

BENTWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

Chair: Mrs Jane Costigan

Clerk: Allison Spyer

5 Bronze Close, Beggarwood, Basingstoke RG22 4UF

Tel: 07786 063570 Email: clerk.bentworth@parish.hants.gov.uk

MINUTES OF MEETING

Tuesday 2 June via Zoom App

Present:

Parish Councillors	Clerk	District & County Councillors	Others
Jane Costigan (Chair) Veronica Parker (VC) Tony Costigan Danny Green	Allison Spyer	Tony Costigan	

**ACTION
FOR**

28.43 Apologies for absence:

Callum Knight

28.44 Declarations of interest:

There were no declarations of interest

28.45 Police Update:

Dan Ross was not on the call to update.

28.46 Meeting open to the public:

Member of the public wished to reiterate that the query at the last meeting regarding the Clerk / wages / duties was for governance and transparency and wished it to be known the Zoom call if recorded was recorded by someone unknown.

28.47 Minutes of the May Meetings:

Minutes of the AGM and Extra Ordinary meeting were approved.

28.48 Matters Arising:

Review of Parish Council Employee – JC was able to confirm that after taking advise the Employee does not report to the village but to the Parish Council. If any of the public would like to discuss the PC employee they would need to be elected to the Council and any discussions taken privately. It was agreed to review the Clerk role at the next FAG meeting and going forward should be done annually.

FAG

28.49 District Councillor Update:

EHDC - Help for Businesses affected by Coronavirus has been well and truly supporting companies throughout the district. There is a whole suite of e-mail addresses for business support starting with Support Direct from EHDC and the specialist team. The first point of contact should be through www.easthants.gov.uk/business. I fully recommend that any business, no matter what size, review the main website as there are substantial funds available through the government scheme. Please note that these are not loans. My colleagues and I have been helping a large number of companies across the district apply for and be successful in obtaining grant money.

EHDC support teams have been active by assisting Hants CC track vulnerable, lone residents to ensure that they are receiving the correct treatment, if necessary equally ensuring that they are receiving sufficient food.

Enforcement officers, primarily parking wardens in the old fashioned terminology, have been used to assist with the delivery of NHS prescribed drugs, again ensuring that the necessary healthcare is to hand.

The district food banks have seen a general increase in activity and great thanks to the volunteers that man the 8 outlets across our district. Please note that the enforcement officers will be active again from Monday 15th. June therefore you will need to pay for your cars being parked, stay off the taxi ranks and disabled bays, use the street parking available within the current rules and regulations.

Our local high streets will start to re-open from Monday next and we have special marshalling teams to help deal with the expected increase in traffic and footfall. Again, should you need assistance while travelling in these areas the marshals are on hand to help.

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As far as the property portfolio is concerned, we have managed to collect 85% of the March quarter's rents. We have had several requests for rent variations e.g to pay monthly rather than quarterly in advance. The team have worked well with the tenants to assist where we can.

I will report again after the next quarter due date, but basically it seems that we are bucking the trend as far as the property investment area is concerned taking into account Covid 19.

A further extension to my portfolio is the bin collections. The operatives have all worked extremely well not only as a team but the level of service to the district has been excellent. I think I can speak for you all when I say that we should congratulate them.

I hope that you find the attached information useful and look forward to giving you my next update in July.

28.50 Thank You to Chris Hurley

Cllr Chris Hurley has stood down from the Council after 20+ years. It was felt by all that his efforts over the years needed some form of thank you and recognition. It was agreed that in the short-term gift of wine would be sourced and sent directly to him with a note from the Chair, then a more formal and permanent gift and presentation when we can all meet in Jubilee Hall.

VP/JC

28.51 Dog Waste Bins:

As there has been an increase of dog waste in the village the PC have been investigating the best way to deal with it. There are two options. PC can either buy our own bin, site it on PC land and be responsible for getting it emptied. Or ask EHDC Environmental Services to come out and assess the village with the view of providing a bin which would be their responsibility to empty. If EHDC do provide the bin it would be sited where they want it and likely to be near a highway for ease of emptying. It was agreed to ask EHDC to assess the village. AS confirmed Environmental Services have been emailed and asked for a review however this will not happen until after lockdown. In the meantime the Clerk will include in her villager report a request that dog owners pick up after their pets.

AS

28.52 Adoption of Complaints Procedure

The Complaints Procedure (attached as appendix 1) was formally adopted by the council and will be added to the standing orders.

AS

28.53 Finance:

a Payments for approval

• Allison Spyer, Salary & costs	£513.79
• HMRC, PAYE	£16.20
• Jenny Lewis, Scarecrow Competition	£100.00
• Jason Giles, Village Maintenance	£153.00
• Eleanor Greene, Internal Auditor	£190.00

b Receipts

- No current receipts

c Balance of Current Account

- Available funds in the Treasury Account £10,440.00

d Audit

- AS reported that the Internal Auditor has approved the audit and signed the annual return and AGAR (exemption certificate). AS signed both documents online and will send to JC to sign.
- AS read out the IA report. The IA stated that the records of the Council to be in good order and the checks went well. There were four matters arising and are listed at the end of the minutes as appendix 2.

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28.54 Planning Committee Report:

Case No: 58702, Land North of Haley Lane, Station Road, Bentworth, Alton

Request for EIA Screening Opinion - development of solar farm and associated development.

Bentworth PC would like an Environmental assessment, reason being there is a very mature hedgerow that might be damaged and / or taken out endangering habitat. Would also like to know if there is a public right of way?

28.55 Councillors Report:

Environment: Nothing to report

Traffic & Highways: Nothing to report

SpeedWatch: Nothing to report

Trees: Nothing to report

Young people and families: Nothing to report

Website: Nothing to report

Broadband: Nothing to report

Communications: Nothing to report

Village Green: Nothing to report

28.56 Other Reports:

Community Care:

Neighbourhood watch:

School Report:

28.57 Meetings Attended:

None

28.58 Forthcoming Meetings:

28.59 Date of next Meeting:

Tuesday 7 July at 7.30pm

28.60 The Chairman thanked all members for their attendance.

Signed Date

Appendix 1

Complaints Procedure

The following is the Parish Council's procedure for dealing with complaints about the Council's administration or its procedures, a complaint against the Clerk or a complaint against a Parish Councillor. Complaints about a policy decision made by the Council will be referred back to the Council for consideration.

The procedure is based on the framework suggested by the National Association of Local Councils.

Ø Definition of a complaint?

Generally, this will be about the Parish Council's procedures or administration. It will be an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Council's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service - whether the action was taken (or the service provided by the Council) by the Parish Council or a person or organisation acting on behalf of the Council.

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Complaints should always be directed through the Clerk (except for complaints about the Clerk, in which case, the Chairman takes the place of the Clerk in managing the process). It may be that the matter you are concerned about could be dealt with in a less formal manner. However, if you wish to use the procedure, please read on.

Ø Making a complaint

We cannot please everyone all the time. What we can promise is to listen and to do what we can to deal with your problem.

It is not appropriate to deal with all complaints from members of the public under the formal complaints procedure. The Parish Council receives queries, problems and comments as part of its day-to-day business and they should not all be regarded as complaints. It is hoped that less formal measures or explanations provided to the complainant by the Clerk will resolve most issues. Any informal complaint will be reported to the Parish Council by the Clerk.

If your complaint about procedures, administration or the actions the Council's employee is notified orally to a Councillor, or to the Clerk to the Council, a written record of the complaint will be made, noting your name and contact details and the nature of the complaint.

You will be asked to put the complaint in writing (letter or e-mail) to the Clerk to the Council. Refusal to put the complaint in writing does not necessarily mean that the complaint cannot be investigated, but it is easier to deal with if it is in writing.

When your complaint has been received, we will write to you within seven days to let you know –

- Who is responsible for dealing with the complaint.
- How it will be dealt with.
- When the complaint is likely to be dealt with.

Ø What to do

Complaints can be made in any of the following ways –

Write or telephone the Clerk to the Parish Council (see Website for details). If you wish to write rather than e-mail, please contact the Clerk for her address.

Write to the Chairman of the Parish Council (see Website for details)

If the complaint is about the Clerk, telephone or write to the Chairman.

Ø What happens next?

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On receipt of your written complaint, the Clerk to the Council will seek to settle the complaint directly with you by explaining the Parish Council's position, if this is appropriate. Attempts will be made to resolve the complaint at this stage.

Generally speaking, complainants can expect to receive a response in full within a month of the acknowledgement of the complaint.

Ø Complaint about the Clerk

If the complaint is about the Clerk to the Council, you should write to the Chairman. The Clerk will be formally advised of the matter and given an opportunity to comment.

Ø Complaint about the ethical behaviour of a Parish Councillor

Members of Parish Councils sign a declaration to abide by a Code of Conduct and if they breach that code, there are consequences. A complaint alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct should be made in writing and addressed to Dartford Borough Council's Monitoring Officer at The Civic Centre, Home Gardens, Dartford DA1 1DR.

Ø Unreasonable and Vexatious Complaints

There will be circumstances when a complainant persists in wishing to pursue a complaint when it clearly has no reasonable basis, or when the Council has already taken reasonable action in response, or where some other process, whether through the courts or some other recognised procedure, should, or has been taken. These matters will be referred to the Parish Council by the Clerk with a summary of the issues and of the attempts made to resolve the complaint. The Parish Council may, in such circumstances, decide that no further action can usefully be taken in response to the complainant and inform the complainant so, making it clear that only new and substantive issues will merit a response.

Ø Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints will be disregarded.

Ø Formal Complaints

In certain circumstances, procedures/bodies other than the Parish Council may be appropriate in respect of the following types of complaint:

Financial irregularity - statutory right to object to Council's audit of accounts under S.16 Audit Commission Act 1998. On other matters, the council may need to consult its auditor.

Criminal activity - the Police

Ø How will the procedure operate?

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Complaints about the Council's procedures, administration or policies will be dealt with by the Parish Council. The outcome of the complaint will be published.

The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within seven working days and will also advise when the matter will be dealt with by the Complaints Committee.

You will be invited to attend the meeting and to bring any representative if you wish.

Seven clear working days prior to the meeting, you are requested to provide the Parish Council with copies of any documentation or other evidence which you wish to refer to at the meeting. Similarly, the Parish Council will provide you with copies of any documentation which it wishes to rely on at the meeting.

Ø Procedure at the Meeting

The Complaints Committee will consider whether the circumstances of the meeting warrant the exclusion of the press and public.

The Chairman will introduce everyone and will explain the procedure.

You, as the complainant, or your representative, will outline the grounds for complaint.

Members of the Complaints Committee will ask questions of you or your representative.

If relevant, the Clerk will explain the Parish Council's position.

Members of the Committee will be able to ask questions of the Clerk to the Council.

The Chairman will summarise the Parish Council's position and then you will be offered the opportunity of summing up.

You will be asked to withdraw from the meeting (together with your representative or anyone accompanying you) whilst Members reach a decision on whether or not the grounds for the complaint have been made. It may be appropriate in some circumstances for the Clerk also to withdraw from the meeting whilst Members reach a decision.

If any points of clarification are required, you will be invited to re-join the meeting whilst clarification is sought and then asked to withdraw again.

You will then re-join the meeting to be advised of the decision of the Committee, together with reasons for the decision, or, if necessary, to be advised when a decision will be made. Dependent on the detail of the reasons for the decision, it might only be possible to give you the decision at the meeting, with the detailed reasons following in the decision letter.

Ø After the meeting

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The decision will be confirmed in writing within seven working days, together with details of any action to be taken.

Ø Complaints relating to the Clerk

These will be dealt with either by the Parish Council as an employment matter. Such complaints could result in disciplinary action or, in cases of gross misconduct, dismissal from the Council's employment. The matter will be dealt with internally to protect the employment rights to which employees of the Parish Council are entitled. The complainant will be informed of action taken.

Ø What to do if you are still not satisfied

The decision of the Parish Council is final with no appeal process as the Local Government Ombudsman does not consider complaints in respect of Parish Councils.

Appendix 2

Internal Auditors Report

Control Area	Issue	Recommended Action
Minute authorisation	The June 2019 minutes had not been initialled on each page which is a requirement of LGA 72	The paper minutes are the master record of the council. Please ensure they are fully compliant.
AGAR Box 4	The figures presented for audit included the clerks expenses in box 4 – this is not in accordance with the updated guidance.	Expenses of running the parish admin should go in box 6.
Bank Reconciliation	The bank reconciliation for some of the year did not agree with the cash book.	Members should check and initial that the bank statement and the cashbook agree to the same value.
Website Transparency Code	The council is covered by the transparency code. The standard documents (fin regs, stand ords, risk assessment, asset reg) and the recent AGARS should be published on the website.	Over the coming months please could members review the website against the guidance and assist the clerk in bringing the website up to date.