

Westwell Parish Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Parish Council

Held on Wednesday 17th May 2023 at 6.30pm at Westwell Parish Hall

1. Present and Apologies

Cllrs Drury, Bainbridge, Lister, Hutchinson, Butcher, Richards, Farrington, Bartlett and Wyatt.

Acting Clerk – Sonia Young

17 members of the public were present.

2. Declarations of Interest

None

3. Election of officers

3.1 Election of chair

Cllr Tessa Wyatt proposed Cllr Christine Drury as chair.

Cllr Clive Bainbridge seconded.

All in agreement.

Cllr Christine Drury duly elected as chair.

3.2 Election of Vice-Chair

Chair Christine Drury proposed Cllr Clive Bainbridge as Vice-Chair.

Cllr Ron Butcher seconded.

All in agreement.

Cllr Clive Bainbridge duly elected as Vice-Chair.

3.3 Election of Committee members and Representatives

Chair Christine Drury proposed that all Cllrs continue in the responsibilities as held by them under the previous council and roll their work forwards on the:

Staffing Committee; Westwell Eye Working Group; Grievance and Complaints Committee

As Representatives for: Parish Hall Management Committee; KALC, Highways, Tree Wardens, Community Watch; Tarmac Consultative Committee.

As Councillors with responsibility for verification of Bank reconciliations, Wheel Working Group.

Seconded: Cllr Ron Butcher.

All in agreement.

4. Appointment of new Parish Clerk

Chair Christine Drury proposed the appointment of Sonia Young as Westwell Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer following a successful interview process and the recommendation of appointment by the Staffing Committee of the former Westwell Parish Council.

Seconded: Cllr Tessa Wyatt.

All in agreement.

Sonia Young accepted the appointment pending confirmation of final contract and terms.

5. Declarations of Acceptance of Office

The Clerk accepted the signed Declarations of Acceptance of Office from all 9 elected Councillors.

Action: Clerk to submit to Ashford Borough Council Elections Officer Carolann Bellringer.

6. Appointment of the Internal Auditor

The internal auditor will review and report to the Council via the council's AGAR whether its systems of financial and other internal controls over its activities and operating procedures are effective. The internal audit function must be independent from the management of financial controls and procedures of the Council which are the subject of review. The internal auditor will not have any involvement in the financial decision making, management or control of the Council.

Chair Christine Drury proposed the appointment of David Burke as internal auditor for the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2022-23. She said that Mr Burke had confirmed that work for WPC as Internal Auditor would be on a Pro Bono basis.

Seconded: Cllr Tim Lister.

All in agreement.

7. Minutes of the meetings held on 8th March and 5th April 2023

Chair Christine Drury proposed the acceptance of both sets of minutes.

Seconded: Cllr Tessa Wyatt.

All in agreement. Cllr Tony Bartlett abstained from voting on the 5th April meeting as he was not present at the 5th April meeting.

8. Financial report**8.1 Review of the Council's Risk Register**

Register circulated to all Cllrs in advance of the meeting.

Chair Christine Drury proposed approval.

Seconded: Vice-chair Clive Bainbridge

All in agreement.

8.2 Approval of the Annual Governance Statement 2022-2023 (page 4 of the AGAR)

The Council considered and approved the statement as read out by Chair Christine Drury. The Chair and the Clerk signed and dated the document on behalf of the Council.

8.3 Section 2 Accounting Statements 2022-2023 for the year ending 31st March 2023.

The council considered and approved the accounting statements and supporting documents as provided by the former clerk Nicky Ideson who had, prior to the meeting, signed and dated Section 2 of the AGAR 2022-2023. These were read out by Chair Christine Drury. The Chair signed and dated the accounting statements on behalf of the Council.

Action: Former Clerk Nicky Ideson to submit all documentation to the external auditor Mazars.

8.4 Payments in accordance with the Budget

Receipts and Payments 08/03/23 – 17/05/23

| Payments | Gross | Net | VAT |
|---|--------------|------------|------------|
| N Ideson (salary Mar) inc back pay | 932.97 | | |
| N Ideson Expenses (Jan) | 35.65 | | |
| Woven Magic - Bunting | 237.60 | 198.00 | 39.60 |
| HiP- W gateway sign & SL 30 mph marking /painting | 16488.30 | | |
| Windsock Company - Flagpole | 750.80 | 591.00 | 124.80 |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| N Ideson (salary April) | 771.77 | | |
| N Ideson Expenses (April) | 49.90 | | |
| HMRC – Employers NIC | 27.94 | | |
| F Dwyer – Flagpole Installation | 1180.80 | 984.00 | 196.80 |
| ICO | 40.00 | | |
| Laptop & Software | 529.95 | | |

| Receipts | £ |
|----------------------------------|-------|
| | |
| Lloyds Bank interest (Feb & Mar) | 15.52 |

Balance (cheque and deposit accounts): £57519.85 at 31st March 2023

Balance (No 2 account): £3.44

Balance (Eye account): £2610.14

Cllrs noted the payments in accordance with the budget.

Cllr Ron Butcher proposed approval of payments as noted in accordance with the budget.

Seconded: Cllr Graham Hutchinson.

All in agreement.

8.5 To consider a headstone request

The design for the headstone of Donald MacDonald was reviewed by full council. It was agreed that the design fell within the specifications set out by WPC.

Cllr Graham Hutchinson proposed accept.

Seconded: Vice-chair Clive Bainbridge.

All in agreement.

9. Suspension of the meeting for a Public Forum

The chair closed the meeting for public debate at 7pm.

10. Public Forum

Public comment made on Item 11.1) further consideration of PA/2023/0283 Land adjacent to Holly House. The application had also been discussed at the 5th April 2023 meeting. Comment made as follows:

The owner of the land subject to the application PA/2023/0283 commented:

- the land proposed for development was not rural land and had been a garden for over 20 years.
- a highways consultant advised the mean average speed of cars through the village had been recorded at 26-27mph.
- the elevation of the proposed houses would be lower than Holly House.
- the proposed development was 87% sustainable based on current regulations and that door widths and allied adaptive features were designed to be sustainable over the lifetime of the occupier.
- a site visit had been undertaken by councillors.

Other public comment:

- traffic was slowed by the narrowness of the lane and the existing hedge abutting the proposed development; any proposed change to that width or reduction to the hedge would lead to increased speeds and safety concerns for other road users, including those reversing from their drives into faster moving traffic from properties opposite to the proposed development.
- the proposed development ignores the Local Plan and NPPF.
- the proposed development ignores the established Village Confines.
- the proposed development is within an area of AONB.
- support by WPC would give the green light to other potential housing development within Westwell and the Village Confines.
- difficult balance between providing for future generations and providing for the here and now and protecting what the village is now.

Chair Christine Drury encouraged all public present who had view on the planning item PA/2023/0283, to submit their comment to the ABC planning portal and confirmed that WPC has asked for the application to go to Planning Committee so that the decision-making process was open and transparent to all. The Chair reminded those present that WPC was a consultee and ABC was the deciding authority and confirmed that this application would test the policies within the Local Plan.

The Chair also confirmed that only Westwell centre had a defined 'confine' and it did not extend to the Parish areas of Sandyhurst Lane or Tutt Hill.

The chair re-opened the meeting at 7.59pm.

11. Planning

11.1 PA/2023/0283 Land adjacent to Holly House

Cllrs had taken on board all comment from the applicants and the public at a series of public meetings – a pre-application information event provided by the applicant at the Parish Council's request; and two open-forum sessions – one on 5th April and one as listed above. All were well-attended by residents. The issues revolved on the following points:

1. **Access** to the site, which is amenity land attached to Holly Cottage is on the main route of 4 into the village. There is no verge, a thick hedge on the site side runs up to the boundary of a house on a wooded site (Choblers) and there are houses close to the road on the facing side of the road. The road is used by all the usual vehicles; passing involves slowing down and giving way. The development would not only change character of the road, it would disrupt this intensive but currently manageable equilibrium, temporarily during construction and when the houses are occupied. The plans include a proposal to make a short section the lane visually less closed in and in practice easier to walk along by moving a section of the hedge into the site to recreate a verge that may have been there once when the lane was narrower.
2. **Topography.** The amenity land behind the hedge (the site) is at a slightly higher level than the road. This has raised concerns that if approved, the houses would be prominent and therefore intrusive. The parish council made a site visit and came to the view that if built the houses would be set on level ground some distance from the road. The roof heights would not be greater than Choblers or Holly Cottage. If the proposal to move the hedge were approved, it would be re-set on this higher ground.
3. **Sustainability.** The application is presented as sustainable building, exceeding standard building requirements and KCC have asked that they also be built to the lifetime standard M4(2) to help KCC Adult Social Care expectations. On the design and construction aspects of sustainability, three well-designed dwellings built to these sustainability standards could be a beneficial addition to the housing stock of the village. On other aspects of sustainability, any development in a small rural village presents a challenge in terms of access to services.
4. **Planning Policy.** Planning decisions are Plan-led and therefore need to follow the policies set out in the Ashford Local Plan 2030. This is not major development which is directed by policy SP1 to locations which are accessible and sustainable. Westwell is protected by being a village in the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The application classifies as a windfall development of three dwellings for which policy HOU3a applies. HOU3a specifies that development be within the built-up confines. The confines were drawn on defined criteria and most recently reviewed in 2019 including with a public consultation in the village. This site is outside the confines criteria and map, and therefore cannot be compliant with the Ashford 2030 Local Plan.
5. **Nutrient Neutrality** The village is within the Stour River catchment and therefore all new additional residential building is subject to the Stodmarsh mitigation requirements and approvals from Natural England and the Environment Agency.

Proposal to object: five councillors voted to object as the proposed development is outside the confines of the village and contrary to the existing Local Plan.

Proposal to approve: three councillors voted to approve the development as they considered it would be a good, well managed development of appropriate size, sustainability and proportion.
 Proposal: comment only. One councillor voted to comment only.
 Decision made by majority vote: **object**.

11.2 PA/2023/0653 and PA/2023/0579 Nash Court

This is a listed building and had this not been the case, WPC considered that it was likely that the items subject to the application - general refurbishment and an extension - would fall under the remit of permitted development and not require planning permission. It was considered by councillors that the proposed works were overdue and would respect the existing fabric of the building – if not improve on it in a few areas, such as the replacement of the plastic guttering to cast iron.

Chair Christine Drury proposed: **support**.

Seconded: Cllr Ron Butcher.

All in agreement.

11.3 PA/2023/Berries Mount, Gold Hill

This application is a variation of Condition 3 of approved plans 21/00700/AS to amend the internal layout and rear windows.

Chair Christine Drury proposed: **no objection**.

Seconded: Vice-chair Clive Bainbridge.

All in agreement.

11.4 98/00963/FP Swinford Cottage, The Street

Full Building regulations – no comment required.

12. Vote of thanks to outgoing Clerk

Chair Christine Drury gave a vote of thanks to outgoing Clerk Nicky Ideson for being a great Parish Clerk who had worked really hard, undertaken much training, proved very dedicated to the role and been extremely easy to work with.

13. Correspondence

All correspondence was circulated to Cllrs prior to the meeting. No comments made.

14. Other items

14.1KALC

Draft minutes were circulated prior to the meeting by Cllr Tony Bartlett.

14.2 Highways including HIP

Cllr Tim Lister will circulate the timescales for KCC Highways Consultation and the deadline for response.

Cllr Tony Bartlett to circulate the timescales for the works on the HIP and when diversion notices will be posted (access will not be impacted). The works have been confirmed to start on Tuesday 29th August for four days. A letter drop will be done to explain the types of work and advance warning signs displayed at either end of Sandyhurst Lane.

14.3 Tree warden

Cllr Lucy Farrington confirmed that the dead fir in St Mary's churchyard would require a planning application notice and that she would action that as a priority as ABC had indicated that it was at least a six-week process. Once secured, she will ask the PCC to authorise its removal.

14.4 Parish Hall Management Committee

Chair Christine Drury confirmed that the Parish Hall Management Committee worked with WPC to deliver a village-wide celebration of the Coronation of King Charles III that included a screening of the ceremony on a big screen in the Hall and later celebrations in a marquee.

15. Items for the next Agenda

Noticeboard at Tutt Hill.

16. Dates for future meetings

Wednesday 21st June and Wednesday 19th July.

The meeting closed at 21.05pm

Chairman's Signature.....



19/7/23.....