

Minutes of the Zoom Parish Council meeting held on Tuesday 19th January 2021

Present:	Cllr. Michael Smith (Chairman)	Cllr. John Meischke (Vice-Chairman)
	Cllr. Stephen Block	Cllr. Christine Dinnin
	Cllr. Catherine Hammon	Cllr. Kay Jancey
	Cllr. David Stock	Cllr. Emma Waltham
	Clerk: Jane Allsop	

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies: Cllrs. Ian Knight, Helen McCash, and District Councillor Sophie Bell.

2. Public participation

None.

3. Chairman's/ Clerk's report

None.

4. Declaration of interests

None.

5. Minutes of the last meeting

a) Acceptance

- **Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Monday 8th December 2020**
Parish Councillors agreed that the minutes be approved.

b) Review of actions

None.

c) Action points resolved

1. Contact EHDC re bus shelter and put notices on Facebook, website, and notices boards
2. Sign Budget and Finance minutes
3. E-mail contractors re grass cutting, hedge and maintenance quotes
4. Display conclusion of audit notices
5. Renew SLCC annual subscription
6. E-mail all Parish Councillors re the Sports & Social Club payment for the 3rd quarter
7. Arrange a site meeting with Parish Councillors to discuss condition of the double tennis courts
8. **Obtain quotations for an Oak tree for the sportsfield**

Cllr. Smith contacted Majestic Trees, who supplied the Acer tree purchased in memory of Nigel Poulton and they had all the Parish Council information to hand. They have provided a quotation of £658 to supply a Holm Oak tree including installation and staking the tree. Cllr. Smith explained the features of the Holm Oak.

Quercus Ilex, the evergreen Oak, Holly Oak or Holm Oak, is a large evergreen Oak native to the Mediterranean region. It takes its name from holm, an ancient name for holly. Questioned as to its hardiness Cllr. Smith said it was rated H4. (Down to -10c)

He said a Holm Oak does not grow as big as a traditional Oak and the tree supplied would be between 4.5 to 5 metres tall (about 15 foot). He asked Parish Councillors if they would prefer a traditional Oak or are happy with the suggestion of a Holm Oak tree as it would give an extra interest on the sportsfield.

Cllr. Dinnin said that now we know we have a problem with the Oak tree on the Church Walk side of the tennis courts, are their sufficient funds to spend on a new tree. Cllr. Meischke said if the Oak tree had to come down, a replacement would not be sited in the same location as the current tree is too close to the tennis courts and causes lots of problems. Cllr. Dinnin said that the tree provides the only bit of shade beside the tennis courts. Cllr. Smith said we have sufficient funds to purchase a new Oak tree and the proposed location is up by Harry's bench where the conifer trees were taken down. The Oak tree by the tennis court will probably still be standing when we are all long gone.

Cllr. Smith asked Parish Councillors if they were happy with that and they signalled their agreement.

Cllr. Stock asked if the tree would have full protection and expressed his concern that a newly planted tree up near Harry's bench might be subject to vandalism. Cllr. Smith said that Majestic trees would only be staking the tree and not providing full protection. He suggested we get the tree first and then decide if it needs a tree guard. Harry's bench may need to be moved and Cllr. Dinnin was in doubt that the bench would survive the move. It was agreed to try and avoid moving the bench and if necessary, contact Harry's family.

Cllrs. Smith, Meischke, Dinnin and Stock to visit the site and agree the exact installation site for the tree.

Action: M. Smith/J. Meischke/C. Dinnin/D. Stock

9. **Write to Green King re condition of the George and Dragon boundary fence along Hockerill footpath**
Cllr. Smith said he had written to Green King, but to date no response has been received.
This items to remain on the agenda. **Agenda: 02/2021**
10. Accept Adam Welch's quotation to clear the leaves on Hockerill footpath and cut back hedge
11. E-mail to all allotment holders
12. Write parish News insert

d) Action points outstanding for more than two months

1. **Send minute books to HCC for archiving:** outstanding. **Action: J. Allsop**
2. **Arrange for the disposal of the old acoustic screen:** outstanding. **Action: J. Meischke**
3. **Investigate the installation of electric car charging point at the Community Hall**
Due to the current Covid-19 lockdown, this item to be removed from the agenda and revisited later this year.
4. **Submit article to Parish News re re-opening of Forever active and Library opening times**
This item cannot be fulfilled because the Community Hall is closed due to Covid-19 lockdown.
This item to be removed from the agenda.

6. Planning

a) Applications

The following planning applications were dealt with via e-mail and letters put through the doors of residents as and when required.

- i) **Highfields, Whempstead Road, Whempstead (3/20/2549/FUL)**
Demolition of existing dwelling and erection of dwelling with detached double garage,
The Parish council agreed they had no objection in principal but requested that the Common Land area is not compromised in the whole or in part by enclosure, removal, or replanting. The Clerk advised the planning department accordingly.
- ii) **Lamsden House, Blue Hill Farm, High Elms Lane (3/20/2590/HH)**
Removal of balconies and demolition of rear extension. Single storey side/rear extensions. Alteration to fenestration and glass roof over garden room. Proposed basement/wine cellar. Renewal of solar thermal panels to photovoltaic panels to main roof. Proposed canopy attached to the rear elevation. Replacement of windows and doors to detached garage
Parish Councillors agreed a no comment response and the Clerk advised the planning department accordingly.

b) Decisions

- i) **15 Rivershill (3/20/2118/HH)**
2 single storey side extensions, two storey rear extension, new front dormer window, new first floor side window openings and alterations to fenestration
from the hours of 0700 to 1900 **-EHDC permission granted**
- ii) **3 Blue Hill Cottages (3/20/2136/HH)**
Demolition of conservatory and construction of round floor rear extension to include roof lights and steel flue
-EHDC permission granted
- iii) **The Beaneside (3/20/2149/HH)**
Demolition of conservatory. Construction of a single storey side extension **-EHDC permission granted**

7. Reports

a) Neighbourhood plan and Benefits Committee – progress reports

Cllr. Waltham reported as follows.

The NP Steering Group met over zoom in January and agreed to postpone the Regulation 14 consultation until the end of the current lockdown. In the meantime, the group is continuing to liaise with the prospective developers on plans for their sites, as well as working with relevant stakeholders to bring to fruition the benefits the village expects to realise on release of the Green Belt land, such as football pitches and the circular walk. The next meeting is at the beginning of February.

Cllr. Waltham added that she and Cllr. Smith had a video call with Fairview New Homes last week. Cllr. Smith had been in contact with the Ryan family about a lease for the land between the Fairview site and the Stevenage Road and had not got very far with it, so they asked Fairview New homes (who now own the Walkern Road development site) to get involved as they have an established relationship with the family.

Cllr. Waltham said she is having problems with the Neighbourhood plan website. She has not been able to edit the website for some time due to problems with the hosting site. She has given herself a deadline date

of the end of January and if they have not fixed the problem, she will have to redo the website with a new hosting and upload everything to that site, which will be time consuming. The NP Steering Group need a working website to be able to complete the Regulation 14 consultation. She said the hosting is due for renewal in March and she will not be renewing the current hosting.

When the Covid lockdown is eased, and the NP Steering Group start to do the Regulation 14 consultation, they have asked the Clerk to help liaise with the stakeholders. David Humby and the Clerk are currently in the process of putting together a list of stakeholders and their contact details.

Cllr. Smith asked if the Parish Council could see the draft Regulation 14 document before it goes to public consultation. Although not yet complete, Cllr. Waltham said that the draft is available in the drop box, and Charles Clark is in the process of completing it.

b) Footpaths

- **Hazeldell Footpaths** - report provided by Cllr. Stock

After making contact with HCC, Cllr. Stock was able to report that KIELYS (the Contractor) will be returning in February/March to undertake any missing works. Although this will be weather-dependent, he was assured that these works will be carried out when possible.

With regard to the blocked drain adjacent to No. 84, Ringway did visit the site to clear the gully but noted that the frame was broken and could not be removed. Therefore, they will be returning to repair this and clean out the gully in due course. A date for this is awaited and is being chased, and Cllr. Stock will be informed when a definite date is known.

He will continue to monitor the overall situation re the footpaths.

David had nothing further to add just keeping an eye on it.

c) Sports and Social Club

Cllr. Meischke said that this item has been kept on the agenda as a reminder that we need to discuss our future relationship with the Sports and Social Club.

It was agreed to defer this item and put it on the April 2021 agenda.

Agenda: 04/2021

d) A602 improvement scheme update

Cllr. Meischke asked for this item to be removed from the agenda until April 2021 with a reminder to chase the A602 team about the installation of a dog bin just passed the Watton House entrance and a village gateway.

Agenda: 04/2021

He reminded Parish Councillors that updates are sent to the Parish Council on a regular basis and are also available online. The Clerk uploads their updates to Facebook and the Parish Council's website.

e) Meeting dates for the Civic Year 2021/22

It was agreed that Parish Council meetings shall continue to be held on the third Tuesday in the month, except for the December 2021, which will be on the 2nd Tuesday.

• Tuesday 18 th May 2021	• Tuesday 16 th November 2021
• Tuesday 15 th June 2021	• Tuesday 14 th December 2021
• Tuesday 20 th July 2021	• Tuesday 18 th January 2022
• No meeting in August 2021	• Tuesday 15 th February 2022
• Tuesday 21 st September 2021	• Tuesday 15 th March 2022
• Tuesday 19 th October 2021	• Tuesday 19 th April 2022

The Parish Council meeting in May 2021, will be preceded by the Annual Parish Meeting and the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council.

8. Reports

a) Sub-Committees

Budget & Finance

Cllr. Block reported on the following items.

- **Monthly accounts**

Watton-at-Stone Parish Council		
Petty Cash – Receipts		Petty cash - Payments
None		None
Payments		
ICO	Annual subscription	35.00
HMRC	Tax & Ni -October - December 2020	269.13
Wages and salary	December 2020	1330.63
SLCC	Annual subscription	166.00
Bidwells	Allotment rent - 1/2 year	335.00
BT	phone calls package - October to December 2020	69.79
Community Hall	BHIB Trustees indemnity insurance	379.00
		2584.55

Receipts		
Sports and Social Club	Q3 Oct & Dec = 75% charge, Nov = 0	198.75
Nationwide	Interest	17.33
Santander	Interest	0.22
Chris Wrigley	Allotment deposit	50.00
Sarah Nesfield	Donation for Allotment clearance	50.00
		316.30

Watton-at-Stone Community Hall

Petty Cash – Receipts		Petty Cash -Payments	
Floodlighting - donations	80.00		
	80.00		
Payments			
British Gas	Gas supply		59.64
Wages	Cleaning December		342.65
Amazon	Voucher		20.00
British Gas	Electricity		71.81
British Gas	Gas supply		45.30
			539.40
Receipts			
Sports and Social Club	Q3 Oct & Dec = 75% charge, Nov = 0		198.75
Santander	Bank interest		0.09
HMRC	VAT rebate for November 2020		64.65
			263.49

Parish Councillors approved the payments.

- **Approval and signing of Precept forms for 2021/22**

Parish Councillors approved the annual precept requirement for 2021/22 of £37,165. This is equivalent to 1% increase.

The Precept form to be signed by the Chairman, two Parish Councillors and countersigned by the Clerk.

The completed precept form to be returned to East Herts Council.

Action: J. Allsop

- **9-monthly statement of accounts for the Parish Council and Community Hall**

Parish Councillors were e-mailed a copy of the 9-monthly statement of accounts on 15/01/2021.

Despite the Covid restrictions the Parish Council and Community Hall remain very well funded. Loss of income from the Community Hall is slightly offset by zero Council Tax and lower utility bills.

- **9-monthly inspection of accounts**

Cllr. Block carried out the 9-monthly inspection and everything was in order.

Recreation and Amenities Sub-Committee

Nothing to report.

Community Hall Trustees

Cllr. Meischke reported on the following items.

- **Hall closure due to Covid-19 lockdown**

Cllr. Meischke said that he and Rosemary Brown continue to visit the hall on a regular basis to make sure everything is working properly, including regularly running the water and flushing toilets to stop the mechanism from ceasing up.

- **Gutters**

Cllr. Meischke said he has taken a video of the leaking guttering during heavy rainfall, which he copied to Cllr. Smith. He suggested that we ask a guttering specialist to come and have a look at the problem and supply a quotation for what needs to be done to resolve the problem.

He explained to councillors that the Community Hall has steel guttering and downpipes which are joined together with plastic fittings and it is those joints that are leaking. He said the problem needs to be sorted as soon as possible because the walls are getting very damp. Parish Councillors agreed with this course of action.

Action: J. Meischke

- **Windows & Doors - repair and repainting**

It was reported at the December 2020 meeting that Cllr. Meischke, Smith and Stock had looked at the external windows and doors and agreed not all of them need repainting.

When the weather improves, Cllr. Meischke said he will meet with Mark Blacktin to show him which doors and windows need attention and ask him to requote. Mark Blacktin's original quote was exceedingly high and it was for doing all the external doors and windows.

- **Annual Charity return**

Cllr. Meischke said that the Clerk had today submitted the annual charity return for the year ending 31st March 2020.

Environment Sub-Committee

Cllr. Dinnin provided the following report.

- **Allotments**

The rubbish clearance by Frank Cooper on the allotments has been completed, a £50 deposit has now been paid from the tenant who had previously not paid one, due to the amount of rubbish that was left on the plot she took over. Also, a donation of £50 from another allotment holder for the disposal of rubbish.

Cllr. Dinnin said that track going into the allotments is in a bad state with puddles and mud, although Frank Cooper have said that they filled the potholes before Christmas. The rest of the track along the length of the allotments is not looking good either.

Cllrs. Dinnin, Smith, Meischke and Stock agreed to visit the allotments and agree a course of action.

Action: C. Dinnin/M. Smith/J. Meischke/D. Stock

Cllr. Dinnin said she has started to look at updating the Allotment tenancy agreement as a couple of things need revising. Particularly the section when the tenants leave their plot, the agreement needs to include clearing the plot of all rubbish, removing all tools and equipment etc. Perhaps the Parish Council need to consider increasing the deposits. Also, the termination of tenancy agreement is currently one-year and should be reduced to three-months. Cllr. Smith said that the use of carpet on the allotments should be forbidden.

Cllr. Dinnin said we ought to e-mail all allotment holders telling them to keep their plots tidy at all times and not to use carpeting on their plots for covering bare soil because of long term disposal problems but to use G-Tex (weed control membrane) instead. Cllr. Dinnin agreed to put a draft together and e-mail it to the Environment Sub-Committee members.

Action: C. Dinnin

Cllr. Stock provided the following report.

- **War Memorial**

Further to the incident on 25 December in which a car crashed onto the War Memorial site (as reported to Councillors by Cllr. Meischke on 26 December) and then departed further along the High Street before being abandoned at the entrance to Rivershill, Cllr. Stock visited the site and updated the Parish Council via e-mail as follows.

He said that he visited the site to take a detailed look after the bits of wreckage had been removed and, as in many cases, thought that things could have been worse. He was amazed as to how close the car came (e.g. a few cms on either side) to causing substantial damage to the War Memorial and bench, both of which thankfully remain untouched.

In summary, there is:

- significant damage to a small area of the front edge and paving of the site which will need to be replaced
- substantial damage to the right-hand site of the site, involving the demolition of the large established shrub adjacent to the bench, part of the hedge, and most of the wooden boundary-fence.

Cllr. Stock then contacted Ben Storey (Grassroots) to discuss the situation in detail and subsequently received a quote for the repair work accordingly. He circulated the quote to all Councillors for their information and pointed out that it did not include the cost of the shrub to replace the large one adjacent to the bench and had assumed that the damage to the boundary hedge may not be terminal; but we need to check as this could also involve additional costs. We need to establish the type and degree of replacement planting needed to fill the space resulting from the loss of the large established shrub.

Having discussed the situation, Cllrs. Stock and Meischke agreed that we await further information from the police re the event and also consider the insurance implications before we proceed further.

The Clerk contacted the Police (Sally Brooks) for an update and on 15 January was told that investigations are ongoing and currently persons remain unidentified.

Bearing in mind its current state, Cllr. Stock sort a view from Councillors as to what we should do to ensure that the site is repaired as soon as possible to restore it to its previous good condition, e.g., claim from the driver's insurance (if this can be established), from our insurance (bearing in mind our excess and possible impact on premiums) or bite-the-bullet and pay for it ourselves.

Cllr. Meischke said that this afternoon he had asked the Clerk to contact PCSO Sally Brooks again to tell her exactly what the policeman on duty said at the time and asking for the details they promised to send us, i.e., the vehicle registration number, make, model and the incident number. Also, the person/company the vehicle is registered to. The Clerk did this immediately and a response is awaited. It was agreed that we discuss how to proceed once we have received the response.

b) Routine Reports**i) Emergency escape lighting tests and manual alarm call tests**

Cllr. Meischke carries out the emergency escape lighting and manual alarm call tests on a regular basis. He continues to inspect the hall regularly including running the water every 2-3 days to prevent the risk of legionnaires disease.

ii) Gas and electricity meter readings

Cllr. Meischke gives the Clerk gas and electricity meter readings at the end of each month and she uploads these readings to the providers websites.

iii) Weekly reports - Fire Inspection and shower tests

Done.

iv) Monthly village-report

Cllr. Hammon completed the report on 18th January 2021.

A copy of the report has been e-mailed to all Parish Councillors; therefore, the following is a summary.

Generally, the village is looking good. A lot of mud about given recent weather.

- **Sportsfield:** The oak between the playing field and the tennis courts has debris below it which looks like fungus fallen from the tree. There is a lot of fungus growing from a part of the tree where a large branch has been cut away in the past.

Cllr. Smith said that he and Cllrs. Meischke, Dinnin and Stock would inspect the tree when they visit the sportsfield to look at the site for the new Oak tree.

Action: M. Smith/J. Meischke/ C. Dinnin/ D. Stock

- **Community Hall:** As noted by Cllr. Smith last month/the Trustees, the Community Hall doors and window frames need redecorating.

Refer to item 8 a, Community Hall Trustees - Windows & Doors repair and repaint.

- **Ornate village sign:** There is fungus growing out of the bottom of the village signpost, on the side towards the road.

Cllrs. Smith and Meischke to inspect and agree a course of action. **Action: M. Smith/J. Meischke**

- **Allotments:** The end of the track near the path through to the church has been really cut up by a couple of vehicles turning round.

Cllr. Dinnin said it is usually like that each year and recovers after winter. Cllr. Hammon suggested we could put some wood chippings down. Cllr. Dinnin said that there is a membrane under this area and wood chippings would not be a good idea.

- **War Memorial:** Looking fine apart from the damage from the accident. Still gravel and debris on the stonework – would be good to clear that when possible. Remembrance Day wreaths still looking smart. Refer also to item 8 a, Environment Sub-Committee - War Memorial.

- **Salt bins** – all ok except the one at the entrance to Great Innings which is half full. Cllr. Hammon did not inspect the salt bin up at High Elms lane.

- **Dog bins** – all fine.

- **Litter bins** – all very full but lots of people out walking in the village

The Clerk said that Rosemary Brown complained to her that the litterbins are full of disposable coffee cups, which are recyclable and suggested that the Parish Council put one of the unused litterbins on the sportsfield for people to deposit their coffee cups in. Parish Councillors agreed that this was not a practical solution. Cllr. Smith said that the bin men are being exceptionally good about picking up additional waste that is around the litterbins. Cllr. Hammon said there was one bin at the bottom of the horses' field near the War Memorial that had a couple of bags of rubbish at the bottom. Cllr. Smith said that someone is doing a regular litterpick of the village and deposits the waste at this location each week and the litter collectors remove it.

- **Lammas wooded slope** - Cllr. Hammon said that during the storms a few weeks ago a small tree came down. This is in the wooded area at the top of the steps and is blocking the path.

Cllr. Waltham said that a couple of weeks ago she noted that there was a small tree further down the bank on the board walk.

Cllr. Smith agreed to investigate both fallen trees and agree a course of action. **Action: M. Smith**

v) Weekly sportsfield-report

Nothing to report.

vi) Weekly defibrillator inspection

Cllr. Hammon inspected the defibrillator whilst carrying out the monthly village-report on 18th January, and all was in good order.

vii) Website/Facebook

None.

viii) Highway and Lighting faults

None.

ix) Dog fouling reports

None.

x) Police reports

None.

9. Correspondence received**a) Licence application for Covid Wilkestock events in 2021**

Cllr. Smith provided the following report.

We were made aware, via Margaret Stanley, that an application had been made to EHDC concerning arrangements for fortnightly events at the Wilkestock venue. This would have come under Aston Parish Council which explains why we were not informed.

The Clerk managed to track down the application and there was a very robust objection from the Police. We asked Sophie Bell to investigate and she informed us that the application had been refused and she believed this was on the basis that it was considered irresponsible in the light of the pandemic. This must have been frustrating for the applicants as the application ran to about 20 pages detailing how the event was to be handled but I think the refusal was justified.

• Astonbury Wood

Cllr. Block provided the following report.

Herts County Council have put Astonbury Wood up for sale. The Stevenage Brook runs alongside the wood before it meets the Beane. Aston Parish Council have launched an e-petition (<https://democracy.hertfordshire.gov.uk/mgEPetitionDisplay.aspx?Id=86>) on the Herts County Council website asking the County Council to sell the woodland only to a person or organisation that clearly demonstrates that their ownership will:

1. Maximize the social and environmental benefit to the local community; encouraging greater recreational involvement and continued public use of the woodland.
2. Focus on increasing the extent and quality of all the habitats and biodiversity in the woodland.
3. Have the capability and resources to maintain and operate the wood on a sustainable basis.

Cllr. Smith said that this site is opposite the Three Horseshoes pub and runs up to Aston and encouraged Parish Councillors to sign the e-petition if they feel inclined.

10. Village organisations

Nothing to report.

11. Items for Parish News

No items were identified for inclusion in the next issue of the Parish News.

The meeting closed 1956.

The date for the next Parish Council meeting is Tuesday 16th February 2021.