

WESTMESTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Ordinary Council Meeting held virtually via Zoom on
Thursday 27th August 2020 at 7:30 pm.
(Members of the Public were invited to attend)

Present

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

Officer: Nick Wiltshire, Clerk to the Council.

Public: None.

In response to the pandemic, there is new legislation in place to allow Westmeston Parish Council to meet & make decisions virtually. This meeting should have been the Annual General Meeting, but the legislation has allowed this to be postponed until May next year. Anything that would normally be approved at the AGM (such as approving policies) will come forward throughout the year.

1. Apologies for Absence – Apologies had been received, & with the reasons outlined, were accepted from Cllrs Kendal Golding & Vincent Tickner.

2. To approve the minutes of the Council Meeting held on 10th March 2020 (previously circulated)

Resolved – That the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 10th March 2020 be agreed as a true & accurate record.

3. Declarations of Interest: None.

4. Public Forum & Questions: None.

5. Chairman's Report & Urgent Items: None.

6. Covid-19 - The provisions of the Coronavirus Act 2020 allow local authorities to put in place different meeting arrangements for the period from 4 April 2020 to 7 May 2021, including holding 'virtual meetings'.

(a) **Virtual Meeting Policy** – This is a new policy to reflect the changes in how the Council meets, as provided by recent legislation, to allow it to continue to conduct its business.

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Resolved – That this policy, as submitted, be approved.

- (b) **Annual Meeting of Council** -In the light of COVID-19, changes in legislation were made to allow the business usually conducted at the Annual Meeting of Council (election of Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Committee membership, etc) to be postponed either to the next usual Annual Meeting in May 2021 or at any time during the 2020/21 Council Year once Council were able to reconvene.

Resolved – That elections of office until the Annual Meeting of Parish Council in May 2021 be postponed. Passed unanimously.

- (c) **Dispensation for Members' non-attendance resulting from the cancellation of meetings due to Covid-19.**

Resolved – That all Members be granted dispensation for non-attendance at Council meetings since March when the Covid-19 restrictions were introduced. Passed unanimously.

7. The Annual Return for 2019/20:

- (a) Members reviewed the effectiveness of the system for internal control & considered the Governance Statement as set out in the Annual Return; & (b) Members considered the Accounting Statements.

8. Approval of the Annual Governance Statement 2019/20.

Resolved – That the Governance Statement as set out in Section 1 of the Annual Return for 2019/20 be accepted & approved. Passed unanimously.

9. Approval of the Accounting Statements 2019/20.

Resolved – That the Accounting Statements as set out in Section 2 of the Annual Return for 2019/20 be accepted & approved. Passed unanimously.

10. Authorisation for the Chairman to sign & date the Annual Return for 2019/20.

Resolved – That the Chairman be authorised to sign & date the Accounting Statements. Passed unanimously.

11. To exempt the Council from a Limited Assurance Review by the External Auditor for 2019/20 (Financial Year ended 31/03/2020).

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At the conclusion of the Financial Year, the Parish Council was able to satisfy the various qualifying criteria set out on the Certificate of Exemption & exempt itself from a Limited Assurance Review, resulting in a cost saving of some £200 (ex VAT).

Resolved – That a resolution to exempt the Council from a Limited Assurance Review by the External Auditor for 2019/20 (Financial Year ended 31/03/2020) be adopted by Council & that a Certificate of Exemption be completed & signed by the Chairman & Clerk then sent to its appointed auditor (PFK Littlejohn LLP). Passed unanimously.

12. Governance:

i. Review of Council Policies & Procedures:

A review of the Council's Policies & Procedures remained on-going. The following policies had been created or updated, in line with models & had been circulated to Members for information & comments, if considered necessary:

- a. **Bring Your Own Device Policy (new);**
- b. **Financial Regulations (new);**
- c. **Standing Orders (updated); &**
- d. **Document Retention Scheme (new).**

No comments had been received prior to the meeting. After some discussion, the Vice-Chairman said that she had looked through the existing & draft Standing Orders & had noticed a change in 4dv.in that the number of days was showing as eight. It was thought that this previously read as three whereas in fact it was blank. Secondly, 9b. previously showed 5 but had been amended to 10 days as the number of clear days needed to be more than the number of clear days shown in 9d.

Cllr Mark Clark felt that a. didn't apply as he didn't have a single item of personnel & private data regarding those in the parish nor had received anything marked Confidential. It was pointed out that Councillors used personal email addresses. The ICO say that the use of personal email accounts and privately-owned devices may make it more complicated for Councils to demonstrate that they are GDPRcompliant. It was pointed out that although the Council was small it was still a local government authority & required policies to be in place for the protection of Members & the Council. Following some discussion, it was broadly felt that having commonsense, business practice, knowing what's right & wrong policies such as a. were excessive & not needed by a small parish council such as this. Cllr Mark Clark proposed that b., c. & d. be adopted & a. be declined. This was seconded by the ViceChairman.

It was **Resolved** – That b., c. & d., as submitted, be approved & a. be declined. Passed unanimously.

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- ii. **Code of Conduct for Members** – A Code of Conduct is a legal requirement & has been created in line with that adopted by Lewes District Council.

Resolved – That this Code of Conduct, as submitted, be adopted. Passed unanimously.

- iii. **NALC Code of Conduct Consultation (previously distributed).**

Resolved – That following the extension of the closing date of the consultation that Members submit their comments to the Clerk by 7th September for submission as the Council's collective response.

13. Financial Matters:

Selection of insurance policy: 3 insurance companies were invited to tender & quotes for similar cover were obtained, as follows:

The Council's existing insurers, Zurich Insurance - £ 347.18; BHIB Councils Insurance - £357.10 (fixed for 3 years); & Business Services at CAS Ltd. (RSA Insurance) - £248.71 (fixed for 3 years).

Having purchased the Business Services at CAS Ltd. (RSA Insurance) policy it transpired that a Proposal Form was required & in the course of completing this it appeared that the Council was over-insured. As a result we have been given a refund of £40.17 & the premium will now be £198.96 rather than £248.71 for each of the next 2 years.

Resolved – That the information be noted. Passed unanimously.

- (a) Year End Bank Reconciliation for 2019/20.

Resolved – That the Year End Bank Reconciliation for 2019/20 be accepted & approved for signing by the Chairman & the Clerk. Passed unanimously.

- (b) Quarterly Bank Reconciliation (April-June 2020).

The Vice-Chairman explained that what would normally happen is that she & Cllr Mark Clark would go over the bank reconciliation at the end of the quarter to make sure that all was in order, however, meetings have not been held due to Covid-19. Consequently, they haven't had the opportunity to do this as they have not had sight of bank statements, invoices or the chequebook so they haven't been able to reconcile or initial anything. Due the strange times in which we live the usual way of carrying out a bank reconciliation is not possible. As some

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Members had not received details, copies of bank statements & the Quarterly Bank Reconciliation documents would be sent out to all Members before the next meeting & receiving the Quarterly Bank Reconciliation (April-June 2020) would be deferred.

- (c) Statement of Receipts & Payments for 2019/20.

Resolved – That the Statement of Receipts & Payments for 2019/20 be accepted & approved. Passed unanimously.

- (d) Annual Risk Assessment Report presented by Cllrs Cathy Mills (Vice-Chairman) & Tessa Haughton following inspection of Council property in accordance with Covid-19 guidelines for approval.

Resolved – That the Annual Risk Assessment Report be received & approved. Passed unanimously.

- (e) Asset Register for 2019/20 to be received for approval.

Resolved – That the Asset Register for 2019/20 be received & approved. Passed unanimously.

- (f) The following invoices were approved for payment:

Church Corner Maintenance: reimbursement to Cllr Cathy Mills for March, April & May: £105.00. Cheque no. 000165.

Business Services at CAS Ltd. – Annual Insurance cover: £248.71. Cheque no. 000161.

Mulberry & Co. – Internal Audit fee: £252.00. Cheque no. 000162.

ESALC Limited. – ESALC & NALC annual subscriptions for 2020/21: £104.59. Cheque no. 000164.

4 x Litter-Picking Traffic Signs: reimbursement to Cllr Cathy Mills: £345.60. Cheque no. 000166.

4 x Traffic Cones for Litter-Picking: reimbursement to Cllr Rob Mills: £19.96. Cheque no. 000168.

Church Corner Maintenance: reimbursement to Cllr Cathy Mills for July (£35.00) plus 20 x Large Product Labels: reimbursement to Cllr Cathy Mills (£22.85): Total = £57.85. Cheque no. 000169.

Church Corner Maintenance: reimbursement to Cllr Cathy Mills for August: £35.00. Cheque no. 000170.

Zoom Standard Pro Subscription (18/08/20 to 17/09/20): reimbursement to Clerk: £14.39. Cheque no. 000171.

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ICO Annual Fee: £35.00 Direct Debit Payment.

(g) Re-Appointment of Internal Auditors Mulberry & Co. for 2020/21.

Resolved – That Mulberry & Co. be re-appointed Internal Auditors for 2020/21.
Passed unanimously.

14. Planning:

(a) Planning Applications for consideration:

- i. **Cripps Cottage, Lewes Road, Westmeston. BN6 8RH ([SDNP/20/03278](#))** - Single storey home office in rear garden.

Resolved – No comment. Passed unanimously.

- ii. **Gallops Farm, Streat Lane, Westmeston, East Sussex. BN6 8SB ([LW/20/0407](#))** - Conversion of barn to single dwelling, demolition of modern brick barn with replacement extension & new garage.

As it was felt that there were no material reasons to object it was **Resolved** – No comment. Passed unanimously.

(b) Planning Applications for noting comments made:

- i. **Land Adjacent To Middleton Common Farm, Middleton Common Lane, Streat. BN6 8SF – ([LW/20/0140](#))** - Change of use of agricultural land to dog day care facility (sui generis) with construction of site access, reception building & field shelter & provision of car parking. *Awaiting decision.*

“Two of the issues of most concern to residents are traffic/ access safety & noise. Competence for the former lies with the Highway Authority & the latter with Environmental Health (EH).

Westmeston Parish Council has no comments to make on the development itself but does observe that the Noise Impact Assessment carried out for the applicant is based on a key assumption:

It is thought that it is extremely unlikely for more than one dog to bark at precisely the same time on site.

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Making this assumption about dog behaviour - however good the dog management & enrichment - is tantamount to assuming there can never be a noise nuisance from this site. EH should look at this afresh.”

- ii. **Grimwade Farm, Spatham Lane, Westmeston, East Sussex. BN6 8XL** ([LW/20/0259](#)) - (Demolition of three derelict barns & replacement with family dwelling (Resubmission following [LW/19/0152](#)). *Awaiting decision.*

Westmeston Parish Council wishes to object to this application. The proposed house is not within the settlement boundary & it could only constitute an exception in terms of the Neighbourhood Development Plan if it complied with the relevant policies of the NDP & DS1 of the NDP. It is not, however, a small affordable house. Concerns have been raised by the SDNPA in relation to the location of the proposed new dwelling, its size, appropriateness & the Dark Sky Reserve (despite design changes to the previous proposal to ameliorate light pollution). The Council supports SDNPA’s concerns. With regard to the general ‘superior design’ argument, this is irrelevant no matter how good the design when the application fails to meet other basic criteria as indicated. Ceding weight to this argument risks granting precedence to other applications seeking to advance the ‘superior design’ argument (notably [SDNP/19/05295/FUL](#)).

Resolved – That comments submitted for these Planning Applications be noted.

- (c) **To consider any applications received after despatch of this agenda.**

None received.

- (d) **To note any Decision Notices received.**

- i. **Land at Keymer Road, Ditchling, East Sussex. ([SDNP/20/05154/FUL](#))** - To retain the use of the land on a permanent basis for one rugby pitch for Ditchling Rugby Club, with associated use of the Cricket Club Car Park & Clubhouse, following temporary permission granted under reference SDNP/16/05154/FUL. To note that in the absence of any material planning considerations WPC’s Planning Lead made no comment.

Resolved – That the **Grant of Planning Permission** be noted.

- ii. **Underhill, Underhill Lane, Westmeston. BN6 8XG ([SDNP/20/01997/HOUS](#))** - Retention of temporary construction access on a permanent basis, & amendment to application no ([SDNP/19/01577/HOUS](#)) for change of

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materials to roof. To note Members' response of there being no material planning considerations, hence No Comment.

Resolved – That the **Grant of Planning Permission** be noted.

- iii. **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 & erection of stable block with improved access to the Lewes Road.

Resolved – That the **Refusal of Planning Permission** be noted.

- iv. **Ivinghoe Spatham Lane Westmeston BN6 8XH (SDNP/19/05453/FUL)** - Replacement building incorporating holiday cottage, car port, stables and storage. *This application is liable for Community Infrastructure Levy and will be subject to the rates set out in the Charging Schedule (<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/communityinfrastructure-levy/>).*

Resolved – That the **Grant of Planning Permission** be noted.

- v. **1 Church Cottages, The Street, Westmeston. BN6 8RJ (SDNP/20/01209/HOUS)** - New front porch & revised fenestration to left elevation. To note Members' response of Objection based on the use of uPVC windows on a building in a Conservation Area where the vernacular material is wood for window frames.

Resolved – That the **Grant of Planning Permission** be noted.

- vi. **Land at Keymer Road, Ditchling, East Sussex. (SDNP/20/05154/FUL)** - To retain the use of the land on a permanent basis for one rugby pitch for Ditchling Rugby Club, with associated use of the Cricket Club Car Park & Clubhouse, following temporary permission granted under reference SDNP/16/05154/FUL. To note that in the absence of any material planning considerations WPC's Planning Lead made no comment.

Resolved – That the **Grant of Planning Permission** be noted.

(e) **Any other matters for information only.** None.

15. Clerk's Report.

- i. **Website Accessibility & Privacy Policy**

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Details of new regulations regarding website accessibility requirements & the action taken so far to improve the accessibility of the Council's website were reported.

Resolved – That the information be noted.

ii. Computer Equipment

Pursuant to Council minute 64 (e), it can be confirmed that updated quotes have been obtained recently & are being appraised prior to purchase. A contingency sum of £1,200 was agreed for the purchase of IT equipment. Given that VAT can be reclaimed, this sum of £1,200 is considered to be ex VAT. In addition to the one-off cost of purchase of IT equipment, there are monthly expenses.

Resolved – That a sum of £1,200 (ex VAT) is available to purchase computer equipment is confirmed but further details regarding the monthly expenses entailed regarding software amounting to £56.25 per month (ex VAT) are made available to Members' for their consideration at the next meeting. **Action: Clerk**

16. Church Corner: Nothing to report other than monthly maintenance continues to be carried out by Martin Driver.

17. Items for information only & referral to next agenda.

None.

18. Date of next meeting: Tuesday 8th September 2020 at 7:30 pm to be held by remote attendance via Zoom video conferencing.

The meeting closed at 8:57 pm.

These Minutes will be presented for approval at the next Meeting of the Parish Council

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Addendum to the minutes of August 27th 2020 as approved at a full meeting of Westmeston Parish Council 8th October 2020

- Agenda item 12b Quarterly Bank Reconciliation April – June 2020. **(13b on the minutes)**

As Mark Clark and Cathy had not had a chance to inspect the bank statements, invoices and cheque book due to Covid it was agreed unanimously that this would be held over until the next meeting and those documents sent to us for inspection.

This is not made clear in the minute.

- Agenda items 2, 3, & 4 are in different order to the minutes
- Agenda item 11ii Code of Conduct for Members. It was again pointed out that every member had a hard copy of the Code of Conduct but that no electronic copy was available. It was proposed and seconded and passed unanimously that the Code presented be adopted and should be posted on our website as soon as possible.
- Agenda Item 11 Governance sub heading i. Review of Policies c Standing Orders **(Item 12 Governance – sub heading i. Review of Council Policies and Procedures on the minutes)** c. Standing Orders (updated) (At the meeting the Standing Orders were discussed and changes to clauses 4v and 9b made by the clerk without consultation with council were rejected. It was proposed, seconded and carried unanimously that these clauses would revert to those passed by council in July 2019 and the standing orders need no further action.

Query from Cllr Cathy Mills prior to the meeting as to why heading had been changed.

- Agenda items 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 are in different order and do not match the minute headings, this makes it almost impossible to follow unless you have the patience of a saint.
- Agenda Item 16 Items for information only and referral to next agenda. **(Item 17 on the minutes)**

Mark Clark questioned why the 2 items outstanding were not listed here. Signing of the minutes and Item 13. No satisfactory answer was forthcoming.

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