



ACOL PARISH COUNCIL

The Village Hall
The Street
Acol
Kent CT7 0JA

e-mail: clerk@acolparishcouncil.org.uk

Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Thursday 24th August 2023 at 7.30pm, Acol Village Hall

Present: Parish Councillors Richard Steel – Chairman [RS], Chenice Butterworth [CB], Sarah Corby [SC], Wendy Winpenny [WW], Gavin Winpenny [GW]

In Attendance: Sara Archer – Clerk, District Cllrs Abi Smith & Abi-Leigh Barlow, KCC Councillors Derek Crow-Brown & Linda Wright plus 5 members of the public.

01/23-24 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC

Under Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public will be excluded by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted during the period 7:30pm – 7:40pm.

02/23-24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from PC Beth Ninnim.

03/23-24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests declared.

04/23-24 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: To accept the minutes of the previous Parish Council meeting held on 22nd June 2023 as a true record. These were proposed by Cllr Wendy Winpenny and Seconded by Cllr Corby and duly signed by the Chair.

05/23-24 CIVILITY & RESPECT PLEDGE

- b) The Chair circulated a briefing note regarding the Civility & Respect Pledge prior to the meeting. The Civility & Respect Pledge was considered, and it was resolved to approve the motion to adopt the pledge accordingly, and any relevant policies and procedures would be put in place to support the commitment.

RESOLVED: To approve the adoption of the Civility & Respect Pledge. **Proposed:** Cllr Steel, **Seconded:** Cllr Gavin Winpenny.

- b) The Clerk had prepared a Dignity at Work Policy to support the Civility & Respect Pledge. This was circulated to the Parish Council prior to the meeting. Councillors had considered the Policy and no further comments were made.

RESOLVED: To approve the Dignity at Work Policy. **Proposed:** Cllr Steel, **Seconded:** Cllr Gavin Winpenny.

06/23-24 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

- a) Cllr Steel confirmed the appointment of Sara Archer as the new Clerk with effect from 7th August 2023.

- b) Cllr Steel advised of the results following the recent survey to canvass residents' views on the adoption of the BT kiosk located beside the Village Hall. Of the 12 respondents, 11 were in favour of disconnecting the landline.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the Kiosk was a community asset and should be maintained as such, however, it was felt it would be appropriate to disconnect the landline and repurpose the Kiosk. Suggestions for its future use were welcomed and would be considered in due course.

RESOLVED: To approve the disconnection of the BT landline and repurpose the Kiosk as a community asset. **Proposed:** Cllr Steel, **Seconded:** Cllr Gavin Winpenny.

- c) Following concern regarding low attendance of representatives from external bodies at the Parish Council meetings, it was proposed to introduce an Attendance Register to record the attendance of both Parish Councillors and various other external representatives who had been invited to attend the meetings. The Clerk presented a template used by the other Parish Councils she clerked which recorded attendance, and any declarations of interest to be noted. This would then be signed at each meeting and held on file.

RESOLVED: To approve the introduction of an Attendance Register for Parish Council meetings to be held on file by the Clerk. **Proposed:** Cllr Steel, **Seconded:** Cllr Gavin Winpenny.

- d) To effectively manage and share the Council's workload, and to enable resident's to easily direct any comments or concerns they may have, it was proposed that each Parish Councillor was appointed as a lead contact for each of the responsibilities outlined below:

Finance/Children & Families – Cllr Butterworth

Leisure & Community/Community Safety – Cllr Corby

Training/Communications – Cllr Steel

Highways – Cllr Gavin Winpenny

Planning & development – Cllr Wendy Winpenny

RESOLVED: To approve the lead contact for each of the responsibilities as outlined above.

Proposed: Cllr Steel, Seconded: Cllr Butterworth.

07/23-24 CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk advised she was in receipt of a planning application on the Acol/Monkton border, ref: FH/TH/23/0969 and suggested Councillors forwarded any representations they wished to make to her, and she would respond accordingly on behalf of the Parish Council.

The Clerk had attended a meeting at TDC whereby Parish/Town Clerks were invited to receive a service update on cleansing services, beach & coastal services, open spaces and street enforcement services. The meeting would be held on a regular monthly basis and a litter forum was also being introduced to be held quarterly, for Clerks to raise any concerns they may need to be escalated.

Training dates had been circulated, Councillors were advised to contact the Clerk for any sessions they would like to attend, and she would book the spaces as appropriate.

08/23-24 COUNCILLORS' REPORTS

Cllr Butterworth advised she had been liaising with The Darling Buds of Wade regarding the potential of placing decorative planters in the Village, however, it was not the right time of year to plant, therefore, the suggestion and quotes would be discussed further at a future meeting. Cllr Wright suggested Southern Water were contacted to enquire about the availability of 'smart planters'.

Cllr Butterworth and Cllr Steel would be meeting with the Managing Director of Quex Park Estates to discuss the options available to implement a safer pedestrian route from Acol village to Birchington. An update would be provided at the next meeting.

Cllr Wendy Winpenny reported she was in the process of arranging a meeting with Cllr Neville Hudson, Birchington Parish Council, in order to discuss the Neighbourhood Plan. Enquiries were ongoing and an update would be available at the next meeting.

Cllr Winpenny confirmed the monies collected from the last Village Celebration was approximately £300, and suggested this was allocated to purchase and maintain a bench for the Village. The suggestion would be considered further and discussed at a future meeting.

Cllr Gavin Winpenny advised he had researched signage for the Recreation Area to remind dog owners of their responsibilities: to keep their dogs on leads, to pick up after their dog and to not allow the dogs to enter the Play Area. Signs were costed at approximately £40.00. It was discussed and agreed it would be appropriate to erect the signage.

RESOLVED: To approve the purchase of relevant signage as outlined above for the Recreation Area.

Proposed: Cllr Gavin Winpenny, Seconded: Cllr Steel.

09/23-24 INDIVIDUAL OFFICER REPORTS

a) **County Councillor Derek Crow-Brown** congratulated the Chairman for his recent appointment as Vice-Chair of the Thanet Area Committee and thanked him for his attendance at the memorial service held at Minster Cemetery for Baron Longchamps. Cllr Crow-Brown informed the meeting that he was liaising with Lezanne Ceazar, KCC Highways, to highlight the impact of road closures on the surrounding villages, and to raise concerns with regard to Highways issues on behalf of the Parishes.

The consultation to consider the closure of Household Waste Disposal Sites had been delayed. The potential closure of the site at Richborough raised particular concern as this would have a significant impact on residents within the smaller Parishes. The probable increase in fly-tipping was also noted. The Chair advised he had written to the Leader on behalf of the Parish to express their objections to the closure of this site.

KCC Cllr Linda Wright notified the meeting she was a representative on the Flood Management Committee at KCC, and reported that Southern Water were introducing a number of different initiatives to manage waste water more effectively. She expressed her disappointment that the new housing development in Margate did not meet level 5 energy efficiency levels and felt this should be addressed with future developments.

Cllr Wright advised that her concerns regarding the dentistry of children under the age of 10 had been noted and the Headteachers at Birchington and St Nicholas Primary Schools had expressed an interest in trialling the supply of toothbrushes and toothpaste to their students. Discussions were in progress with the dental companies to sponsor the initiative.

b) **District Councillor Abi Smith** was encouraged by the appointment of new Executives at TDC which was a positive step forward. A motion to consider a moratorium on larger housing developments had been included on the Cabinet agenda for consideration and would be debated at the Full Council Meeting in October.

Cllr Abi-Leigh Barlow informed the meeting she had been working on a research paper to study how building on agricultural land impacts psychologically on residents. The paper is in its early stages but was encouraging to hear.

c) **Ward Police Officer – PC Beth Ninnim** met with the Chair prior to the meeting. It was agreed that a day would be arranged to monitor and take action on concerns in the Parish, for example, Speedwatch, prohibited vehicles, parking etc. PC Ninnim would forward convenient dates to the Chair, and all Councillors were asked to assist where possible. PC Ninnim advised she was aware of the issues with joyriders at Columbus Avenue, and suggested any issues should be reported using 101.

10/23-24 CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED CLOSURE OF ST MILDRED'S CHURCH

Rev Mark Ham was invited to speak to the meeting and outlined the case for the closure of St Mildred's Church, Acol. The PCC concluded that because of the ongoing financial pressures and the high cost backlog maintenance works required at the Church the Parish did not have sufficient funds to cover these costs nor would have the potential to in the foreseeable future.

The Parish has arrears in its payment of Parish Share (used to fund the costs of ministry & mission, including paying for Parish Priests, safeguarding, training, accommodation, and other associated costs) to the Diocese of Canterbury. Arrears from 2019 to 2022 total £70,805 and could increase to over £90,000 by 31 December 2023. A position which is unsustainable.

Although the closure programme may cause upset and distress, and there may be some legal complexities to remedy and overcome, it will sustain the future viability of the Parish.

After the Consultation exercise has concluded, it will, following the development and approval of a business case, plan to reinvest sale proceeds in to All Saints Church to provide a reinvigorated and refreshed worship space and community hub for local communities to use and enjoy.

It was confirmed there could be a restrictive covenant applied to the sale of the building if necessary.

The consultation closes on 30th October 2023 at 12 noon with a public Consultation meeting to be held on Wednesday 20th September 2023 at 7pm at Quex Hall, Birchington CEP School.

Cllr Butterworth expressed her willingness to help capture residents' views and gauge opinion on the closure.

The Parish Council were handed a copy of the consultation document which would be available for residents to view.

11/23-24 HIGHWAYS

a) Speedwatch – All Parish Councillors would be involved in a monthly programme of Speedwatch sessions to monitor both speed and breaches of vehicle weight limit in the Village. A schedule would be published on the website in due course.

b) 7.5 tonne weight limit – data was being collected regarding overweight vehicles travelling through the Village, and passed on to the relevant bodies.

c) Footpath to Quex – As discussed under item 8.

d) Street Cleansing, litter, fly-tipping – As discussed under item 7.

e) Highways Improvement Plan – A meeting would be arranged with the Clerk to discuss this further.

12/23-24 FINANCE

a) It was agreed that Cllrs Corby, Gavin Winpenny and Wendy Winpenny would inspect the receipts and payments as listed in the schedule of payments for each meeting.

b) The Clerk advised it was best practice to approve monthly bank reconciliations at each meeting. It was agreed that Cllrs Corby, Gavin Winpenny and Wendy Winpenny would inspect the banking statements against the cash book and sign the Reconciliations accordingly.

c) The Clerk had circulated the quarterly budget update to the Parish Councillors prior to the meeting. This was noted and no further comments made.

d) The Chair advised the current email hosting platform was with Ionos at a cost of £2 + VAT per month. Additionally there is an annual cost of £10 + VAT for the domain name – www.acolparishcouncil.org.uk. The total cost equalling £34 + VAT. The Chair explained he had paid the costs to maintain this service from his person account and proposed therefore that he was reimbursed and a direct debit was set up from the Parish Council bank account.

RESOLVED: To approve the reimbursement of costs paid to date, to the Chair, evidenced by invoices and for future payments to be made by direct debit direct from the Parish Council Account. Proposed: Cllr Gavin Winpenny, Seconded: Cllr Corby.

e) The Chair confirmed the website was currently hosted by Hugofox free of charge to date, however, they were now introducing a tiered level service charge for the hosting platform. The basic level starting at £9.99 + VAT per month which did not include the planning tracker service. It was considered that Hugofox meets the needs of the Parish Council and is easy to maintain, therefore, with no competitive alternative, it was proposed to approve the continuation of the website hosting on a basic level service. The additional costs would be included within the next budget.

RESOLVED: To approve the continuation of Hugofox website hosting platform on a basic level of service at £9.99 + VAT per month. Proposed: Cllr Gavin Winpenny, Seconded: Cllr Corby.

f) The Chair advised that following the previous meeting where it had been agreed to set up an online survey to canvass resident's views on the adoption of the BT telephone kiosk, in the absence of a free alternative, he had personally subscribed to an online survey service. It was therefore proposed that the Chair was reimbursed for the costs incurred with the survey, evidenced by invoices.

RESOLVED: To approve the reimbursement of £24 to the Chairman for costs incurred with the online survey. Proposed: Cllr Butterworth, Seconded: Cllr Wendy Winpenny.

g) Following the recent election of four new Parish Councillors and one Co-option, it was considered essential that training was provided to support their appointment as representatives of the community. The Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) regularly run courses for new Councillors, including Dynamic Councillor and Introduction to Planning, which were fundamental training sessions for new Parish Councillors. It was proposed that a budget of £2500 was considered for future training, and the Chairman was reimbursed £180 which was paid personally to fund

the training of three Councillors on the Dynamic Councillor Course, prior to the transfer of account to the online banking facility.

RESOLVED: To approve the budget of £2500 for training, with outstanding costs being met from reserves for the current financial year. To approve the reimbursement of £180 to the Chairman for costs paid to date, evidenced by invoices. Proposed: Cllr Steel, Seconded: Cllr Wendy Winpenny.

h) Prior to the May 2023 elections, the Parish Council utilised an account that was linked to the business account of a former Councillor. Following advice from KALC, it was considered appropriate to open a current and instant access savings account with Unity Trust. It was proposed to retrospectively approve the transfer of banking facility to Unity Trust which would incur a monthly service charge of £6 + VAT, with outstanding costs being met from reserves.

RESOLVED: To retrospectively approve the transfer of banking facility to Unity Trust Bank, noting the monthly service charge of £6 + VAT per month. Proposed: Cllr Butterworth, Seconded: Cllr Corby.

i) Following the retirement of the former Clerk, in recruiting an appropriately experienced person to the vacancy, Councillors reviewed remuneration to ensure it was matched by similar authorities. It was considered an increase in annual budget from £2800 to £4000 was necessary. Similarly, to bring payroll duties in line with other local councils, it was suggested that the employee HMRC PAYE reporting was outsourced to an appropriate company. It was proposed that the increased salary costs were retrospectively approved, together with the outsourcing of the payroll HMRC duties accordingly.

RESOLVED: To retrospectively approve the increased salary costs and note the additional costs for the current financial year to be met by reserves. To approve the outsourcing of payroll duties to an appropriate company at a cost of no more than approximately £150 per year. Proposed: Cllr Wendy Winpenny, Seconded: Cllr Corby.

j) It was considered that the CCTV cameras were essential for the safety and security of the Parish. Due to the annual maintenance contract being an unjustifiable expenditure, it was considered unnecessary. Therefore, the Parish Council were subject to the standard call-out charges by Sunstone. Following a system failure, the CCTV was in need of repair and considered to be urgent. It was therefore proposed that the essential work was carried out at an approximate cost of £300 with the budget overspend being met from reserves. Councillors were also asked to approve the continuation of the policy established by the former Parish Council, to pay for maintenance on an ad-hoc basis.

RESOLVED: To approve the CCTV repair costs, noting the budget overspend to be met by reserves. To approve the continuation of maintenance being provided on an ad-hoc basis. Proposed: Cllr Corby, Seconded: Cllr Gavin Winpenny.

13/23-24 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

- A resident and former Councillor advised that the BT telephone kiosk had been purchased by the Parish Council from BT in 2009. Discussion took place with regard to the use of the telephone as an emergency landline. Evidence suggested the telephone had not been used for at least four years which had been confirmed by BT. It was emphasised that following the public consultation, the telephone would be disconnected and the kiosk would be adopted for an alternative purpose.

A resident suggested it was repurposed as an emergency telephone specifically dedicated for 999 calls and would make enquiries with regard to the costs involved with this.

Following much discussion, it was agreed that a consultation with the community would be undertaken and suggestions would be welcomed for the repurposing of the community asset.

14/23-24 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is to be held on Thursday 26th October, 7:30pm, Acol Village Hall

The meeting was closed by the Chair at 21:00hrs.