

LONGSDON PARISH COUNCIL.

Minutes of the Longsdon Parish Meeting held on Thursday 6th. May 2021 Remotely via Zoom.

Present Chair J. Sargeant. (Chair of the Parish Council).

In Attendance: Four Electors.

John Bourne, Clerk to the Council.

1. Apologies for Absence.

Apologies for absence were received from Parish Councillors T. Beastall and K. Shaw & District Councillor N. Hawkins.

2. Approval of Minutes of Last Parish Meeting.

The minutes of the last Parish meeting held on 9th. May 2019 had been circulated and it was now agreed that they be signed as a true and correct record.

3. Matters Arising.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

He reported that since the last Parish Meeting the Covid-19 Virus has changed life in an unprecedented manner. It sadly took the life of our colleague and friend Parish Councillor Richard Weston who served the Parish for decades. His passing was an event which brought the severity of the pandemic to our door.

Now that the incredibly successful British mass vaccination programme is allowing a partial return to what we took for granted as normality, it seems that this is the last day that we are able to shield ourselves with a virtual meeting. The legislation removing the need for local authorities to hold physical meetings expires today.

He had been very impressed by the way that Parish Councillors and the Clerk all embraced video conferencing technology at the drop of a hat and thanked them for being patient and courteous to others during the meetings. He thanked Parish Councillor Daral Sargeant for helping him trial the Zoom platform in a multi-user environment set up at home and verify its suitability for Parish Council meetings. It's not easy to test a multi-user application on your own.

He offered special thanks to Parish Councillor Richard Lovell for all his support as Vice Chair and in particular during the period prior to virtual meetings where we still needed to keep the Council's wheels turning.

He also thanked Councillor Keith Shaw for representing the Parish Council at the Parish Assembly meetings and former Councillor Beverley Bromley for her great work in bringing the Parish Council and the Longsdon Memorial Hall Committee a bit closer together.

He said that he was not reflecting on the Council's activities or achievements here because thankfully Clerk to the Council John Bourne had prepared and circulated a draft report regarding that, specifically for this meeting.

He went on to say that, as ever, the Clerk meticulously maintained the Council's accounts as Responsible Financial Officer with the Auditor again commenting on their high standard. The Council simply says "We should write to.." and the Clerk encapsulates our wishes in an email or a letter addressed to the appropriate person without further ado. He rightly takes great pride in his meeting minutes which are always professional, concise and comprehensive. Ultimately they are what the public see of the Council and we can be proud of them. He organises and schedules contractors to carry out the physical tasks demanded by the Council, monitors them to their conclusion all while keeping the Chair of the Council informed of progress. Excellent work, thanks John.

Lastly, he said that he couldn't help but despair over the state of the New Inn site after years of badgering the local authorities and more recently the local M.P. in a vain attempt to get the tragic eyesore suitably dealt with. He fervently hoped that we continue to apply what pressure we can and see acceptable progress in the near future.

4. To Receive a Report for the Years 2019 / 2020 / 2021.

Due to the Covid epidemic restrictions no Annual General Meeting took place in 2020 and there was a break in the normal meeting schedule. Subsequent meetings were held remotely via Zoom after an account was set up.

Consequently the officers elected at the AGM held in 2019 continued in office viz:

Councillor John Sargeant as Chairman with Councillor Richard Lovell as Vice Chairman.

Councillors J. Sargeant and K. Shaw as representatives on the Staffs, Moorlands Parish Assembly.

Councillor B. Bromley as the Council's representative on the Longsdon Memorial Hall Management Committee.

John Bourne, Clerk to the Council, as the Responsible Financial Officer.

In August 2020 the Council paid tribute to Councillor Richard Weston, a long serving Parish Councillor, who had sadly passed away. The vacancy was duly advertised through the normal procedure and eventually four applications were received for co-option. Carole Hawthorne was duly co-opted onto the Council.

Estimates for both of the financial years were prepared. Councillors agreed that the precept requirement for the year 2020/2021 would be £5,000.00, an increase on the previous year, which would result in the Band D property parish rate being £17.73, a rise on last year of 9.92%. In the following year the precept requirement for the year 2021/2022 remained unchanged at £5,000.00.

It was agreed that the Clerk's salary be increased by £100.00 in the new financial year.

The annual accounts of the Council for the first year were audited by the usual internal auditor. He commented that the accounts had been kept to a high standard and were in good order. There were no adverse comments. A new internal auditor was employed for the following year after his retirement and she also gave a favourable report on similar lines.

As the Council had a turnover of less than £25,000 it was deemed exempt from an external audit.

This option was pursued and the necessary forms were certified, signed and forwarded to the external auditor in both years.

A new battery and new pads were purchased for the defibrillator machine on the front of the Memorial Hall. This machine is now registered on a National database.

It was suggested that another machine be purchased for the lower end of the village but before this could be arranged the owners of the business property involved purchased one themselves.

A grant of £100.00 was forwarded to the Douglas Macmillan Hospice in the second year after a request was received.

A question was asked as to why the Parish Council was paying the maintenance costs on St. Chad's Church Clock when it was not working. The Church Administrator was approached and she reported that extensive repairs costing around £4,000.00 were needed but a further inspection was planned.

A wreath was again purchased for the Remembrance Day service in the first year but due to Covid restrictions a donation of £20.00 was forwarded to the Leek branch of the British Legion last year in lieu of wreath laying.

The Council appointed a replacement contractor employed under the lengthsman scheme of Staffs. Moorlands District Council.

The village tubs were again planted for the summer period in both years but as the planting was not up to the usual standard in the second year the Council's lengthsman was approached and he took on the work with an early planting in 2021.

The Chairman ensured that the Council's website was compliant with the Accessibility Regulations and the Council registered, each year, with the Information Commissioner in the sum of £40 – 00.

The Council contacted Staffs. Moorlands District Council on numerous occasions regarding the dangerous state of the old New Inn site building but after numerous excuses no action was taken. The dilapidated hoarding around the building started to cause a traffic hazard and the hoardings were eventually replaced.

A new Hatton Anti Vandal Bus Shelter was installed in the wall of the Memorial Hall, with the permission of the Trustees, in the total sum of £3,192.00 excl. V. A. T.

Staffs. Moorlands District Council was again approached about the dangerous state of the wooden bus shelter opposite the old New Inn but originally no action was taken. A quotation for repairs to the shelter had been received from a local contractor. However, after further initial pressure, the Moorlands Council actually demolished the shelter and cleared the site without notice. The Parish Council decided to install another Hatton Bus Shelter on the site. This has been purchased and will be erected on the site at a total cost of £2,855.00 exc. V. A.T.

Numerous complaints about various matters were received regarding the dangerous use of the pedestrian crossing on the A53 at the junctions of Sutherland Road and School Lane. Staffs. County Council's Highways Department were approached about the matter in November 2019 but no action was taken, apart from a small trimming of bushes on the approach from Leek.

A complaint was also received of a parked car near to the crossing which was causing visibility problems for traffic emerging from Sutherland Road. This matter was reported but no action was taken.

The matter was raised again by a member of the public at the November 2020 virtual meeting who pointed out a dangerous personal experience at the crossing. It was agreed that County Councillor Heath and Karen Bradley M.P. be contacted about the problem. Since then the white lines of the crossing have been re-painted and the Belisha Beacon globes are to be cleaned.

Due to the practice of having virtual Council meetings all planning applications were forwarded to Councillors by email and comments returned. All the details were recorded in the minutes of the meetings.

Most comments provided no objections but one or two applications were recommended for refusal. Two complaints remain outstanding:

to Staffs. County Council regarding the lengthy delays in acknowledging highway complaints.

to Staffs. Moorlands District Council regarding the absence of replies to questions asked.

5. Any Other Business.

There was no business under this item.