

# **FORTON PARISH COUNCIL**

## **MINUTES OF MEETING**

held in Forton Parish Hall at 7:10 p.m.

on Wednesday 10 May 2023

**1**

**PRESENT:**

**Councillors:** S Spencer (Chair), P Hammond (Vice Chair), D Carver (RFO),  
A Hawkins

**Borough Councillors:** Mark Winnington

**Clerk:** Carol Little

**Member of the Public:** Sean O'Donovan

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**Apologies for Absence:**

Cllr O Thomas and Cllr Z Young submitted apologies to the Clerk which were accepted.

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**Declaration of Councillors' Personal Interests:**

None

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**Parish Council Vacancy:**

Cllr Spencer confirmed that the Parish was short of a councillor due to an error with L Bayton's nomination form. The clerk confirmed that Stafford Borough Council had notified her of this issue and it had provided another form, but this had not been returned by the deadline. The clerk confirmed she would check with the Borough Council about the procedure for advertising and recruiting for an additional councillor.

On receipt of the agenda, L Bayton had informed the clerk that she was no longer a councillor but she was nevertheless invited to this meeting if she wished to be co-opted. As she was not present the council took the view that she was no longer interested in the post.

Cllr Carver commented that representation from Sutton would be good for the parish council and it was agreed that if anyone had an individual in mind they should approach that person and encourage them to apply. The vacancy should now be advertised.

**ACTION: CLERK**

Cllr Winnington confirmed that in a co-option, even when more than one application is received, there is no election; the council is empowered to ask applicants for interview and decide, as a council, on the most appropriate candidate.

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**Minutes of Meeting held on 15 March 2023**

Councillors approved the minutes without amendment.

There were no matters arising and the Chair signed them as a true record.

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## **Matters Requiring Attention in the Parish**

Sean O'Donovan (Member of the Public) was welcomed at the meeting. He had two concerns to raise, namely fires under the Skew Bridge, which is a listed monument and giant hogweed (an injurious weed) in Meretown Lane.

Mr O'Donovan said that in the last 5 years there has been two fires on the bed of the canal under the Skew Bridge. On the first occasion, he had discovered a group of teenagers under the bridge with a fire. On the second occasion, Stafford Borough Council had instructed contractors to do some pointing repairs. On their arrival they had found some people there with a fire and told them to leave. The contractors then had removed chain link fences that had been placed across the canal bed on both sides of the Skew Bridge to give them access but they had not replaced these on completion of their work which now means anyone can gain access. Mr O'Donovan said that there is a lot of rubbish gathering there, even including a sunbed.

Mr O'Donovan said he had contacted both Stafford Borough Council and Staffordshire County Council but this had not resulted in any action. He then contacted the Conservation Department of Stafford Borough Council, which told him that the issue was the responsibility of the land owner. Mr O'Donovan queried whether the landowner was Newport and Shrewsbury Canal Trust - but has not received a definitive answer.

The owner of the adjoining land to the West reinstated the chain link fence on that side of the bridge, but this has once again been taken down by persons unknown.

Mr O'Donovan added that in the 11 years he has lived in Meretown, the hedge adjacent to the canal and Meretown Lane, which is on a bend and a hill, has been neglected and he has voluntarily cut it on a number of occasions to allow traffic to have a better around the bend.

Mr O'Donovan is concerned that further fires could cause a lot of damage to the Skew Bridge.

Mr O'Donovan's second concern was a year-on-year increase in the prevalence of giant hogweed on the verges of Meretown Lane, in the vicinity of the bridge over the river Meese. He described giant hogweed as one of the most dangerous plants in the country.

Prior to Covid, Mr O'Donovan had reported its presence to Stafford Borough Council. He referenced their documentation about how they dealt with accumulations of giant hogweed and that it should be reported

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through the “Staffordshire app”. The Council’s workpeople visited some months later, but the giant hogweed had by that time died back so that the weedkiller they applied was ineffective.

Cllr Winnington asked Mr O’Donovan to send him an email with the details so that he can look into this further.

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## **Financial Report; Authority for Payments:**

### **7.1 2022/2023 Year-End - 31 March**

The financial statement for the year ended 31 March 2023 was tabled. It balanced to the bank statements covering the year-end with a closing balance of £883.62. This statement provided the information for the annual return (AGAR), page 6 referred to at 7.5 below.

The council accepted the 2022/2023 Year End financial statement as a true record and the Chair signed a copy.

### **7.2 2023/2024 Quarter One**

The Quarter 1 financial statement dated 20 April 2023 was tabled. It balanced to the latest bank statements received with a closing balance of £1530.48, the first tranche of Precept, Council Tax Grant and Concurrent monies amounting to £749.82 having been received from Stafford Borough Council on 06 April. The council accepted the 2023/2024 Quarter 1 financial statement as a true record and the Chair signed a copy.

### **7.3 Insured Risks**

The Council needed to undertake its annual risk assessment and agreed that a review of its insurance cover at this time would meet that responsibility. Councillors satisfied themselves that renewal on the same terms as last year and at the same cost of £196.00 met the risks the Council might face during the forthcoming year. (Insurance cover runs from 01 June to 31 May). The proposed insurance schedule was consulted for this purpose.

The council agreed to continue its insurance with Zurich Municipal on the terms offered from 01 June 2023 to 31 May 2024 at the premium of £196.00 (budget £205.80).

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## 7.4 Payments For Approval

Precept Payments	£.p	Budget £.p	Agreed to Pay £.p
Clerk's Salary (gross) – 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter	122.85	122.85	98.45
PAYE	nil	nil	24.40
Clerk's expenses	TBA	15.00	-
SPCA subscription 2023/24 (already agreed & paid)		102.96	-
Zurich Insurance premium 2023/24	196.00	205.80	196.00
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£318.85</b>

The council approved the above payments and authorised the RFO to make them.

**ACTION: RFO**

## 7.5 Annual Audit 2022/2023

The RFO will submit the annual audit papers prior to 30 June 2023. The necessary notices for the exercise of electors' right to inspect accounts and records will be posted on 12 May 2023 with the period allowing examination from 05 June 2023 to 19 July 2023 (30 working days).

The council then: -

**7.5.1** Approved the Certificate of Exemption (Page 3 of the AGAR) which the RFO had already signed. The Chair then also signed leaving the minute reference to be added later.

**7.5.2** Noted the receipt of the Internal Audit Report (Page 4 of the AGAR).

**7.5.3** Addressed the Governance Questions Nos 1-8 (Page 5 of the AGAR) Answering each in the affirmative. The Chair and the Clerk then each signed leaving the minute reference to be added later.

**7.5.4** Approved the Accounting Statements 2022/23 (Page 6 of the AGAR) which the RFO had already signed.

**7.5.5** Recorded a vote of thanks to Andrew Smith for conducting the council's internal audit without charge.

## 8 Update on A519 safer road campaign:

Cllr Spencer confirmed the Cllr Young had volunteered to progress work on this issue following the site meeting with the County Council, particularly regarding the community speed watch initiative.

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As Cllr Young was not present, the Clerk confirmed she had received an email to say that a Public Meeting had been arranged for 22 May at 7pm at the Swan. It was not clear what advertising had taken place for the event, but the Clerk would get in touch with Cllr Young and assist with posters etc.

Cllr Winnington and Cllr Carver gave their apologies as they would not be able to attend. However Michelle Shaker would be present. Cllr Spencer confirmed this was not a Parish Council event though the parish council will continue to be supportive.

In relation to the speed watch initiative, Cllr Spencer confirmed that the equipment that had been previously purchased still needed to be located and then volunteers would be required to operate it.

**ACTION: CLERK**

Cllr Winnington confirmed he had travelled down the A519 that evening and it found it to be in a horrendous state of repair, but that he had heard SCC was going to do some pre-patching. Cllr Winnington agreed to keep chasing.

In addition, Cllr Spencer confirmed the 40mph speed sign had still not been replaced after having been knocked down, and Cllr Winnington asked for an email regarding this so that he could follow it up.

**ACTION: CLERK**

Cllr Winnington also gave an update on Shay Lane - SCC had originally said that it was going to do a "light touch" ecology survey on 02 May but now confirmed it would need to do a full ecology survey and nothing further has happened. Nevertheless if all goes to plan, preparatory work should commence by the end of June.

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## **Planning Applications**

Planning application received for 1 Sutton Barns, details of which had been circulated previously. There were no comments to add. Clerk agreed to advise planners.

**ACTION: CLERK**

Cllr Spencer had been asked by Sean O'Donovan to publicise the Open Garden Event he is holding on 20<sup>th</sup> May at Brook House in Meretown in aid of All Saints Church, Forton.

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## **Any Other Business:**

**10.1**

Cllr Hammond proposed a vote of thanks to Mike Smith for helping to look after the Parish Council for circa 20 years. It was unanimously agreed that the work he has put in, not only on behalf of this Parish but the whole of

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the County, has been exemplary and invaluable. The Clerk was asked to write a letter accordingly.

**ACTION: CLERK**

Councillors also wanted to record that Patrick Farrington will be hugely missed and it was agreed a letter of thanks should also be sent to him.

**ACTION: CLERK**

- 10.2** Cllr Hammond invited the Parish Council to assist the Parish Hall Committee in making the Parish Hall more comfortable by supporting idea of buying two collapsible adult tables to accommodate 16 people for £120 (£60 each). The Parish Hall Committee felt the building should have one but would benefit from two.

Councillors discussed the issue and agreed that a grant of £60.00 towards the cost of these tables would be in the interests of the community. The Parish Hall committee was asked to make a written application for such a grant.

The Parish Hall Committee will sort storage.

- 10.3** The Clerk asked if she could ask her contact to repair the Forton notice board at a similar sum to that of the Sutton board satisfactorily repaired recently.  
Councillors readily agreed.

## **11**

### **Date of Next Meetings**

Wednesday 19 July

Wednesday 22 November

Wednesday 13 March 2024

Wednesday 8 May 2024

All at 7.00 p.m. in Forton Parish Hall

**Meeting Closed at 8:22 p.m.**