

SHOREHAM

Parish Clerk:

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COUNCIL

MINUTES of a MEETING of SHOREHAM PARISH COUNCIL

at Shoreham Village Hall on 4th September 2019 from 7:30pm

Present: Jonathan Histed (in the Chair)
M Cockburn, B Jeffery, N Powell

Also Present: 34 members of the public
County Councillor Roger Gough
District Councillor Irene Roy

Clerk: Sarah Moon

Question Time: John Saynor, Co Chair of the Shoreham Society gave the following report.

1. John Saynor stated that he would be representing the Shoreham Society at the forthcoming hearings of the Sevenoaks District Council Local Plan and asked whether the Parish Council would also like him to represent it. The Parish Council agreed that they would be happy for him to do so and thanked him for volunteering as the comments it made on the plan during the consultation period were in line with those of the Shoreham Society.
2. The Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership was launched on September 1st. A Community Rail Partnership is a national scheme, which aims to promote leisure travel on rural railways as well as economic development throughout the areas they serve. The Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership has been set up between Sevenoaks and Swanley and has the backing of all town and parish councils along the line (Sevenoaks, Otford, Shoreham, Eynsford and Swanley). Its main objective is to encourage day trippers to the area to use the train. John Saynor reported that he had been attending the steering groups and wished to update Parish Council about it. There is a small budget for part time member of staff and minor improvements to stations and the DVCRP are asking Shoreham Parish Council for a small contribution of £100 a year for this (see item 12c).
3. Another specific aim of the DVCRP is station adoption. This allows individuals to adopt a station in order to improve its appearance. This may involve planting flowers and plants, putting up notices and anything which would improve the overall appearance of the station. Anyone interested in adopting Shoreham Station should attend a short training course, which will allow them to carry out the work. This work is undertaken on a voluntary basis and MUST be low cost. Ideas for improvements would also be welcomed and should be relayed either to the Shoreham Society or to the Parish Council. The Parish Council were fully supportive of this initiative and the Chairman expressed his thanks accordingly.

Another member of the public emphasised the importance of Facebook as a useful forum for debate and requested that new parish councillors join. The Chairman explained that individual members could not enter debate via this

forum as the Council only exists when it meets as a body and therefore decisions can only be taken at meeting. The Clerk pointed out however that any member can answer questions of a factual nature and this should be encouraged. The Chairman thanked the member of the public for posting all that she does on Facebook – it is very beneficial to the whole community.

1. Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Blamey, Collins, Hibbins and Sheward and from District Councillor John Edwards-Winser.
2. There were no disclosures of interest.
3. The minutes of the meetings held on Wednesday 3rd July 2019 (copies previously distributed) were received and signed by the Chairman.

4. **District/County Councillor Reports**
District Councillor

The District Councillor explained how she has been heavily involved in the traffic/parking issues in Otford and lots of initiatives are now in the pipeline. Shoreham has problems with speeding and parking and Cllr Roy has volunteered to help drive forward any schemes we decide to progress. She stated that Otford, like Shoreham, is also a conservation village and so speed bumps, traffic islands etc are not always appropriate measures to reduce speed. There are however, several psychological measures which could be used. For instance, a bend can be created in wider roads by use of planting or road surfaces can be changed to slow down traffic. Cllr Roy urged residents to report any accidents to the Parish Council. At present, only accidents where the emergency services are called out are included in crash data. If more accident data can be gathered, it will strengthen the case for reducing the speed limit/introducing traffic calming measures.

County Councillor

The County Councillor stated that he has been liaising with Go Coach and KCC regarding the planned discontinuation of the 421 bus service (see item 9 below).

He also reported that he has been taking up issues affecting the Highway with regard to the development of the Kingsdown Meadow park home site at Romney Street.

Finally, he is hoping to call a meeting soon at Well Hill to discuss the broadband situation.

5. **Chairman's Report**

There was no separate report from the Chairman, who confirmed he would give his update as part of agenda item 7.

6. **Report from the Clerk**

Due to lack of time, the Clerk was unable to give her report, however, she agreed to update members via email.

7. **Walnut Tree Trust**

Following a notice in September's Gazette regarding the proposed sale of the Walnut Tree Cottages and barn and the plans for the released funds, the Chair confirmed that he, Cllr Jeffery and the Clerk had met with two of the trustees to discuss whether an alternative plan could be considered. The Trustees stated that they had spent several years in discussion with the Charities Commission in order to move their plan forward and provided the Clerk with a statement, to be read out at the Parish Council meeting (see Appendix A).

Having listened to and considered the statement, the Parish Council were unanimous in their view that this plan was not in the best interests of the village.

Firstly, it would impact the two families who currently live in the cottages. These tenants have been informally served notice and will eventually be evicted once the cottages are put up for sale on the open market. Rents have been extremely low for some time, which has clearly contributed to the lack of income the trust has received. The 'Scheme', which defines the original purpose of the Trust, states that the Trust 'must not let the property for less than the best rent obtainable'. This has not been adhered to. Indeed, the current tenants have stated that they have offered to pay more rent in order to save their homes but these requests were refused by the Trustees.

Secondly, the Trust's proposal would have a negative impact on the whole village. The three cottages and the adjacent outbuildings form a beautiful aspect at the centre of the village and protecting this view was the original purpose of the trust. To privately sell the cottages, demolish the outbuildings, and build three new units adjacent to the cottages would dramatically alter the street scene in the conservation area and have a negative impact on the centre of the village. It must be noted all of these buildings are listed and therefore they should be restored, protected and used rather than demolished.

Moreover, the Trustees stated in their letter to the Charities Commission that they could not afford to maintain the properties and have no way of obtaining funds. As already stated, the rents have been significantly below the market rate for some time and one of the cottages is currently vacant, which is generating no rental income. Allowing the outbuildings to fall into such a state of disrepair has also lead to a reduction in income. The barn had previously been rented by the shop and used for storage and this could have continued had the building been adequately maintained. Selling the cottages and building new housing units would inevitably involve substantial transactional costs, all of which could be avoided if the buildings are retained and let out for sensible sums. Finally, the Trust has spent almost £50,000 on professional fees in an attempt to change the 'Scheme' with the Charities Commission in order to allow their proposal to go ahead. Clearly this money could have been spent on maintenance of the buildings.

The Trustees expect their plans to be finalised by October at which point they intend to have a public consultation.

Whilst the Parish Council applauds the fact that the Trustees have put their plan in the public domain, they would also request that they listen to what is being said and remain open to alternative ways forward.

Having outlined the Parish Council's views, the Chair then asked the members of the public present if anyone was in favour of the Trustees' plans. Nobody was and everyone agreed that alternative options should be explored.

It was therefore RESOLVED that the Clerk write to the Trustees to request a meeting with them to offer help with administrative and professional advice, fundraising, business advice and property advice and to endeavour to assist them in finding a way forward, without carrying out that which they decided to do three years ago.

It was also RESOLVED that the Parish Council write to the Charities Commission asking them to liaise with the Trustees given this is of public interest and the buildings the Trust look after are of particular importance to the village and the Conservation Area in which they are situated.

The Chair also advised members of the public to write to both the Trustees and the Charities Commission with their personal views on the matter.

8. **Shoreham Station**

Alan Williams gave an update on the recent developments regarding the campaign to install step free access at Shoreham Station. Mr Williams is part of a community working group who have been in discussions with the train companies and Network Rail to assess the feasibility of installing a ramp or lift onto the London bound platform. The group encouraged members of the community to fill in an on-line survey requesting step free access and about 10% of

Shoreham households did this. As the level of response was so high (more than the second highest, which was Brighton), Govia Thameslink agreed to investigate further and are trying to prioritise Shoreham Station. A feasibility study will be undertaken in the near future and, if it is proved possible to install step free access, then fundraising will commence. There are several sources of funding such as CIL and Department of Transport grants. Mr Williams asked whether the working group could state the Parish Council's support in any correspondence. The Parish Council agreed that this would be fine and they would be happy to offer assistance in any way they could, particularly with requests for funding.

9. **Traffic and Parking**

1) Bus Service

Following the news that the 421 bus service will be discontinued in November, the Clerk confirmed that she had spoken to Go Coach and gave the following update:

- Apart from the morning and afternoon school runs, the service is not well used and it is therefore not financially viable to continue running it during the day.
- Notwithstanding the financial viability, bus drivers often find it difficult to navigate and access the village due to parked cars/delivery vans obstructing the route. This has caused damage to the buses.
- Go Coach confirmed that in order to compensate for the discontinuation of the bus service, a new taxi bus service would be introduced early next year. Plans for this have not yet been finalised but it is likely that this would consist of a bookable minibus, which would pick residents up from their homes or from various points around the village. The vehicles used would be suitable for wheelchairs. They did not yet know whether bus pass concessions would be valid on this method of transport or whether a small charge of around £1.50 per journey would be levied.

County Councillor Roger Gough confirmed that the 421 route is subsidised by KCC and they would therefore be conducting their own checks on the service in terms of its usage to ascertain whether it is indeed unviable. He also confirmed that he would take up the issue with the KCC officer responsible and also with Go Coach. Members of the audience did not agree that the service was underused. Indeed, of the 34 members of the public present, around half had attended the meeting in order to lobby for a continuation of the bus service, some representing other bus users who were not able to attend. It was suggested that perhaps changing the route in order to be able to better navigate the village could be considered. They also requested that if a taxi bus service were to replace the bus service then the current concessions used on the buses should also be applied to any new scheme.

It was RESOLVED that the Clerk write to Go Coach, echoing the sentiments of the public at the meeting and endeavouring to influence them to avoid discontinuing the service.

2) Traffic and Parking

Due to time constraints and the length of time required to debate the traffic and parking situation in the village it was RESOLVED to defer this item until the October meeting.

10. **Consultations**

The following consultations are now open to the public and the Chairman implored members of the council as well as members of the audience to participate in these.

- i. Draft Drainage and Planning Policy Statement – deadline 30th September
- ii. Draft Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy Consultation – 23rd September
- iii. Draft Kent and Medway Housing Strategy – deadline 9th September (extended until 30th September)

11. **Village Sign**

At the Parish Council meeting held on 6th February 2019, it was resolved to install a decorative village sign to serve as a focal point in the village. Several letters of objection had

been received regarding this matter although the majority of feedback was very positive. It was subsequently decided to form a working party, who would make recommendations on how to move this project forward and it was agreed that the sign would be designed by way of a competition. Cllr Powell showed the Parish Council a leaflet which he had produced, inviting people come up with a design and explaining the reasons behind the competition. Entries will be judged by the Parish Council and the winning entry will be professionally made and installed on the High Street. An application will be made to the National Lottery to fund this project.

A motion to extend the meeting past 10.00pm was agreed.

Copy for the leaflet was approved by the Parish Council and it was RESOLVED to distribute it to all households throughout the parish.

12. Correspondence/Information

- a) A cheque for the sum of £200 has been received from the Shoreham Open Gardens Safari in respect of seating planned for the Centenary Wood.
- b) A request for financial assistance has been received from Citizens Advice North and West Kent but due to time constraints it was agreed to defer this until a later meeting.
- c) A request for a donation of £100 has been received from the new Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership and, following John Saynor's report on the scheme, the Parish Council agreed to make this contribution.
- d) The July 2019 edition of 'The Clerk' magazine has been received.
- e) Issue 3 of the 'Allotment and Leisure Gardener' magazine has been received.
- f) The Summer 2019 edition of the CPRE's 'Countryside Voice' magazine has been received.

13. Financial Matters

Accounts/Payments: The schedule of payments was authorised.

14. Dates of next meetings (all starting at 7:30pm unless otherwise stated)

- a) Planning/Finance Meeting : Wednesday 18th September 2019, Shoreham Village Hall
- b) Planning/Council Meeting : Wednesday 2nd October 2019, St Marys Church Hall, Woodlands
- c) Planning/Amenities : Wednesday 16th October 2019, Shoreham Village Hall

Sarah Moon, Clerk to Shoreham Parish Council

The meeting closed at 10.02pm
Sarah Moon, Clerk to Shoreham Parish Council

Appendix A

Statement to Shoreham Parish Council by the Trustees of the Walnut Tree Trust

Over a number of decades, successive trustees have always taken their responsibilities to their tenants seriously. Currently we are now down to only two tenants who have lived in the cottages for at least 15 years each.

The Trust has continued thanks to the good intentions of its trustees, who have no material interest in the Trust. The Trust's primary purpose has never been to act as low-cost housing landlords. Its primary purpose is to "preserve and maintain the cottages".

The present trustees became dissatisfied with modest state of our finances and the somewhat directionless progress the Trust had been making. From 2016, the trustees began to formulate a strategy to concentrate the Trust's aims on improving the stock of its low-cost housing, in full recognition that the three cottages have been put to inappropriate use Since September 2016 we have:

- *Introduced an annual rental escalator based on CPI + 0.5% + £2 per week*
- *Commissioned structural surveys of the derelict outbuildings – the barn, the old slaughterhouse, and the garage in front of No 29. These surveys concluded that trying to preserve these structures would be throwing good money after bad; furthermore, none of these buildings is subject to the "preservation" object in the Charity Commission's Scheme for the Trust*
- *Organised a tender process for three separate firms of architects, to come up with appropriate ideas for better utilisation of the Trust's land and buildings*
- *Appointed a full professional team to work with the trustees on a feasibility study for the conversion of the barn into a residential dwelling, and the building of three low-cost housing units*
- *Held a pre-application meeting with SDC planners in Aug 2017 to help to define the art of the possible for this site with multiple considerations*
- *Engaged a firm of solicitors, with specialist charity expertise, worked with them and the Charity Commission to look at all our options considering the restraints imposed on us by our charitable status*
- *Undertaken a limited refurbishment programme for the three cottages.*

Given the length of time it has taken to get near to a final resolution of our legal and practical issues, the Trustees consider they have acted in strict adherence to the parameters our advisers have set out for us.

Ultimately, the Walnut Tree Trust never had the purpose of a low-cost housing provider, and the present Trustees consider that their proposals to (i) seek detailed planning consent for the construction of a new dwelling on the barn site, (ii) the sale of the three listed cottages to private buyers, and (iii) the proposed construction of replacement, professionally managed low-cost housing units within the village.

The trustees look forward to further dialogue with the wider community during our planned consultation exercise. The trustees will not forsake their commitment to low-cost housing, and believe there could be significant benefits to the wider community from careful management of this potentially large endowment through the sale of the cottages.

The trustees of Walnut Tree Trust
04/09/2019