

WESTMESTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Council Meeting held on
Tuesday 10th March 2020 at 7:30 pm at Westmeston Parish Hall

Present

Councillors: Rob Mills (Chairman), Cathy Mills (Vice-Chairman) Mark Clark, Tessa Haughton & Vincent Tickner.

Officer: Nick Wiltshire, Clerk to the Council.

Public: None.

72. Apologies for Absence – Apologies had been received, & with the reasons outlined, were accepted from Cllrs Clare Farrands & Kendal Golding.

73. To approve the minutes of the Council Meeting held on 14th January 2020 (previously circulated)

Resolved – That the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 14th January 2020 be agreed as a true & accurate record.

74. Declarations of Interest: None.

75. Public Forum & Questions: None.

76. Financial Matters:

(a) To agree payment of invoices.

Payment of the following invoices was approved:

Calico UK – Standard annual charge for SSL certificate service: £28.80 Cheque no. 000156. For clarity, it was reported that payment of this invoice was urgent so approval for this payment is made retrospectively.

NS Wiltshire – Clerk’s Salary 8 weeks as per invoice: £520.00 Cheque no. 000157.

NS Wiltshire – Clerk’s Travel & Postage & sundry items as per invoice: £36.77 Cheque no. 000158.

NS Wiltshire – Clerk’s office expenses from 01/04/2019 to 31/03/2020 including contribution towards use of office in Clerk’s home, including computer facilities, insurance, telephone, gas & electricity as per invoice: £126.00 Cheque no. 000159.

(b) It was reported that the Section 137 limit for 2020/21 is £8.32 per elector.

Resolved – That this information be noted.

(c) The Clerk referred Members to the Clerks’ Legal & Finance Networking Day to be held on Thursday 26th March 2020. The cost was £120.00 + VAT. It was advertised

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as being suitable for clerks, deputy/assistant clerks & RFOs of all levels of experience. The day would include networking as well as presentations on current topics of interest & guidance on new legislation & changes. The Clerk asked for approval to attend this event as part of on-going development as well as being beneficial to the Parish Council. Cllr Cathy Mills proposed that it be agreed, seconded by Cllr Vincent Tickner and it was approved unanimously. Cllr Tickner asked that the Clerk gives a report on the event at the next Council Meeting.

Resolved – That approval for the Clerk to attend The Clerks’ Legal & Finance Networking Day to be held on Thursday 26th March 2020 be agreed.

77. Highway Matters:

(a) Beacon Parishes Traffic Group: Cllr Rob Mills (Chairman) reported that Ditchling Parish Councillors had expressed concerns arising from HGV lorries & coaches passing through Ditchling. Accordingly, given that this was a common problem for Westmeston it was felt that it was in the best interests of local residents to continue to work with this Group.

(b) Spatham Lane Speed Limit: Cllr Rob Mills (Chairman) reported that the relevant County Councillors & the local MP have been consulted regarding this project to reduce the speed limit to 40 mph; however, they were not able to attend a meeting that had been arranged to discuss the cost involved. To help towards the cost of funding this project a quiz was being held on 21st February at Mid Sussex Golf Club. It was a great success with some 120 people attending & £2,290 was raised towards funding the project.

(c) Voluntary Litter Picking Scheme: This Scheme is now a regular activity, hugely benefitting the local community, which continues to require support & encouragement. To help mitigate the potential risk to volunteers from the proximity of road traffic it is felt that portable warning signs would be a positive precaution on health and safety grounds. A pair of professionally made durable signs would cost in the region of £200. Permission was sought for the Parish Council to obtain these, in the interest of Health and Safety, should it be unsuccessful in approaching Lewes District Council to provide them. Cllr Tessa Haughton proposed that it be agreed, seconded by Cllr Mark Clark and it was approved unanimously.

Resolved – That approval be agreed for a pair of professionally made durable signs costing approximately £200 be purchased by the Parish Council, in the interest of Health & Safety, should it be unsuccessful in approaching Lewes District Council to provide them.

(d) ESCC Highways: Potholes can be reported using an on-line form, as follows:
<https://www.eastsussexhighways.com/report-a-problem/roads/pothole-in-road>

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78. Beacon Parishes Neighbourhood Development Plan Implementation: Cllr Rob Mills (Chairman) reported that the Parish Council has been playing its' part.

79. Planning Matters:

There were no new Planning Applications for consideration.

The live Planning Application regarding **Land On The East Side of Lewes Road, Lewes Road, Westmeston (SDNP/19/04853/FUL)** - Change of use of land to permit the keeping of horses and erection of stable block with improved access to the Lewes Road. As requested by Council at the previous Meeting, the Clerk had checked the current status of this application & reported that it remains "Application in Progress".

80. Lewes District Association of Local Councils: Cllr Vincent Tickner referred to a meeting that was held on 9th March 2020 & gave a synopsis of what was discussed. Much discussion involved those parishes north of the South Downs. Subjects ranged from potholes, which took up half the duration of the meeting to Broadband availability; Coronavirus; hustings for the Police & Crime Commissioner Elections being held in Hassocks; & access of East Sussex residents to Household Waste Recycling Sites, with particular regard to county boundaries.

81. Church Corner: Nothing to report.

82. To note correspondence received since the last Meeting & any action required: Cllr Vincent Tickner has executed a detailed inspection & compiled a report regarding activities that have been taking place in the vicinity of West Wood (attached). This is a draft & once approved for display will be circulated with the Minutes.

83. Annual Risk Assessment

The Clerk referred members to the Statement of Risk Assessment which is shortly to be updated in time for the Audit on 11th May. Cllrs Tessa Haughton & Cathy Mills (Vice-Chairman) volunteered to execute the risk assessment for consideration & approval by Members.

Resolved – That approval for Cllrs Tessa Haughton & Cathy Mills (Vice-Chairman) carry out the risk assessment be agreed.

84. Date of next meeting: Tuesday 12th May 2020 at 7:30 pm. This meeting is the Annual Council Meeting & will be preceded by the Annual Parish Meeting at 6.30 pm. (For information purposes, due to the Coronavirus Pandemic this has now been cancelled).

The meeting closed at 8:50 pm.

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Concerns and Responses over West Wood, Westmeston Parish

Efforts undertaken

In January 2020, I was requested by the Chairman of Westmeston Parish Council, as I am the designated Tree Warden and Environment Councillor, to follow up initial dialogues he had had regarding concerns expressed by local residents (particularly in Wivelsfield Parish) regarding the actions undertaken in relation to the felling and coppicing operations that had recently been taking place in West Wood to the very north of Westmeston Parish. Between then and now the following actions have been undertaken:

1. I had an initial meeting with one of the local concerned residents;
2. The Clerk of Wivelsfield Parish Council was contacted to elicit information as to the range of concerns expressed;
3. I made an initial inspection of the wood, limiting passage to the one public footpath, and the one public bridleway, but observing from the perimeter, and while doing this, I spoke to 2 dog walkers regarding problems encountered;
4. I have linked with one Wivelsfield Parish Councillor to encourage collaboration on this issue between the 2 Parish Councils;
5. I linked with the Specialist Advisor (Arboriculture) Lewes District Council, SDNPA (where overlapping with Lewes DC) and Eastbourne District Council, who also passed certain issues through to the Lewes DC – Planning Enforcement Officer;
6. Regarding the Footpaths and Bridleway through the wood 2 Rights of Way Officers on East Sussex County Council (ESCC) were contacted, one of whom has an intimate knowledge of the wood;
7. Regarding the Felling and Coppicing, a Forestry Commission (FC) Field Manager (based in Farnham, Surrey) was contacted, who supplied a copy of the felling licence (which is of 10 years duration and open to the public) (see attachment), and also, following my request, visited the site with his colleagues on March 16, 2020;
8. I had intended, following these contacts with officials, to contact the current owner of the woodland, to try to facilitate an amicable dialogue for overcoming these concerns, but, as with many other people, Coronavirus considerations have currently taken priority.

a) Footpaths and Bridleways

The main concerns expressed over pathways were that:

1. Pathways blocked with cut trees
2. The Public Footpath from Hundred Acre Lane to Eastern Road very muddy
3. Saplings cut to a few inches high to widen footpath – short stumps a trip hazard.
4. Who is responsible for the maintenance of pathways and bridleways through the wood?

There is only one public footpath through West Wood (Number 1) from near Woodlands Farm on Hundred Acre Lane through the northern section of West Wood to Eastern Road South in Wivelsfield. When walked in February 2020 this was very muddy; signposting was unclear and in one place the signpost broken and lent against a tree; some broken saplings inhibiting

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walkers, but no cut trees inhibiting the footpath). The only public bridleway from just north of public footpath on Hundred Acre Lane goes northwards through a gully in West Wood, and then out onto village fields. There was no observed tree cutting blocking route, but it was very muddy. ESCC Footpaths and Bridleways is responsible for public footpaths and bridleways. The wood was last surveyed by ESCC Footpaths Team on November 22, 2019, but they have taken note of comments on their present state in West Wood.

There are a number of tracks and pathways through the wood, apparently established by the owner, and a number of “unofficial” pathways seem to have been established through the wood, particularly near the Wivelsfield end of the wood, and coppicing and cut trees in this area appear, from a distance, to be obstructing some of these improvised footpaths. Neither East Sussex County Council, nor the landowner is responsible for other “unrecorded” pathways.

The difficulty would appear to lie in a number of local residents treating, particularly the northern part of the wood, as a public amenity, through which they have gradually established “unofficial pathways”, particularly incorporating the public footpath and the public bridleway in a circular route, that has led back into Wivelsfield village, and now the first part of the plan of coppicing and felling in Section 1b has interrupted such a circuit. This section is due to be replanted in due course.

The private property owner of the wood does not have to maintain footpaths through the wood for the public, but a solution might be found in designating certain improvised paths, particularly in the very northern part of the wood as designated “permissive ways”, perhaps with members of the local community participating in the maintenance of these in collaboration with the owner, leaving most of the wood to the south for the exclusive use of the landowner.

b) Structures

1. In 2018, 2 yurts and a tree house appeared (the yurts have now gone and a tree-house has not been located, but a swing has been established from one tree, and some metallic rubbish deposited in certain spots – it is not clear who was responsible for any of these).
2. A yellow shipping container has been established in the wood (this is presumably for storing felling and coppicing tools for the duration of the licensed 10 year coppicing and felling plan).

It should perhaps be noted that there are the remains in this wood of the underground hide-out to be used during the Second-World War by Territorial Army forces to sustain local resistance to invasion.

c) Felling and coppicing concerns

Comments - “The key concerns seem to be the amount of clearance taking place and the manner of this clearance (sawn trunks seemingly being left on the ground for some weeks and some trees reputedly being cut off at odd heights”).

Some local residents claim they “are not against proper woodland management” ... they are

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“very much in support of it”. They have been only looking for “information, communication and ultimately reassurance that a significant ancient local amenity is safeguarded”.

There has been some “dismay at the amount of clearance being undertaken in the woods and concern for whether there is some ulterior motive (in terms of plans to use the woods for some form of commercial activity, as opposed to simply clearing it for land management’s sake”.

1. Autumn 2019 – Hedge and mature trees felled alongside Hundred Acre Lane (these works were permitted);
2. Mature hornbeam near northern boundary was felled (these works were not prohibited);
3. The entrance towards the south on Hundred Acre Lane was made very large (this was permitted);
4. The wood is predominately classified as “Ancient Semi-natural Woodland” - not “ancient woodland”)
5. This is “woodland” not “agricultural land”. Covenants would be attached to the title deeds of the land;
6. Felling at bottom north corner of wood nearest village (village fields one side-bridleway from Field House Green Road almost to Lashmir) (Section 1b of 10-year programme; subsequently to be restocked)
7. Felling Licence granted mid-2019 for thinning and felling coppice work – of 10 years duration, with stipulations” – (the licence “is for a combination of ‘felling of coppice’ and thinning”. Re thinning, the licence states, “Any thinning operations approved by this licence will be implemented evenly across the operational area and will not remove more than 30% of the original canopy cover per operation.” One concerned individual suggested that “more than 30% of the canopy had disappeared”, but the inspection by the Forestry Commission staff on March 16, 2020, suggested it was correctly implemented.
8. The full 60 acres of woodland could not be removed using this licence;
9. The licence is in the public domain attached to this note;
10. How is the licence enforced? (Periodic inspections by FC – none had been done by the end of February 2020, as it was comparatively early in the 10 year programme, but FC staff did inspect it following a specific request to do so.

The way ahead?

1. The ESCC Footpaths and Bridleways team is now fully conscious of particular current concerns over the current state of the public footpath and public bridleway through West Wood. For any future concerns on these aspects they need to be addressed to: East Sussex County Council - Rights of Way and Countryside Management 0345 6080193 | Fax: 01273 337199 eastsussex.gov.uk
2. Over any further issues related to the felling and coppicing of West Wood, the newly-appointed Field Officer in the Forestry Commission responsible for this is contactable on email <matthew.smith@forestrycommission.gov.uk>.
3. Over any further issues over “improvised” or “permissive” footpaths through West Wood it would be best for local residents to enter into contact with the current owner, which I could hopefully facilitate.

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Vincent Tickner
Westmeston Parish Councillor
Tree Warden & Environment
March 20, 2020

11/06/2019

Application ref: 019/1531/2019 Management Plan Ref: 660952
Felling Licence (Forestry Act 1967) Woodland Name: West Wood

Please find a copy of your approved Felling Licence and map(s) enclosed. If you are an agent receiving this Felling Licence on behalf of the owner / tenant, please ensure you forward a copy to the owner / tenant for their attention.

Please note the expiry date for completion of the work. If the licence contains conditions for restocking, it is the responsibility of the owner / tenant to ensure that the conditions are met by the required date(s) specified in the Licence. The Forestry Commission may visit the site at any time to inspect the progress of any restocking. If you're a farmer or land manager and claim rural payments, you must follow a set of rules called Cross Compliance, which include Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions of land (GAECs), and which may impact what times of the year you can use your felling licence to cut down trees on land receiving payments. Failure to comply with Cross Compliance may constitute a breach of the rules and result in a reduction of the relevant payment by the Rural Payments Agency.

I should also bring to your attention the Timber and Timber Products (Placing on the Market) Regulations 2013. The EU Timber Regulations prohibit the trade of illegally harvested timber and timber products and require those who are responsible for placing timber onto the market for the first time – whether an owner, contractor or timber merchant – to maintain documentation that proves that the timber is from a legally harvested resource and supply chain.

An EU Timber Regulations pro-forma for this felling licence is enclosed. We have completed the relevant parts to confirm that timber felled under this licence has been felled legally. However, you or the party placing the timber on the market for the first time will need to complete and retain the form (along with any other documents that demonstrate the timber has been felled in conjunction with all other relevant legislation e.g. Health and Safety).

For information on how and who should complete the form please read the Operations Note 33, on our EU Timber Regulation web page:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-timber-regulation-europerations-note-33>

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The enclosed felling licence only gives you permission to fell trees. It does not give you the additional consents that you require in order to conduct works (including felling) within Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Scheduled Monuments. These may be enclosed with this felling licence, but if they are not, you should not fell trees on protected sites without the formal consent from Natural England or Historic England respectively.

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