



Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on Thursday 19th October 2023 held at Northiam Village Hall

Present: Cllr Fairbrass (Chair), Cllr C Biggs, Cllr Harding, Cllr Lockett, Cllr Russell, Cllr Sargent, Cllr Wadie (Vice-Chair), Cllr Fenton & Cllr Schlesinger

Also Present: Gilly Lowe, Locum Clerk, Cllr T Ganly (RDC), Cllr T Biggs (RDC) and approximately 20 members of the Public

Date: 19th October 2023

FC23/208. To receive and accept Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received & accepted from Cllr Paul Redstone, ESCC.

FC23/209. Chairman's Announcements

MF wanted to mention that 'Lolly' is due to retire after 45 years of service and give her a big round of thanks.

The meeting was closed at 19.01.

FC23/210. To adjourn the meeting to enable members of the public and Councillors to address the meeting. This is a 'for information' session only and no action can be taken upon those items raised.

A representative from the CIC wanted to make statements relating to 3 items on the agenda. Item 19.4 the 6-month grazing licence for Field 13. The CIC has cautioned the council about the financial consequences and many owners and long-term tenants do not graze their land, apart from with sheep, over the winter particularly on clay soils - far from being profitable, the CIC are concerned any profit will be outweighed by the costs and the fact that it will take a year for the field to be ready to be grazed again;

Item 11.3 the proposal to introduce an SFF working group – it is fair to say that SFF can't be effectively managed without a forum of discussion between NPC and the CIC; the existence of such a forum would have helped with the recent decision about grazing Field 13; finally item 11.1 the grazing of Field 11,12,13 & 14 – the CIC have had a conversation with the only grazier who has expressed an interest, and circulated a proposal document for information - apologies that it was rather last minute.

A member of the public asked that draft policies for discussion on the agenda be

published so that the public have knowledge of the content prior to a meeting.

Sharon Blagrove from Bexhill who runs the biggest political group called Rother Review then asked 3 questions: How much money has the PC received from the CIC? Will the appointed Environmental Advisor be employed as a councillor and will any complaints about him be handled in a similar manner? Given that working groups can't make decisions, but councils can, why create a new working party to discuss SFF?

A member of the public asked why a councillor had taken photographs of someone eating in their car.

The Chair said that specific questions would be answered by email and the clerk took down the details.

The meeting was re-opened at 19.13

FC23/211. To receive Declarations of Interest and Lobbying

To receive any declaration by members of personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of the interest and whether the member regards the interest as personal, pecuniary or prejudicial under the Code of Members Conduct.

JL - item 10.6 as honorary president of the Conservation Society.

CB – item 10.1 as it is a neighbouring property.

FC23/212. Minutes – It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 21st September 2023 be approved and the minutes were duly signed. JL pointed out an amendment that the Annual Inspection was of the playground **AND** playing fields, and this addition was included in the signed minutes.

FC23/213. To receive report from County Councillor

In Cllr Redstone's absence his written report was published on the website and circulated beforehand to councillors.

FC23/214. To receive report from District Councillors

Cllr T Ganly reported on the following:

- A brief overview of the Rural Rother Trust, which is organised by RDC and the income comes from PC donations. It provides small day to say items to families struggling with a range of issues, for example providing a new vacuum cleaner. He encouraged the parish council to donate if they were able.

Cllr T Biggs reported on the following:

- The PCSO had reported 2 incidents of thefts from vans; the playground was vandalised in Beckley; Rother are holding a review of affordable housing on 2nd Nov. (MF will attend). He also reminded the council that applications for Community Grants are open until 30th November. The Beckley Road is closed again whilst Southern Water investigate a sewerage leak, but it should re-open soon.

Finance

FC23/215. The payments for October 2023 were circulated and **AGREED**.

FC23/216. The provision of the Christmas tree for St Mary's Church and the village was **AGREED**.

- FC23/217.** To approve the chairman's signature on a letter to Hodge Bank confirming changes of signatory and giving permission to the clerk to discuss the account. Also, to note that Cllr Penelope Farmer is no longer a councillor and therefore needs to be removed from the approved signatories. The Chairman signed the letter and the clerk will make the necessary arrangements.
- FC23/218.** To confirm notice of the conclusion of audit by the external auditors and appropriate publication of the Notice and Section 3 of the AGAR 2022/'23.
- FC23/219.** The date & time for a first meeting of the Finance Committee to discuss the 2024/'25 budget was agreed as Thursday 16th November at 5.30pm in the parish office.

Expenditure in line with 4.1 of the Financial Regulations

Purchase of the poppy wreath for Remembrance Sunday - £21.99

Governance

- FC23/220.** The clerk updated on corporate email addresses. Members agreed on the domain name of www.northiamparishcouncil.gov.uk and the associated email addresses will follow the same format as other local government addresses. The one-off set-up costs to purchase the domain name is £50 and owning it is £60 per annum thereafter. The current premium package with Netwise allows for unlimited email addresses. The clerk was authorised to purchase the domain name and set up the new emails.
- FC23/221.** The suggestion of live streaming was briefly discussed but the associated costs were deemed not worth the financial investment. JL mentioned that the Hoey report suggested better consultation between the PC and the village and that should be looked into. SS suggested reinstating the meeting report in the parish magazine. MF said they would explore other means and ask for suggestions from the public.
- FC23/222.** Memorial bench & CCTV draft policies had been circulated for discussion. Deferred to the next meeting to allow for publication on the website to inform members of the public of draft content.

Outside Spaces

- FC23/223.** The Annual Inspection report of the playground and playing field had been circulated. JL said that the worst items were the 3 stiles on the playing fields which are in bad condition. He mentioned that ESCC are giving away metal kissing gates, and suggested the council install those as replacements. The Trim trail which was not meeting standards, has now been removed as planned. Other points mostly concerned the fencing and a few minor comments about the surface. MF suggested the council agree a programme of works to make necessary improvements and allow for these in the budget-setting. PS said it was disappointing to read that when the leg of the cable runway was replaced, the zip wire wasn't re-tensioned. The clerk was asked to report this.
- FC23/224.** TW explained that he had been in touch with Brian Banks a great deal recently over matters such as Beacon Field and the newt ponds, and felt it would be a great asset to the council if he accepted an invitation to become an Ecological Advisor to the council.

RDC are requiring councils to be more ecologically aware, and some parish councils have declared climate & ecological emergencies. The proposal was unanimously approved and the clerk will write to formally invite him, and also inform RDC. JL added that Northiam were fortunate to have him as a resident.

- FC23/225.** Members agreed to the offer by O'Connors to make the necessary repairs to fences at the playing fields. TW will liaise and make arrangements for access.
- FC23/226.** The clerk has reported to RDC Environmental Health the rodent situation emanating from the Muddy Duck. The case has been assigned a reference number (ref: 40539) and allocated to a case officer for investigation.
- FC23/227.** The contractor has been contacted about the cemetery pathway – awaiting feedback. A member of the public suggested having a copy of the Roads & Streetworks manual which provides details of how it should be done.
The contractor subsequently confirmed that he has visited the site and will make the necessary repairs – email of 22nd October
- FC23/228.** JL spoke on behalf of Conservation Society and their request to plant an oak tree for the King's Coronation. The council unanimously approved the request and agreed the suggested location in the playing field. PS ask if they could remove the old stump at the same time which is overgrown with brambles.
- FC23/229.** The replacement part to repair the noticeboard will cost £320 + VAT including carriage. Once received it can be installed by a volunteer. The council approved the purchase 8 to 1 (MF voted against) and asked the clerk to order the item asap.
- FC23/230.** The playground inspection training was purchased and has been carried out by TW and SS to date. MF, PS & JH to do it and the clerk will check when it needs renewing.

St Francis Field

- FC23/231.** The CIC drafted a proposal and a simple licence for properties who wish to access the orchard which had been circulated to members. The council asked a few questions and made some suggestions for inclusion. The amended version will be brought back to the next meeting for final approval.
- FC23/232.** The CIC had circulated a report providing an update on the progress of the change of use planning application. After a brief discussion, members felt that it was imperative that despite the CIC still working on the planning assessment document, and awaiting further answers from Rother's planning department, the application be submitted. The council can provide a cheque for £231 (the application fee), and would like to briefly glance at the application before submission. The CIC will collect a cheque from the office and follow up.
- FC23/233.** The council to consider the proposal of re-instating the working party to liaise with the CIC. This this item was deferred to the closed session at the end of the meeting to allow for confidential discussion.
- FC23/234.** The CIC had previously circulated a proposal to use Field 9 as a Community Garden. MF was concerned about income potential and felt that whilst giving any profits to Rye Foodbank is worthwhile, local residents should benefit more directly. The CIC wish to

launch the idea at their AGM at the end of November and will be asking for volunteers and donations of seeds and plants at the appropriate time. After further discussion of the overall benefits for mental health and making provision for the village to enjoy the produce, the council agreed unanimously provided there are no associated costs to the PC.

Planning applications – to consider and agree responses

- FC23/235.** RR/2023/1908/P – Sunnymead, Beckley Road, Northiam, TN31 6JB
Proposal: Demolition of existing property and erection of new chalet bungalow, Widening of existing vehicular access and siting of mobile home during the construction period only.

After a brief discussion, the clerk was asked to submit the following comments online:
Northiam Parish Council does not object to this application. Additionally, to protect dark skies, there should be no, or limited, external lighting.

- FC23/236. To report any external meetings with representatives of Northiam Parish Council – to allow members to ask any questions and to receive the minutes.**

JH had attended the RALC meeting on 11th October and reported that some topics had already been covered – police report, and making grant applications. The dog control consultation had resulted in short, fixed leads, not extendable leads in certain public spaces. The group who are helping Crowhurst progress a community solar farm gave an interesting talk and apparently funding is available. She will report further with more information.

To report correspondence

- FC23/237.** Email of 24/09 complaining about the state of Workhouse Pond
 JL thought it looked like it had been tidied around the edges. PS said that O’Connors are meant to trim, but it was pointed out that the rushes etc. are needed to protect wildlife – BB suggested coppicing some trees around it. The clerk will make enquiries.
- FC23/238.** Email of 26/09 – ESALC AGM & conference on 14th November. No one able to attend.
- FC23/239.** Email of 06/10 referring to Zero Hour, Climate & Ecology Bill – the council decided not to comment.
- FC23/240.** Email of 23/08 & subsequent quotes for repair to the war memorial plaque – MF said that the plaque has been returned to the office, so no longer missing. JL will speak to the builder who offered to repair it for free, and hopefully it will be restored in time for Remembrance Sunday.
- FC23/241.** Email of 26/09 – HWAONB Management Plan consultation – deadline of 5th November. JL happy to respond on behalf of the council and asked the clerk to forward the details.
- FC23/242. Reports from Councillors**
 PS said that he had been in touch with the Football Club re the pavilion working group and they are arranging dates to meet. JL said he has the names of the people at Rother who will need to oversee it.
 The trim trail has been removed, and will probably need some top soil to level it out once it’s settled.

BR provided an update on the bollards at Jempsons. Cllr Redstone had followed up with Highways, and the latest advice is to contact Balfour Beatty. BR will report back.
 TW asked if there is a dog waste bin at Beacons Field? Yes – there are 3.
 CB said that the cemetery volunteers thanked the council for agreeing to storage of equipment in the chapel. She had also reported to Rother the grass cuttings being dumped in the ditch as there is a nearby drain and it could cause problems when the rain arrives. She will follow it up.

FC23/243. Second session for public questions

A representative of the CIC requested that when council reports on estimates or quotes they ensure that net prices are mentioned. As the council can reclaim VAT it is misleading to include VAT expenditure.

The CIC said that they will prepare a budget in for SFF spending. In answer to the earlier question about what money is passing between the council and the CIC, he reminded the audience that they work together.

A member of the public asked why the council was spending time working on a licence for properties that exit onto SFF as it is only about 5 homes with direct access. BB also had an issue with access into the orchard, as he believed the Conservation Society were trying to establish a wild flower meadow there – also need to be wary of people dumping grass cuttings and other garden rubbish if they have access.

Sharon, from Rother Review thanked everyone for listening earlier, and left some cards with details of their FB site. The group has an avid interest in what goes on in Rother especially in parish councils and it provides a good place to have your say. There are many district councillors on the group.

A member of the public asked why progress with the change of use planning application had been so slow when the CIC had permission from NPC a year ago to submit it. The Chair replied that was in the past, and the new members were trying to move things forward and make progress.

FC23/244. To agree the public's exclusion from the confidential part of the meeting.
 It was **RESOLVED** to move into public session at 20.42.

That in view of the confidential nature of the business (employment/legal issues/contractual) about to be transacted it was resolved under the provisions of Public Bodies admissions to meetings Act 1960 s.1 that the press and public be temporarily excluded, and they are instructed to withdraw.

Human Resources

FC23/245. To update on the appointment of clerk and approve the job offer.

All members were in agreement to offer the role to Nicky Ideson. The locum clerk confirmed a 2-3 week handover period to include the next meeting and the interim audit on 9th November. The new clerk can start immediately.

Leases & Licences

FC23/246. To update on the lease of the parish office at Northiam Village Club

The clerk confirmed that this had been returned to Wellers Hedleys to pass on to the Village Club's lawyers.

FC23/247. To agree and sign the legal documents in relation to the sewer diversion.

The clerk has replied to Greymoor with the suggested points about the video survey of

the whole sewer before and after works, and of them covering the cost of legal advice from our solicitor – she is awaiting a response.

FC23/248. To update on the Bowls Club Lease

The clerk has spoken to Heringtons in Eastbourne and Battle who cannot find any record of the lease. The clerk has contacted the secretary of the Bowling Club to ask if she has any correspondence on file. PS said he will look back through old files to see if there is an alternative contact name.

FC23/249. To discuss the draft grazing licence of Field 13 for 6 month’s grazing by the stables tenant.

The clerk had circulated a draft grazing licence, and councillors had suggested a couple of further conditions. The CIC’s advice was also considered and members felt that the access route along the permissive path and the terms surrounding the hardstanding should be included. JL will send the clerk a map to show the access route. Once finalised, the licence will be signed by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman on behalf of the council, which will be witnessed by the clerk and counter-signed by the Licensee.

FC23/250. To consider the CIC engage with potential users to graze Fields 11,12,13 & 14 from the end of April 2024

Members agreed that the CIC could engage as per their proposal, although they felt disappointed that there weren’t more possible graziers to choose from. There was some discussion about the reality of Field 13 being unusable for a year after 6 months of grazing.

DEFERRED ITEM - FC23/233

MF felt strongly that the working party should allow for two-way communication with the PC making suggestions for plans at SFF. There should be a 5-year plan really moving towards the goal of financial self-sufficiency. The clerk reminded members that no decisions would be made at working party meetings, it was a forum for discussion and to aim to progress plans. Any proposals would still need to be approved at full council meetings. Members agreed in the main, and there were numerous volunteers to be members of the working party. It was felt the Chair, and Vice-Chair should be joined by CB, BR and JH although SS and JF also expressed an interest. The proposed date for a first informal meeting with the CIC was 2nd November, although this is TBC.

The meeting closed at 9.05pm

Signed.....

Date.....