

APPROVED

Midridge Parish Council

Minutes of Council Meeting

Monday
1st March 2021

Time: 6.45 pm

Present: Cllrs H Howe (Chair), W Mellors, P Makinson & H Alexander

In Attendance: Paul Howell MP, Cllr J Clare (DCC)
Stewart Smith, Mary Jeffery, Roger Howe (Midridge Allotment Association)
Bill McCready, Emma Hayman

Official: A Jordan (Clerk)

NOTE – owing to the COVID-19 situation, this Meeting was held using Video Conferencing.

21/21 NOTICE OF MEETING

The Notice convening the Meeting was taken as read.

22/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

23/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

24/21 PARISH COUNCIL ELECTION SITUATION

Cllr Sue Smith has resigned as a Parish Councillor and Vice-Chair of the Parish Council for personal reasons.

RESOLVED that a Letter be written thanking Sue Smith for her valuable work as a Parish Councillor.

Action: Clerk

Alan Jordan announced that he is resigning as Clerk to the Parish Council, and intends to stand for election as a Parish Councillor in the Election due on 6th May. However, under the terms of his Contract of Employment he is required to give 2 months notice, which would mean that he would still be a paid employee of the Parish Council on 8th April, the deadline for Nominations, and would thus be disbarred from submitting a Nomination.

Alan Jordan further stated that he will continue as an unpaid Acting Clerk until the newly elected Parish Council first meets after the 6th May Election. He is advised by CDALC that it is possible for him to continue as an Acting Clerk should he become a Parish Councillor, provided he is unpaid for the work. He is prepared to do this, but only for a reasonable period of time, which would have to be agreed with the new Council. This would mean that the Parish Council should have about 6 months in which to try and find a replacement Clerk. If they were unsuccessful, after this they would have to rely on temporary “stand-in” Clerks from CDALC.

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RESOLVED that the Parish Council waives Alan Jordan's contractual notice period after 31st March, 2021.

CDALC have advised that the Clerk for a small Council such as Middridge should be paid for 5 hours work per week, with an initial Salary currently in the range of £10.04 to £11.08 per hour, depending on their experience and performance.

RESOLVED that a Job Advertisement be prepared on this basis, which will be submitted to Parish Councillors for their approval, before being sent to CDALC.

Action: Clerk

Councillor Philip Makinson has indicated that he will not be standing for election as a Parish Councillor in the Election due on 6th May, and the position with regard to some other existing Councillors is currently uncertain. The Parish Council will thus need one or more suitable new people willing to become Parish Councillors, and a Flyer encouraging Residents to volunteer has been prepared. There had been concern as to whether the delivery of the Flyer was permitted under the COVID-19 Regulations, but Cllr. J Clare said that the Government has just changed its advice, and this is now permitted.

RESOLVED that copies of the Flyer be printed, and delivered to all Households in the Parish as soon as practical.

Action: All

25/21 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting of 11th January 2021 were accepted, and will be signed by the Chair as a true record.

26/21 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

None

27/21 POLICING

Some young people have been noticed congregating near the Village Hall, drinking alcohol, and with a small fire. They have been warned off by a Resident, and no further action is considered necessary at this time.

28/21 "ELDON WHINS" DEVELOPMENTS

Persimmon Homes have informed us that they have submitted a Planning Application for the proposed "Acorn Gardens" Sculpture, but the Parish Council have not been notified by the DCC Planning System; Cllr. J. Clare kindly agreed to investigate.

The recent heavy rain and snow fall caused flooding across the C35 Middridge Road near the new "Eldon Whins" Developments, something that is supposed to be prevented by the Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) which is required to be provided as a condition of the Planning Permission. Cllr. J. Clare reported that the DCC Planning Enforcement Team are investigating, with a view to preventing any repetition of this problem in future.

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There was also extensive flooding (primarily of part of the Byerley Park Nature Reserve in Great Aycliffe) due to a blocked culvert under Blind Lane; whether this problem has now been cleared is to be investigated.

Action: Chair & Clerk

29/21 “THE PADDOCK” WILD-FLOWER GRASSLAND

Cllr. Sue Smith and the Middridge Allotment Association (MAA) have prepared a Proposal document, with three options, for improvements to the Allotments, to be funded by the available Section 106 money. These all involve an extension to the Allotments, to provide additional Plots and Parking Spaces, which necessarily reduces the area of “the Paddock”. The preferred “Gold” option, which provides for educational facilities in the Allotments, and for Bee-keeping, also covers the transformation of “the Paddock” into a Wild-flower Grassland. It was noted that the only vehicular access to the proposed Wild-flower Grassland would be through the Allotments (which are locked up when not in use), and that this option provides for Security Fencing or Hedging to limit undesired access to “the Paddock”. It was considered that this would address many of the Residents’ concerns regarding the original Wild-flower Grassland proposal.

The DCC Ecology Officer (Tammy Morris-Hale) has seen the Proposal document, and indicated her broad support.

RESOLVED that the Parish Council supports the “Gold” option in principle, and will continue to work jointly with the MAA to endeavour to ensure that it is implemented.

30/21 GROUNDS MAINTENANCE & GENERAL REPAIRS

A wide strip of the Village Green near 25 – 30 Northside has been badly damaged by vehicles driving over it. The road at this point is relatively narrow, and further restricted by Residents parking their vehicles outside their properties, and there is video evidence that much of this damage is due to DCC Refuse Collection lorries.

After discussion, it was agreed that the best solution would be if arrangements could be made for the Refuse Bins from 25 – 30 Northside to be placed near 25 Northside, so that there would be no need for Refuse Collection lorries to drive down this section of road.

Another issue is who is to pay to have the Village Green restored to its original condition? Cllr. J. Clare stated that DCC were unlikely to accept full liability, since it would be impossible to prove that their vehicles were the only ones responsible for the damage. However, he recommended that the Parish Council write to DCC, suggesting that they should be prepared to cover some of the cost; this was agreed.

Action: Clerk

Cllr. J. Clare further suggested that a Meeting be arranged between the Parish Council, interested Residents, and DCC to discuss these issues, and has kindly agreed to investigate this possibility.

31/21 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

A Planning Application for a change of use for Little Hare Farm, Walkers Lane (off the Bridleway near “Ten Houses”) has been received. This would permit Equestrian activities to be undertaken on the site, something that has in fact been going on for some time.

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Cllr. J. Clare stated that a further Planning Application for the building of a House on this site is expected to be submitted in future.

Emma Hayman said that the Owners of the site appear to have encroached onto the Bridleway when installing new fencing; this is to be investigated.

Action: Cllr. H Howe

It was also agreed that the Clerk should discuss these matters with the Planning Officer concerned.

Action: Clerk

32/21 CHILDREN'S PLAY AREA

Nothing to report.

33/21 ROAD-TRAFFIC

The DCC Speed Matrix recently installed in the Village has not worked since it was put in place; Cllr. J. Clare kindly agreed to report this. He also agreed to investigate whether anything is happening regarding the proposal to limit the speed in Walkers Lane to 30 mph.

34/21 NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (NP)

Stewart Smith said that there had been no progress on the NP due to Shaun Hanson's other commitments, but work is expected to start shortly.

The Application for £2000 from our DCC Ward County Councillor's Neighbourhood Budgets to fund the additional work on the NP has been accepted by GAMP; and should receive Board approval at the Meeting due on 23rd March.

35/21 ACCOUNTS

The Clerk indicated that Parish Council's total assets at the end of the 2020/21 Financial Year could be as low as about £940. This is due to an unprecedented combination of circumstances, but the Council's higher 2021/22 Precept, the expected GAMP funding (see **34/21**), and a higher than normal VAT Refund should quickly restore the situation.

The question of the Parish Council's Internal Auditor for the 2020/21 Accounts was discussed.

RESOLVED that the Colin Gray be appointed Internal Auditor for the Parish Council's 2020/21 Accounts.

Action: Clerk

RESOLVED that the following Accounts be approved for payment:-

| Payee | Purpose | Sum |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| Hayfields Contracting Ltd. | Xmas Tree Erection & Removal | £300.00 |
| A D Jordan | Clerk's Jan-Mar Salary | £247.70 |
| HMRC | Clerk's Jan-Mar Tax | £164.80 |
| A D Jordan | Clerk's Annual Expenses | £31.97 |
| | TOTAL | £744.47 |

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The Chair inquired whether all the work due in the second phase of the Walker's Lane Street Lighting SLA, which has been paid for, had actually been completed. The consensus was that it has not; inquiries are to be made.

Action: Clerk

36/21 GAMP & CDALC

All the available GAMP Area Budget Funding for COVID-19 related Projects has now been provisionally allocated. The final group of Projects should receive GAMP Board approval at the Meeting due to be held on 23rd March.

CDALC – nothing to report.

37/21 GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE

Nothing to report.

38/21 OTHER MATTERS

(a) Village Website

Pixel Media are making good progress with the development of the new Parish Council Website, and Cllr P Makinson was able to give Parish Councillors a demonstration. The most important point is that the menu structure is correct, as the basic content can be easily modified (with a little training) to suit future requirements.

It was agreed that development will continue, and that Parish Councillors will be given a further opportunity to comment on the final version before this is approved.

Action: Cllr P Makinson & Clerk

(b) Armed Forces Covenant

There was further discussion of the proposal that the Parish Council should sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant. There was general agreement that this was a good idea in principle, although the Parish Council's ability to do much in practice was limited.

RESOLVED that the Parish Council sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant.

Action: Clerk

39/21 ADDITIONAL ITEMS

DCC have funding to install a number of Electric Vehicle Charging Points in the county, on a first come, first served basis. It was agreed that one or more of these would be an asset in the village, with the Village Hall Car-park probably the most practical location.

RESOLVED that the Parish Council apply to have Electric Vehicle Charging Point(s) installed in the village, and discuss with the Midridge Village Association whether they would be prepared to have these installed in the Village Hall Car-park.

Action: Clerk

40/21 NEXT MEETING

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The next Meeting of the Parish Council is the statutory Annual May Parish Council Meeting. At present the Government legislation which currently permits Parish Council Meetings to be held by Video Conferencing will expire before this Meeting can be held, and thus it would have to be a physical Meeting by law. Representations are being made to have the Government change this, but there are no guarantees that these will be successful.

Consequently, it is necessary to plan at present for a physical Meeting, which hopefully can be held in the Village Hall, although this will need to be confirmed.

Action: Clerk

May Meetings are normally held on the third Monday in May, due to Village Hall availability, and it was considered safest to continue this tradition.

Consequently, the next Meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Monday, 17th May 2021, at 6.45 pm, location to be confirmed.

The Chair closed the Meeting at 9.05 pm.