

# Hessett Parish Council

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## MINUTES

of the meeting held at Hessett & Beyton Village Hall, Hessett on

**Monday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020 at 7.30pm**

**Present:** Councillors: Michael Poulter (Chair), Simon Elsworth Lynn Heymoz, Andrew Pearson and Debbie Willis.

**In attendance:** Maximilian Clay (Clerk to the Council),  
County Councillor Otton (part) and three members of the public.

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and thanked everyone for co-operating with Covid-19 protection measures.

### 9. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Bauly and the meeting resolved to approve the reason for absence. Cllr Turvill was absent.

### 10. Declarations of Interest

- a. Cllr Pearson advised that he had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interests in item 15.a.i.
- b. There were no Other Disclosable Interests declared.

### 11. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council held on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020 were agreed to be a true record and the Chair was authorised to sign them as such.

The minutes of the Financial and Annual Return matters agreed virtually on 28th July 2020 were agreed to be a true record and the Chair was authorised to sign them as such.

### 12. County & District Councillor Report

County and District Cllr Penny Otton had submitted a written report and this was received.

Cllr Pearson asked about the policy concerning the wearing of masks (as Covid-19 infection mitigation) on school buses running on 'closed routes' as he had been informed that the County Council's contracts did not require this and so pupils were not wearing masks. C Cllr Otton reported that there was to be a meeting to discuss the difficulties concerning school transport and she would add this matter to the discussions. There was also to be a meeting about further works affecting the Beyton to Woolpit stretch of the A14 and C Cllr Otton would advise.

A member of the public asked about the problems on Hubbards Lane and Cllr Heymoz expressed discontent, which was shared by the Council as a whole, about the lack of consistency in the approach to Highways and related matters and the apparent lack of accountability. In responding, C Cllr Otton agreed that this was problematic and felt that even County Councillors were frustrated and that they had been distanced from those responsible for Highways work.

The Council resolved that it would send a letter to the Head of Highway and Cabinet Member for Highways expressing discontent about the apparent lack of contactability and consistency.

Cllr Elsworth asked about progress on the extension of the small, surfaced parking area on the Green and was informed that further news was awaited.

### 13. Public Forum

A young resident spoke to express interest in the potential community dairy scheme and said that working with animals had given her confidence, pride and a sense of achievement.

Mrs Katie Mitcham set out an idea for a community dairy scheme which would engage people from the village. The idea was to create a small herd of organic milkers to supply raw milk to people in the village. This would be a carbon neutral, or even carbon negative, scheme and Mrs

Mitcham would be seeking grants and crowd-funding.

A resident spoke to item 16 (below) and referring to previous correspondence in support of developing a community wood at the Heath. He also suggested that this could be done by a group separate from the Council, under a licence to use the land. In response to a question about the proportion of the Heath that could be planted, he said that he had thought about the whole Heath but that it could be just part.

#### **14. Clerk's Report & Administrative Business**

**a. Decisions under Delegated Authority** - There were no decisions to report.

**b. General Report** - The Clerk reported the following:

- ◆ The Play Area annual safety report had arrived that day and would be brought before the next meeting. No significant risks had been identified.
- ◆ A consultation on the review of County Divisions (the county-level equivalent of electoral wards) had just been launched and would be brought to the next meeting.
- ◆ Old Phone Kiosk - This item was put on hold during the Covid related lockdown but a consultation has been prepared and is ready to go. It was noted that the residents of the house behind the kiosk had apparently expressed a view it is an eyesore and should be got rid of. The consultation needs to make clear that, for reasons relating to basis on which the kiosk was acquired by the Council, the options do not include the possibility of selling or moving it.
- ◆ A table of outstanding works and business was presented to the Council. This had been reduced considerably and it was felt that the most of the remaining items could be dealt with, or at least put in train, by the end of 2020.
- ◆ Cllr Poulter has relinquished his role as Webmaster now that everything has been transferred to the new web site. There are still some glitches, partly arising from the need for training on the new system. The Council resolved to approve expenditure of up to £50 on training.
- ◆ Cllr Pearson wished to donate a bridge to Parish Council, to go over the drainage ditch alongside the Heath, in memory of his father. The Council looked at pictures of the bridge and was delighted to accept the gift.

It was noted that the benches in the play area and on the Green had become dirty and in a poor condition. It was agreed that the Handyman would be asked to clean these, along with the village signs, before the time of the next meeting.

#### **15. Planning & Environment**

**a. New Planning Application Consultations**

*Councillor Pearson left the meeting*

- i. DC/20/03814 - 10 Heath Close, Hessett:** *Erection of two storey side extension including rear balcony and single storey rear extension.*

After brief discussion it was agreed that the proposal would have little or no impact on neighbours and was a reasonable size in proportion the house and garden. Accordingly it was resolved to support the application.

*Councillor Pearson rejoined the meeting*

**b. Updates on Planning Applications Considered Previously**

- i. DC/20/02360; Land at the Five Bells Pub, The Street Hessett:** *Full Planning Application for the addition of two Shepherds Huts to be used as tourist accommodation ancillary to the pub.*

The application, which had been supported by the Council, had been approved.

**c. Five Bells** - There was no new information to report but it was resolved to invite the owners to come to the January meeting of the Council to provide an update on progress and plans.

- d. **Grass Cutting Contract** - In discussion it was noted that the performance of the contractor was very much better than that of the previous contractor and the Council agreed that the slightly higher cost of returning to M&TJ's was more than justified by the quality and efficiency and thoroughness of their work.
- e. **Drainage Ditch at Hubbards Lane** - The meeting noted that although the County's pluvial flood officers had eventually attended the site and required the contractors working on the new build houses to re-instate the drainage ditch, it had taken far too long for them to do so and there had been at least two lots of flooding in the meantime. This was unsatisfactory, as is the fact that the contractor has simply replaced the fairly deep ditch that they filled in with a very shallow channel which would be inadequate in heavy rain. The Clerk will follow this up and seek further action.

## **16. Potential Community Wood and / or Community Orchard at the Heath**

The Council received a written summary of discussions on this matter to date and a summary of the context which was that the idea had first been mooted as a potential longer-term plan last year. There were two ideas, which could be considered as a single concept or separately: a community wood, planned to have amenity value and climate change benefits, and a community orchard, with similar benefits.

The Heath is owned by the Parish Council and is much used by residents for walking and the exercising of dogs. The Council placed benches in two different parts of the Heath two years ago and these have been appreciated and well used by residents.

There does not seem to be any legal impediment to planting on part of the heath. Informal discussions with the farmer who crops it for hay (and who currently claims RPA payments on our behalf, by combining this holding with another to meet the minimum ground area requirement) indicate that this is not a central part of his farming system - although there could be wider financial implications for him and his partners under the RPA scheme. The land currently produces between £525 and £600pa in RPA income which helps to keep the precept element of Council Tax bills down.

The entire land and farming-related subsidy and grant system is currently under review by the Government and will certainly change over the immediately coming years. It is highly likely that the new regime will place greater emphasis on considering land from a wider perspective than at present. A tree planting grant scheme has been put in place already (based on long-term returns to land owners over a 35 year period) and looks set to remain open for some time to come - the initial target is 11m trees to be planted by the end of 2022. As part of its announcement of that scheme the Government stated that, subject to certain conditions, claiming this grant will not preclude joining other grant/ subsidy schemes in due course.

In addition to the above there are schemes whereby the cost of trees and the planting costs can be met.

In discussion there was general agreement that some planting could be worthwhile but that planting the whole Heath would be too much. It was argued that many people, especially children and the elderly are attracted to the Heath precisely because it is open and the ground fairly even. It was recognised that the orchard idea had some drawbacks in relation to ongoing maintenance.

Anecdotally it seems that many residents like the Heath in its present form and feel that its open nature affords safety. However, there is a diversity of opinion among residents which needs testing out further.

It was resolved to conduct a consultation of all households in the village. This would include maps with potential planting areas (as well as making clear that maintaining the Heath in its present form would also be an option) to stimulate thought, an explanation of the process of the consultation and ensuing process, as well as the idea itself. The responses would be collected. Cllr Heymoz felt that the Village Ladies may well be willing to help with the latter.

## **17. Governance**

The Council reviewed its two main governance documents:

- a. **Standing Orders** - Other than changes to the financial thresholds concerning contracting (to match the nationally set figures that had been reviewed to take account of inflation), no changes were proposed. The Council resolved to re-adopt the Orders with the financial updates.
- b. **Financial Regulations** - Other than changes to the financial thresholds concerning contracting (to match the nationally set figures that had been reviewed to take account of inflation), and a minor clarifying change that had been agreed at a previous meeting, no changes were proposed. The Council resolved to re-adopt the Orders with these updates.

## **18. Election of Representatives to:**

- a. Village Hall Committee - Cllr Willis offered to serve and was duly elected
- b. Hessett Charities Trustees - Cllr Pearson was willing to continue to serve and was duly re-elected.

## **19. Tree Survey**

The Clerk had previously reported that costs for a full survey had become unrealistic and unreasonable (representing over 10% of the Council's annual budget). In view of this he proposed that a less formal survey be undertaken by a reputable and qualified tree surgeon, in conjunction with him and Cllrs Pearson and Baulby. The cost would be up to £300. The Council resolved to adopt this approach.

## **20. Play Area Fencing**

An indicative quotation of around £2,200 had been obtained. There was a brief discussion and it was then resolved to seek formal quotes for the full re-fencing of the play area using a method (such as plastic post holders) that minimised the likelihood of rot. It was further resolved to delegate to the Clerk any instruction to contractors, based on the quotes, subject to email consultation with Councillors.

## **21. Locality Fund Grants**

The Council noted that funds were available and considered whether there were suitable projects towards which a grant could be applied. Two possibilities arose in discussion: planting troughs around the village signs and new benches.

The Clerk was asked to establish the cost of benches and report back to the next meeting.

## **22. Responsible Finance Officer's Business**

- a. The Clerk informed the meeting that the Annual Governance and Accounts Reporting (AGAR) Process was almost complete and that the Council's certificate of exemption from AGAR review had been acknowledged by the external auditors. The only outstanding matter was the public right of inspection which runs until 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020.
- b. The Council received the schedule of receipts and payments and approved the payments.

## **23. Councillors' reports and items for future agendas**

- ◆ Cllr Elsworth reported that the wild flower planting had faded somewhat after a good early start and that the difficult dry autumn last year may have been a factor. He and Cllr Pearson were keeping an eye on things and felt that it could be worth augmenting the previous sowing, depending on progress. He also commented that it often takes two years for plantings such as this to establish themselves and a watching brief would be maintained.
- ◆ Cllr Heymoz reported that a complaint had been levelled against her by a neighbour who had claimed criminal damage. Cllr Heymoz confirmed that the police had exonerated her, following an investigation which had shown that there were no grounds on which to proceed.
- ◆ Unrelated to the previous matter, Cllr Heymoz tendered her resignation as a councillor, for

personal and family reasons. In tendering her resignation Cllr Heymoz paid tribute to the work and support of other members of the council and especially 'our stalwart Chair' and the Clerk. The Chair thanked Cllr Heymoz for her sterling service to the Council and said that she would be sorely missed. The Clerk informed the meeting that he would need to report the resignation to the District monitoring officer and the resignation would be advertised before a move to co-option could be called. In the intervening period members of the public have the right to call an election, although this is rare.

- ◆ The problem of speeding vehicles, especially at the southern end of the village, was reported and it was agreed that this would be discussed at the next meeting. Members were asked to think about ideas that could help to cut down speeding in preparation for that discussion.
- ◆ Cllr Pearson had noted that the village sign had become loose. He agreed to inspect the sign and let the Clerk know what was required to rectify the fault so that remedial action could be organised.

**The meeting closed at 9.23pm.**

Signed as a true record by authority of the Council

Chair

Date