sussex would be returning on 1st June. He referred to the next few months as the 'recovery phase' as communities gain confidence to go out, with some local shops reopening. He referred to the possibility of new schemes, such as a 'local Amazon' with a list of businesses potentially offering click and collect services. Cllrs Wallis and Park both referred to the parish communities making use and, in some cases, sharing online shopping delivery slots.

Cllr Standley said that the Annual Meeting of the District Council had taken place earlier and was well attended. He extended his thanks to all the volunteers who had been giving up their time to help out in their local communities.

Cllr Obbard noted that Cllr Standley and others had done a good job of keeping the parishes well informed throughout the Covid-19 crisis. Referring to other matters, Cllr Obbard noted that there were two ongoing public consultations: one about proposed future initiatives of ES Fire and Rescue Services and the other about Wealden DC's Community Statement. Turning to planning, Cllr Obbard noted that the proposed residential block at Strawberry Close was going to planning committee (at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council) and that it was being recommended for approval. Cllr Rutherford noted that the Parish Council had objected.

Cllr Howell reported that Planning Committees North & South had been using online platforms to hold its meetings remotely and these had been successful. Referring to the consultation about the Local Plan, Cllr Howell urged the Parish Council to be robust in its response and suggested liaising with neighbouring parishes prior to responding. With reference to the as yet undetermined application by Inspired Villages, Cllr Howell noted that the applicants were now seeking a resolution.

Cllr Howell went on to note that local shops had been carrying out home deliveries during the current Covid-19 crisis. She also observed that, in some cases, shielding had been patchy.

(Cllr Crookshank left the meeting temporarily at 6.55pm)

8. To ratify the decision to approve the renewal of the Parish Council's insurance policy with BHIB
Agreed unanimously.

9. To review Standing Orders and adopt

The Clerk referred to the amendment at item 2 of the currently adopted Standing Orders to include the following:

(X) Under Local Authorities and Police Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) Meetings (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, a meeting, with public access, will be convened online via an appropriate platform to allow the Council to fulfil its statutory duties.

The Standing Orders, including the above amendment, were unanimously approved and **adopted**.

10. To review Financial Regulations and adopt

The Financial Regulations were approved and **adopted**.

11. Finance

11.1 To approve the accounts payable

Cllr Rutherford read out the list of payments and these were **approved**.

11.2 To approve the bank reconciliation

The Clerk attempted to share the bank reconciliation document on the screen but was unable to do so. The Clerk confirmed that the accounts reconciled and it was agreed that she would circulate the document after the meeting.

12. Highways and Lighting

12.1 Lighting in Rushlye Close, Bells Yew Green

The Clerk updated the Parish Council with details about the proposed streetlight for Rushlye Close. After some discussion, it was **agreed** to proceed with a solar light mounted on a wooden pole, to be located at the top of the set of steps at the end of the cul de sac. **Action: Clerk**

12.2 To select fingerposts in need of refurbishment for next round of match funding

Cllr Rutherford asked councillors to consider which fingerposts within the parish might benefit from refurbishment. Cllr Howell said she would check one of the posts on the green in Frant. Cllr Macdonald-Brown confirmed that there were no fingerposts in Bells Yew Green that needed attention. Cllr Best agreed to review the fingerposts in Eridge and let the Clerk know if any needed attention. **Action: AB**

13. Green Spaces

13.1 To discuss the provision of two signs near the children's playground in Frant – an information sign and a contact details sign

The Clerk explained the two options: firstly, an information sign for the playground side of the green, with some detail about why the green is being maintained as it is and secondly, a simple sign with details of how to contact the Parish Council, to be located near the playground equipment. With regards to the latter, the Clerk noted that the Parish Council was obliged to carry out its weekly risk assessments and that in placing a contact sign there did not mean that the Parish Council would rely on members of the public for reporting any issues.

(Cllr Crookshank returned to the meeting at 7.10pm)

It was noted that representatives from Orchard Landscapes had been approached on the green by some residents requesting that different areas of the grass be cut (contrary to the approved mowing schedule). Cllr Luther said there was a feeling amongst some residents that the mowing schedule resulted in the area beyond the swings being left as long grass, placing a disproportionate burden on residents at this end of the green. Cllr Luther considered that an information sign might convey the wrong message, implying that the way in which the green was being managed was entrenched and may also suggest that the wildflower meadow is no longer a trial project. Cllr Luther considered that an information pamphlet might be a more appropriate first step. Cllr Howell noted the scientific research behind the current management of the green and suggested it was this sort of information that could be included in the pamphlet.

13.2 To discuss producing an A5 pamphlet about Frant Green for local residents

Following on from the discussion at item 13.1, Cllr Rutherford noted that it had been agreed some months ago to establish a section on the Parish Council website dedicated to the work of the Friends of Frant Open Spaces Group and the Parish Council's approach to the maintenance of the green. It was agreed that Cllr Howell would liaise with Mrs Steadman about reinvigorating this. **Action: JH**

13.3 Update on Eridge Centenary Green

Cllr Best referred to recent correspondence from Thomson Snell and Partners concerning the proposed terms of the lease for the new green in Eridge, noting that the terms seemed reasonable. He suggested that pressure should be kept up to ensure a quick resolution and granting of the lease and that quotes for implementing the green could then be sought in the autumn. The Clerk confirmed that the Parish Council's insurers, BHIB, had confirmed the new green would be covered under the £10 million public liability clause in the current policy.

Cllr Howell raised the issue of the car park at the rocks in Eridge. Cllr Best said he had been liaising with the Sussex Wildlife Trust but their response had, to date, been unsatisfactory. He noted that Holy Trinity Church had closed their car park and that the Nevill Estate had been helpful in discussions.

14. Communications

14.1 To consider the Parish Council's response to Wealden DC's Draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) Consultation

It was agreed that councillors would review the Draft Statement and email the Clerk with any comments.

Action: Cllrs

14.2 To discuss and review ongoing support within the Parish during the Covid-19 crisis

Cllr Park noted concern that some of the more remote residences, particularly those occupied by the elderly, might not be accessing the Community Hub or other services, especially if they are not online. Cllr Standley responded that, at both County and District level, great effort had been made to contact these residents, via other means including by letter for all over-70s and by telephoning them. He also noted that updates had been issued via local radio stations and on social media. Cllr Wallis noted that there was a prominent information sign in Wadhurst and opined that something similar could be placed in Bells Yew Green. Cllr Standley made the point that the information displayed would be mostly relevant to the section of the population that were being shielded and ought not to be venturing outside.

Cllr Howell said that local volunteers were working well to support people and that simply knocking on neighbours' doors to ensure they are alright was important. Cllr Rutherford agreed and asked councillors to signpost any queries from parishioners to the relevant support network, for example, the Community Hub.

(Cllr Standley left the meeting at 7.40pm)

15. Planning

15.1 To consider planning and licence applications:

- **WD/2020/0441/F – Land adjacent to 3 Rushlye Close, Hawkenbury Road, Frant, TN3 9AP** Proposed open sand school.

No objections.

- **WD/2020/0573/F – Land at South Farm, South Farm Lane, Langton Green, TN3 9JN**
Proposed rural worker's cottage to support stables and cattery businesses. Landscaping improvement works to area to north of site.

After some discussion, it was concluded that the need for the proposed worker's cottage had been established in the application and it was agreed to support the application. It was agreed to request that a condition be imposed on any permission granted to tie the cottage to the main farmhouse.

- **WD/2020/0426/LBR - 12 High Street, Frant, TN3 9DU**
Part retrospective application for works to include repairs to the roof and dormer, replacement rooflight and four windows, repairs to some windows and doors. Also, the addition of insulation, repairs to timber boarding and alterations to the floor at first floor level.

The Parish Council noted that some of the works had already been carried out and reiterated its concerns about retrospective applications coming forward. Notwithstanding this, the Parish Council agreed in principle to the proposed works, but that the Conservation Officer should carry out a site visit to establish if there was any harm as a result of the proposals.

The Clerk noted that there was currently an application being considered by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council for a 5-bedroom detached house to the rear of 4 Strawberry Close and that although the Parish Council was not a statutory consultee, it may wish to submit comments about the application. Cllr Obbard explained that it appeared the

applicants had resubmitted this application for a detached house as the other application for the apartments was taking a long time to be determined. Cllr Rutherford concluded that the Parish Council should object, as it did previously, given the proximity to the parish's border.

Action: Clerk

Cllr Howell raised the issue of the planning application at Chase Farm in Frant and noted that she had no strong policy grounds for refusing the proposal. However, in granting permission, Cllr Howell said that several conditions would be proposed, including (but not limited to) that no further building being permitted on the site and no signage/lighting.

16. Chairman's announcements & correspondence for noting

It was noted that the village hall in Frant might seek match funding from the Parish Council for refurbishment works. Cllr Park queried whether there was now a legitimate panel of Trustees in place. Cllr Rutherford agreed that this was important to ascertain before the giving of funds could be entertained.

Turning to the village hall in Bells Yew Green, Cllr Wallis said that some internal works had been ongoing in recent weeks but noted that they were finding difficult to source plaster. Cllr Wallis agreed to issue an invoice to the Clerk to allow for the sum previously agreed by the Parish Council to now be paid.

Action: SW

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

Cllr Park raised the issue of the lack of adequate Broadband provision in some parts of the parish. She said that ESCC were running the Fibre Rollout Programme in East Sussex but that a small community in Eridge and an area in Bells Yew Green were inexplicably excluded from the Programme. She questioned this, stating that ESCC was using taxpayer funds to prop up and reinforce Broadband provision in places where it was already sufficient while deliberately excluding areas where it was not adequate, essentially digitally disenfranchising these communities even further.

Cllr Park said that the sum proposed by Open Reach to provide adequate Broadband was £73, 241. She said that a Government Voucher Scheme could provide up to £74, 000 but that it was wise not to count on receiving all of this, but rather to provision for a small shortfall. She noted some residents were by now so disillusioned that they were willing to provide some funds themselves. Cllr Park asked whether the Parish Council was willing to act as a legal entity with Open Reach to progress this. Cllr Best enquired how safe it was to rely on the Government Voucher Scheme given the financial pressures currently on the government at this time. Cllr Howell also asked how much the Parish Council would be liable for in terms of this shortfall. Cllr Park responded that there was a good chance there may not, in fact, be any shortfall and, if there was, it would be nominal. Cllr Luther asked whether there any other models of this arrangement that could be looked at for good practice. Cllr Park said there was indeed recent precedent of Community Fibre Partnerships.

Cllr Wallis noted that the Friends of Bells Yew Green held a small sum of money from when the Bells Yew Green Society was wound down.

Cllr Rutherford concluded that, in principle, the Parish Council could act as a legal entity subject to a proposal to be put forward by Cllr Park and the Clerk investigating the remit of the Council in such an instance. He also said there was CIL money available that could be used for what was clearly a genuine issue of providing a form of infrastructure for the benefit of local residents.

Action: DP

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 8.10pm.

ACTION	BY WHOM
Liaise with TofCo and ESCC about installing the light in Rushlye Close.	Clerk
Identify any fingerposts in Eridge that could benefit from refurbishment and email the Clerk.	AB
Speak with Mrs Steadman about sending the Clerk information for the website.	JH
Email comments to the Clerk about Wealden DC's draft Statement of Community Involvement.	All
Submit an objection concerning the application at Strawberry Close.	Clerk
Send invoice to the Clerk for refurbishment of village hall in BYG.	SW
Provide councillors with a report into the Parish Council working with Open Reach to achieve better Broadband provision.	DP

District and County Report to Frant Parish Council May 2020

I am sure you will be pleased to know that given the extensive report circulated in April this one is somewhat shorter.

I continue to have regular updates on Covid 19 with Government and MP's as well as updates with officers at County and District.

Wealden Community Hub

Over 900 calls have been received and residents have been re-directed as appropriately or sometimes given the reassurance they seek.

Business rates grants –

My report in April had the figure distributed at 20m – this has risen to £30m.

To remind councillors

Businesses in receipt of Small Business Rate Relief or Rural Grant Relief could claim 10K – Rateable value had to less than £15001.

Businesses in the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure would receive 25k if their RV was between 15.001 and 51000

Inevitably some businesses just missed out and were understandably disappointed but the regulations were laid out by Govt

Some limited discretion has been introduced within the last week but the funding is currently limited.

Waste – All Wealden services are now operational.

The County Council HWRC are also open from today (Mon 18th) with strict social distancing measures in place.

Schools

The Govt have announced that Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 can start returning from June 1st. Secondary schools are expected to have some face to face contact for years 10 and 12 before the end of the summer term.

Recovery Plans

Although wary of a possible Wave2 the mood has changed from crisis management to recovery. Authorities across East Sussex are working on how the recovery can be put in place. WDC and ESCC are working with strategic partners including the SELEP.

There is of course a concern that some businesses will not survive the lockdown.

Tourism is an important part of the Wealden economy and a sector that will be one of the last to fully recover.

RWS May 2020

