

**Minutes of the Graffham Parish Council meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2023 at the Empire Hall**

**1. Attendance and Apologies for Absence**

**In attendance:** Councillors Barker, Charman, Coakes, Mackie (Chair), Macqueen, Warren and White.

**Apologies:** Councillors Bracey and Churchward which Councillors **RESOLVED** to accept.

**Also in attendance:** District Councillor Alan Sutton and one member of the public.

**2. To Receive Declarations of Interest, Notification of Changes to Members' Interests and consider any requests for a dispensation.**

There were none.

**3. Public Session (Members of the Public may speak for up to five minutes at the discretion of the Chair)**

One member of the public raised the issue of land ownership within the village and in particular the difficulty in identifying unknown landowners which was perhaps brought into greater light given the increasing number of new owners within the parish in recent years. The particular issue at hand was the difficulty in identifying those (unknown) landowners responsible for clearing obstructions to footpaths and other public rights of way. Given the recent adverse weather, there appeared to be an increase in social media comment which seemed to have the effect of raising speculation and questions rather than addressing the concerns and resolving the issue. It was suggested that a database of local landowners be retained so that they could be more readily, and accurately, approached where an obstruction needed to be removed. District Councillor Sutton confirmed that such a database already existed: it was maintained by West Sussex County Council (WSSC) and it was WSSC's responsibility to deal with this. The point was also made that WSSC had the powers to take enforcement action, including the issue of financial penalties, where landowners failed to meet their obligations in ensuring safe use and passage over footpaths and other public rights of way. As such, Cllr Sutton confirmed that an approach to WSSC, rather than to the Parish Council, remained the appropriate course of action in such cases.

One member of the public raised a question about what appeared to be retail units at the regenerative farm at Hoyle. Whilst there did not appear to be any immediate cause for concern, the member of the public made the point that any such retail or "click and collect" services in the future could well create additional traffic concerns and might set a precedent for other sites given the increasing use of, and reliance on, such services. The member of the public questioned whether the planning permission might exclude such services to address any concerns. Councillors agreed to look at the planning permission granted for this particular site to see how any such services had been addressed. Cllr Sutton confirmed that he is a member of the District Council's Planning Committee and sought to provide reassurance that any such future applications would be dealt with on a case by case basis and would not be influenced by precedent.

**4. Approval of the minutes from the Parish Council meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2022**

Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes from the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2022 as a true and accurate record.

**5. County Councillor reports**

Cllr Richardson was unable to attend the meeting and so he had provided a report in advance. Residents should be reminded of the need/requirement for them to maintain drainage ditches. Cllr Richardson had managed to clear two flooded roads in the village on Saturday morning - both were caused by lack of maintenance of ditches or the ability of water to be able to get into them. He cut a couple of channels through the mud banks and the water poured into them and cleared the road in minutes. Residents also need reminding that nesting season is rapidly approaching so they need to ensure that hedges and undergrowth on their property/land is cut back 1 metre from the

edge of the carriageway before nesting season starts. It is the water sitting on the roads, unable to drain away that is causing many of the potholes. Cllr Richardson reported that Highways are doing their best to catch up with all the potholes but cannot do anything when they are full of water and need to wait for them to dry out. The section at the top of Perot Lane towards Heyshott is particularly bad - they went twice last week to try and do it but everything was full of water. Cllr Richardson has been told that considerable patching and surface dressing work is planned on the roads around the village in the new financial year, but he does not have any dates at the moment. Cllr Richardson suggested that the parish council might wish to set up/encourage the set-up of a regular village working party like the Lodsworth PC do. They have a team of residents that go around once a month or once every couple of months, scraping mud off the roads, making sure water can get into ditches, clearing leaves so drains stay clear, cutting things back, litter picking etc. They collect everything up into trailers and have an agreement with a local farmer to tip it in a corner of a field. The parish council then pay a set amount per head for everyone to have a couple of drinks at the pub as a thank you. Getting the community spirit going again and getting everyone to do their bit to look after the village would be great.

## **6. District Councillor reports**

Cllr Sutton provided an update on various matters. First, he confirmed that a review of the Local Plan was being undertaken, although it was unlikely that this would have any material impact on Graffham. The timetable for the review has been extended. Second, he was pleased to report that the District Council had reached a settlement with the unions concerning bin strikes and accordingly these strikes would not be going ahead. Third, he raised awareness of a new initiative called "Programme For Supporting You" which was aimed at helping those more vulnerable members of the community who were experiencing particular difficulties in the current cost of living crisis. Finally, he reported that there has been a change of management in respect of the District's housing association which was designed to address a desire to improve the standards of accommodation for social and affordable housing.

## **7. Chair's announcements**

Cllr Mackie provided an update on the application process for the role of clerk. Applications had been received and interviews had been held. Cllr Mackie proposed that Louisa Thomas be offered the role of clerk. Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve that Louisa Thomas be offered the role of Graffham Parish Council Clerk with effect from February 2023 (subject to contract and satisfactory references). Councillors also **AGREED** to approve the appointment of a locum clerk and Responsible Financial Officer for a period of, initially, six to nine weeks to provide necessary training and support to the new clerk.

## **8. Planning applications**

**SDNP/22/05127/LIS Church of England School, The Street, Graffham. Proposal: Remedial works to the outbuilding including repairs to a collapsed roof verge, window and door repairs and replacements, Fascia/barge board timber replacement, renewals and decorations, replacement and installation of new rain water goods, repointing works, removal of internal ceilings with asbestos containing material.**

Councillors **AGREED** to support this application.

**SDNP/22/05625/FUL The Paddocks, Selham Road. Proposal: Construction of a L shaped block of 9 no. stables.**

Councillors **AGREED** to support this application provided that the proposed reinstated hedge is planted at the earliest appropriate time and is subsequently maintained.

**SDNP/22/05698/LIS Ambersham House, Selham Road. Proposal: Repairs to external fabric and internal alterations to residential dwellinghouse.**

Councillors **AGREED** to support this application.

**SDNP/22/02220/CND & SDNP/19/02221/CND Field East of Timbers, Ambersham. Proposal: Change of use of part of arable field to allow for extension of polo practice ground. Removal of condition 3 from planning permission SDNP/09/02763/COU.**

Councillors **AGREED** to support to these applications and are in agreement with the Highways Team, local residents and the applicant that all highways/road improvement works be removed from the applications.

**9. Payments and bank reconciliation**

**Review schedule of payments and bank reconciliations since the last meeting (21<sup>st</sup> November 2022).**

Councillors **AGREED** to defer this to the next council meeting in March to allow the new clerk and locum time to carry out the necessary work.

**10. Variance Report**

**To note any variances in actual vs budget for the current financial year**

Councillors **AGREED** to defer this to the next council meeting in March to allow the new clerk and locum time to carry out the necessary work.

**11. Recreation Ground**

**To receive an update on plans for Graffham playground**

Cllr Bracey had circulated an update prior to the meeting. The Rec has been approached by Sussex Lionesses RTC which is a girls football group catering for under 10 to under 16 age groups to utilise the football pitch and changing facilities which are currently unused. This is at an early stage but could provide sporting opportunities for Graffham girls and improvement to the facilities we are able to offer. The pavilion is in need of some of the external weatherboard replacing and repainting which budget permitting will be completed prior to next winter. To enable the Rec to offer an outside area the plan is to build a 60sq m patio on the South end of the pavilion with the aid of a grant from GPC. Plans are currently being produced for a scaled down Playground design circa £40 - £45K to incorporate a sensory garden & eco friendly play equipment. Local residents have expressed interest in helping with the garden element and with the release of funds from the GPC the Rec should then be able to get a further grant from CDC and additional funds from SDNP are being investigated. It is intended any shortfall would be made from public donations. The Tennis & Bowls Clubs continue to thrive.

**12. To receive reports on or from:**

**Highways and Footpaths**

None received.

**Empire Hall**

None received.

**Selham and Ambersham**

None received.

**13. Next meeting date**

It was **AGREED** that the next meeting would be on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2023.

**14. Any other business**

Cllr Warren raised the issue of traffic and speeding in the village. It was noted that this would be on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting in March.