

Minutes of the Monthly Council Meeting of Lower Halstow Parish Council held in the Memorial Hall at 7.00 pm on Tuesday 6th December 2022.

Present: Cllrs: K Howard-Challis (Chair); M Szabo (Vice-chair); T Portman; A Smith and Mrs A I Smith (Clerk.)

In attendance: 3 members of the public

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from the PCSO and Cllr Groves.

2. Declarations of Pecuniary or Non Pecuniary Interest

None.

3. Public Session

It was raised that a lot of the kerbs around the village are choked up with leaves and could Swale Borough Council be contacted to find out if they will come to clear them to prevent possible problems.

4. Visitors:

a. KCC

No report

b. SBC – report received from Cllr Woodford

Cost of Living Support There are several different schemes ongoing at the moment, please see details below. I would be grateful if these could be shared with residents so we have the best chance possible of reaching those in need.

There is £30,000 of funding available to support Swale residents in the Cost of Living Crisis, we are extremely keen to ensure that this funding is reaching the most vulnerable households. The Cost of Living Fund is now open for applications:

Applications should be made via the application form found on SBC website.

Completed applications along with any supporting documentation, including costings should be emailed tocostofliving@swale.gov.uk First round of scoring will be completed by the project group WC 12th December (date to be confirmed)

Depending on the outcome of the first round of scoring, another round will be completed in January if there are any available funds left

Utility Bills Support – if you know of any residents that are struggling to pay utility bills and aren't on a pre-paid meter, they can now apply for support. This latest update to the Household Support Fund means that they can apply for a voucher for billed gas, electric and water bills by visiting www.children-families.org/household-support-fund.html They can also apply for vouchers for pre-paid meter.

Winter Warmth Grant - provides up to £5,000 towards the cost of repairing or replacing heating systems or installing insulation if you: are over 65 (or under 65 in certain circumstances), have long term health problems or a disability which makes you vulnerable to the cold.

Alternative Fuel Support – The Western Area Committee members requested that officers research relevant charities who could assist households who use alternative fuels in the Western area with their energy costs as part of their response to the cost-of-living crisis. Swale Borough Council (SBC) provide a Fuel and Water Home Advisor Service, managed by Swale Charity Children and Families. One of the services provided by the Advisor is to give households advice on ways to reduce their use of energy and thereby reduce costs. As part of the service, energy efficient packs can be given out which contain things like radiator reflectors, draft excluders, LED light bulbs and timers etc. The content of the packs is tailored to the needs of the household. At the December meeting the committee agreed to allocate funds of just over £4000 to the SBC Fuel & Water Home Advisor Service via the charity Children and Families so that the Advisor can provide energy efficient packs to households requesting assistance with reducing their energy costs in Western area.

Planning-Land to The West of Bobbing Sittingbourne Kent ME9 8QL.

Outline application (all matters reserved except for access) for a mixed used development comprising up to 2,500 dwellings, a 4.99ha commercial employment zone including doctors' surgery, a 4.2ha sports hub, primary school, community facilities, local retail provision, public open space, children's play areas and associated parking, servicing, utilities, footpath and cycle links, drainage, ground and other infrastructure. The application which has been on the horizon for some time has now been submitted. Bobbing PC are hopefully going to be arranging a meeting for residents looking to form a group to oppose this, it may be of interest to residents in Lower Halstow as this will also affect them.

Consultation on Draft Budget

You may have seen the consultation go out on the SBC website and communication on Facebook etc. One of the main points to highlight for Parishes will be the Parish Footway Lighting Grant. You will have received the notification from the Director of Resources advising of changes to the above. Allocations for 2023/24 and 2024/25 will be reduced with the grant ceasing in 2025/26. Unfortunately, with financial pressures on Swale, as with all Councils and with inflations at around 9%, we are limited to an increase of just 2.99% in Council Tax income. We have also seen a massive reduction in the Government grant, this is just over £120,000 - down from £4 million in 2014. These changes to Grant funding are really seeming unavoidable at this stage but please do respond to the consultation so your views can be heard.

c. **PCSO**

The Parish Council received the following report from the PCSO:

Crimes of note:

- 12/11/22 – The Street – Cyclist knocked off his bike whilst riding along the street. The driver got out of his vehicle and then made threats to hit the cyclist. A crime report was taken and is currently under investigation.

Anti-social behaviour and other incidents of note:

- 30/11/22 – Sheerness Road – Reports of males lamping in the field. Officers attended and located the males. Males were searched, details were taken, and warnings given.

- 02/12/22 – Crouch Hill Close – males going house to house offering to do work to people's roofs. No further reports made.

- 04/12/22 – Vicarage Lane – reports of males poaching in field. Officers contacted the informant.

d. **Friends of the Brickfields**

There will be work parties on the second Sunday of the month.

5. To resolve the Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 4th October

- a) It was resolved that the Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 1st November 2022 Parish Council meeting are a correct record and were signed accordingly.

6. To discuss and agree response (if any) for the following Planning Application:

Application: 22/505245/SUB Officer: William Allwood Address: Little Callum Farm Basser Hill Lower Halstow Kent ME9 7TY Proposal: Submission of details pursuant to conditions 9 (Manure Storage and Disposal Details) and 29 (Cycle Park Details) of application 22/501873/OUT.

The Parish Council agreed not to comment on this application.

7. Any applications received between producing the agenda and this meeting.

None received.

8. Finance

a) National Salary Award

It was agreed to accept the new pay scales applicable from 1 April 2022 and retrospectively applied to 1 April 2022.

Proposed by Cllr Howard-Challis, seconded by Cllr Szabo and agreed unanimously.

- b) Discuss and agree budget for coming financial year.

The budget for the financial year 2023/24 was considered and agreed. Proposed by Cllr Howard-Challis and seconded by Cllr Szabo.

- c) Quote for a new noticeboard at The Green
Deferred to the next meeting.
- d) Quote for renovation of Village Sign
The sign will need to be taken down and transported to the workshop for renovation. The Clerk will make enquiries regarding transportation. The quote for the renovation work was accepted.
Action: Clerk
- e) Quote for play area maintenance
The Parish Council agreed to accept the quote received. Proposed by Cllr Howard-Challis and seconded by Cllr Smith. It was also agreed to look into the possibility of an annual maintenance contract for the play area.
Action: Clerk

9. To receive reports on the following:

- a) Parks, Leisure and Planning:
No report
- b) Footpaths, hedges, Burial Ground and allotments:
Cllr Portman has had some compliance regarding the cutting of hedges in response to letters that were sent. There are some that will need to be chased again. Cllr Portman will continue to monitor the hedges around the village.
Action: Cllr Portman
- c) Parish Highways Plan
Nothing has been received from highways regarding any progress on the 20mph zone. The Clerk will chase for an update.
Action: Clerk
- d) Brickfields and the Seawall.
Cllr Portman read an extract of the following letter to the meeting received from Sally Harvey, Area Director for the Environment Agency via Gordon Henderson:

Dear Gordon

Re: Sea Wall Works, Lower Halstow

Thank you for your correspondence dated 7 November 2022 regarding the sea wall works at Lower Halstow. We understand the concerns of the Parish Council and will do our best to begin works to the sea wall at Lower Halstow as soon as we have all the necessary permissions in place. We will monitor the wall over the winter and will ensure that the Parish Council, as the landowner, is kept up to date with our plans as they progress. It is worth explaining the context of the works at this location as it affects the longer term situation at this location. Following an economic, environmental and technical appraisal of the whole Medway Estuary and Swale (MEAS) strategy area, the strategy recommended a Hold the Line (HTL) policy for the area in front of Lower Halstow village. This means that, subject to funds being available, the Environment Agency can justify continuing to spend public money to maintain the defences here. However, the work done for the strategy showed that, under government's Treasury rules, we cannot justify continuing to invest public money to maintain and improve the separate section of defences in front of the Brickfields, including the area that is currently eroding. As a result, the strategy recommended the implementation of No Active Intervention (NAI) here. That being said, we need to carry out further work to understand the extent of the proposed defence works for Lower Halstow village and the detailed impacts of implementing NAI at the Brickfields. Therefore, as this section of defence is at risk of collapse, the Environment Agency has approved funding for a short-term "rip rap" (armourstone) repair to the Brickfields frontage. This will give us time to carry out these investigations, which we anticipate will be from 2025 onwards. These short term repairs are not a permanent fix, and the NAI policy is

likely to be implemented in the future, depending on the results of future investigations. That would not prevent Lower Halstow Parish Council, as the landowner, from carrying out works to the defence in the future, but the Environment Agency will not be able to access Flood Defence Grant in Aid funding to assist. Funding for the current repairs was approved in September 2022 and since then we have been working on the design of the repair with our contractors as well as ensuring we have the necessary permissions and approvals in place before we commence. The site is located adjacent to the Medway Estuary and Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA), and Ramsar sites as well as a Marine Conservation Zone. This means we are required to undertake a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) to determine whether the project is likely to significantly affect the features of the designated sites. Due to the historic and archaeological interest at the site, an archaeological assessment is also required. We have commissioned consultants to carry out this work but have experienced some delays due to the limited availability of suitable consultants. These assessments are now underway, and we will seek approval from Natural England and the Kent County Council Archaeologist in due course. We are working hard with our contractors to deliver the seawall repair works to The Brickfields, Lower Halstow as soon as possible. We will monitor the seawall over the winter and will ensure that the Parish Council are kept up to date with the plans as they progress. If you would like to discuss these matters further, please do not hesitate to contact me at sally.harvey@environment-agency.gov.uk. Yours sincerely Sally Harvey Area Director – Kent, South London and East Sussex

Cllr Portman will write back to request the monitoring reports and ask further questions.

10. To receive the Clerk's report:

The payments received this month for the car park totals £100.00. All the allotments have been rented for the next season, with the exception of three plots, one at the Memorial Hall site and two at Tutt's. Chase letters have been hand delivered today and if payment is not received these allotments will be advertised for rent.

I am awaiting receipt of a contract for another barge to berth at the dock, but due to the postal disruption, this has not yet been received.

The bank balance as at 30 November 2022 was £73,135.18

It was agreed that Cllrs Howard-Challis and Szabo will authorise the payments, as per the payment list below, via internet banking.

11. Items for information only:

It was noted with great sadness that former Councillor Tricia Carr has passed away.

- a) Items for the Village News and website: To say that the Village Sign will be removed for renovation shortly.
- b) To receive agenda items for next meeting:
 - Noticeboard for The Green
 - Review of the Wharf Terms & Conditions and Wharf Rates

The meeting closed at 19.47pm

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 3rd January 2023

Payments October 2022

Payee	Description	Gross Amount £	VAT £	Cheque No/Bank Payment
DCK Payroll	Payroll Services Invoice:	36.00	6.00	268470654
Mr M Tidy	Village Cleaning	152.00		674004120
Mrs A I Smith	Clerk's Salary and Expenses 25 th December 2022	970.76		326262863
KALC	Burial Law and Management Workshop (T Portman) Invoice: 5126488809	72.00	12.00	530000126
Lower Halstow Memorial Hall Trust Fund	Hall Hire 4 th October 2022 Invoice 77	21.25		684131497
Peter Froggatt	Reimbursement for Poppy Wreaths x 2	40.00		427414520
Business Stream	Water Services	38.74		953019088

Multipay Direct Debit - 09/12/22

£3.00

EDF – Direct Debit - 16/12/22

£0.36 credit

Date:

Signed:

**Cllr. K Howard-Challis
Chair**