

HERSTMONCEUX PARISH COUNCIL

Agenda Item: Committee Reports – Finance & General Purposes Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on **Tuesday 03 January 2017** at Herstmonceux Village Hall, Herstmonceux.

Present: Councillors: Mrs J. Angear, M. Bradshaw (Chairman), Mrs H. Kenward, S. Nash, and I. Stewart.

Mrs Clare Harrison, Clerk, attended. S. Goacher, RFO, took the Minutes,

Members of the Public: Councillor Mrs. J. Alder.

FIN.01.01.17 APOLOGIES: Councillor M. Goodsell (Unwell).

FIN.02.01.17 DECLARATIONS of INTERESTS:

Councillor Mrs. Angear: Herstmonceux Village Hall, Herstmonceux Bowls Club, Angears Builders.

Councillor Bradshaw: Campaign to Protect Rural England, Herstmonceux Business Association.

Councillor I. Stewart: Herstmonceux Village Hall.

FIN.03.01.17 DISPENSATION REQUESTS: None received

FIN.04.01.17 PUBLIC QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS: None.

FIN.05.01.17 CURRENT YEAR EXPENDITURE:

1. **Highway Verge-Cutting Tender:** The RFO reported to the meeting that he had received an email from the ESCC and new maps setting out the verge areas within the rural (outside the 30mph restricted) highway following the meeting with representatives of the ESCC on 25 November 2016. A copy of the email received was distributed to each Member attending.

The RFO sought authority to incorporate the instructions from the ESCC in the description within the Tender document, and to distribute copies of the new maps to prospective contractors, so that the tender process may continue.

Councillor Mrs Kenward reminded the meeting of the overhanging branches, which may need trimming to permit grass verge cutting, along the A271 between the Cricketers Lane junction and Collins Honda Garage. The matter of the branches would be conveyed back to the ESCC.

The meeting was in full agreement that the Tender process should be restarted as soon as possible, and that the RFO incorporate the detail as supplied by ESCC.

Subsequent to the meeting the RFO agreed with Councillors Bradshaw, Nash, and Stewart that the Tender deadline should be 7 February 2017, and that tenders be opened at the F&GP Committee that evening.

2. **The Access Road at Village Hall:** The Chairman asked the Clerk if there was any progress to report on the legal aspects of the new lease of the access road into the Village Hall / New Surgery site. The Clerk stated that she would contact Kent CC to get an update and report at the February meeting of the F&GP Committee.

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FIN.06.01.17 RECREATION GROUND ACCESS:

Councillor Nash reported to the meeting that the access road from the A271 into the car park area of the Herstmonceux Recreation Ground was a project that had been included in the Annual Estimates and that Councillor Nash had highlighted as a project that was overdue. The access road was in a poor state and had been deteriorating for some time, had no passing places, was narrow for traffic especially during summertime or when events were on, dangerous to pedestrians, and had been washed away in places.

Councillor Nash had approached Hailsham Roadways to provide a quotation to widen the access road for the whole of its length, put in all necessary drainage. The quotation had come in at over £60,000 plus VAT. There were aspects of the individual items making up the quotation where savings could be made or that the items could be done cheaper by other smaller contractors. There may be other ways that the figure could be tweaked and reduced accordingly.

The meeting recognised that under the Council's Financial Regulations there was a requirement to obtain three quotations for such a project, and Councillor Stewart reminded the meeting that the Council were not obliged to accept the lowest quotation, but the quotation which would be of best value to the Parish Council and its residents.

The meeting agreed that the project was one which was needed and would provide, together with other footpaths and footways an off the highway connection with future development to the centre of the village.

There would be a requirement to negotiate a lease of the land for the widened access road, and if the road is to be used by farm or other agricultural vehicles by the landowner, the possibility of a shared maintenance agreement for the road should be a requirement of the Parish Council.

The meeting recognised that the Annual Estimates had not allocated a sum of money to cover the quotation already obtained and that there would be the necessity to 'Vire' funds from other projects initially, and then replace this over a period via an increased Precept.

A proposal to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to obtain two further quotations from suitable contractors to widen the access road into the recreation ground car park, incorporate all necessary drainage, and to investigate the legalities of leasing the land needed from the landowner, and the possibility of requiring a shared maintenance agreement with the landowner. Proposed: Councillor Nash; Seconded; Councillor Stewart; All Members in favour.

FIN.07.01.17 DONATION to CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England):

The Chairman declared an interest as a Member of CPRE, took no part in the discussions, and gave over the Chairmanship of this item to Councillor Stewart.

Councillor Stewart closed the meeting to permit Councillor Mrs Alder (Public) to make comment in support the Parish Council in making a donation to CPRE for this purpose.

Councillor Stewart reopened the meeting and the RFO read an extract from a legal advice note from SALC: 'Parish Councils should not be seen to have bias or pre-determine decisions. Parish Councils are expected to have an open mind when considering any matter, up to the point of voting. To do otherwise results in a flawed decision and a decision that could be challenged.'

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Councillor Stewart informed the meeting that the letter from CPRE stated that it was 'making an urgent appeal for funds to help fight the onslaught of inappropriate development we are facing across Sussex. This is vital to get the right outcome for communities like yours.' And had changed his personal opinion slightly saying that as long as a donation did not bias any opinions or decision of the Parish Council.

Councillor Nash had investigated policies of other Parish Councils and had found a Parish Council in Surrey where it had a Policy not to give donations or support to any campaigning organisations, and in the list of organisations, CPRE was specifically listed.

The meeting discussed the matter further and was divided in its opinion, and, therefore, **RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL** that the matter be openly discussed by all Councillors as a separate item on its Agenda at its meeting on Monday 16 January 2017, and a majority decision taken.

Councillor Bradshaw resumed the chair.

FIN.08.01.17 DONATION to EASTBOURNE FIRST RESPONDERS:

The RFO referred to Minute 16.11.136 approving the F&GP Committee recommendation FIN.01.11.16: **Donation:** Mrs. Harrison, Clerk to the Council, informed the meeting that training of Councillors and Officers in First Aid had been arranged. The Community First Response and the Ambulance Service would be undertaking the training and this would be at no cost to the Council. Both organisations indicated that a donation to both organisations would be appreciated as such donations go towards helping new volunteers pay for their kit (circa £2k). The meeting discussed the matter and it was **RECOMMENDED to FULL COUNCIL** that a donation of £50 per organisation be made on behalf of the Parish Council. Proposed: Councillor Mrs. Angear; Seconded: Councillor Mrs. Kenward: All in favour.

The RFO had asked this to be reconsidered as the decision was taken before any training took place and that the Ambulance Service did not take any part in the CPR and Defibrillator training.

There was some concern that this matter could not be discussed within 6 months of the decision, but Councillor Stewart stated that if the Ambulance Service took no part in the training then the allocation of a donation was not possible, as it was Council Tax payers money.

The meeting discussed the matter and it is **RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL** that the proposed donation of £50 to the Ambulance Service should be reallocated by adding it to the already agreed £50 donation to the Eastbourne First Responders making a total donation to this organisation of £100. Proposed; Councillor Bradshaw; Seconded; Councillor Stewart; All Members in favour.

FIN.09.01.17 DONATION to HERSTMONCEUX BUSINESS ASSOCIATION:

The Chairman, Councillor Bradshaw declared his interest in the Herstmonceux Business Association, took no part in the discussions, and handed the chairmanship of this item over to Councillor Stewart.

The RFO reported that he had received a donation from the Rural Community Support Society of £50 towards the Christmas Lights and Decorations displayed within the village. The RFO stated that he would be passing this on to the

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Herstmonceux Business Association. The Clerk was asked to write a letter of thanks to the Rural Community Support Society and state that this had been passed onto the Herstmonceux Business Association.

The RFO continued by stating that he had received a request from the Herstmonceux Business Association for a possible donation of £101.40 to defray the shortfall in the costs of the Christmas lights and decorations within the village.

The RFO had suggested to the Herstmonceux Business Association that it considers applying for a Grant towards the provision of the Christmas Lights and decorations, each year, and had sent it the appropriate forms for completion. This action was agreed by the meeting.

Councillor Angear wished to record the Parish Council's appreciation of the Business Association's work in making the village look very festive over the Christmas period, especially Councillor Bradshaw's contribution and efforts. However, Councillor Angear wished it was made clear that she had not suggested that the Parish Council would contribute £100 towards costs, as indicated in Councillor Bradshaw's email of 13 December 2016.

The meeting agreed that the Parish Council should contribute to the Christmas lights and that this should be achieved via the Grant system in future, but also **RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL** that a Donation of £51.40 be made to defray the revised net deficiency of the provision of the Christmas lights. Proposed; Councillor Mrs Angear; Seconded; Councillor Stewart; All Members in favour.

Councillor Bradshaw resumed the Chair.

FIN.10.01.17 PRECEPT AND REFERENDUM PRINCIPLES:

The RFO referred to a recent email sent out by The Clerk concerning Parish Councils based on the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Sajid Javid's statement in the House of Commons on the local government finance settlement on Thursday 15 December.

The RFO read from the Department for Communities and Local Government: The Provisional 2017-18 local government finance settlement: confirming the offer to councils: Consultation Paper:

3.3 Council tax referendum principles for town and parish councils

3.3.1 Since the introduction of council tax referendums in 2012-13, no referendum principles have been set for local precepting authorities such as town and parish councils ("parishes"), although the Government has made it clear that we would keep this under review and take action if necessary.

3.3.2 We recognise the value of parishes and the greater role in service delivery that many are performing to deliver ambitious services for their residents. However, the increase in the average Band D council tax level of 6.1% set by parishes in 2016-17 was notably higher than those in the previous five years, as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Average percentage increase in Band D council tax levels set by parishes

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	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Parishes	2.3%	3.9%	5.2%	4.3%	3.3%	6.1%

3.3.3 The recent technical consultation proposed an extension of referendum principles to larger, higher-spending town and parish councils. Following consideration of responses, the Government has decided to defer the setting of referendum principles. However, the Government has issued a challenge to town and parish councils to demonstrate restraint when increasing precepts that are not a direct result of taking on additional responsibilities. The Government will keep the level of precepts set by town and parish councils under review and may introduce referendum principles in the future. The Government will also consider ways in which increases can be made more transparent to local taxpayers.

The meeting noted the reference.

FIN.11.01.17 THE CLERK:

The RFO sought authority for expenditure in connection with the following:

- Become a member of the Society Local Council Clerks – subscription to be paid by Parish Council.
- Become a holder of a Cardholder under the Parish Council's BarclayCard Account.
- Hold a Staples UK Ltd store card under the name of the Parish Council.

The meeting **RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL** that the Clerk should become a Member of the Society of Local Council Clerks, on behalf of the Parish Council, be a BarclayCard card holder, and a Staples UK business card holder, and authorises any associated expenditure. Proposed: Councillor Stewart; Seconded; Councillor Nash; All Members in favour.

FIN.12.01.17 RISK MANAGEMENT REVIEW and DISASTER PLAN:

The RFO brought to the attention of the meeting that LCAS, to which the Parish Council was a member, were holding a seminar at Crowborough on 18 January 2017. One free place was allotted to the Parish Council and further places were chargeable at £30 per place. The Clerk, Mrs Harrison agreed to attend and Councillor Ms Ashley to be asked, if not Councillor Mrs Angear will attend.

The Risk Management Policy, reviewed in February 2015 was circulated by the RFO, and it was highlighted that the monthly monitoring of the Defibrillators needed to be organised and added. Councillor Bradshaw asked that Members acquaint themselves with the Policy and the matter placed on the Agenda for the February 2017 meeting.

FIN.13.01.17 DATE OF NEXT MEETING: The next meeting of the F&GP Committee is scheduled for Tuesday 07 February 2017, commencing at 7.30pm.

FIN.14.01.17 ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING: The RFO records that the following items will appear on the agenda for the next meeting:

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- 1. Highway Verge-cutting Tender** – opening of tenders received.
- 2. Financial Regulations Review** – to receive Regulations for further discussion.
- 3. Herstmonceux Parish Council Action Schedule 2017-18**
- 4. Risk Management Policy Review.**
- 5. Village Hall / Surgery Access Road** – update.
- 6. Disaster Plan** – initial items for inclusion. Further discussion at the March F&GP Committee meeting.

FIN.15.01.17 **CLOSE OF MEETING:** There being no other business, the Chairman, Councillor Bradshaw thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting at 21.15 pm