

# The Parish Council of Dickens Heath

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on Tuesday February 11<sup>th</sup> 2020 in the Library, Dickens Heath

### Present:

**Dickens Heath Parish Councillors;** Trevor Eames, Maureen Holloway (Chair), Diane Potter, Nargis Rashid, Alan Scholes, Mike Small, Doreen Wright.

Solihull Borough Councillors; Ken Hawkins, Richard Holt

Solihull Senior Library Officers; Alison McGrory, Kate Bunting, Martin Sergeant

23 members of the public

Clerk: Ms Helen Marczak

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### **Minute 151 (2019/20) Apologies for Absence**

None.

### **Minute 152 (2019/20) Reduction in Library Opening Hours Pilot**

Chair Maureen Holloway welcomed the guests from Solihull MBC and opened the discussion with a summary of how the Parish Council had sold their former property at Wharf House to form a partnership with SMBC, to co-locate in the Library, and to work towards expanding the use of the building as a community centre and to increase the opening hours of the Library. The proposal to cut the opening hours has therefore come as a huge shock to the Parish Council.

Alison McGrory of SMBC replied that she would give some of the background to the pilot, and then answer questions from residents. Three years ago, a review was carried out of Library Services which included detailed engagement at Dickens Heath Library – they looked at usage of libraries and options for the future. The evidence was that libraries are not being used as they had been in previous years, and many authorities have either closed libraries or transferred them to be run by volunteers. SMBC wish to keep libraries open, as residents value them, but they are not being used as much now for traditional library services. Library buildings can be used on a self-service basis, without a trained librarian, and the building can also be used for other community activities. Olton Library is an example of a very active community library. She added that a cut of 6 hours for Dickens Heath is a lot, that it was right at the time of the review, but maybe it isn't now – they do recognise that the community is growing in size.

She suggested that perhaps the Library could be open on a self service basis while Parish Council meetings are taking place. In Bristol Libraries, there is a system of swipe cards which can be used to access libraries on a self service basis until 10pm. She feels that the way forward is to view Libraries as community spaces which happen to have books in them.

- A resident questioned the level of engagement that was done 3 years ago, and suggested that this assessment of how the Library was being used may not reflect how residents would wish to use it.
- The Clerk added that 2 of the community groups that moved from Waterside with the Parish Council have now stopped meeting at the Library as they found the unlocking/locking procedure, and being responsible for the building, too intimidating.
- Borough Councillor Richard Holt said that he had objected to this cut in library hours, and that a cut in opening hours leads to reduced confidence in the community that use it. If they turn up to find the library closed, they may not come again. He feels that Library Services should be doing more, and has the impression that this is what they wish to see happening – a reduction in usage that will allow them to close the Library.

Minutes of Dickens Heath Parish Council Meeting held Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2020

Signature.....

Date.....

Alison McGrory acknowledged that it is clear that the strength of feeling of residents is high. Further discussions need to be held about which community groups might use the building, how the problems of accessing and being responsible for the building can be overcome, and how this can be built on.

- Borough Councillor Ken Hawkins said that Dickens Heath Library is a special case, it is a relatively new community which is growing, and will continue to do so with the further development.
- A resident, who was in attendance with his son, said that they use the Library on several days each week. His son, who is in Year 6, addressed the meeting and said that he comes to the Library as often as he can after school to use the computers and meet his friends. He feels that the proposal to reduce opening hours is a bad idea, and he would like the Library to be open extra days.
- Another resident added that some evening opening would allow parents who work to have time to look around at the books.
- Another resident said that the Library is so important to the children and the community – they can't let it go. Stronger links with the School was suggested.
- Some residents can only go to the Library on a Saturday, so they don't agree with cutting opening hours on Saturday afternoons.

Councillor Maureen Holloway added that all of this had been going on behind the Parish Council's back – while they were discussing the co-location and sharing the costs of the building, they had no idea of this proposal to cut hours.

Alison McGrory agreed that a wider engagement exercise needed to be done, and they needed to look at how the Library could be made more accessible. She proposed the setting up of a small Working Group – to include SMBC Officers, Councillors and members of the local community – to look at all the options. Members of the public who would be interested in joining the Working Group were asked to leave their contact details, and the Clerk to liaise with SMBC Officers about taking this forward.

### **Minute 153 (2019/20) Public Participation**

#### Exposed Cables on Dickens Heath Rd

Near to the Welcome Signs on Dickens Heath Rd, by the Bellway site on the left hand side as you exit the village, 2 cables can be seen coming out of the ground – they should be capped off. This to be followed up with SMBC/Bellway.

### **Minute 154 (2019/20) Declarations of Interest/Requests for Dispensations**

None.

### **Minute 155 (2019/20) Report from Borough Councillors**

Borough Councillor Ken Hawkins thanked everyone at the meeting for their positive messages and support for the Library. He mentioned Grimebusters, a SMBC initiative to cleanse/cut back areas that are in need of attention as a one off. Also, a 'Combat Stress Garden' is to be created in Monkspath – which will be a quiet place in which to remember veterans.

### **Minute 156 (2019/20) Minutes of the previous Meeting held on Tuesday January 14<sup>th</sup> 2019**

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

**Minute 157 (2019/20) Actions from the Previous Meeting**Village Green

Contact with the solicitors is on-going, the Clerk has been in touch with Fairways about the contract for the Village Green once the transfer is complete, and with Dickens Heath Management Co. regarding paperwork for the Playground.

Paint to Spray on Dog Mess

Matt Gardner at SMBC has approved the use of this spray paint on pavements as long as it is biodegradable and non toxic.

Hanging Baskets/In Bloom

The In Bloom volunteers have met and decided on a purple, orange and red coloured theme. Some additional hanging baskets to be ordered from Plantscape – prices have not increased from last year. There are 7 baskets along Main St that need replacing – these are the responsibility of Dickens Heath Management Co and Nick Yates of Savills cannot see any problem with replacement baskets but will have to check with the ultimate landlord. An additional 6 baskets are also required for lamp posts by the new developments (which had solar Xmas trees on them). Plantscape to be asked to provide a 'bright mix' of colours as before.

Government Consultation on Unauthorised Encampments

This covers various recommendations for making it easier for the Police to deal with unauthorised encampments – which the Parish Council is in support of. Councillor Trevor Eames to draft the response.

Youth Worker for New Community Centre at the School

Chris Barr of SMBC has provided a quote for the cost of a youth worker for one evening per week, which the Parish Council has agreed to fund. The School will be employing this youth worker, and so the PC will liaise with the Headteacher.

Wild Flowers

A meeting has taken place with Sarah Jones of SMBC about wildflower sowing, and proposed sites are by Miller and Carter, on Dickens Heath Rd, and strips of verge by the Village Green. The Parish Council are pleased that SMBC have agreed to do this sowing at no cost.

Flooding Drop In Session

Ed Bradford of SMBC is looking at dates for this.

Bellway Lamp Posts

Despite repeated contact with Bellway, some of the lamp posts on Dickens Heath Rd, near the Fishers Drive bus stop, are still not working. The Clerk to email again and to copy in Nick Page of SMBC.

**Minute 158 (2019/20) Planning Applications**

An additional planning application at 35 Spindle Lane for single storey front extensions and a single storey rear extension with render was also considered.

No comments on any of the planning applications.

**Minute 159 (2019/20) Transfer of the Village Green**

The final details in the legal process for the transfer of the Village Green have taken longer than expected, but it is now expected to happen imminently.

**Minute 160 (2019/20) Attendance at Outside Groups or Events**CIL Meeting with SMBC Officers

Councillor Trevor Eames reported that this was very helpful and he will complete a report to inform Parish Councillors.

Solihull Area Committee

Nick Page of SMBC was in attendance and gave an update.

Parish Council Conference February 26<sup>th</sup> 2020

Several Parish Councillors indicated their interest in attending this.

**Minute 161 (2019/20) Financial Matters**

Proposed by Councillor Potter, seconded by Councillor Holloway, **Resolved** that the payments in Appendix I of the February 11<sup>th</sup> 2020 Agenda be approved – 18 payments totalling £3,884.48 including an additional payment of £13.15 to Councillor Holloway for In Bloom expenses and a correction to £118.48 for the BT direct debit for phone and broadband.

Report on Finances for the Year to Date

This was received, there is currently a surplus of £121,000 and a projected end of year surplus in excess of £100,000.

Insurance for the Village Green

The Parish Council's current insurance policy already includes insurance cover for public open space and a playground, and they have noted down the specific play equipment that is in the playground. There is no extra charge for this, but there would be an extra charge for insuring the replacement of damaged equipment. It was agreed that this was not necessary given that the Parish Council intend to replace the whole playground once the lease for the Village Green is in place.

Appointment of Internal Auditor

It was agreed that the Clerk should contact Bill Robinson to ask if he would once again carry out the internal audit.

**Minute 162 (2019/20) Festival on the Green 2020**

Councillor Trevor Eames gave an update - in previous years the stage and sound costs have been covered by Smart Homes, but this year they are not able to meet the full costs. The Festival on the Green Committee wondered whether the Parish Council would consider making a larger grant for this year? The Committee need to start booking the entertainment, so they need to know the level of funding. It was agreed that the Committee should send in a grant application for the Parish Council to consider.

**Minute 163 (2019/20) Parish Council Website Accessibility**

The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 require all public bodies to ensure that their websites are accessible to as many people as possible, especially those with disabilities, and guidelines have been issued which are very technical. Websites are required to be compliant by September 2020. It was agreed that advice should be sought from Mark Emms who hosts the PC website.

**Minute 164 (2019/20) Correspondence**Pop Choir

Pop Juniors have now moved from the Library to meet in the School. Anya of Pop Choir thanks the PC for their support over the last few years.

In Bloom

The entry form is now on-line and it was agreed that this should be completed.

Knocked over Bollards

A resident flagged up bollards that have been knocked over on Mereways and Griffin Lane. These have now been fixed.

Dickens Heath Sign

The Dickens Heath sign on stilts at the junction of Rumbush Lane and Dykens Way is too close to a lamp post, and redundant now that the Welcome Gates are in place. SMBC to be asked to remove it.

**Meeting ended 9.25pm**

**Next Meeting : Tuesday March 10<sup>th</sup> 2020: 7.15pm in the Library (1<sup>st</sup> floor)**