

**HIGH ONGAR PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES**

Meeting: MEETING OF
PARISH COUNCIL

Date: 19th JUNE 2023

Time: 7.30PM

Venue: HIGH ONGAR VILLAGE HALL

PRESENT:

Councillors (4) Cllr Toby Acton (TA) (Chairman), Cllr Steve Smith (SS) (Vice Chairman), Cllr Chris Funnell(CF), Cllr Simon Bosworth

District Councillor: Ray Balcombe (1)

Officers in Attendance (1)

Susan De Luca - Locum Clerk , & A Jones

Members of the Public (3)

Members of the Press (0)

1098 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (2)

Apologies received from Parish Councillor: Cllr John Tory(JT). Gordon Arthur (GA) both being unable to attend for personal reasons.

1099 OTHER ABSENCES

None, Members were advised that Cllr Graham Chapman had decided that he did not wish to continue as a Councillor and had resigned.

1100 MINUTES

Councillors **AGREED** the Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 15th May 2023.

1101 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Toby Acton declared an interest in any matter relating to the Information Technology & the Village Hall. Cllr Chris Funell declared an interest in any matters in relation to the Village Hall.

1102 DISTRICT COUNCILLORS REPORT

Cllr Ray Balcombe advised Members that he had a relatively short report, primarily he wished to advise on his new position in EFDC Cabinet, where one of his responsibilities was waste services. He further advised on covert cctv, in relation to fly tipping and EFDC Safer Communities. Cllr Balcombe also advised Members on the 'Chatbox' Service operated by EFDC, which was helping residents with their initial enquiries. He also urged Members present to speak to their local residents and to advise them that if any of the bin collections were missed, to log these as missed bin collections with EFDC and for residents to leave their bins out and they would be collected as soon as possible by the Waste Bin Operatives.

1103 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Chairman introduced three local residents. One resident advised that he had concerns in

relation to the **High Ongar Village Hall** and also in relation to the lack of a Notice Board close to the Village Hall. The Locum clerk explained to Members that she had been corresponding with the Member of public on both of these matters and had hoped she had hoped that had answered his initial concerns. However in order to go forward on this matter she needed this councils permission to formally contact the Charity Commission, and to also speak to the High Ongar Village Hall Trustees, in her capacity as Locum Clerk. Obviously, this would incur additional work. Members agreed that this was ok to go forward with. The Chairman explained the role of Trustee was an onerous and somewhat complicated one and it had been very difficult to get residents to fulfil this role once they realised what was expected of them, it was not simply just ‘managing’ the hall.

It was therefore agreed that

- the locum clerk would contact the Charity Commission in a formal capacity in relation to all matters relating to the High Ongar Village Hall including ownership, foundation documents, scheme, Trustees, and Governing Document
- the locum clerk would contact Emma with regard to the Annual Accounts when they were lodged with the Charity Commission, and also the day to day running of the hall and also this year’s accounts.
- She would also investigate whether or not there was the possibility of looking for the Parish Council to become Managing Trustees, and not simply Custodian Trustees.
- Once she has this information she would come back to the council and the Member of the Public and advise

In relation to the **Notice Boards**

- It was agreed that this item was on the agenda, however Members felt that whilst it was not the responsibility of the Parish Council to put a Notice Board in the Village Hall Grounds , they all agreed there had been a Parish Council Notice Board close to the Village Hall previously. They all felt that this would be an asset to have another one there.

The Chairman introduced the two further Members of the Public, who advised that they also had concerns in relation to the High Ongar Parish Hall and the Notice Board, however their main concerns was

- that the **Princess Diana Garden** now seems to be overgrown and unkept. They asked if members had any plans to re-vitalise the Garden. Members were very concerned regarding this matter, and those present advised that they would visit the area to have a look at the garden. The two members of the public advised that if the Parish Council could re-vitalise this area, then they would be happy to help maintain it in the future. Members would report on their visits at the next meeting.

1104 REPORT OF THE CLERK

The Clerk reminded Members that she had previously sent round all information items electronically, and that no one had asked for any further information on these to be brought to the meeting. She had followed up and been working on items from the las meeting including:

- Administrative Matters
- Highway Matters & Fly Tipping (Cllr Gordon Arthur)
- Land Ownership Matters
- Financial & Banking Records
- Audit & Accounts
- Village Hall
- Street Lighting
- Ownership of Parish Assets
- Defibrillators
- IT

1105 CHAIRMAN REPORT

Cllr Toby Acton gave the following Report:

The chairman reported on the Training Courses that he had attended at Essex Association of Local Councils in Great Dunmow. He advised Members that he felt that training for Councillors was a very good idea and as it was available all councillors should try to attend if possible. He had also been looking at matters in relation to the IT, and to the Village Hall.

1106 VICE CHAIRMANS REPORT

Cllr Steve Smith advised, that he had hoped the police could have been here as he had some questions in relation vehicle thefts. The locum Clerk had previously sent Cllr Smith a report from the local police officer, however, Cllr Smith still had concerns in relation to the number of incidents detailed on the report.

1107 FINANCIAL REPORT

Members **APPROVED** the current statement of accounts and list of payments as detailed on the attached Schedule A Members also agreed the list of Reserves as on Schedule B

1108 AUDIT MATTERS**a) INTERNAL AUDIT**

Councillors were asked to note that the internal audit for 2022/2023 was completed on 9th June 2023. A copy of the report was attached to the agenda. Councillors **NOTED** the content of this report and **AGREED to** address the matters raised.

b) EXTERNAL AUDIT (AGAR) FOR PRIOR YEAR - 2021/2022 – This had been circulated to all Members

Members were advised that Each year the Council is required to complete an Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) which is reviewed by an external auditor appointed by the Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments Ltd. For this Council, PKF Littlejohn was, and remain, the appointed auditor, and will be so for the next 5 years. PKF Littlejohn conduct what is known as a 'Limited Assurance Review'. On 28th September 2022, the external auditor issued a report, explaining that they had been unable to certify completion of the review at that time, subsequently resulting in a number of queries raised with the previous Clerk and correspondence between both parties. On 19th May 2023, the external auditor issued its final report, a copy of which is attached to the agenda. The Council is required to consider the findings of the final report, agree what action needs to be taken, and ensure this is recorded in the minutes.

In addition, the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 confirm that the Council must also:

- Prepare a "Notice of conclusion of audit" which details the rights of inspection, in line with the statutory requirements.
- Publish the "Notice" along with the AGAR (Sections 1, 2 & 3) and the Auditors final report and certificate before 30 September (or as soon as possible where this date has passed), which must include publication on the smaller authority's website.
- Keep copies of the AGAR (Sections 1, 2 & 3) and the attached final report and certificate available for purchase by any person on payment of a reasonable sum.
- Ensure that Sections 1, 2 and 3, plus the attached final report and certificate, of the published AGAR remain available for public access for a period of not less than 5 years from the date of publication.

Councillors **NOTED** these points.

c) EXTERNAL AUDIT (AGAR) FOR 2022/2023 – This had been circulated to all Members

Members were advised that an authority is able to declare itself exempt from the Limited Assurance Review if the income and expenditure for 2022/2023 are both below £25,000, unless the authority has been issued either a statutory recommendation, advisory notice, judicial review, or application to court regarding unlawful item of account. Whilst an ‘except for’ matter has been raised on the previous year’s audit, this would not preclude the Council from declaring itself exempt. As such, the Council needed to **CONSIDER** the following:

- Confirm eligibility to declare itself exempt, and to complete and sign the Exemption Certificate.
- Prepare the Annual Governance Statement (Section 1), and to approve this by way of resolution.
- Consider the Accounting Statements (Section 2), and to approve this by way of resolution
- Ensure that both the Annual Governance Statement and Accounting Statements is signed and dated by the person presiding at the meeting.

Members **NOTED** that all authorities, whether declaring themselves exempt or not, must arrange for the exercise of public rights. This includes:

- Informing the electorate of a single period of 30 working days during which public rights may be exercised, by publishing the relevant Notice and Sections 1 & 2 of the approved AGAR at least the day before the period for public rights commences. The Notice must not be dated the same date as the first day of the 30 working days. Publishing means inclusion on the authority’s website. Publication on a notice board is not mandated but is good practice.
- The inspection period must include the first 10 working days of July, i.e. 3 to 14 July inclusive this year. In practice this means that public rights may be exercised:
 - at the earliest, between Monday 5 June and Friday 14 July 2023
 - at the latest, between Monday 3 July and Friday 11 August 2023.

The AGAR must be approved by 30th June 2023 and submitted to PKF Littlejohn by 30th June 2023.

In addition, this Council must publish various documents on a publicly available website as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015 and the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities, including:

- Certificate of Exemption, page 3
- Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/23, page 4
- Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2022/23, page 5
- Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2022/23, page 6
- Analysis of variances
- Bank reconciliation
- Notice of the period for the exercise of public rights and other information required by Regulation 15 (2), Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015

Members **AGREED** all the relevant documentation on the AGAR.

The Chairman and the Locum Clerk signed all the relevant Documentation,

Members **RESOLVED** that this Council was indeed Exempt for the financial year 2022-2023.

Members **AGREED** that this council would fulfil all of the above requirements and the Notices would be placed on the Website and on the Noticeboards.

The Chairman asked Members to **NOTE** that whilst the Council may have fell slightly short of some of the items necessary in previous years, it was probably due to going over the £25,000 Exemption Limit. He further commented that he knew this Council was now following the 'right track'.

1109 HIGH ONGAR VILLAGE HALL

Following on from Questions from Members of the Public Members are advised that the locum clerk had spoken to Danielle Frost from the RCCE regarding possible assistance with the Village Hall and the various Constitution / Foundation Documents that the clerk had located. There is some queries regarding one of the Documents and whether or not it referred to the current Village Hall. During the Meeting it was ascertained that the High Ongar Village Hall was actually owned by the Parish Council and the Land Registry Document was brought to the attention of the Parish Council. The Locum Clerk would try to obtain the original S106 Documentation from EFDC to see if she could glean any further information. Before any further inroads could be made the Locum Clerk advised that she need to undertake the following

- Contact the Charity Commission
- Contact the sole Trustee to ascertain how the Management etc of the Hall is currently being undertaken
- Look at why the Village Hall Accounts are Overdue
- How were the Hall Meetings Advertised
- Arrange a Meeting with the Sole Trustee of the Village Hall
- Set up a Task & Finish Meeting regarding the Village one the above have been looked at and some of the Questions have been answered.
- Look at different types of Trusteeships – ie Managing Trustees
- Look at the provision of a Notice Board close to the High Ongar Village Hall

Members **AGREED** all the above.

1110 COUNCILLORS REPORTS

Ward Councillor – Paslow Common – Nothing to Report

Ward Councillor – High Ongar – It was understood that fly tipping continues – District Cllr Ray Balcombe had already spoken about the possibility of getting Covert CCTV

However it was understood that all fly tipping was being monitored in that area

Ward Councillor – Norton Mandeville –Potholes along the Norton Lane still not repaired.

1111 STREET LIGHTS

Members were advised that the locum clerk has been liaising with the Parish Council's Street Lighting Contractor: A&J Lighting and the Chairman and Vice Chairman in relation to their location and maintenance. They have **CONFIRMED** that the Parish Council either own or have adopted and maintain the following Street Lights:

ROAD NAME	FTG No	LOCATION
MILL LANE	9009	Outside No 4
MILL LANE	9010	Outside No 38/38
MILL LANE	9011	Adjacent Mission Hall
MILL LANE	9012	Opposite No 86
MILL LANE	9013	Opposite Millfields

MILLFIELDS	9014	Outside No 1
MILLFIELDS	9015	Outside No 8
MILLFIELDS	9016	Outside No 28
MILLFIELDS	9017	Outside No 32
MILLFIELDS	9018	Outside No 43
MILLFIELDS	9019	Outside No 58
MILLFIELDS	9020	Footpath to Mission Hall Lane
THE STREET	9005	Outside Belmont
THE STREET	9006	By church wall opposite shop
THE STREET	9007	opposite Red Lion Pub
THE STREET	9008	Outside village hall
CHELMSFORD RD	9001	Outside Sunnyside
CHELMSFORD RD	9002	Outside Koma
CHELMSFORD RD	9003	Opposite Mulberry House

Members **NOTED** that Streetlights can be detailed as a Community Asset.

1112 CONSULTATION

The Locum Clerk advised Members that she had received notification from Epping Forest District Council advising that from 1st June 2023 the Council will no longer be undertaking direct consultation with residential and business properties within 150 metres of premises that are subject to an application submitted under the Licensing Act 2003. The Council's Licensing Team will, however, continue to notify Town and Parish Councils electronically of new applications. Town and Parish Councils may then consider if wider consultation through its own methods is warranted and discuss applications with residents should they wish to do so. Members **NOTED** this move by the District Council and felt it would not benefit residents and would place more work on Parish and Town Councils

1113 WEBSITE & IT

Members were advised of different proposals for the Website, after which it was **AGREED** to go with Heath Computers, who currently provide the Microsoft Councillors email address. It was also **AGREED** to provide a refurbished computer for the locum clerk. Also Heath Computers would provide .Gov Domain name and would also update the website. This would be reviewed in one years' time.

1114 CONFIRMATION OF POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Members **AGREED** at the last meeting that Councillors would review the Model Code of Conduct (parts 1,2 and 3). Members had reviewed this **RESOLVED** to adopt this at the meeting.

1091 REVIEW OF EFFECITVENESS OF SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CONTROL

The Council has a duty to ensure that the financial management of the body is adequate and effective and that he body has a sound system of internal control. To this end this Council reviewed its effectiveness of systems of Internal Control. Members are asked therefore to **CONFIRM** that they are happy with this system for this financial year 2023-24. **To ensure this the Council AGREED that Councillor Gordon Arthur would review all payment and income on a three monthly basis.**

1092 APPOINTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDITOR

Council was asked to **CONFIRM** the need for the appointment of an Internal Auditor . The Clerk would look at EALC's list of Auditors.

1093 PARISH COUNCIL INSURANCE

The Parish Councils insurance is due for renewal during July 2023. Members were asked to **CONFIRM**, they have adequate Insurance in place. The Clerk advised that the Invoice for renewal from Zurich had been received and this was due for payment in July. Cllr Acton advised he had reviewed the Insurance in the year previous and he was happy with the cover provided.

1115 DEFIBRILLATORS

Members were advised that the Locum Clerk has located a document in relation to five Defibrillators. The Clerk has been investigating as to whether the regularly monthly checks are being carried out, as no documentation relating to this could be found. This ensures that the equipment is maintained and ready and safe to use. She emailed the names which were on the spread sheet and shown as being 'Guardians'. However the two responses from email respondents that have been received so far indicate that those people were not aware that they had to undertake any checks or had any responsibility for the defibrillators . Therefore it is essential to ask how are we being made aware that these are being maintained to a safe standard, or how are we aware if they have been taken out to be used and are safe to be used again. A discussion ensued after which it was **AGREED** that the Clerk would provide Cllr Simon Bosworth a Check List Sheet , and he would check the Defibrillators monthly.

1116 PLANNING MATTERS

Members discussed the following matters:

No	Application Number	Location	Proposal
1	EPF/1139/23 <i>Ian Ansell</i>	Norton Field Farm Norton Lane High Ongar Ongar CM4 0LN	Proposed erection of a storage building for domestic and agricultural use

NO OBJECTION

2	EPF/1217/23 <i>Alastair Prince</i>	Harley Cottage 202 Nine Ashes Road High Ongar Ongar CM4 0JY	Formation of new access with walls and gates. Closing existing access.
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No OBJECTION

SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING ITEM

1	EPF/1092/23 <i>Caroline Brown</i>	208 Nine Ashes Road High Ongar Ongar CM4 0JY	Proposed 4.6m x 3.2m rear extension to property, to form new orangery.
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NO OBJECTION

Meeting Closed 9.48pm

Signed

Date