

ETCHINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of the Meeting of Etchingham Parish Council
held on Thursday 15th June 2023 at 7.30pm The Parker Hall, Parsonage Croft, Etchingham

Members Present: Cllrs: John Barnes (in the Chair), Mary Barnes, Sid Barrow, Rob Beeney, Colin Boylett, Trevor McGregor and Roma Turner.

Also present: P Barton – Clerk to the Council. There was one member of the public.

2652. Apologies for Absence: Apologies for absence were received from County Cllr Eleanor Kirby- Green, which were accepted.

2653. Minutes of the previous meetings:

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 18th May 2023, having been previously circulated, were agreed with the inclusion of thanks to the outgoing vice-chairman, Cllr Colin Boylett for his many years of service in this role and then signed as true and accurate records of those meetings.

2654. Declarations of Interest:

Cllr. M. Barnes reminded Council that she is a member of the RDC Planning Committee.

Cllr. J Barnes declared that he is the substitute Conservative member of RDC Planning Committee.

2655. Etchingham Parish Council – Dispensations:

The Clerk confirmed that no written requests for dispensations had been received.

2656. Chairman's Announcements:

The Chairman had no announcements to make except that while this meeting was a meeting held in public it was not a Public Meeting. Any person present wishing to speak about any item on the agenda should do so under agenda item 7 'Public Time'. There would not be any other opportunity for the public to speak at the meeting.

2657. Clerk's Report:

The Clerk's report being solely on the matter of the Annual Governance Review this was deferred until Finance, Agenda item 10.

2658. Public Time:

- a) In her absence County Cllr Eleanor Kirby-Green submitted her report, highlighting the new Flexibus arrangements, which is available on file.
- b) Cllr John Barnes reported that there were no immediate matters on which to report with regards to Etchingham. There were no questions.
- c) The Member of the Public present raised concerns as to the appropriateness of the remedial work being offered in order to have the current planning conditions lifted at New House Farm, Sheepstreet Lane.

He stated that (i) Information given in the application regarding neighbour's windows overlooking NHF and a row of conifers is misleading if not total erroneous. (ii) The proposal included the erection of a fence in order to sound proof NHF so that even its immediate neighbours would not be affected by activities, currently not allowed, on the NHF premises. It was claimed by the MOP that, while sounding credible on paper, closer inspection showed that there were no technical specifications to validate this proposition and, in fact, part of the offer including black plastic sheeting covering an existing fence against a line of conifers (Leylandii) which would neither be effective nor appropriate in an AONB. Other materials to be used included recycling redundant materials to be found on site.

(iii) As 'events' are being held and being publicly advertised as available at New House Farm, Sheepstreet currently it was suggested by the MOP that adherence to remaining conditions and the actual installation of remedial works being completed properly were doubtful as abuse of conditions regarding 'lighting' as well as noise and unsupervised inappropriate behaviour continues and has been evidenced on an on-going basis.

The Chairman proposed and EPC agreed that this matter should be discussed and any action resolved under Planning Agenda item 9b.

d) As no members were to be excluded this right was not exercised.

2659. Parish Matters:

a) Village Amenities:

- i) Village Shop/The Old Stores: The owner of the premises (EPC) has been served with a letter of concern from the Environment Agency regarding the rear river wall being a potential flood hazard should it collapse and fall into the River Dudwell. The selling agents have been informed as has the insurers, Zurich. The Clerk is taking further expert advice.
- ii) The Monthly Inspection Reports for the playgrounds were accepted. The new playground build, after a shortlist of snagging defects are corrected, will be handed over in time for the Village Party in the Park (Fete) on 24th June.

b) Children and Young People

- i) Cllr Turner reported that a new school governor has been appointed, Mrs Annette Childs. She also reported arrangements for end of school year events are in hand including the school leavers' service to be held in Etchingham church.
- ii) Cllr Boylett had submitted his report on ERGT fundraising which was approved and is available on file.
- iii) there were no other matters to consider.

c) Highway, Footpaths and Community Safety

- i) Two items were raised. Verge clearance detritus left blocking the Rover Rother and the 30mph sign southside of A265 just before Parsonage Croft being obscured by hedge growth. Both items will be logged with ESCC.
- ii) No new report from TESAG as further correspondence with ESCC Highways is still on-going.
- iii) Cllr Boylett had submitted his Speedwatch report which is on file.
- iv) Cllr Boylett had submitted the reports from Rother Police which were accepted and are on file.
- v) There have been changes made within the areas covered by individual PCSOs so our new PCSO, Chloe Cameron has met with the Clerk and areas of mutual concern and interest discussed. In addition to this change, the Rother Parishes Forum is currently suspended.
- vi) Cllr McGregor will look into appropriate Resilience Policies for a Parish Council of EPC size and location. Discussion to be deferred to a future meeting.

d) Environmental and Other issues

There were no issues to report.

e) Communications

There were no issues to report.

2660. Planning:

Cllr Mary Barnes reminded Council that she is a member of Rother District Council Planning Committee, Cllr John is also a substitute member of the Rother District Council Planning Committee.

a) To consider and make recommendations on local planning applications as follows:

RR/2023/1025/P Shoyswell Manor Cott, Sheepstreet Lane: Erection of pool house containing indoor private swimming pool. **It was Resolved that EPC would make no objection to this application.**

RR/2023/1026/P Shoyswell Manor Cott, Sheepstreet Lane: Erection of garage and workshop with accommodation above for ancillary use. **It was Resolved to make a General Comment asking that the applicant provide his definition of 'ancillary' use and that this, if acceptable, should be made part of the Conditions. Should this request be declined ETP will ask its District Councillor to Call In the application and request a site visit by the Planning Committee.**

RR/2023/1124/P Shortridge Farm – Barn to South, Sheepstreet Lane: Design revisions of previously approved scheme RR/2020/148/P for the conversion of a redundant farm building to 1 x 4 bedroom dwelling. **It was Resolved that EPC would make no objection to this application.**

b) Any other planning matters:

RR/2021/1573/P New House Farm : Request for a Discharge of Conditions. After full discussion of the points raised by the member of the public **It was Resolved that the following be submitted to the relevant**

Planning Officer :

New House Farm, Etchingham, ENF/275/22/ETC

Dear Sirs

Regarding the above, a member of the public brought this to the attention of Etchingham Parish Council during public time at its last regular monthly meeting. An ongoing situation of which EPC was already aware and highly concerned as this alleged nuisance is affecting the quality of life and quiet enjoyment of their own homes of many neighbouring properties, not just that of the gentleman attending the meeting.

This was discussed fully and at some length when the meeting resumed and Planning Matters was reached on the agenda.

Etchingham Parish Council resolved it was not satisfied that there was sufficient detail of the specification of the acoustic barrier set out in the application and also considered the application to be inaccurate and misleading in part.

The description of the proposed acoustic barrier is vague and does not provide a detailed specification of how the planned barrier will provide effective sound reduction. For example, it describes a surface mass of 7.5kg/m² when the industry standard for acoustic fencing starts at 10kg/m².

The application should be refused until the applicant provides a comprehensive specification and sectional technical drawings of the exact material being used, setting out how it will meet sound prevention standards. The materials specified should be fit for purpose and absorb sound.

EPC did not agree that conifers at the boundary with the neighbouring property would offer any sound prevention properties and absolutely rejected the proposed retention of black plastic damp proof membrane (DPM) attached to the applicant's trees. The DPM is by its nature intended to repel water, not sound, and is completely out of character adjacent to a listed building and as fencing material in the AONB.

EPC was surprised to see the suggestion that New House Farm is overlooked by neighbouring property, the Grain Store. It was felt unlikely that Planning Permission would have been given by yourselves for conversion of that property if it had views into the neighbouring farmhouse. EPC Planning Committee had, in fact, visited the properties as part of the original Planning Application and considered the description set out in the current submission to be incorrect and misleading.

I attach two images of the black plastic attached to the conifers (Appendix 1) which you may have seen before but which added to the Council's resolve that this is both unsightly in any given circumstance and totally inappropriate as a fencing material in an AONB.

Etchingham Parish Council thanks you for reading thus far and trusts in an equitable outcome to this Application.

There were no other planning matters at this time.

2661. Finance:

- a) The Report of the Internal Auditor on the accounts for 2022-2023 and the Clerk's Report having been previously circulated there were matters arising. See Appendix 1 for Report with EPC comments inserted.
- b) Consideration to the Annual Report 2023 was made, it was approved and the presiding chairman and Clerk/RFO authorised to sign Section 2.
- c) Consideration to the Annual Accounts for 2022-2023 was made, they were approved and the presiding chairman and Clerk/RFO authorised to sign appropriately.
- d) The appointment of Mulberry & Co to advise and assist in updating the Asset Register and to update the Contracts of Employment for all three members of staff was approved.
- e) The provision of an interim audit for 2023-2024 was approved.
- f) The consideration of staff salary level to be taken in Closed Session at the end of the main meeting in public.
- g) Authorisation of payments – the Clerk presented the accounts for payment to the Council.

June 2023		
		TOTAL PAID
Paulette Barton	Mid-Month Expenses	521.67
Paulette Barton	Salary & Expenses for June 2023	1,387.97
Olga Bilai	Salary & Expenses for June 2023	305.52
Laurence Worton	Salary & Expenses for May 2023	45.23
MULBERRY&CO	Internal audit for the 2022-2023 council year	309.60
Tim Crane	Grass cutting	1,090.00
Redlynch Leisure Installations	Playground & footpath in Queen's Gardens	69,741.60
B Online Ltd	Monthly payment due to broadband supplier	33.23
EDF	Electricity for Shop	23.00
	Total Payments	73,455.12

It was Resolved that the payments for June 2023 be approved and that proof of the BACs payments together with copies of the relevant invoices be signed by two councillors to comply with Financial Regulations and best practice as soon as possible.

2662. To review and approve:

- i) Etchingam Parish Council Standing Orders
The Standing Orders were reviewed and ***it was Resolved to approve them without amendment. To be reviewed in one year.***
- ii) Etchingam Parish Council Financial Regulations were reviewed and ***it was Resolved to approve them without amendment. To be reviewed in one year.***

2663. To receive reports from Members and Representatives passing such resolutions as may be necessary

- a) **ESALC** – work continues as usual.
- b) **RALC** - report to follow next month after RALC meet.
- c) No other meetings or conferences had been attended by Members or the Clerk.

2664. Correspondence

All correspondence having been distributed by e-mail upon receipt there were no further items to discuss. The same issue of the suspended tree branch hanging above Fysie Lane already having been raised by EPC with ESCC Highways there was no further action to follow the copy correspondence circulated from a resident on that subject. The resident had already been thanked for the provision of the photographs illustrating the problem so clearly.

2665. Etchingam Parish Council – Notification to members of Council decisions:

There were no notifications.

2666. Agenda items for the next meeting to be held on Thursday 20th July 2023 in The Parker Hall at 7.30pm not mentioned in the minutes above.

Signed By the Chairman original held on file

Date..... 20th July 2023

APPENDIX 1



Images of black sacks attached to leylandii & metal fencing – New House Farm

540

APPENDIX 2

Report from RFO/Clerk following Internal Audit 2022/2023

To be considered against Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/2023 and the Internal Auditor's Report. Copies form Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

For the first time there are 'ticks' in the 'No' column of the Annual Internal Audit Report. Leeway was given last to allow time to address various issues but not all have been completed.

This is now a matter of extreme urgency.

Item A was OK

Item B: this involves the incorrect posting of documents on the website. This is an easy fix and has happened due to changes in legislation during the year which I did not notice. As soon as I send the full documents to Cllr Boylett he will be able to upload so we do not have this issue again next year. This is also the response to Item L which covers the same area. ***In progress.***

If the *recommendation* that all councillors use the council email address for their council correspondence is not followed then there will be another black mark next year. I apologise that my interpretation of recommendation is not the same as the Internal Auditor (however, he is far more knowledgeable about the thinking of the External Auditor than I so it would be unwise to ignore this). ***It was Resolved that all effort would be made to help councillors create and use an independent email address for council business.***

Although the Standing Orders do not require updating according to the latest information from NALC they still have to be officially reviewed and approved every year, minuted at that meeting and uploaded to the website. This is on the agenda for the June meeting. ***See minute reference 2662 (i).***

Similarly, and this is worse as the Financial Regulations have not be reviewed since 2020 since when they were revised to follow the NALC guidelines, there is nothing requiring revision but they must be reviewed every year, minuted at that meeting and uploaded to the website. This is on the agenda for the June meeting. ***See minute reference 2662 (ii).***

VAT refunds have been brought up to date as the Refund document has been submitted for 2022-2023, bringing in a refund of £6,103.97. Exceptionally high as this include the hefty bill for the emergency tree work in Burgh Woods/Fysie Lane. ***See Statement of Receipts & Payments June 2023.***

For 2023-2024 VAT refunds will be submitted Quarterly so that we do not carry forward the £11,623.60 VAT from the Queen's Garden playground invoice which will – assuming all snagging is completed – during June to year end. A little extra work in the office but necessary to keep the reserves in order.

Item C: the Risk Management Policy has not been reviewed since its adoption in June 2017. This must be addressed as this, again, has to be done annually. It would be helpful if the Clerk could be assisted by Cllr McGregor in re-drafting this policy (if re-drafting is necessary) ready for review by full Council as this falls very much within his personal skill set – for which we may be grateful. ***To be presented at July meeting 2023.***

Item D: regular reporting of performance against budget will be very simple once the new Scribe package is in place, as it is a regular report within the package. ***Q1 to be presented at July meeting 2023.***

This report has been maintained manually as part of the administrative process to date but was not presented to Council for its information hence the 'no'.

No Council action required to correct.

Item E: was OK.

Item F: EPC does not carry Petty Cash so this section is N/A

Item G: Although able to give us a yes 'tick' to the actual question he enquired about Contracts of Employment on his own company created audit list for completeness and I had to admit these were not in place. We all know that Contracts of Employment are required by law for all employees and, under current legislation in fact are required prior to employment commencing, it is suggested that Council consider for approval expert outside assistance.

It was Resolved that Mulberry & Co be instructed to assist the Clerk in preparing up to date Contracts of employment for all three EPC Employees.

Item H: The Asset Register requires a major overhaul, it is suggested that Council consider for approval other expert outside assistance. ***It was Resolved that Mulberry & Co be instructed to assist the Clerk in preparing an up to date fit for purpose Fixed Assets Register.***

Item I: In future on approving the quarterly Bank Reconciliation both these and the supporting Bank Statements will be require physically signing off together with the minuted resolution, which is currently up to date. ***Full sign off will commence in July with the presentation for approval of the Qtr 1 2023/2024 Bank Reconciliation.***

Item J: The arrangements for signing off the Annual Governance and Accountability Report have been set up for the June agenda to be uploaded after submission to the External Auditor signed by the appropriate signatories at the June meeting. It has been more clearly shown for this year to avoid the criticism of the previous methodology.

Item K: we are not certified exempt so this section is N/A.

Item L: The website is incomplete as explained under item B paragraph one. ***In progress.***

Item M: was OK.

Item N: was OK.

Item O: was OK.

CLOSED SESSION – 15TH JUNE 2023

After full discussion *it was Resolved that due to the increasing work load the Clerk's hours of work should rise from 24 hours per week to 28 hours per week.*

It was also Resolved that all three members of staff should receive a two-level rise in SCP point. The Clerk from 26 to 28, the Administrative Officer from 12 to 14 and the Handyman/Lineman from 11 to 13; payment from 1st July in accordance with the NALC Annual Salary Award 2022-2023

15th June 2023