

The Parish Council of Dickens Heath

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on Tuesday January 17th 2017 in the Parish Rooms, Waterside

Present:

Dickens Heath Parish Councillors; Trevor Eames, Maureen Holloway (Chair), David Jones, Jill Lovett, Diane Potter, Doreen Wright.

9 members of the public

Clerk: Ms Helen Marczak

Minute 126 (2016/17) Apologies for Absence

Apologies were accepted from Councillor Alan Scholes.

Minute 127 (2016/17) Public Participation

Removal of Safety Fencing around Drainage System at David Wilson site

A resident is very concerned about the removal of this safety fencing. Chair Maureen Holloway has today spoken to Solihull MBC Neighbourhood Co-ordinator Matt Gardner about this. Matt will be speaking to the relevant officers at SMBC, Ed Bradford and Mike Eastwood, and SMBC know how concerned the Parish Council are. The Clerk has also contacted the legal department at SMBC about the potential safety implications of the removal of the fencing. Councillor Trevor Eames said that he had visited the site to take some photos, and had slipped down the bank while doing so – so the site is unsafe. Various residents have written to the Chief Executive of SMBC to express their concern. Councillor Alan Scholes has done some research on SUDS planning guidelines regarding safety, and this one doesn't meet them. The water level is quite high, which may indicate a problem with the pumping station. If the pump were to fail, this would be an additional safety issue, and residents need to know how to raise the alarm. The initial response from SMBC is that the fence should not be there as the area is a public amenity. Apparently the fencing wasn't included in the original plans, and so SMBC did not want to adopt it, but the area is now a hazard.

Flooding at The Paddocks

A resident said that there is a point on Braggs Farm Lane at which there is a dip, and this is a flooding issue. Matt Gardner has got involved with this, and the headway wall on the other side has been replaced with sandbags. However, the resident stated that this makes no difference, and water lies next to the retaining wall and can't drain away. The residents have been dealing with Dean Biddle who is the enforcement officer at SMBC. Chair Maureen Holloway said that this would be followed up with Matt Gardner. There was some discussion about whether SMBC would be adopting the roads at The Paddocks, Councillor Doreen Wright asked if this could be clarified with SMBC.

Problems at Waterside

- A resident raised the continuing problems at Waterside. Some residents have received a letter from Eon which warns that Dickens Heath Management Co. have not paid their bills and so the electricity supply to the lifts and car parks etc. may be cut off. DHMC have replied that this is just a disagreement that will be resolved.
- Residents have also received letters from DHMC stating that storage boxes in the underground car park must be removed as they are a fire hazard. But residents feel that DHMC allow the waste areas to be in a state that is more of a fire hazard.
- Many lights are not working.
- Litter picking is haphazard.
- There is a faulty drainpipe on a corner, and the wall is getting more and more damp. This has been reported by more than one resident.
- The service is appalling and properties are being devalued. There is a risk that Waterside will look like a slum in a few years' time.

Councillor Jill Lovett lives at Waterside, and stated that the lighting on the steps on one side of the water feature are not working at all, and haven't done for a while. DHMC say that this is apparently because the cabling has been chewed by rats.

Councillor Maureen Holloway suggested that a group of Waterside residents need to go to the Leasehold Advisory Service. There is an initial fee, but then residents can speak to a solicitor at no charge. A lot of the apartments are rented, and it is difficult to get these residents involved. Councillor Eames said that another problem is that DHMC are answerable to the Receivers, and the Receivers are not allowing them to spend any money. The Receivers are in the process of selling off everything, and Waterside should be sold to a responsible landlord who will then appoint a new managing agent or agents. The resident asked if the Parish Council's advice was therefore to tough it out? Councillor Holloway reiterated that the Leasehold Advisory Service could be of assistance, and that residents may have legal cover in their insurance which could pay the required initial fee.

Crime in Dickens Heath

There has been a recent spike in levels of crime in the village and at Whitlocks End train station, and a resident asked whether the Police were taking action. Councillor Jill Lovett said that she had seen the Police driving round at Whitlocks End. The problem seems to be that although crimes in Dickens Heath are logged with the Police, most aren't solved. There has recently been a mugging near the Miller and Carter. Councillor Lovett said that following a crime, residents need to ring 101 to get an incident log number and then ring the next day to check what has been done. Although residents shouldn't have to ring again, unfortunately it seems that this has to be done. Councillor Jones commented that the Police are very short staffed. Residents can email details of crimes to the Clerk who will then forward them on to the Neighbourhood Police team. The Clerk to liaise with the resident and Police to ensure that all incidents have been logged.

Minute 128 (2016/17) Declarations of Interest/Requests for Dispensations

Councillor Trevor Eames has requested a dispensation in relation to the Solihull Local Plan and his actions with the Solihull Ratepayers in objecting to Shirley Site B - which is one of the 2 proposed sites in Dickens Heath parish. The Clerk has received several expressions of concern that Councillor Eames has a conflict of interest. Councillor Eames explained that he was objecting to the loss of a fenced off section of Site B which is currently a public amenity area owned by SMBC, and had been encouraging residents of Shirley to also raise objections. Councillors Maureen Holloway and Jill Lovett pointed out that the Parish Council had gone to a lot of trouble to gather opinions from residents through a survey which was well balanced and avoided influencing residents one way or the other. Councillor Holloway feels that the Parish Council has been compromised by Councillor Eames' actions.

The request for a dispensation was put to a vote and refused. Councillor Eames will therefore not participate in any Parish Council discussions about the Solihull Local Plan.

Minute 129 (2016/17) Report from the Borough Councillors

None present.

Minute 130 (2016/17) Minutes of previous meeting held on Tuesday November 15th 2016

Proposed by Councillor Potter, seconded by Councillor Lovett, it was **Resolved** that the minutes be approved as a true and accurate record.

Minute 131 (2016/17) Actions from the Minutes of the previous meeting

Manual Brushing of Pavements

There is concern that the pavements are not being kept as clean as hoped - Matt Gardner will follow this up so that the Parish Council are provided with a schedule of when the brushing is taking place. Councillor Jill Lovett commented that the little bridge over to the Waterside Nature Reserve is also very slippery, but this is DHMC's responsibility.

Hedge Planting in the SMBC Nature Reserve

The SMBC Ecologist has been out to Dickens Heath to discuss taking this forward. They have also set a date to remove the plastic supports from trees. Later in January there will also be a walk around the Waterside Nature Reserve to follow up on any issues.

Noticeboard at the School

There has been no reply yet from the school regarding this suggestion.

Canal Path Maintenance

There has been no reply yet from our contact at the Canal & River Trust, Councillor Lovett also has some contacts that can be followed up.

Minute 132 (2016/17) Planning Applications

There is one planning application - 2017/00050 - Apartment 5, Leasowes House, 3 Main St which is a notification for prior approval for a proposed change of use from Office use to a Dwellinghouse.

As this is a prior notification, the Parish Council cannot in principle object to the change in use. It was agreed that the Parish Council should comment that they have no objection as long as no parking space is to be allocated to this dwelling.

Councillor Eames moved to the public seating for the following one agenda item.

Minute 133 (2016/17) Solihull Local Plan Consultation

The consultation has now been extended to February 17th 2017.

Adam Weber summarised the results so far from the Parish Council Residents' Survey. There have been 531 responses so far. Tonight was the agreed closing date, but Adam can leave it open and he will analyse the results as of midnight tonight and then continue to monitor them. The Parish Council will look at the results in a week's time, and Adam can provide an up to date analysis at that time. Jean Walters is also working on a draft response for the Parish Council to consider. The extension to the consultation now means there is plenty of time for the Parish Council to agree a response.

Richborough, who have put forward Site A in Dickens Heath, had offered to hold a public information session. The Clerk to follow this up with them.

Minute 134 (2016/17) Neighbourhood Plan CommitteeStanding Orders in relation to this Committee of the Parish Council

No amendments are required to Standing Orders, as they stand they will allow the Neighbourhood Plan Committee to operate as a formal standing committee of the Parish Council. It was agreed that the relevant parts of Standing Orders can be used to produce terms of reference for the standing committee of the Parish Council.

To Confirm the Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Committee

It was agreed that Councillor Jill Lovett would be the Chair, all in favour. Councillor Lovett will contact the current members of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee and propose that they have an initial informal meeting. This will be followed by monthly formal clerked meetings.

The Prince's Trust

Councillor Lovett feels that Chris Weatherburn of The Prince's Trust is the right person to provide the advice that the Committee need to guide them through the Neighbourhood Plan process – he has been very prompt with his assistance, he has good credentials, and will assist at no cost. It was agreed that a possible donation to The Prince's Trust was for a future discussion.

Hockley Heath Parish Council Neighbourhood Plan Meeting

Councillor Lovett recently attended this meeting in Hockley Heath. They had a lot of footfall, but she didn't feel that the responses were very good. People were asked to fill in post-it notes, but they were very ambiguous and apprehensive as the responses were in public. Councillor Lovett felt that we have had better responses. Councillor Lovett proposed getting in touch with Hockley Heath PC and liaising with them over our Neighbourhood Plans – this was agreed.

Minutes of Dickens Heath Parish Council Meeting held Tuesday 17th January 2017

Signature.....

Date.....

Minute 135 (2016/17) Dickens Heath Sports Club

Councillor Dave Jones has been looking into the use of the new facilities at Dickens Heath Sports Club in Rumbush Lane. They have a lot of facilities and a large car park. The football pitches are currently used by Leafield Ladies – who have 7 teams. Dickens Heath Football Club is a men's team and has been going for 4 years. They currently play at Light Hall School, but the manager and many of the players live in Dickens Heath, and it would be great if they could move to Rumbush Lane. Councillor Jones has negotiated a reduction in the cost per game for DHFC to use the pitch and changing rooms, but it would still be a lot more expensive than the team's current arrangements. The facilities are excellent, but the team really need to try the pitch first, and so a season's trial would be a good idea. Councillor Jones proposed that a grant of £800 be made to DHFC for the first season, and this was agreed in principle.

RoSPA have been approached with regard to looking at the safety of access to DH Sports Club if the Youth Group were to be based there, and the production of a report and recommendations. RoSPA have quoted £750 plus VAT to do this. The remit of this report could be extended to also cover the removal of the safety fencing around the SUDS on the David Wilson site. This was agreed in principle, the Clerk to seek a revised quote.

Minute 136 (2016/17) Village IssuesExpansion of Floral Displays

It was agreed that this would be included on the February agenda.

Memorial

Councillor Maureen Holloway proposed that Councillors should visit Earlswood Garden Centre to look at the stones there. Councillor Wright to speak to a stonemason who lives in the village.

Resident Request for Dog Bins

It was reiterated that dog waste can be put in ordinary bins. Dog bins do seem to be effective as they are always full. It was agreed to again publicize that dog waste can be placed in ordinary public bins.

Minute 137 (2016/17) Reports from Councillors who have attended Outside Groups SAC

Councillors Trevor Eames and Doreen Wright attended the SAC meeting where Jim Harte, of SMBC, spoke about community safety. Council cutbacks have necessitated the consolidation of services to avoid duplication across all public services. They are trying to meet the needs of the community with diminishing resources.

Minute 138 (2016/17) Financial Matters

Proposed by Councillor Eames, seconded by Councillor Potter, **Resolved** that the payments in Appendix I of the January 17th 2017 Agenda be approved – 16 payments totalling £2,770.46 for December 2016, and 21 payments totalling £6,761.99 for January 2017. January's payments included additional payments to Opus of £101.47 for gas and to GBR Phoenix Beard of £725.56 for the property service charge.

Councillors' Allowances

Advice has been received from SMBC of the new levels of allowances that Councillors can be paid. Co-opted Councillors are not allowed by law to be paid an allowance. Following some discussion, it was agreed that the Parish Council would not increase councillors' allowances at this time, but that Councillors should claim for any expenses incurred.

Budget for 2017/18

This had been discussed at a budget meeting in December 2016 and was approved.

Precept for 2017/18

At the budget meeting in December, the Parish Council had discussed keeping the level of the precept the same as 2016/17. The level of the Council Tax base for 2017/18 has now been received from SMBC, and Dickens Heath has an additional 146 Band D equivalent dwellings in the tax base. If the precept charge is kept the same as 2016/17, the Parish Council's Precept income will increase by £5,825 for 2017/18. There followed some discussion about whether the precept charge could be decreased, or whether it should remain unchanged. Various additional costs for next year were flagged up – including the Neighbourhood Plan, which may require some contingency funds. Councillor Eames pointed out that the Parish Council does still hold significant reserves, in excess of half a year's precept – which is the recommended level of reserves. The number of dwellings in the Dickens Heath tax base will also increase next year due to the building in the village centre. Several of the Parish Councillors agreed that they understood Councillor Eames' point of view, but there are a lot of unknown costs in the next year – from the Neighbourhood Plan to problems with the safety fencing at The Paddocks.

It was **Resolved**, by 5 votes to 1, that the Band D precept charge remain the same for 2017/18.

Report on Parish Council Finances

The Parish Council currently has a surplus of £98,000 and is projecting a surplus of £74,000 at the year end. Councillor Di Potter verified the bank reconciliation to the bank statement.

External Audit

External audit arrangements for 2016/17 will be the same as last year, with Grant Thornton carrying out the audit. There will be a change from April 1st 2017 with arrangements to be confirmed.

Minute 139 (2016/17) The Parish RoomsProposed Bookings

Alicia, who used to run yoga classes in the Parish Rooms, would like to temporarily run some classes again. This was agreed.

Fire Risk Assessment

The quote from Unicorn was agreed.

Minute 140 (2016/17) CorrespondenceDangerous Parking on Packmores

Vehicles are left parked on both sides of Packmores at the junction with Rumbush Lane, residents feel that this is dangerous and double yellow lines are required. To be followed up with Matt Gardner of SMBC.

Literary Litter Pickers

There are 2 litter pick community groups based at libraries in Solihull - they meet monthly at the library and have refreshments afterwards, SMBC provide the equipment, and many families take part. Councillor Dave Jones will be meeting with representatives of SMBC with a view to taking this forward in Dickens Heath.

Youth Group

The Youth Group have thanked the Parish Council for all their support over the previous year.

Bid for CCTV Funding

The Parish Council bid, to the Police and Crime Commissioner's Stronger Communities Fund, has not been successful. The bid was to extend CCTV to the area around the school, it was agreed that this should be added to the February agenda.

Concealed Entrance on Dickens Heath Rd

A resident's car has been hit as it pulled out of the concealed entrance just before the clock island. Solihull MBC were requested to look into a warning sign for cars driving away from clock island – but Highways have replied that they cannot do anything because there is no approved sign to warn of a concealed entrance.

Bollard opposite Tesco and the Library

A repair is imminent for this knocked over bollard.

Minute 141 (2016/17) Items for Next Agenda

CCTV, Floral displays.

Minute 142 (2016/17) It was Resolved that, in accordance with paras I and II Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public should be asked to withdraw due to the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted.

Minute 143 (2016/17) Traders' Temporary Parking in the Village Centre

Councillor Trevor Eames gave an update on the temporary parking proposal.

Minute 144 (2016/17) Staff Issues

Unused Annual Leave at the Year End

This was discussed.

Letter to Staff about a Pension

This was agreed.

Meeting ended 9.55pm

Next Meeting : Tuesday February 21st 2017: 7.00pm The Parish Rooms