



Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held via Zoom

Thursday 16th April 2020

Present Sue Isherwood, Chair
Ros Wyke, Councillor
Sue Reece, Councillor
Peter Bright, Councillor
Guy Timson, Councillor
John Millbank, Councillor

In attendance Mark Smith, Website Administrator
Chris Harris, Clerk

1. Apologies for Absence

Cllr Graham Noel, Somerset County Councillor; Jo Tucker, Councillor.

2. Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

2a Declarations of interest from Councillors on items on the agenda

Cllr Wyke, as a Member involved in the consideration and determination of planning applications by Mendip District Council, declares that the views expressed by her at Parish Council meetings on any particular proposal are based on the evidence available to her at the time, and is provisional only. Cllr Wyke will not be bound by any recommendation made by the Parish Council on any proposal, and will consider any matter afresh in connection with any application which comes before her in her capacity as a Member of Mendip District Council, taking all further evidence into account.

No other declarations or written requests were received.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 1st April 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 1st April 2020 were reviewed and agreed as a correct record.

4. Emergency Planning Group Update

Cllr Reece gave a summary of actions to date.

- Regular updates have been provided on an almost daily basis since the first one just over a month ago, disseminated via the email contact tree.
- The helplines established earlier appear to be working well and a variety of WhatsApp groups are springing up.
- There are now around 100 volunteers in the village, around 30 working with the shop and delivery service, 30 acting as local 'eyes and ears' and about a dozen with more specific roles. A number of volunteers are over 70 and while keen to help, need to abide by government advice on minimising external contact. The EPG are exploring ways in which they can contribute.
- Advice has been taken on safeguarding. For the listening service, only those trained and qualified are considered; more generally all volunteers are asked to state whether they have been barred from working with children or adults. There are concerns that the needs of those who are known to be at risk are not fully supported: the EPG to liaise with Cllr Wyke on how to manage this going forward.
- Advice has been taken from a doctor regarding health risks of some procedures and activities. Shop procedures have been audited and found safe for both staff and customers and guidance on safe handling provided with the delivery service. Plans for a DVD and toy exchange have

been dropped although advice has been issued for anyone thinking of doing so informally. In similar vein, advice notices have been placed in the phone box book exchange.

- It is not the role of the EPG to enforce government guidance on social distancing or risk-taking behaviour but, along with the Chair of the PC, will continue to inform the community of updates to government advice, including guidance provided in the Countryside Code.
- The EPG has sought to 1) emphasise support for village institutions that serve the community (e.g. shop, pub, local businesses, web site) and 2) help support local initiatives that promote wellbeing (e.g. ideas for family activities, Easter Egg and telegraph pole competitions).
- The EPG is in touch with other organisations concerned with the community response to the pandemic such as the MDC Cluster co-ordinator, SPARK (a resource supporting community action), similar teams in neighbouring parishes and foodbanks in Wells and Cheddar. The EPG is also seeking to make contact with the national NHS volunteer scheme and know of three villagers who are members.
- The EPG is aware that there may be a gap in provision concerning emergency financial support for those not able to receive funding from other official sources. To this end, the EPG has been working with the Friendly Society to provide a response to this need, as the FS may be able to access funding not available to statutory bodies.
- The EPG is currently operating with a small team and informal consultation arrangements with a number of others. While it may be felt by some that this arrangement has lacked transparency, it has allowed for fast and effective responses to rapidly changing circumstances, plus a degree of proactive action which larger, more formal committee structures are less able to offer. This may be something that needs further review as time goes on.

Councillors thanked Cllr Reece for her report and once again expressed their appreciation to her, Mick Fletcher and all the volunteers who are putting in extraordinary efforts to keep the whole community so well supported at this time.

Financial support for the Friendly Society is discussed in Item 5 below.

Councillors discussed the organisation of the EPG and considered that there is no indication for changes to the current informal arrangements given how effectively it is operating at present. In order to support the EPG in its work this will be reviewed on a regular basis going forward.

5. Update on Impact of Coronavirus pandemic on Parish Council business

Councillors discussed the current situation on the following matters.

Robert Glanville Playing Field Trust: Cllr Timson confirmed that the RoSPA inspection will be going ahead as planned. General maintenance such as grass cutting continues. A funding grant application is in progress; Cllr Wyke was able to provide Cllr Timson with some additional advice on completion of the application.

Village Hall: Cllr Bright noted there was little to report at this stage as the hall is closed and planned works have yet to commence.

Community Shop: Cllr Reece had covered much of this in her earlier report. A funding application is being made to the Somerset Community Fund; Cllr Wyke noted that, as a CIC (Community Interest Company), the shop could also apply for the government's Coronavirus Business Support grant.

Online conferencing: Zoom has increased its security protocols and it appears to be working well with most Councillors fully conversant with the process. Unfortunately, Cllr Tucker has connectivity issues: while not ideal, it is hoped that going forward she may be able to connect via phone.

Funding: Councillors discussed financial support for the Friendly Society to offer a 'hardship fund' for those in need. The Chair noted that the FS are putting in place an application protocol which should be approved shortly. It was **agreed** that a sum of up to £2000 be reserved to match the Friendly Society's own contribution to the proposed hardship fund. To ensure transparency of proceedings the Society would be invited to apply to the Council for a grant, explaining how they intend to disperse the funds. The standard Parish Council grants form can be used.

6. Website Update

6a Website Traffic

Mr Mark Smith provided an interesting breakdown of website traffic since the start of lockdown which showed a 4-fold increase in activity, most of which was to the home page, news, covid-19 and shop pages. This appears to show that the website is currently meeting the needs of the community. Updating will continue, with a refinement of links and navigation, etc. Councillors were asked to provide pictures and other information to update the Parish Council page.

6b Change Control Policy (draft)

Mr Smith presented a draft Change Control Policy to ensure continuity and compliance regarding updates and changes to the website. It was agreed that he would liaise directly with the Chair on any substantive changes, who would then disseminate to the rest of the Council. A final version of the Policy will be presented at the next meeting.

Mr Smith left the meeting after his report.

7. Reports from the Somerset County Councillor and Mendip District Councillor

There was no report from the Somerset County Councillor as all information relating to the current situation is being circulated on a regular basis from SCC.

The Mendip District Councillor gave a summary of actions to date.

- At the time of reporting, the incidence of identified coronavirus in Somerset is relatively low compared to national rates as is the mortality rate, but this is not the time for complacency as levels of both are set to rise as the county starts to reflect the national trend.
- Nightingale hospitals serving the South West have been set up at the University of the West of England and in Exeter. While the predicted number of excess deaths in the region appears to be abating, again complacency is to be avoided.
- What is concerning is the increasing number of 'collateral' deaths, that is, from non-covid-19 related causes. Stress and worry in the community is leading to increased illness rates (all causes), and there are concerns that i) these may not be given the same priority as covid-19 cases; ii) people are reporting later and/or are more reluctant to attend hospital and iii) early discharge may be adding to the risk.
- There are continuing issues around adequate levels of PPE.
- Pharmacies are operating shorter hours – these have been made widely available.
- Levels of support for those at-risk and the vulnerable was slow to start but is now increasing.
- Hardship funds are now in place and residents have the option for a council tax 'holiday' in May and June to ease the burden on finances, or to spread payments over 12 months instead of the usual 2.
- The One Number community contact number has been rolled out and appears to be working well.
- MDC have paid out over £20 million so far in £10,000 and £20,000 business support grants to 1,500 local businesses, with another 900 businesses eligible for payment. There are also business rate 'holidays' available and other support at various levels.
- Meetings at MDC are being held virtually; issues of public engagement are being addressed and should be resolved shortly.

Councillors thanked the District Councillor for her comprehensive report.

8. Clerk's Report

There was no report from the Clerk as all current matters were covered under various other items.

9. Planning

9a Planning Applications to consider: none

9b Mendip District Council Decisions:

The following decision was noted:

2020/0400/TCA	Tree Works, Apple Rock, Old Ditch	No objection
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9d For general consideration/monitoring:

i) Land at Lynchcombe Lane, unauthorised occupancy
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No new developments have arisen since the last meeting; to continue to monitor. If the owner's plan to sell the land is genuine, Councillors were keen to explore any funding opportunities arising to purchase it as an allotment site for the village, as this had been one of the projects planned for this year.

ii) Shamrock Stables (Planning Application 2019/2336/FUL)

The Clerk had noted that an additional document had been added to the ongoing planning application for this site, which had not been brought to the Parish Council's attention. Clerk to contact the Case Officer regarding this omission. **Update:** The Clerk contacted the case officer and an extension to allow time for proper review and consideration was granted.

iii) Land at Top Road (Planning Application 2019/1549/FUL)

The Clerk had noted that several additional documents had been added to the ongoing planning application for this site, none of which had been brought to the Parish Council's attention. Clerk to contact the Case Officer regarding this omission. **Update:** The Clerk contacted the Case Officer who set a deadline of less than two weeks for a response without sight of documentation and before the next scheduled Council meeting. The Clerk formally requested an extension to allow time for proper review and consideration which was granted.

10. Finance

10a Payments to Note

There were no payments to note.

10b The following payments were approved:

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|---|---------|
| • Mark Smith, website development costs | £290.50 |
| • Tory Voake, expenses relating to a new phone for the shop | £23.90 |
| • Sue Reece, expenses relating to a new phone for the shop | £50.00 |

10c The following account balances as at 15/04/20 were noted:

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|-------------------------|------------|
| • Treasurer's Account | £1,352.32 |
| • Business Bank Account | £25,498.86 |
- (this includes the 2020/21 precept of (£9,520.00))

12. Notices

In line with the 2020 Coronavirus Act, there will be no Annual Parish Meeting in May 2020. Whether it will be held later in the year or rollover to next year will depend on circumstances and ongoing lockdown restrictions.

13. Any Other Business/ Items for Next Agenda

None.

14. Date of next meeting – currently scheduled for Wednesday 6th May 2020 @ 7.30 p.m. as a virtual meeting via online conferencing facilities.

Signed electronically:



Chair of the Parish Council

Date: