

# The Parish Council of Dickens Heath

## Minutes of the Virtual Meeting of the Council held on Tuesday June 9<sup>th</sup> 2020

### **Present:**

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

7 members of the public

Clerk: Ms Helen Marczak

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### **Minute 1 (2020/21) Apologies for Absence**

None.

### **Minute 2 (2020/21) Public Participation**

Chair Maureen Holloway welcomed everyone to the Parish Council's first virtual meeting using Zoom.

#### Neighbourhood Watch

Two residents present spoke about the Neighbourhood Watch scheme that has been set up in Dickens Heath in response to antisocial behaviour and crime in the village late last year. It started with informal patrols, that were quite successful, and this has now progressed to a formal Neighbourhood Watch scheme. The next step is to make the scheme more structured through Neighbourhood Watch, with closer liaison with the Police. This should lead to less crime and antisocial behaviour, along with lower insurance premiums – so it is a really positive scheme. The group are looking for support from the Parish Council on taking this forward – assistance with publicity, use of facilities and possibly with funding in the future. They have had success using Facebook and Whatsapp community groups - if more people get involved, they are more likely to become eligible for Police support for example with sponsored signage. They have 38 active members, with a patrol usually once a day, but they struggle to cover the whole of Dickens Heath. Councillor Di Potter added that plaques and signs are very effective, each street that is actively patrolled can have 2 signs. Councillor Maureen Holloway said that it sounded to be a great initiative. All agreed that the Parish Council should offer the support requested to the Neighbourhood Watch scheme.

#### Covid-19 Community Essentials Delivery

This has been set up by a resident and is based at Waterside. For the past 11 weeks, they have been delivering essential goods to vulnerable people in Solihull and South Birmingham. The resident asked whether the Parish Council might support leaflets with information about their charity on one side and information about Neighbourhood Watch on the other side. Councillor Nargis Rashid asked whether he could forward more information about the charity, or he could send in a grant application form for the Parish Council to consider.

### **Minute 3 (2020/21) Declarations of Interest/Requests for Dispensations**

Councillor Maureen Holloway declared an interest during the discussion about the Village Hall, as she is one of the Directors, and would therefore take no part in any decision.

### **Minute 4 (2020/21) Minutes of the previous Meeting held on Tuesday March 10<sup>th</sup> 2020**

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

**Minute 5 (2020/21) Actions from the Previous Meeting**Village Green

Fairways are now maintaining the Village Green, with regular mowing, weekly litter picks and twice weekly bin emptying. The playground remains closed.

Library Opening Hours

The Working Group set up to discuss the Library's opening hours remains suspended. Solihull MBC have contacted the Parish Council's solicitor for an update on finalising the lease on the Library 1<sup>st</sup> floor. It was agreed that the lease could not be progressed until a final decision has been made on the opening hours of the Library.

Hanging Baskets

The hanging baskets will be arriving on June 20<sup>th</sup>, slightly later than usual as Plantscape have been let down by a supplier due to coronavirus.

Community Chest Grants

Although the Community Chest has been deferred, Dickens Heath Allotments have sent in an application form. It was agreed that this should be considered as a grant application at the next PC meeting.

SUDS at The Paddocks

Solihull MBC have confirmed that this should be adopted late summer of this year.

Weeds on Islands

SMBC to be contacted to request spraying of weeds on the traffic islands.

Bus Stop at Clock Island

Transport for West Midlands have looked at this – they cannot provide a bus shelter, but can provide a bus stop pole and flag, in this location. They will need to liaise with SMBC, but there will be a delay due to coronavirus.

Lamp Posts by Fishers Drive Bus Stop

These lamp posts, which have not been working for a long time, are currently finally being connected up by Bellway contractors.

**Minute 6 (2020/21) Delegated Decisions Made Since Lockdown on March 24<sup>th</sup> 2020**

The following delegated decisions that have been made since lockdown were noted and formally approved:

1. With the support of Catherine from the Library, a Facebook Community Covid-19 Support Group, and a Pharmacy Volunteers Whatsapp Group were set up to support residents during the coronavirus pandemic.
2. Approval of March 10<sup>th</sup> 2020 minutes for publication.
3. Approval of April payments.
4. Approval of finalisation of lease of Village Green to the Parish Council from SMBC.
5. Approval of end of year financial statements.
6. Approval of reimbursements for planting out planters at Waterside.
7. Approval of work on website to ensure that it meets accessibility requirements.
8. Approval of May payments.
9. Approval of summary of Annual Return 2019/20 for External Audit.
10. Approval of increase of bin emptying on Village Green to twice a week.

**Minute 7 (2020/21) Planning Applications**

No comments.

**Minute 8 (2020/21) Proposal to Transfer the Administration of the Village Hall to the Parish Council**

The administration of the Village Hall currently consists of a group of Directors plus an administrator who deals with the bookings. For a while now, the Directors have struggled to get people involved in the running of the Village Hall. Parish Council Chair Maureen Holloway is one of the Directors, and she invited Len Cresswell, another Director, to speak. Len is a Parish Councillor in Cheswick Green, and has been involved with the Village Hall in Dickens Heath since it opened. He added that their biggest problem is in engaging local residents. One of the Directors has recently given notice that they are resigning and so now only 3 of

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the remaining Directors are Dickens Heath residents. He believes that it would make good sense for the Parish Council to take on its administration, permission would need to be sought from SMBC. Chair Maureen Holloway asked whether the rest of the Parish Council felt the question should be asked of SMBC, and she withdrew from the decision.

Councillor Trevor Eames said that the Village Hall currently benefits from being a charitable organisation but there should be no problem if the PC just takes on the administration. The Village Hall will not be open before September. All were in favour of Solihull MBC being approached to ask whether the Parish Council could take on the administration of the Village Hall.

### **Minute 9 (2020/21) Procurement of a Replacement Playground**

Councillor Nargis Rashid has been in contact with the School with regard to carrying out a consultation with the children before the specification for the playground is drawn up.

Councillor Alan Scholes said that he has been in touch with Solihull MBC and asked whether the playground could be extended – and it can, but the financial implications would be considerable. It would be ideal to keep to the current footprint of soft areas with new equipment. It was agreed that the nature of the playground should remain the same, with play equipment for the same age range of children.

A parent at the meeting was invited to comment – she said that many parents feel that the current play equipment is very basic and that some use of the surrounding area, for example with stepping stones, would enhance the facility.

The Parish Council's Financial Regulations state that a contract that exceeds £25,000 will need to go out to tender or go through a public sector purchasing organisation. A replacement playground is very likely to cost more than this, and so the Clerk has asked SMBC for some advice. They have recommended ESPO – a public sector purchasing organisation who have a list of approved suppliers and will assist in drawing up the specification.

All agreed that the Clerk should contact ESPO.

### **Minute 10 (2020/21) Village Green – Fitness Classes**

Local gym Cre8 have started to use the Village Green for small group fitness classes, as they are currently unable to use their own premises due to coronavirus. The Parish Council are concerned that this is a breach of their lease from SMBC, which does not allow commercial activity on the Green. Councillor Trevor Eames said that it is a temporary activity which is not bothering anybody, it is a community activity and SMBC policy is to support businesses. Councillor Nargis Rashid agreed that it is a temporary situation due to the exceptional circumstances of lockdown. A resident in attendance lives on the edge of the Village Green and does not feel that Cre8 are causing a nuisance to nearby residents. Councillor Mike Small added that Cre8 are in a difficult situation, and he feels that the PC should support them as a local business. It was agreed that, subject to certain conditions such as no damage to the Green, no nuisance, and having risk assessments and public liability insurance in place, the Parish Council would be in support of this temporary use of the Village Green while Cre8 are unable to use their own premises. The Clerk to ask for permission from SMBC as landowner.

### **Minute 11 (2020/21) Antisocial Behaviour & Litter during Lockdown**

There has been an increase in antisocial behaviour during lockdown, all agreed this was a Police issue and any concerns should be forwarded to the Police. Litter on the Village Green has been a real problem during lockdown and the good weather, but the increase in the frequency of the bins being emptied has improved things. It was agreed that the PC should publish a thank you to all the residents who have been helping by litter picking during these difficult circumstances, and encourage them to keep doing so. The Clerk to ask SMBC whether they still offer to provide litter pickers for residents.

### **Minute 12 (2020/21) Redeployment of SMBC Neighbourhood Co-ordinator**

All agreed that it is very sad that Matt Gardner has been redeployed to cover Highways, and he will no longer be the Parish Council's point of contact with SMBC, and that the Parish Council was not informed that this was to happen. Alison McGrory at SMBC has apologised for the lack of communication.

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**Minute 13 (2020/21) Financial Matters**

Proposed by Councillor Potter, seconded by Councillor Small, **Resolved** that the payments in Appendix I of the June 9<sup>th</sup> 2020 Agenda be approved – 18 payments for June totalling £3,944.77, 16 payments for May totalling £4,161.75, 16 payments for April totalling £4,453.68 and 2 end of year 2019/20 payments totalling £8,581.25

Report on Finances for the Year to Date

Income since April 2020 includes the precept of £41,001, a Covid Support Grant from SMBC of £5,891 and the £110 reimbursement of the In Bloom entry fee for 2020. There is currently a surplus of £140,000.

Councillors Maureen Holloway and Di Potter verified the bank reconciliation to the bank statement as at May 31<sup>st</sup> 2020.

Internal Audit Report 2019/20

All approved the internal audit report – with a couple of recommendations to be followed up on.

**Minute 14 (2020/21) Annual Governance & Accountability Return 2019/20**

1. The Annual Governance Statement 2019/20 was approved and signed by the Chair, having previously been signed by the Clerk/RFO.
2. The Annual Accounting Statements 2019/20 were approved and signed by the Chair, having previously been signed by the Clerk/RFO.

**Minute 15 (2020/21) Parish Council Website Accessibility**

Mark Emms, who hosts the Parish Council’s website, is currently working on this and the Clerk has cleared off a lot of out of date posts.

**Meeting ended 1pm**

**Next Meeting : Tuesday July 14<sup>th</sup> 2020**