

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF SWEFLING PARISH COUNCIL
Tuesday 13 July 2021 at 7.30 pm., taking place at the Sweffling Village, Hut,
Low Road, Sweffling.

Attendance and apologies:

PRESENT: John Stanley in the Chair

COUNCILLORS: Jude Chin (JC), Julia Kinsey (JK) Audrey Lummis (AL), Erika Spall (ES).

IN ATTENDANCE: Michael Smithson, Clerk to the Council.

Members of the public, Stephen Ashurst, Sandy Rowe, Glenys Smithson, Margaret Spurgeon, and Anthony Wilkinson, were also in attendance.

There being a quorum the Chair formally opened the meeting and welcomed all attending

1. **APOLOGIES:** Apologies were received from Cllr John Tesh on account of ill health and Cllr Maurice Cook on account of attending other meetings. Both apologies were accepted.
2. **To receive declarations of interest and to consider requests for dispensations:**
 - 2.1. There were no declarations of interest and no requests for dispensation.
3. **Minutes of the previous meetings:**
 - 3.1. Minutes of the meeting held on 08 June 2021 having been circulated prior to the meeting, it was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that they represented a true and fair record of that meeting, and the Chair was **authorised to sign** the same as drawn.
 - 3.2. There were the following **MATTERS ARISING:**
 - 3.2.1. **Village sign.** The Chair reported that Kim Hayes had done an amazing job in restoring the broken fingerpost. There will be a cost associated with the work, and that sum is yet to be determined, however the cost is unlikely to be substantial.
 - 3.2.2. **Mill House.** The Chair reported that he had received an email from Dom Starkey at E.S.Planning (**Planning**), who had answered some of the questions posed by residents. It is now apparent that development at the site had not originally been wholly developed in accordance with the granted permission. Accordingly, steps had been taken by Planning, preliminary to enforcement. The Applicant then to avoid enforcement action, had opted to apply for retrospective development permission which had now been granted. The general feeling of the meeting was one of disappointment at the Applicant's approach. The Clerk reported that he had received no response at all to his email of 30th June 2021 however the position had now been largely clarified, as above.
 - 3.2.3. **Jubilee Field.** Cllr Erica Spall had produced a report on the Field (**copy attached**). This report was discussed below under "**Clerk's Report**"
4. **Public participation incl. Police, District and County Councillors' reports.**
 - 4.1. The Clerk reported that a report had been received from District Councillor Maurice Cook, which had been circulated before the meeting and was taken as read. The Clerk confirmed that the report had been posted on the village website.
5. **Clerk's Report** (copy attached). The report, having been distributed by email prior to the meeting was taken as read, but several points were amplified namely:
 - 5.1. About the **Clerk's resignation**, the Chair reported that steps were being taken via SALC to advertise the position with the qualification that ideally any newly appointed Clerk should have relevant experience. The Clerk mentioned that there was a job description annexed to his contract of employment and this would serve as a useful guide both to the Council and to any applicant to assist in understanding the nature and extent of the employment obligations.
 - 5.2. **Online banking** remains a work in progress but hopefully this might be sorted before the Clerk's departure, although his cessation will of itself require a change in the bank mandate.
 - 5.3. **Jubilee Field.**
 - 5.3.1. See above 3.2.3. Cllr Spall's report having been distributed by email prior to the meeting was taken as read, It was noted that the grass had been cut by James Rogers, (**Contractor**) mid-June for a sum of £150 plus VAT.
 - 5.3.2. IT WAS UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED THAT:
 - 5.3.2.1. Cllr Spall be delegated the task of agreeing a grass cutting timetable and reasonable fee with the Contractor for the rest of this season and the Chair and any one other Councillor are delegated authority to sign cheques for such services,

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- 5.3.2.2. without further recourse to a full council meeting, if and so long as all such payment obligations are notified immediately.
- 5.3.2.3. Future grass cuts will cost less. Subject to prevailing climatic conditions the cutting season will be April- September inclusive.
- 5.3.2.4. Cllr Spall has authority on behalf of the Council to agree a fee with the Contractor for the removal the dumped agricultural equipment at the top end of the Field.
- 5.3.2.5. The ride-on mower (garaged at home by Andy Franklin) apparently owned equally between the Council and the Townland Trust (**Trust**), now appears to be surplus to Council requirements and so **IT WAS UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that steps might be taken to see if the Trust might for a fair price, wish to acquire the Council's interest in the machinery, although it was noted that the Trust had now made other arrangements for grass cutting on the Townland Meadow. The Clerk was instructed email Trustee Sandy Rowe, to open a dialogue.
- 5.3.3. It was noted that Cllr Tesh may be able to provide additional guidance as to the Field generally.
- 5.4. **Planning Committee.**
 - 5.4.1. It was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that Audrey Lummis, should replace former Cllr Wyard, to keep the planning committee going.
- 5.5. **Audit Report. Generally.**
 - 5.5.1. The Chair had read the Audit Report, prepared by the Council's Internal Auditor David Smith (**DW**) (distributed by email prior to the meeting) was taking as read. The Chair considered that whilst it cannot be ignored that there is much work to be done, some parts of the report seemed to him to be a proforma response. Looking at the positives, the Chair said that the Council might take some comfort from the financial governance compliance, which was in order, adequate, good and/or satisfactory.
 - 5.5.2. The Clerk confirmed that he would, to the extent that changes had not already been made, review the document carefully and implement as far as he could prior to his departure on 15 September, the various recommendations made by DW. Some assistance from other council members might be required and Cllr Chin agreed to provide necessary support if required.
- 5.6. **Website.**
- 5.7. Much of DW's criticism was directed at the website. The Clerk acknowledged that his attempts to salvage something from the IONIS hosted site had been disappointing. Unbeknown to the Clerk, DW had a couple of years ago produced a draft Wix hosted village website, for the benefit of the Clerk's predecessor. The draft Wix site (like DW's audit services) has been provided by DW completely free of charge had demonstrated the suggested alternative site to the Clerk. The proposed site has been very recently updated to reflect the current position and was simple, low cost, but impressive.
- 5.8. If adopted, DW has volunteered to provide training to the Council to acquire necessary skills to maintain it.
- 5.9. There being no annual costs except for registration, (approximately £75.00 plus VAT) with consequent savings to the Council, it was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that the Wix website - in preference to the other 2 options contained in his report, and put before the Council - be adopted by the Council, and that the Clerk be authorised to transfer the site from IONIS and be further authorised to settle the registration fee and to arrange appropriate training, as offered by DW.
- 6. **Planning:**
 - 6.1. The Mill House application (DC/21/0623/FUL) had now been determined. Please see Chairpersons remarks at 4.2 above.
- 7. **Finance:**
 - 7.1. **Finance Report:**


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- 7.2. No **Bank Reconciliation**: for the period ending 01 July 2021 had been submitted, as the up-to-date Cashbook circulated to the Councillors in advance of the meeting, (**copy annexed**) and copy bank statements (also circulated in advance) were sufficient to identify the current cash position to the meeting
 - 7.3. **Receipts & Payments since last meeting**: A copy of the cash book for the Council (**copy annexed**) made up to date to the 1st of July 2021, was produced by the Clerk and noted by the meeting and **unanimously approved**.
 - 7.4. Likewise, a schedule of cheques to be drawn in settlement of outstanding invoices (**copy annexed**) was put before the meeting and **unanimously approved** for payment.
 - 7.5. Both the **Financial Risk Assessment and Internal Control Policies** having been circulated prior to the meeting were taken as read and it was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that the documents be approved as drawn and be adopted by the Council.
 - 7.6. Questions as to the ownership of the **ride-on mower** as reflected in the Assets Register were raised by the Clerk but further information was required before a full discussion might take place.
- 8. Correspondence.**
- 8.1. **Complaint against Chair.**
 - 8.2. As mentioned in the Clerk's Report, two complaints (copies having been circulated to the Councillors prior to the meeting) have been made against the Chair by Bobby Rusack. It was advised by the Clerk that it would be inappropriate to either to discuss or comment on these matters as the process was pending. The Chair indicated that he felt he had done no wrong and had nothing to fear and had received some support from residents. The Chair indicated that as necessary, he would consider his position following the outcome of the process, which might have the following consequences, Namely:
 - 8.2.1. no further action;
 - 8.2.2. local resolution including an apology; and
 - 8.2.3. a formal investigation.
- 9. Questions to the Chair.**
- 9.1. Cllr Kinsey referred to the draft/**Safeguarding Policy** for the Council (a copy having been circulated to the Councillors prior to the meeting) and which she hoped might subsequently be freely adopted by both the Council and other village organisations. Cllr Kinsey reported some minor amendments might be required to the version circulated. Cllr Kinsey would deal with any necessary amendments before the September meeting.
 - 9.2. The **Sweffling Hut** management committee, through member Kirstin Stanley mentioned that there were likely to be a number of resignations at the end of their financial year this autumn. Some of the management committee wondered if the Parish Council might be interested in taking over the ownership and management of the Hut. the Clerk advised that if there was to be any consideration then the legal ownership of the Hut property subject to existing trusts would need to be examined. There was also a question as to the state and condition of the Hut and it was inevitable that a full survey of the building might be required.
 - 9.3. Cllr Chin said that he was not in favour of taking over such responsibility. Further consideration of the position would therefore be deferred to a subsequent meeting of the Council.
- 10. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING:**
The Chair gave confirmation that the next Parish Meeting would take place at the Village Hut on Tuesday **14th SEPTEMBER 2021, 7.30pm.**

There being no other competent business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.20 pm.

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John Stanley, Chairperson