

# Minutes of the Darrington Parish Council Meeting Virtual Meeting

12<sup>th</sup> November 2020 7PM

**Present:** Cllr Britton (Chair), Cllr Smith (Vice Chair), Cllr Tagger, Cllr Thompson, Cllr Stones, Cllr Stainer, Cllr Jackson, Cllr Loughran (Wakefield MDC)

Clerk (Ian Thompson)

## **In Attendance:**

One member of the public attended, and was introduced by Cllr Loughran as Melanie Jones, prospective Labour candidate for the delayed “May 2021” election.

## **1. Apologies:**

Cllr Jones of Wakefield MDC.

## **1A. Declarations of Interest:**

None offered.

## **2. Public Forum:**

Nothing was raised.

## **3. Minutes of The Previous Meeting:**

Cllr Jackson proposed and Cllr Stones seconded the proposal that the October minutes are a true and correct record. There was no dissent.

## **4. Matters Arising:**

### **i) Field Committee Section 137 Grant Update**

At the previous meeting the councillors approved a grant towards replacing a rotten bench and repairing a damaged one. The RFO, Cllr Stainer, reported that the timber bench has been rebuilt and the chairman of the field committee is in the process of ordering the new one. As yet no invoices have been seen for these works but the work is ongoing.

### **ACTION PS when invoice received**

### **ii) Highways England Matters**

The first item regarding Highways England refers to a request from the last meeting for an update on the A1 upgrade to a “smart motorway” project. The clerk was asked to contact Highways England for an update. The clerk reminded councillors that in the publication entitled “Road Investment strategy for the 2015/2016 – 2019/2020 Period” the stretch between Darrington and Redhouse was described as a scheme planned for the period 2020/2025. Yet in the very recently published Highways England document “Delivery Plan 2020-2025” this stretch is not referred to until Appendix D where it appears under “proposed pipeline for future schemes” – effectively ruling out any plans until 2025 at the earliest.

The second item was with regard to the grazing of sheep on what is Highways England land. This was referred to Highways England some time ago but no action seems to have

been taken by them. The clerk has raised a “Freedom of Information” request to Highways England asking for what land they own adjacent to the A1 northbound from the slip road entry to the A1. That reply has not been received but is expected before the end of the month.

**ACTION Clerk**

iii) Winter Planting Situation

First Impressions have “planted” the boxes but the chairman commented that three boxes are damaged. Despite the Electricity Board having done work in the vicinity of two of the damaged boxes and potentially been responsible for the damage the chairman reported that once the COVID restrictions are lifted and the weather improves they will be repaired relatively easily by councillors rather than go through a protracted claim process. Cllr Thompson also reported that grass on the verge of Estcourt Road has been damaged as holes were dug to repair damaged cables. The chairman commented that it is the wrong time of the year to re-seed and again would review in the Spring.

iv) “Dog Waste” Dispensers

Three dispensers have arrived and are currently in storage. Cllr Stainer provisionally arranged to install assisted by two members of the Field Committee but the new lockdown restriction prevents work at the moment. It was pointed out the permission from the vicar is required if installation on the “old orchard” is planned. It was agreed that once restrictions are lifted a visit will be made by Cllr. Smith, Britton and Stainer to review. It may be that an additional one in Valley Road would be considered.

**ACTION FS/PS/MB**

v) Christmas Tree Update

Cllr Stones has agreed with Mr. Morrell and Mr Peter Batty who will provide some of his farm workers, who are currently working together on his farm, to provide a joint party to take the tree from the “Brotherhood”, transport it to the site on Mr Morrell’s trailer and then install and put the lights in place. Cllr Stones will liaise with all parties so that the work can be done on one day legally and safely.

**ACTION VS**

vi) Website Accessibility Compliance

The council is aware that all council websites are required to have a statement confirming that their website conforms to the accessibility requirements defined in recent legislation. At the last meeting this topic was discussed, and the clerk was asked to discuss the issue with Mr Kelvin Wilkins who designed and installed the existing website. It was felt that Mr Wilkins would not have the time to modify the site and this proved to be the case. He is happy to give up stewardship of the website. The clerk has reviewed the council websites of all 24 of the Wakefield MDC parish and town councils and reported that they are provided by a variety of companies. Some are clearly “home-made”, but others are provided by companies who specialise in council websites. Darrington Parish Council is particularly fortunate in having Cllr Smith who has designed and installed a number of websites and the products she uses for design include ensuring accessibility requirements are met. She offered to pursue redesigning the Darrington website and has already begun and is awaiting updated photographs of the village for inclusion. Initially she will replicate much of the content of the current site. Over time it will evolve. The clerk pointed out that financial reporting is mandatory on

the site and suggested, once the initial work has been done to look at other council's sites for ideas for additional material.

**ACTION FS**

vii) Wentbridge Verge Cutting Update

The clerk has acknowledged the email from the Wentbridge resident who wrote to complain about the lack of consistency in verge cutting around Wentbridge. The clerk has contacted Wakefield's "Street Scene" department for comments on this complaint. He received a call from their liaison officer who apologised for not replying but they are short of staff at the moment and having to spread the workforce across different divisions and are not able to answer anything other than the most urgent correspondence. The clerk will continue to monitor the situation.

**ACTION Clerk**

viii) Newsletter

Cllr Stones is managing production of the next newsletter. Normally the golf club and the Darrington hotel pay publication costs and for advertisements within the newsletter but both are currently closed. Cllr Smith suggested that we put advertisements for the regular contributors in for nothing on this occasion and also give them the opportunity to draft their own copy including a message to their customers. The suggestion was universally accepted. Cllr Stones will press councillors for their contributions.

**ACTION VS**

ix) Wentworth Park Rise Tree Ownership

The tree in question is currently on the grassed area outside of the wall of 1 Stoney Mews and effectively on the verge of Wentworth Park Rise. A request had been made to ascertain ownership and therefore responsibility for this tree should it need attention. The clerk raised a "Freedom of Information" request on Wakefield MDC regarding the tree. They replied to state that there is no tree preservation order on it and that they do not own the tree. Referring to the original planning application on the Hillcroft Farm development it appears to be outside of the plan. The clerk is in the process of obtaining the deeds of 1 Stoney Park Rise to see if it is within that property's land. Those deeds are expected within the next couple of weeks. If the tree is not part of that property the clerk will ask Wakefield MDC for guidance on responsibility for the tree.

**ACTION Clerk**

## **5. Infrastructure Levy**

The infrastructure levy is a planning charge imposed used by local authorities on new developments within their catchment areas. The local authority can pass up to 25% of this levy to the local parish council. The Hillcroft Farm development is subject to such a charge relating to the properties in what is now known as "Stoney Mews". Darrington Parish Council has recently been awarded £12,500. The parish council has up to 5 years to spend this money and it must be accounted for in the annual financial reports and posted on the parish council's website. The charge is made as a result of new properties inevitably increasing the strain on the local infrastructure and spending should therefore be on infrastructure related projects. The RFO reported that he has such a report for a previous Infrastructure Levy and it will be published on the website.

## **6. Standing Orders & Financial Regulations**

The clerk believes that a review of the council's current standing orders and financial regulations should be made. Cllr. Thompson reported that when she was a parish councillor in her previous village these items were both reviewed and approved on an annual basis. The clerk will distribute to all councillors these current documents. The National Association of Local Council is a body which has published their recommended versions and which could be used as a comparison and a model for changes. The clerk was particularly concerned about the need to spend money at short notice with a payment being required before the next parish council meeting and mentioned that in the NALC standing orders he had seen it was proposed that the clerk and chairman be allowed to jointly agree to spend up to £500 without approval, expecting an endorsement at the next meeting. The chairman, however, was not in favour of this approach and in the unlikely requirement for such a short notice payment he would use email to gather the opinions of other councillors and make every effort to wait until the next parish council meeting for formal approval before any such payment be made. He is certain that a record of any payments must be discussed at a parish council meeting and a record of the decision would be recorded. Cllr Smith pointed out that such regulations were probably advanced before "email" and it is very easy to email all councillors in an emergency and glean opinions before spending anything. What is more an email thread is ideal for a documented record.

**ACTION Clerk to Distribute Existing Regulations**

## **7. New Clerk Recruitment**

The clerk reported on his current situation which is that he was due to have an aortic valve replacement before the middle of November, but obviously with the COVID situation hospitals are filling up and routine operations slipping. He is near the top of the list for a valve replacement operation and was told that it should occur within the next four weeks. The chairman asked if there was a possibility of the clerk coming back once recovered and he stated almost certainly not and he would like the councillors to proceed as if he would not. After much discussion the councillors felt that they would like to carry on with the previously successful model of having one person nominated as the clerk but the load would be spread throughout the council. Previously a model that worked well was that the chairman could produce the agenda and present planning matters. We already have a highly proficient RFO in Cllr Stainer and previously another member produced the minutes. The current clerk pointed out that a major requirement of the clerk was to advise on the legality of whatever the council might undertake and advised that any councillor nominated as "clerk" should join the Society Of Local Council Clerks" and even do the initial course to understand more about the law and where to turn to for advice. The clerk and councillor Smith will review what the current clerk does and it can be discussed at the next meeting.

**ACTION FS/IT**

## 8. Correspondence

- i) An email from the clerk Ian Thompson, tendering his resignation due to ill health. The chairman expressed his thanks to Ian for his contribution and confirmed that he felt there was no option but to acknowledge and accept the resignation. There was no dissent. He has formally replied.
- ii) A verbal comment from Mrs Wyn complimenting the council on the quality of the floral display this summer and the good work done by the Parish Council in general.
- iii) An email from Wakefield MDC with a link to their 2036 appraisal report of their local plan. This link has been forwarded to all councillors.
- iv) An email from Mr (Cllr) Tagger who acting in a private capacity is reporting Wakefield MDC to the local government Ombudsman. Cllr Tagger reminded the meeting that it is not possible for a parish council to report their district council to the Ombudsman. Cllr Tagger has taken it on as an individual and his email to the clerk gives him the opportunity to update the parish council on the current situation at the meeting. The issue relates to buildings being constructed at Bank Wood Stables despite planning applications have been turned down. Wakefield MDC have failed to enforce their decisions. The council submitted a Stage I formal complaint to Wakefield and whilst Wakefield acknowledged the complaint in November 2019 they replied that they would update us on progress. By July 2020 it was evident there was no progress whatsoever and at this time the complaint was escalated to the authority as a Stage II complaint. Cllr Tagger informed the meeting that the representative from Wakefield handling the complaint did not follow the council's own procedures. The council is required to issue a document stating their conclusion on the complaint. This has not been produced. Ideally this should be submitted as part of the complaints procedure to the Ombudsman. The complaint to the Ombudsman states that because Wakefield council have not followed the complaints procedure and that the land-owner has continued to develop the site despite enforcement notices to the contrary. The complaint is now being considered by the Ombudsman.

## 9. Finance

The opening balance brought forward from the end of September 2020 was £28,062.80

There was one item of income in October:-

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Income Source</u> | <u>Income Stream</u>          | <u>Amount</u>     |
|-------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| 19.10.20    | Wakefield MDC        | Community Infrastructure Levy | £12,500.00        |
|             |                      | <b>Total Income</b>           | <b>£12,500.00</b> |

There was one item of expenditure in October:

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Item</u> | <u>Payment Method</u> | <u>Payee</u> | <u>Reason</u>            | <u>Amount</u>  | <u>VAT</u> |
|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|----------------|------------|
| 8.10.20     | 18-2021     | Cheque 825            | D. Dyas      | Gardening / Maintenance  | £272.00        | £0         |
|             |             |                       |              | <b>Total Expenditure</b> | <b>£272.00</b> | <b>£0</b>  |

This left a balance of £40,290,80

There were three items for payment requiring approval.

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Item</u> | <u>Payment Method</u> | <u>Payee</u>      | <u>Reason</u>             | <u>Amount</u>    | <u>VAT</u>     |
|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 12.11.20    | 19-2021     | Cheque 826            | JRB Enterprises   | Three Dog Bin Stations    | £993.60          | £165.50        |
| 12.11.20    | 20-2021     | Cheque 827            | First Impressions | Winter Planting           | £1,460.40        | £243.40        |
| 12.11.20    | 21-2021     | Cheque 828            | D Dyas            | Gardening/Maintenance     | £80.00           | £0.00          |
|             |             |                       |                   | <b>Total For Approval</b> | <b>£2,534.00</b> | <b>£409.00</b> |

The RFO has not had a formal invoice from First Impressions for the planting – they sent an email stating an invoice was attached but in fact it was simply the original estimate. First Impressions need to be contacted to present a formal invoice.

**ACTION VS**

Cllr. Britton proposed payment. Cllr. Jackson seconded and the proposal was passed unanimously.

The RFO went on to review his updated budget report. During the discussion he commented that the “gardener” had asked if there was more he could do during the winter months. Cllr. Tagger feels that the tithe barn area could do with “a good fettling”. There could be an issue with disposing of waste. Tips are closed. Cllr Thompson will ask the gardener to do this work. She also commented that current thinking seems to be to bury vegetation type waste locally in hedge bottoms rather than simply tip them. The chairman felt that the gardener would probably know well enough how to dispose of such items in this manner.

**ACTION LT**

The forecast balance for year end is in excess of £33,900.

Councillors understand well enough that significant funds are available for major projects. The chairman has written his annual report to be published in the next newsletter as no AGM has, as yet, been held this year, once again explaining funds are available for new projects and asking residents once again for suggestions. Regarding possible projects Cllr Smith is aware that one of the major comments from residents relates to dog mess and believes more waste bag stations could be afforded and would be seen as a response to this important resident issue. The chairman reminded the meeting that a village sign project is also waiting to be progressed once the current crisis is over. The clerk in turn reminded the assembly that one of the outstanding tasks to be performed once the COVID crisis is over and traffic through the village returns to normal, is to lay the speed measuring and traffic counter strips in both Estcourt Road and Valley Road. The data produced might well suggest speeding being prevalent and monies could then be used for speed restriction measures. Cllr. Loughran is very supportive of such measures and asked for any councillors to approach her with ideas and she would push the Wakefield Highways Department to support any plans which Darrington would pay for. Cllr. Smith commented that her comments would be borne in mind.

## 10. Planning Matters

- i) 20/01727/AGR Grove Cottage (near Grove Hall) for barn – application approved.
- ii) 20/02250/FUL Chapel Hill cottage off Valley Road, single storey side and front extension and demolition of existing conservatory.  
Councillors had no comment to make on this application.

Cllr Tagger raised the outstanding request from Darrington Parish Council for Wakefield's planning department to enforce the 3' maximum height for boundary hedging and vegetation at the property in Wentworth Park Rise adjacent to the church. There are laurels planted there well in excess of 3' obscuring the view of the church from the roadside. The clerk reminded the meeting that this is one of the "Outstanding Items" on the list of tasks to be progressed once the COVID situation is resolved. The clerk sent a request via Cllr Jones for Wakefield to get involved some months ago. Cllr Tagger offered to approach Cllr. Jones to ask for an update.

### ACTION AT

## 11. REPORTS

- i) School – They are back and doing as well as possible given the circumstances
- ii) Gardening Club – Cllr Tagger has produced and distributed the eighth edition of the monthly newsletter. Clearly this effort uses ink for production and Cllr Tagger asked if he would be able to claim for printer ink at the next meeting. There was complete agreement that he should. Cllr Stones has been instrumental in publishing the gardening club calendar showing photographs from local gardens. Copies are available for £3.50 from the village shop. Cllr Tagger thanked Cllr Stones for her efforts.
- iii) Police – no report
- iv) Village Field – no report
- v) Newsletter – Cllr Smith will exhort councillors to deliver their articles for the publication.

## 12. Carried Over Items

Given the current situation with the coronavirus pandemic restricting actions and projects that might otherwise be progressing these items are included in the minutes simply so as "not to forget them" when things return to normal.

The remaining items are:-

- i) Parish Meeting and Annual General meeting
- ii) Litter pick
- iii) Speed strips installation and data analysis
- iv) Report from Wakefield Highways covering crossing in Estcourt Road, Marlpit Lane narrowing, 7.5 tonne signs in Valley Road, Unofficial lay-by on slip road and litter on the slip road.

- v) Enforcement of regulations within deeds of property by Wakefield MDC planning.
- vi) Broken glass in telephone box housing defibrillator

### **13. Minor Items**

- i) Nothing offered.

### **14. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020 at 7PM.

The meeting closed at 20:45