

FRANT PARISH COUNCIL
FULL COUNCIL MEETING
Minutes of the Meeting Held on
Wednesday 16th December 2020

Present: Cllr Rutherford (Chair)
Cllrs Howell, Wallis, Best, Crookshank, Park, Luther

County and District Cllr Standley
District Cllr Obbard

Mrs R. Karim – Clerk & RFO

Three representatives from Inspired Villages
One member of the public

1. To receive apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Macdonald-Brown and Steadman.

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 18th November 2020 as a true and accurate record

The Minutes of the meeting on 18th November 2020 were **approved** as a true and accurate record.

4. To approve the Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting on 26th November 2020 as a true and accurate record

The Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting on 26th November 2020 were **approved** as a true and accurate record.

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

- Cllr Luther confirmed that the trail camera, set-up to record animal movements on the green in Frant, had captured some activity by foxes. It was agreed to have another look and Cllr Luther said she would liaise with Cllr Macdonald-Brown about this. **Action: AFL**
- Cllr Rutherford said he had emailed Councillors proposing an uplift in the Clerk's salary, to be agreed at the Full Council Meeting in January.
- The Clerk confirmed that a number of moles had been trapped on the football field and the invoice was ready to pay.
- The Clerk said she had received an email from Reverend Brendan, but he had not alluded to the use of the Henry Smith funds. Clerk to email again. **Action: Clerk**
- The Clerk confirmed that Cllr Obbard's summary of the Parish Cluster meeting had been circulated.
- Cllr Best said he had spoken with a church warden at Holy Trinity about their request for funding and that a representative may attend the next meeting.
- The Clerk confirmed she had emailed ESCC to enquire about the cost and scheduling of their streetlight refurbishment programme but had not yet had a response.

6. Public Forum – time limit 15 minutes

Three representatives from Inspired Villages, the applicant for the recently approved retirement ‘village’ on Benhall Mill Road, addressed the Parish Council and shared a Powerpoint presentation. In advance of submitting for Reserved Matters, changes to the design and layout were explained. Cllr Crookshank requested that the contractors use the main Tunbridge Wells road network, including the A21, to avoid undue pressure on the minor roads near the site. It was confirmed that a Construction Management Plan would be submitted as part of the Reserved Matters.

Cllr Park expressed her concerns around the length of the building phases and how well the new development could be expected to integrate given the already saturated level of new development within half a mile of the site. In responding, the developer reiterated the merits of the scheme, including the offer of community facilities, the ethos of the development as focussing on wellbeing and lifestyle and the ongoing liaison with the Highways Authority to minimise disruption during the phases of construction.

Cllr Obbard sought reassurance that Bream standards would be written into the construction and the developer suggested that it was seeking to go above and beyond what was required, in terms of the Building Regulations.

Cllr Luther queried whether there was still any appetite for communal living, given the current Covid-19 pandemic. It was agreed that the current market was challenging but sales had still been steady.

Cllr Rutherford acknowledged that Inspired Villages wished to maintain a dialogue and the Council would accommodate this dialogue while carrying out its statutory obligations. Clerk to circulate Powerpoint. **Action: Clerk**

(The representatives from Inspired Villages left the meeting at 8.17pm)

7. To receive reports from County and District Councillors

Cllr Rutherford thanked Cllrs Standley, Obbard and Howell for submitting their written reports prior to the meeting (see appendices).

Cllr Standley referred to the anticipated changes to locations within different tiers (for controlling the Covid-19 virus spread) and noted that Hastings and Rother had reported significant recent increases in Covid-19 cases.

8. To discuss and review ongoing support within the Parish during the Covid-19 pandemic

Cllr Wallis reported that she had refreshed links to advice and help from Wealden DC on social media and sent messages to older people who are not online. It was agreed to update the Parish Council website. **Action: Clerk**

(Cllr Obbard left the meeting at 8.31pm)

9. Finance

9.1 To review the conclusion of the interim audit Nov 2020

The conclusion of the interim audit was duly noted and the councillors expressed their thanks to the Clerk.

9.2 To review the conclusion of the external audit: 2019-20

The conclusion of the external audit was duly noted.

9.3 To approve the accounts payable

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

9.4 To approve the bank reconciliation

The bank reconciliation was **approved**.

9.5 To approve the CIL group as a Working Party

Councillors **agreed** to revert to the structure of a Working Party for the purposes of discussing CIL monies, spend and projects.

9.6 To consider the proposed budget for 2021-22

The Clerk explained the proposed budget and highlighted where the budget headings had been broken down into further categories. After some discussion, it was agreed to increase the budget for play equipment by £500 and reduce the budget for village signs by the same amount.

Cllr Wallis said that a new memorial bench was being installed in the playground in Bells Yew Green, in memory of Katie Sutton. Cllr Howell said two benches had been installed at the football pitch in memory of her late husband. Clerk to add these benches to the Asset Register. **Action: Clerk**

Cllr Crookshank said that a fingerpost at the Fairview Lane turning in Eridge had been knocked over. **Action: Clerk**

9.7 To set the precept for 2021-22

On the basis of the proposed budget and the current general reserves held by the Council, the Clerk advised the Council to precept for the same amount as last year, ie. £52,400. Councillors discussed this and Cllr Rutherford proposed that the Parish Council make no change to last year's precept and request the same amount again for 2021-2022 (£52,400). This was seconded by Cllr Howell and was **agreed unanimously**.

10. Highways and Lighting

Cllr Park advised the Council that the drainage work and repairs in Benhall Mill Road had been completed and appeared to have been successful in keeping flooding at bay.

Cllr Wallis said that a road sign had been knocked over in Bartley Mill Road and she would advise ESCC about this. **Action: SW**

Cllr Howell reported that the area in front of the row of houses opposite Massons Joinery in Frant had flooded once again. Cllr Standley said he would make sure this was reported. **Action: BS**

Cllr Park asked that the Council note Cllr Macdonald-Brown's remarks about drainage at the bridge in Bells Yew Green, circulated prior to the meeting.

Turning to the recent Feasibility Assessment carried out by ESCC on behalf of the Parish Council for the new pedestrian crossing in Frant, councillors expressed their surprise at the proposed cost at providing the crossing at some £200,000. Cllr Standley said he, too, was surprised and suggested that the Parish Council could consider using their own contractors and seeking some form of match-funding from ESCC. Cllr Rutherford noted that under the terms of the planning consent, the new houses could not be occupied until a pedestrian crossing was in place. Cllr Crookshank suggested consulting with local residents; Cllr Standley agreed, noting that it helps to get support from within the community. Cllr Rutherford suggested seeking the support of the primary school and the Friendship Group.

Cllr Rutherford recalled that the last feasibility assessment some years ago had proposed a £60,000 cost, which increased to £120,000 over time, in particular because various services were discovered in the path of the proposed crossing. He noted that the current assessment assumed there were no services. He also cautioned that although the new crossing would undoubtedly be a benefit, there may be some disadvantages in terms of the scale of the infrastructure and lights required and the possible impact on neighbouring properties, night skies, etc.

(Cllr Standley left the meeting at 9pm)

11. Green Spaces

11.1 To opt for an ESCC grass cutting regime

It was **agreed** to continue with the same ESCC grass cutting regime as in the previous year.

11.2 To approve the contractor for maintenance of the bund at the green in Bells Yew Green

Councillors requested some more detail from the contractor about his proposed maintenance plan for the bund. Cllr Crookshank said he would contact him for more information. **Action: SC**

Cllr Wallis passed on a request from a local parishioner to clear the overgrown planting around the sundial in Bells Yew Green. It was noted that the sundial had been installed by the then Bells Yew Green Society, now subsumed under Friends of Bells Yew Green. **Action: Clerk**

Cllr Howell said that the green in Frant was getting increasingly impacted upon by vehicular damage. It was agreed that the array of solutions in the recent report from Enplan were expensive and beyond the financial reach of the Parish Council. Cllr Park said she was volunteering to send round some thoughts and alternatives. Cllr Howell asked Cllr Luther to look into the Parish Council's legal responsibilities vis à vis the upkeep of the green. **Action: DP/AFL**

11.3 To review the recent tree survey

It was agreed to ask Treework to carry out all the work to those trees they had highlighted as a priority in their recent assessment of trees in the Parish. **Action: Clerk**

12. Communications

12.1 To consider a response to the *Direction of Travel* Consultation Document, prepared by Wealden District Council

Councillors agreed that the document had provided little of substance to comment on, was bland and did not produce a coherent picture of what Wealden would look like in twenty years' time. Cllr Howell said she would feed this back and the Clerk would submit representations to this effect. **Action: JH/Clerk**

13. Planning

13.1 To approve the Minutes of the Planning Meeting held on 7th December 2020 as a true and accurate record

The Minutes of the Planning Meeting held on 7th December 2020 were **approved** as a true and accurate record.

13.2 To consider planning and listed building applications:

At this point in the meeting, Cllr Howell put herself on mute and took no part in the discussion on planning matters.

WD/2020/2038/F - Burnbrae, Ely Grange, Frant, TN3 9DY

Demolition of detached flat roofed garage and single-storey side extension. Construction of new pitched roof garage and single-storey side extension.

Note: The height, pitch and form of the garage roof have been amended to try and overcome the neighbours' and Parish Council's concerns.

It was noted that comments from a neighbour had been circulated to councillors prior to the meeting. The lack of dimensions on the plans were noted once again. The Council determined that although material changes had been made to the size of the proposed garage, it was still large and could adversely affect the neighbouring property. While the Council acknowledged that the applicant had sought to address its previous comments, the Council remained concerned and queried whether there was a more suitable location for the garage, away from the boundary. It was **agreed** to object.

13.3 To note planning applications determined by Wealden District Council

WD/2020/1874/F- The Hirsell, Ely Grange, Frant, TN3 9DY

Single-storey ground floor extension to main dwelling. Single-storey side extension to ancillary building to create annexe. *Approved 9th December 2020*

Noted.

14. Chairman's announcements & correspondence for noting

None.

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

Cllr Wallis said she was still having difficulties with access to the Council's emails. Cllr Park said that the system appears to periodically reject IP addresses and she said she would investigate using a generic platform, such as Google Business. The Clerk said she would check these types of platforms would be compliant with data protection obligations.

Action: DP/Clerk

Cllr Park asked that the Minutes reflect the significant work Cllr Wallis had put into organising books sales to contribute to local food banks during the pandemic. Councillors expressed their thanks to Cllr Wallis and noted the amount total raised to date was £621.

Cllr Howell told the Council about a current licence application at Tangier Wood to hold events and the occasional sale of alcohol. Cllr Howell said recent enforcement action had been taken in this part of the woodland to remove a large structure. Cllr Best noted that surrounding woodland was often decompartmentalised into distinct areas under different ownership. He went on to note that there had been an issue with recent large gatherings causing a nuisance. Cllr Luther suggested that, in addition to general noise and nuisance, there may be an adverse effect on local businesses and increased pressure on parking availability in Frant. Councillors agreed that the proposed activities were at odds with the characteristics and qualities of the woodland and the AONB within which they sit. It was felt that selling alcohol within the woodland was also inappropriate. It was **agreed** to object to the licence application on the grounds above. Clerk to check deadline for comments and submit representations as necessary.

Action: Clerk

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 9.40pm

ACTIONS**BY WHOM**

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| Set-up trail camera again to try to capture animal activity on the green in Frant. | AMB/AFL |
| Email Reverend Brendan again re: Henry Smith | Clerk |
| Circulate Powerpoint presentation from Inspired Villages. | Clerk |
| Update homepage of website to reflect recent Covid-related advice. | Clerk |
| Action repair of fingerpost at Fairview Lane. | Clerk |
| Add benches to Asset Register. | Clerk |
| Report broken road sign at Bartley Mill Road. | SW |
| Report flooding at houses opposite Massons Joinery. | BS |
| Request a detailed quote for maintenance of the bund at the green in BYG. | SC |
| Action clearance of plant growth around sundial in BYG. | Clerk |
| Put forward alternative ideas for the green in Frant, re: vehicular damage and consider statutory obligations for management of the green. | DP/AFL/Clerk |
| Ask Treework to undertake further work. | Clerk |
| Submit comments re: <i>Direction of Travel</i> consultation. | JH/Clerk |
| Consider different platform for email system. | DP/Clerk |
| Submit representations re: licence application at Tangier Wood. | Clerk |

Appendix 1

County Report from Bob Standley to Frant Parish Council Dec 2020

Covid

Over the last month Covid cases in Wealden have risen. Whilst still below the national average the local number of cases has pushed East Sussex up the tables. Thankfully, the recent announcement that East Sussex was in Tier 2 was “good” news in that Tier 3 would have further increased challenges to local businesses. The County demarcation for tiers has meant that T/Wells has a similar Covid rate as East Sussex but is in Tier 3 because of the large number of cases in East Kent.

As you may have seen in the media the tiers have had the unusual effect in Groombridge. Part is in Kent and the rest in East Sussex so one pub is closed and the other open even though they are close to each other. The boundary has to go somewhere.

Finance

With a further tranche of money from Central Government the gap between Covid Costs and funding has narrowed.

The CSR recently announced was as expected for one year only. Councils delivering Adult Social Care are permitted to raise an additional precept. As previously reported ASC and Children Services use almost 70% of Council funds.

Road markings

There has been a scrutiny report into Road Markings and support to the extra funding allocated to an extra team. Safety is improved when faded markings are re-freshed.

School Attendance

School attendance varies across the County. The latest figures

Primary 81.5%

Secondary 72.7%

Special Schools 70.1

Overall Average 77.6%

The figures for Frant Primary and Uplands are above average at 96.9% and 91.5%

Free School Meals

Govt confirmed that funding for Holiday meals will be provided for Christmas 2020 right through to Christmas 2021

Finally

Have the best Christmas that is possible!

Bob Dec 2020

Appendix 2

Wealden District Report – December 2020

Wealden residents are being urged to speak out against all forms of domestic abuse as the number of recorded cases over 12 months exceeds 1,000 for the first time.

From November 2019 to October 2020, Sussex Police received 1,037 reports of domestic abuse, which is a 4.5% increase compared to the same period last year.

Lockdown has undoubtedly added to the pressures faced in some relationships. But even before Covid came on the scene domestic abuse, which includes coercive and controlling behaviours, was a problem hidden in our midst for too long.

Lockdown can make it very difficult if someone is living with their abuser. As well as violence, the threat may come from emotional or financial abuse, or other forms of controlling behaviour or sexual intimidation. It can show itself in ceaseless verbal criticism, removal of individual choice, isolation, or by stopping access to money or taking away a mobile phone. It is so important that home is a place where everyone is safe. Men and boys can also experience domestic abuse.

“In many cases people are unaware they are the abuser. Self-awareness is so important. Through the White Ribbon campaign, more people have become willing to talk about these issues.”

Wealden District Council has welcomed the news that a solar farm to be built in the District will be used to pioneer the use of renewable energy to directly power Britain’s railways.

Riding Sunbeam’s 3.75 MegaWatt Cuckmere Community Solar Farm will soon be powering the Eastbourne - London mainline railway using a ‘private-wire’ direct connection.

Riding Sunbeams has been awarded £2,527,500 from the South East Local Enterprise Partnership’s (SELEP) £85 million share of the government’s new Getting Building Fund to build the project. It is part of a national initiative to invest in local infrastructure projects to drive economic growth and support a green recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

Grants and Support for Businesses

What support is there?

The Government has launched an online tool to help businesses find Coronavirus financial support. You may be eligible for loans, tax relief and cash grants; this [support finder](#) will help you to see what support is available for you and your business.

Also see:

Coronavirus (COVID-19): what to do if you're employed and cannot work

Listed below is the main support available to businesses in Wealden:

Local Restrictions Grant

Additional Restrictions Grant

Self-employment Income Support Scheme

New Style Employment and Support Allowance

Bounce-Back Loans for small businesses

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

Job Support Scheme

Covid Innovation Response Fund

Covid-19 Corporate Financing Facility

Kickstart Scheme

Support for sports clubs

Support for arts organisations

Support for Zoos and Aquariums

Wealden which is a conservative led council is in a relatively strong position given its prudent approach in recent years although there are concerns regarding proposed changes in Business Rate which could have a detrimental affect from 22/23 onwards. The consultation on the 21/22 budget will be launched this week and the proposals are to freeze Wealden's share of Council tax (approx. 9% of total) and use reserves to balance the books. Councillors allowances would be frozen together with staff pay, except for the lower paid.

There is one final thing to say, I wish you a Happy Christmas and may we have a safer and happier New Year.

Johanna Howell

Appendix 3

Report for Frant Parish Council 16th Dec 2020

All the Town and Parish Councils are getting a fortnightly Covid Pandemic update from David Plank at the WDC Customer Services, keeping Parish Clerks up to date on the latest situation. The Wealden D C website has details at;

<https://www.wealden.gov.uk/press-and-media/coronavirus-covid-19-latest/community-support/>

The phone number to call is the usual one; 01323 443322

A reminder about WDC Consultations;

A new consultation on the future of Leisure Services in Wealden starts this week on 16th December & runs to 10th February;

<https://www.wealden.gov.uk/news/working-towards-a-more-active-future/>

Also the consultation on the Local Plan is continuing until the New Year.

They are calling it “Direction of Travel Consultation” and can be found on the WDC website here;

<https://www.wealden.gov.uk/consultations/wealden-local-plan-direction-of-travel-consultation/>

The details of the changes to Permitted Development Rights that Government announced in the Summer have now been incorporated into legislation.

These will come into effect in July 2021, and will make it easier to switch between different Commercial, Business and Service uses, and residential.

So for example, it will now be much simpler to change from a restaurant to a dwelling.

The Wealden Cabinet met last week and have decided not to raise the Wealden DC element of the Council Tax for 2021/22

They also agreed to freeze the Council employee’s wages, except for those earning less than £24,000 (Full time equivalent) and not to raise Members Allowances.

This is in response to the hard times that many Wealden residents have suffered over the Covid Pandemic period and the Governments guidance on public pay.

The Council’s Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been updated.

Details are available on the website.

Climate Action Plan;

The Council has promoted two schemes to help residents to reduce their Carbon Footprints.

The Solar Together joint buying scheme for solar panels and storage batteries, which has now closed, and the Green Homes Grant scheme.

Links are on the Council’s website.

If you have any specific questions or requests, I am contactable by phone or email and I will do my best to deal with them for you.

Keep safe, follow the Covid-19 advice, and I look forward to a time when we can meet in person,

Cllr Keith Obbard, Wealden District Member for Withyham Ward.