

Hessett Parish Council

MINUTES

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

Monday 14th March 2022 at 7.30pm

Social distancing and other Covid-19 mitigation measures were in place.

Present: Councillors: Michael Poulter (Chair), Lynn Heymoz, Katie Mitcham, Margaret Shaw, Stuart Turvill and Debbie Willis

In attendance: Maximilian Clay (Clerk to the Council),
6 members of the public, for part of the meeting.

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting, especially newly co-opted Councillors Heymoz and Shaw, who had duly signed Acceptance of Office Forms.

77. Apologies

All Councillors were present.

78. Declarations of Interest

There were no Disclosable Interests declared.

79. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council held on 24th January 2021 were agreed to be a true record and it was resolved to authorise the Chair to sign them as such.

80. County & District Councillor Report

County and District Cllr Penny Otton had submitted a report which the Clerk summarised and it was received by the Council.

81. Public Forum

The Chair opened the public forum. The Chair of the reconstituted Hessett Millennium Committee (HMC) spoke to say that representatives of the Committee were present and could answer any questions that arose in relation to the Committee's grant application (Item 86). The Chair noted this and stated that he would allow questions to be asked of the representatives under that item. The Vice-Chair of HMC said that he was keen to see some things happen in the village and was keen to have the support of Council. He understood that the Council had rules but felt that the Council obfuscated rather than helped to explain the rules. He would like to see the Council help people to meet the rules, particularly with reference to the HMC grant application. The Chair called upon the Clerk to respond on behalf of the Council and in doing so the Clerk pointed out that rather than obfuscate the Council had spent a considerable amount of time reviewing the application (which had yet to be discussed - see item 86 below) and highlighting the matters that it would be helpful for the applicant to address in order to maximise the likelihood of the application being successful. This had enabled the HMC to consider providing further information to the Council - which it had done.

The Vice-Chair of HMC said that he was disappointed that the Council would not support the event. Cllr Turvill interjected to point out that the matter had not even been discussed by the Council as yet and so it was unclear how it could be argued that the Council was not supportive. Cllr Willis moved to bring forward consideration of Item 86 of the agenda and the Chair supported this. There was no other business under this item and so Item 86 (recorded below) was taken at this point.

82. Clerk's Report & Administrative Business

The Clerk reported that no decisions had been taken under delegated authority.

The Clerk reported the following correspondence and actions:

From MSDC re Stowmarket Recycling Centre - now re-opened following re-surfacing works.

Hessett Millennium Committee, re request for use of the Green on 16th July 2022 - The request had been received on the day of the meeting and so under transparency regulations (Localism Act 2011) could not be added to the agenda for this meeting but will come before the next meeting.

Torch Relay - A relay is planned around the county, in the run up to the lighting of beacons for the Queen's Jubilee, and nominations are being sought from all villages for names of people who could deserve the distinction of carrying the torch for part of the relay. Councillors agreed to let the Clerk have any names by 28th March. Details of the relay had been posted to the website.

From HMC - Arguing that Minute 72 of the January meeting mis-represented facts. Members had also received the document in question directly from HMC. The Clerk submitted a detailed critique of the document which highlighted the ways in which what it argued were demonstrably and substantially mistaken. The Council resolved that it was confident that the minute was an accurate report.

Cllr Penny Otton - Encouraging applications for Locality Funds - it was agreed that funding of £500 towards the information boards planned for the phone kiosk would be helpful.

Bus Shelter - The District Council was not supportive of a structure on the car parking area but are looking at the potential extension of the car park itself.

Fencing of Play Area - The updated quotation had been received and was within the £4,000 already agreed and so this work had been commissioned and is scheduled for mid-May.

RPA Payment - This is still awaited from the farmer and is being chased.

Grass Cutting - It was resolved to accept M&TJ's indicative quotation for £105 which now includes a monthly strim of the Churchyard to Drinkstone footpath.

Clearance of Growth along the ditch at the Heath - Mr Graham Bauly had kindly carried out this work on a voluntary basis and the Clerk had written to thank him. The Chair proposed a formal vote of thanks and this was carried unanimously.

83. Queens Platinum Jubilee/ Big Picnic Working Group

Cllr Turvill updated the meeting with current plans: the event will be a street-party like event but held on the Green, with trestle tables, a jazz band, bouncy castle, cake-baking competition, egg and spoon races and other family orientated games.

The budget included £258 for a bouncy castle, £350 for a diesel generator, £240 for the jazz band, £50 for the tables and chairs (hire) and £475 for the party marquee, with a £25% contingency. In discussion it was confirmed that the Council's insurance will cover the event and clarification will be obtained in respect to the bouncy castle (which will be operated by volunteers). It was felt that a contingency of 25% was excessive and that 10% should be allowed for contingencies.

The Marquee would become an asset of the Council and could be made available for other groups to use, potentially for a small charge which would help to recoup the cost. It was highlighted that the recent publicity for the event did not mention the Parish Council and it was agreed that this should be rectified in all future publicity and that the event should be called the Parish Council Jubilee Picnic. Subject to this, it was resolved that up to £1,511.00, inclusive of VAT, would be budgeted for the event.

84. Planning

a. Responses to planning application consultations:

- i **DC/22/01012/TPO - 1 Lime Tree Close, Hessett: Consent To Carry Out Works To Tree Protected By A Tree Preservation Order (TPO N^o WS40/T2) Pollard 1no Lime Tree.**

The Clerk explained that the application was for pollarding works that are carried out on this tree from time to time and that this formed part of its routine maintenance. After brief discussion it was resolved to support the application.

b. To receive update reports on planning applications considered previously:

- i **DC/21/06807 and DC/21/06808 - Wilwyn, The Street, Hessett; Planning and Listed Building Consent:**. These applications had been granted.

c. Proposal to cease responding to planning consultations.

Following various issues relating to the frequent lack of obvious relationship between the Council's response to consultations and outcomes, Cllr Turvill proposed a different approach.

Speaking to his proposal Cllr Turvill argued that as the planning authority seems to afford no more weight to the PC's recommendations than to the views of any neighbour, it would perhaps be a better use of the council's time to recommend that residents use the Planning Portal to register their objections. This could save money, as less officer time would be spent on briefing councillors about planning applications, and could make clearer to the public the Council's legal position, whatever it may be (see below) in relation to planning applications.

With regard to the legal position, Cllr Turvill had discovered a document that cast the position of Parish Councils as statutory consultees in a different light to the received wisdom on the matter and this will be researched and advice taken before the next meeting.

In discussion, it was agreed that the situation is unfortunate and that the apparent lack of willingness on the part of the Planning Authority to back up and enforce its own decisions was also unhelpful. On the other hand it was also felt that having planning application items on the agenda served a useful purpose in highlighting applications to residents and also facilitated a dialogue with residents who may have concerns about particular applications. There was also concern about the implications of a blanket withdrawal from participation in the process, the implications for any comments that were made exceptionally (for example if there were a different type of application to which the Council decided to respond) and the lack of clarity about the exact legal position of Parish Councils in these matters.

It was resolved to defer a decision until the next meeting and that, in the meantime, the Clerk would seek legal advice as to the nature of the consultation between the planning authority and parish councils and as to whether any other matters should be taken in consideration when deciding whether to adopt the proposal.

85. Five Bells Inn

It was hoped that the pub would open in the Autumn; the Clerk was asked to find out if there is any more concrete news and report back to the next meeting.

86. Grant Request Hessett Millennium Committee

A grant of £1,000 was sought for staging an event on the Village Green on 16th July 2022.

The Council considered matters such whether the market research that HMC stated had been carried out had supported the need/ demand for the event at the planned time (especially given the village celebration planned for the Jubilee, six weeks earlier); how well the committee understood how to plan an event and so how likely it would be to achieve its plan; whether the figures represented a sufficiently reliable budget for grant-making purposes (the figures did not include all expenditure and were not yet backed up by research/ quotations); whether the applicant had considered all the relevant legal issues; whether the applicant understood the nature of risk, risk management and insurance and whether the need for a grant of the size requested had been demonstrated, given that HMC had reserves of over £2,000.

The Chair of HMC responded that he acknowledged that the costings were not yet accurate and had hoped that the Council would have engaged to support the Committee. The Council noted that it had offered to help (in writing, via the Clerk) and had also set out the detail of what would be required but that this had not been taken up.

After further discussion it was agreed that the application was not yet in a sufficiently clear or robust form to justify a grant and that there were practical, legal and financial issues that that would have to be dealt with to change that position. However, there was general support for the idea and so it was resolved to agree in principle to a grant of £850, subject to all necessary matters having been dealt with satisfactorily in advance of the next meeting so that a final decision could be made then. This would allow the HMC to advance their plans if they were satisfied that they could do what is necessary by then. The Clerk reiterated his willingness to give support in improving the application and the Vice Chair of HMC expressed an intention to take up this offer.

87. Finance

- a. The Council received the schedule of receipts and payments and resolved to approve the payments.
- b. It was also resolved to add Cllr Shaw to the mandate (in addition to Cllrs Mitcham and Willis).

88. Heath Policy

The Council considered a draft Heath Policy, arising from discussion at a previous meeting. In discussion it was asked why no ball games would be allowed and it was explained that this was intended to preserve the quiet, more natural environment which residents had made clear they valued (and ball games can be played on the Green, where there are football goal posts. It was also proposed to add a clause to the effect that nothing should be placed, installed or stored on, or disposed of, on the Heath.

It was resolved to adopt the policy with the proposed amendment; to have a colour sign made setting out the rules and post that the gate; and to deliver a copy of the policy to properties adjoining the Heath asking them to be vigilant on the Council's behalf.

It was also highlighted that now that the grass on the Heath will no longer be harvested, due to the end of the RPA arrangements, the approach to maintaining the grass needed to be decided as part of the policy. It was agreed that a quotation for a single cut once year, replicating what had been happening under the RPA arrangement, would be obtained and brought to the next meeting for consideration.

89. Councillors' reports and items for future agendas

Village Hall Committee - Cllr Willis reported that the committee had met and discussed the arrangements for use of the PC-owned television by Hall users. In particular, the Committee, noting the council's request that it be notified of any request to use the equipment, felt that this would be cumbersome and asked whether the Council would be willing to waive this condition. It was noted that the purpose of the condition was to ensure that there was a clear responsibility associated with the use of equipment, in the event of any damage or any licensing issues. It was agreed that, provided that the Village Hall Committee took responsibility for any damage and any licensing issues, specific requests for use would not be necessary.

90. Staff Matters

- a. The Clerk informed the meeting that, unexpectedly, the National Scales for Clerks' pay had been revised, backdated to April 2021, representing an increase in contractual costs of £87.36pa.
- b. The Clerk recommended that a Staffing Working Party be established to finalise the job description, terms of employment and recruitment for the Village Warden in the new financial year and to recommend an appointment to the Council.
- c. The Clerk gave notice of his resignation and, in response to questions, explained that the main reason was the level of abuse and hostility from a tiny minority of residents, some of whom are unable to understand the difference between fact and invention and what is legal and what is not. He pointed out that this had been seen again this evening (e.g. during items 81, 82 and 86) with a completely unjustifiable antagonism and level of aggression aimed at the Council, its Members and staff. This made fulfilling the role at best burdensome and at times almost impossible. He hoped that a new Clerk would enable a re-set of these relationships. Members of Council expressed regret at the decision
- d. It was resolved to establish a Staffing Working Group which would be delegated the task set out at 90.b and the same tasks in relation to the recruitment of a new Clerk. The group would comprise Cllrs Heymoz, Shaw and Poulter and the Clerk.

The meeting closed at 9.58pm

Signed as a true record by authority of the Council

Chair
Date