

OFFWELL PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD AT 7.30PM

ON MONDAY 20th JANUARY 2020 IN THE VILLAGE HALL

Present: Cllrs. A. Small (Chair), J. Tristram, P. Hopkins, M. Mulrain, C. Whithear

In Attendance: A Jenkins (Clerk), EDDC Cllr. H. Parr, DCC Cllr. M. Shaw

Members of Public: 3

OPEN SESSION

Mrs A. Richards asked whether the Council were finally going to make a decision on employing a Lengthsman contractor, as certain ditches, easements, grips needed urgent work to prevent flooding. She said that some publicly spirited persons had been out cleaning ditches in order to help others but whilst this was highly commended they were putting themselves at risk with no Chapter 8 training/signs or insurance.

The Council needed to make a decision and commit itself to employing a lengthsman contractor to clean the ditches.

She asked that the Council acknowledge the work which had been recently carried out by Mr Bob Branch and Mr Steve Webber in particular and others and thank them.

The Chair and Council acknowledged and thanked those persons for their public spirit. The Chair said that the matter of a Lengthsman contractor was due to be discussed later in the meeting and that he was hopeful that the Council would make a firm decision and commitment to employ someone with correct Chapter 8 training/signage and insurance.

COUNCIL BUSINESS

1. Apologies

Cllr. M. Brake, Cllr. P. Tuke & Cllr. S. Patch

2. Resignation

The Chair reported that he had received a letter of resignation from Cllr. Smith. She was resigning due to personal reasons.

The Clerk advised that he had posted on the Notice board the relevant official CVP1 Public Notice giving the required notice that a casual vacancy exists in the office of Parish councillor on the Parish Council of Offwell.

He had also advised the Returning Officer at East Devon of the Vacancy and that the Public Notice had been posted.

The Clerk explained to Councillors the procedures to be followed in dealing with casual vacancies arising on Parish Councils.

3. Declaration of Interests

None

4. a) Minutes of the Meeting held on 18th November 2019

The minutes were declared a true record of the proceedings, proposed by Cllr. Mulrain, seconded by Cllr. Tristram, all in favour.

5. Matters Arising from the Minutes

The Clerk confirmed that the supply of new sandbags had been passed onto the Chair.

The Clerk said that he was waiting a reply from Stephen Kelly about the gap in the hedge on mill lane near Bagwells Cottage.

Cllr. Tristram reported that the school were unable to take on the role of maintaining and planting the Village Pump area. because of Health and Safety issues. However, John Gumbrell and Emily Croton had kindly volunteered to take on the role.

6. Reports

a) Police:

The Clerk reported that he had not received any police report.

b) District and County Councillors:

EDDC Cllr. Parr had earlier in the day sent a written report which the Clerk had forwarded on to all Councillors. She said that there had been some good news in that the Fire Authority had agreed to retain Colyton Fire Station although there was bad news elsewhere as Budleigh Salterton and Topsham Fire Stations would close. There would also be a redistribution of some Fire Tenders across Devon. She thanked those who had participated in the campaign protest and consultation process.

She explained the reasons why the EDDC Cabinet had rejected Seaton Area health matters request to EDDC for a £2M loan for 40 years to purchase Seaton Hospital.

Meetings were due to take place shortly at EDDC to discuss the budget and precept for 20/21. The Council were facing a difficult financial situation and would have to make 'careful choices' to work towards bridging a £2.7M funding gap over the next 4 years.

DCC Cllr. Shaw had sent his written report which had been forwarded to all Councillors and posted on the website. He said that DCC were also facing difficult budget decisions and there was likely to be a significant increase of 4% due to the cost of social care services.

He reported that following an appeal protest the proposed substantial rent increase for Colyton Health Centre had been reduced.

He also said that it had been good news that Colyton Fire Station had been saved from closure.

c) Other Reports

None

7. Correspondence

The Clerk advised that he had forwarded on to Councillors all email correspondence received.

The items of note were:-

a) Email from from Trip with a poster showing the services it offers to Offwell. **Noted**

b) Email from DCC re the Annual Parish Paths partnership finance forms. Cllr. Tristram advised that he had received the email and forms but that it was not necessary to apply for a grant for any works this year.

- c) Email from DCC Cllr. Shaw enclosing a copy of the minutes of the Seaton and Colyton traffic group meeting on the 6th January 2020. The next meeting will be held on Monday 2nd March 2020 at 2pm in Marshlands. **Noted**
- d) Email from DALC asking for a nomination from Offwell PC for the Royal Garden Party on 27th May 2020. The Clerk advised that only Chairs could attend. Cllr. Tristram proposed the chair be nominated, seconded by Cllr. Whithear. **The Clerk to forward the email and forms to the Chair.**
- e) The Clerk reported that he had received an email from a parishioner asking if a friendly notice could be added to the Notice board and also on the website asking anyone intending to have a firework display to warn residents with a notice on there first. This would enable those with dogs and cats to have some advance warning to prepare and ensure their animals are indoors so they are caused least distress. **The Clerk to prepare a notice for the Notice board and liaise with the website administrator.**
- f) Email from Devon Highways re a link to the display information from their Parish and Town Council events in 2019. **Noted**
 Whilst on the matter of Highways the Clerk asked all Councillors to use the Highways online reporting mechanism for reporting any Highway problems, particularly potholes. He said that it would also be helpful if they could also advise the Clerk at the same time.
- g) Email from EDDC Planning re the East Devon affordable Housing SPD consultation. **Noted**
- h) Email from DCC Highways re the Devon Permit Works Scheme Order which comes into force on the 2nd March 2020. **Noted.**
- i) Email from EDDC re the Free workshops to help community and voluntary groups and other not for profit organisations access over £90,000 of funding available from EDDC through Crowdfunder. The Clerk said that EDDC and DCC are both actively promoting the use of Crowdfunding for this sector and possibly financially supporting a crowdfunding project. Free training sessions are presently being offered by EDDC and that the Parish Council need to make all such Offwell organisations and charities aware of this as soon as possible, so that they don't miss the boat!! **The Clerk had asked the website administrator to mention the Free workshops on the website.**

The Clerk said the Council also need to consider how they can support the voluntary organisations and charities within the Parish to seek funding and grants for any present or future projects. He receives from time to time news of new grant funding opportunities. However these usually have a very short and often immediate application opportunity before the closing date.

In order that the Council can support the organisations and charities, the Council needs to compile a database of all such organisations and charities within the Parish, no matter how large or small. This will then enable him to contact them about any grant funding opportunities.

He requested that Councillors assist him by providing the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of any voluntary organisation and charities they are aware of within the Parish. He would then be able to compile a database.

- j) The Clerk said that he would continue to liaise with ORG & VHC on the availability of the Social Club for the monthly meetings.

7. Finance

a) Current Financial Position

The Clerk advised that there was £8,223.39 in the current account (after allowing for uncleared cheques but not allowing for the below payments).

There was now £3,362.09 in the CIL Account

It should be noted that the Council has resolved to make a commitment to spend of £2,250 from this CIL monies on playground equipment for the Project.

b) Intervening Expenditure to approve

Cllr Mulrain proposed, Cllr. Tristram seconded, all in favour that:

1. £99.40 payment to Devon County Council for Colwell fingerpost
2. £192.00 payment to ORG & Village Hall Charity for the Rooms hire in 2019
3. £318.72 payment to Clerk for salary period from 11th November to 9th December 2019
4. £120.00 payment to Community Heartbeat Trust (reissue of cheque to replace cancelled cheque mislaid in post.

c) Expenditure to be approved

Cllr Mulrain proposed, Cllr. Tristram seconded, all in favour that:

1. £318.72 be paid to the Clerk for salary period from 9th December 2019 to 6th January 2020
2. £120.00 be paid to Community Heartbeat Trust for the Village Emergency Telephone system renewal 26/09/2019 to 26/09/2020.

d) Forthcoming expenditure to approve

None

e) Budget & Precept

The Clerk presented a document (copy attached as Page 9 of these minutes). This showed the budget for 2019/20, the spend to date, the projected end of year figures together with a potential draft 2020/21 budget for Cllrs. consideration and approval.

The Clerk asked Councillors to firstly note that the actual budget agreed last year for 2019/20 was £8,287 whereas the attached spreadsheet showed a budget of £8805 for 2019/20. This was because he wished to show the ditch work as a column so that Councillors when considering budgeting for a lengthsman contractor in 202/21 were able to compare it with the amount paid in the previous year for a lengthsman. That payment of £548 had been mainly funded by a grant under the Parishes Together.

The spend to date was £5,447 with the projected end of year figure being £7,362 which compared favourably to the 19/20 budget. Some of the projected spends were below budget and others above. The main item of saving was that it had not been necessary to hold a Parish Council election last May and there had not been any election costs. The budget had included an amount of £900 for election costs. Also no payments had been made in respect of footpaths whereas an amount of £200 had been included in the budget.

Last year the Clerk had pointed out that the Council had in recent years been supporting the precept by taking monies from reserves (balance held at the bank). However, this had resulted in a substantial reduction in the reserves and the Council needed to consider drawing less from reserves so that over time precepts would become on a par with the budgets.

The budget for 2020/21 is £7,428 assuming similar budgeted amounts to last year's but including an amount of £500 for a Lengthsman ditch work contractor. Councillors discussed this and agreed that it was appropriate to do so and that £500 was an appropriate amount to include within the budget for the ditch work. This would enable them to make an informed and budgeted for decision when the matter for a Lengthsman came up for discussion under Item 11.

The Projected year end spend amount by the end of the financial year on the 31-03-2020 is £7362 which compares favourably with the budget of £8,805. Some of the projected spends were below budget and others did not occur such as the election costs. Also if no further grants/donations are made by the year end, then the projected year end spend would be even less at £6,662.

This projection would result in a year end balance of £6899.68 after allowing for the inclusion of Vat reclaim..

The Clerk said that in considering budgets and setting the precept the Council need to consider the amount they wish to take from their reserves (projected year-end balance) to set a reasonable and considered precept.

Last year the Council decided to take a figure of £3,000 from reserves, which resulted in a precept of £5,287. Although this resulted in the precept rising from £3516 in the previous year, the Council had made this decision in order to maintain a prudent and adequate level of reserves. However, this level of increase did result in complaints from Parishioners.

The Council should take this into account when setting the precept but should also take into account that 20/21 will be the third year when the Government has not applied council tax referendum principles to Parish and Town Councils. The Government only agreed this for three years and it may not continue, so 20/21 may be the last year when council tax referendum principles do not apply to Parish Councils.

The Clerk explained to Councillors what was meant by council tax referendum principles and how this had applied to and impacted on County and District Councils in recent years. The allowance by the Government to Parish Councils was on the understanding that Parish Councils would exercise restraint and mitigate the need for precept increases by measures such as the use of reserves. Offwell PC had in recent years substantially supported the precept level by drawing down from reserves.

The Clerk said that whilst the Council need to consider the impact of an increase in the precept on Parishioners, they also need to note that it is commonly accepted that a Council should have a prudent general business reserve. The Council therefore need to carefully consider both these points when deciding what amount they wish to draw from reserves to support the precept.

The Chair thanked the Clerk for his work in producing the report and budget forecast. Councillors discussed the budget and precept and the matters raised by the Clerk.

Cllr. Tristram proposed accepting the budget for 2020/21, that an amount of £1,400 be drawn from reserves to support the budget and that the precept be set at £6,028. Cllr. Mulrain seconded, all in favour. The Clerk to submit the completed precept form to EDDC.

8. Planning Applications

19/2245/FUL – Northcombe Farm, Offwell EX14 9SP

Construction of detached ancillary annexe

Councillors perused the application and resolved to support the application. Cllr. Hopkins proposed, seconded by Cllr. Mulrain, all in favour.

19/2748/FUL – Rookery Cottage, Offwell EX14 9SL

Construction of replacement timber garage, replacement boundary wall and widening parking

Councillors perused the application and resolved to support the application. Cllr. Whithear proposed, seconded by Cllr. Tristram, all in favour.

20/0021/COU – Sweethayes, Offwell EX14 9SB

Change of use from agricultural land to garden

Councillors perused the application and resolved to support the application. Cllr. Small proposed, seconded by Cllr. Hopkins, all in favour.

19/2737/LBC – The Bishops Tower, Tower Cross, Offwell EX14 9TN

Removal of a first floor window on south elevation and replace with inward opening French doors to form Juliet balcony with inset metal railings

Councillors perused the application and resolved to support the application. Cllr. Whithear proposed, seconded by Cllr. Mulrain, all in favour.

19/2746/FUL & 19/2747/LBC – The Bishops Tower, Tower Cross, Offwell EX14 9TN

Construction of single storey rear lean-to garden room, reinstate an existing porch on the northern elevation, insertion of new doorway in lieu of glazed window, steps out of the utility on the ground floor in the north elevation.

Councillors perused the applications and resolved to support the applications. Cllr. Hopkins proposed, seconded by Cllr. Tristram, all in favour

19/1714/FUL – Northcombe Farm, Offwell, EX14 9SP

The Clerk reported that this application had been approved with conditions.

19/2565/FUL – The Granary, Colwell barton, Offwell, EX14 9SR

The Clerk reported that this application had been approved.

9. Landmark Trees

The Clerk advised that just before Christmas he had been notified of a DCC scheme offering two free landmark trees for Parish and Town Councils. There was a very short application time window, so he had taken the opportunity to register the Parish Council's interest. Further details had now been received with there now being just one tree on offer with various terms and conditions which also stated that the tree would have to be planted in a prominent and publicly accessible place where the tree would have sufficient place to grow to its full mature size.

The Council did not own any land itself, so Councillors discussed possible suitable sites. It was suggested that the field below the woods with a footpath running through it would possibly be a suitable site. The Clerk to speak to the landowner.

10. Lengthsman

The Clerk reported that he had contacted all the neighbouring Parish Councils enquiring as to whether they employed a lengthsman contractor and if they could provide contact details. Unfortunately, those Councils who did use the contractor that Offwell PC had employed last year but who was now unable to take on any further work. The Clerk said that he now had the contact details of the contractor that Cllr. Patch had suggested at the last meeting and that he would contact him to check availability and rates etc. Cllr. Tristram also said that he would check with Buckerell PC as to which contractor they used.

It was proposed by the Chair that once the Clerk had checked the rates etc of the suggested contractor and that he was available, that the Chair and Cllr. Patch meet with the contractor to agree the work that was required and the contract price and then appoint the contractor to carry out the work. He further proposed that the budget for such works be £500. Cllr. Mulrain seconded, all in favour.

11. Offwell Haycart

The Clerk advised that EDDC had confirmed that using CIL money to purchase a new Haycart would be an acceptable use of CIL monies under the regulations. However, it would have to be purchased directly by the Council

Following discussion on the matter of the haycart, Councillors asked the Clerk to check with the Council's Insurers as to the cost of insuring the haycart if the Council were to adopt and take on responsibility for it. The matter to be deferred to the next meeting.

12. Locating houses for deliveries

Cllr. Tristram said that some households were experiencing problems with courier and other deliveries due to sat nav directions to their postcode sending couriers down wrong lanes to other addresses/areas. The Clerk said that Postcodes were set up for the benefit of Royal Mail deliveries and that the difficulties mentioned were experienced by many in the Devon rural areas.

Cllr. Tristram said that the what3words app appears to solve this problem in that it uses a random 3 word string to identify every 5 x 5 metre area in the world. The what3words for any property will take one directly to the front door and it could be used to give directions by anyone ordering goods. He understands that it is used by the ambulance service to find rural addresses.

The Clerk said that he had tried it and also thought that it would solve the problem. The Clerk to make parishioners aware of the app and how it can solve any delivery problems they may be experiencing.

13. Cold Callers

The Clerk advised that a number of residents in Offwell and neighbouring villages had received unsolicited 'visits' from individuals wishing to sell them cleaning products. Some looked respectable; some did not. When an Offwell resident checked on Facebook these men were referred to as The Nottingham Knockers, travelling in a white van, visiting Devon villages, targeting vulnerable people who may be persuaded to buy some goods and, in some instances, returning at a later date to steal from the properties. Dalwood and a few other villages have had visits from this gang. PCSO Bolsover had also recently issued a police alert on the matter.

The Clerk advised that he had drafted out a notice warning about Cold Callers, and had displayed this on the noticeboard. A notice had also been displayed on the village website.

The Clerk advised that the National Scam Team at Trading Standards had recently sent a PDF document link to EDDC. The document gives a lot of information on all types of scams (including

cold calls) and advises on measures that persons can take to prevent the scams. A link to the document had been displayed on the village website.

The Clerk said that he had received the Free ‘Do not knock -No uninvited or unexpected Callers’ door stickers. Cllr. Whithear offered to distribute the stickers.

14. Tree Works at Electricity Sub Station

The Clerk reported that arborist contractors working on behalf of Western Power had cut down the trees around the perimeter wall/fence of the electricity sub station. This was because of Health & Safety concerns due to the size of the trees and vegetation in close proximity to the sub station. A parishioner had raised questions as to whether the large tree stumps which had been left would be removed and whether there would be a replanting scheme. The Clerk had contacted Western Power who had advised that there was no plans to remove or stump grind the tree stumps on Health & Safety grounds due to their proximity to the sub station. A replanting scheme had been carried out amongst the tree stumps along the front wall/fence.

15. A35 Meeting with Highways

The Clerk advised that the meeting was due to take place at 11 a.m.on Thursday 6th February 2020 in the Hitchcock Pavilion, Playing Field (cricket ground), Whiford Road, Kilmington, The Clerk would be attending together with Councillors Patch and Tuke.

The Clerk said that he was still compiling the accident statistics and road information for the Councillors and would liaise with the Councillors ahead of the meeting.

He was also concerned about safety of bus passengers who use the eastbound Offwell bus stop and proposed to raise this at the meeting. There was no safe crossing point for them as there was no pavement on the bus stop side, only a rough grass verge. On the opposite of the road directly opposite the bus stop there was no pavement, only an extremely narrow space between the fences of the roadside properties and the Highway. It was extremely dangerous to walk along that space as one would be practically right on the road edge and could be hit by a vehicle or affected by the turbulence from passing vehicles particularly HGVs.

He felt that this affected peoples desire and opportunity to use the public bus transport and was particularly discriminatory to the elderly, disabled persons, those with health conditions and those with young children. Councillors shared the Clerk’s concerns.

16. Parish Council Website

The Clerk advised that Cllr. Brake had done further work on a new website and had requested another meeting of the sub committee to confirm the direction and make further progress.

17. Agenda Items for Next Meeting

None

18. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be Monday, 17th February 2020 at 7.30pm. The Clerk said that he would confirm the venue when issuing the agenda.

The Meeting closed at 9.45pm

Signed..... Date

