

The Parish Council of Dickens Heath

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on Tuesday February 20th 2024

Present:

Dickens Heath Parish Councillors; Richard Small (Chair), Maureen Holloway, Adam Weber, Liz Woodus, Mike Small and Dave Easterby

6 members of the public

Borough Councillor Ken Hawkins

Planning Advisor to the Council, Jean Walters

Clerk: Ms H Raithby

Minute 264 (2023/24) Apologies for Absence

Mark Connolly-Dowson

Minute 265 (2023/24) Public Participation

Parkinsons Event on the Village Green

Adam Talbot spoke about his personal involvement with Parkinsons and the reason he has been fundraising for many years and has raised a considerable amount for the charity. He would like the event to be similar to a school fair and has quite a lot of the organisation in place already. He was asking if any of the members of the Parish Council or the wider community would like to help support the event. Councillor Richard Small advised that Councillor Connolly-Dowson would be the right person to speak to about this and asked Adam Talbot if there is any other help needed to let us know.

Adam Talbot asked if anyone had gazebos available to use for the event.

Dean Ward – Solihull Council – Update

We can no longer have the solar lights or hanging baskets on the current lamp post columns, they need to be replaced with stronger columns. The columns have deteriorated prematurely due to the extra loads that have been on them. The Parish Council need to draw up a plan of the places that they would ideally like the Christmas lights to go. Dean will provide a catalogue of the choices of Christmas lights. There is an up front cost for the lights but once purchased they will be ours and we will just have to pay for the electricity. We need to have the plan sorted by July. Councillor Richard Small asked if we want the same type of columns will there still be a structural risk, Dean advised that the new ones will look very similar but will be reinforced. They can also be used for different types of lights as well. Councillor Richard Small advised that it’s most likely we would like the lights to be in the central area of the village. Dean will send through a map of all columns in the village. Councillor Adam Weber asked if the new columns will support speed visors etc, Dean confirmed that they will but we will need to discuss this with the Speed Safety Team.

Councillor Woodus asked if we would be able to have hanging baskets on the new columns, Dean advised that we would be able to and that his team can supply the brackets but that Parks/Streetcare would have to be responsible for the upkeep/maintenance of them so they would have to agree to this. The columns are strong enough to take the hanging baskets, yes. Dean confirms they take care of the Christmas lights for many places within the borough, including Tidbury Green, Cheswick Green and Hockley Heath all with different lights depending on what the Parish Council wants.

Councillor Richard Small then asked about the adoption of private roads, in particular, Main Street. Dean advised that this is up to Centrick, they have been looking at going to the Crown, it will then be kept with the Crown or given to Solihull Council. There is a lot of risk for Solihull Council in taking this on and they need to consider how much money needs to be spent on it. Before Christmas the liquidators for Dickens Heath Management Company offered

it to Solihull Council or the Crown. Dean gave some information about the process that happens in this instance. Solihull Council would not take on the freehold for anything so this definitely won't go to them. Councillor Mike Small advised that when the Parish Council took on the car park behind Tesco one of the options at the time was for the Crown to take it and then sell it, this was part of the reason the Parish Council decided to take it on. Dean advised that there are other areas in the village with differing agents that are private that will just keep running that way. Dean advised that this does happen but that highways is different. Borough Councillor Ken Hawkins advised that he has been aware of the meetings happening and that no decision has been made.

Canal Towpaths

Councillor Adam Weber asked Dean Ward about the canal tow path in the village. Dean Ward advised that it is the Canals and Rivers Trust which is now a charity so any work that they do they have to get a grant. The advice is that we write to them suggesting to offer to help raise money to then be spent on the canal towpath, Solihull Council have no control over the canal towpaths.

Planning Matters

Jean Walters there has been a letter circulated by Solihull Council written by Gary Parlour to the inspectors of the local plan dated the 14th of February which Jean has shared with the Clerk and some of the councillors this evening. It is an extremely helpful letter which is questioning the inspector. Jean has had a meeting with Saqid Batti MP and hopefully he will be trying to persuade the inspector to rethink things. Hopefully this will mean, ultimately, that some of the green belt development won't happen.

Councillor Ken Hawkins spoke about a case that he remembers where a planning case went to tribunal and they spent around a quarter of a million pounds on it and unfortunately lost. Councillor Hawkins has been interviewed by a newspaper about this issue and the Green Belt. He is against site BL1 because of the size and loss of sport facilities but there are other proposals that he may not object to such as Dog Kennel Lane which he feels are more sustainable. Councillor Mike Small asks Councillor Hawkins about the opinions of other borough councillors particularly ones who live locally. Councillor Hawkins could not comment on this.

Jean Walters wanted to discuss the planning working group which she feels is working very well. They have a few specialists in in various fields including a highways expert and environmentalist. The group is working well together under Councillor Weber's expert management. She feels it can carry forward to other planning issues as well not just this one, this needs to be agreed by the Parish Council. It's a much quicker way of getting things done as some planning issues are very time critical and it's better than waiting for a full parish council meeting. She feels it's good having three parish councillors on the planning working group as they only need Councillor Richard Small to agree decisions for it to be quorum. Councillor Richard Small advised that Parish Councillors must all be consulted on decisions so they are all kept informed on decision making, this doesn't change the fact that once four Councillors have agreed this makes quorum. Councillor Weber agrees that the group is working well. Councillor Richard Small agrees that it is working well.

Resident of Tythe Barn Lane

Resident spoke about problems with highways and the development also losing the sports facilities Jean Walters gave an update on the work of the working group.

Resident then spoke about lighting in Buckridge Lane he cannot see his front door and would like lights, he also feels this is dangerous particularly for female residents. The Parish Council advised that we have tried, on numerous occasions, in the past to get lighting but it cannot be done due to bats in this area. The resident requested that we remove the signage to advise people that it is an unlit road. Dean Ward from Solihull Council advised that this is not possible because the signage is there for a reason.

The resident asked about paving in Dickens Heath with there being numerous sunken missing bricks replaced with concrete. Councillor Ken Hawkins replied that it needs to be reported online. The resident suggested getting a group of residents together to try and repair the damaged paving. Dean Ward asked the resident not to do this and please report it online through the normal channels and then explained the process when things have been

reported, they are allocated to contractors that are working in the area and depending on how urgent it is will be dealt with. Dean Ward advised they rely on residents and parish councils to notify them of problems so please do report them.

Minute 266 (2023/24) Declarations of Interest/Requests for Dispensations

None

Minute 267 (2023/24) Update from Borough Councillors

Site BL1 Planning Application

Borough Councillor Ken Hawkins has submitted a petition. With regards to the sports facilities we know that the applicants have stated that they will consult on the sports facilities in the Spring, he has requested that they speak to Cheswick Green Parish Council because there was a plan that they were going to use land within that parish. The developers do not have ownership of the land but spoke to the parish council last week and the developers then pulled out of the conversation.

Boundary Changes

The local government boundary Commission has released their proposals which Councillor Hawkins sent out, they are consulting at the moment until April the 10th and then they will announce the results in July. It is likely that Councillor Hawkins won't be our Councillor after these changes but will be our Councillor until 2026.

Flooding

He will be having some meetings regarding the flooding problems we've been having in the village.

Ken advised that he has a column in the Dickens Heath Directory and encourages residents to read this for updates.

Minute 268 (2023/24) Minutes of the meeting held 16th January 2023

Some updates need to be made to these, to be agreed at the next meeting.

Minute 269 (2023/24) Parish Council Decisions

Table Tennis Table

There was a discussion around the Facebook poll that has been done to gauge residents' feelings about having a Table Tennis Table on the Village Green. 76%, 190 residents voted yes to the idea. 23%, 57 residents voted against the idea. Councillor Easterby asked if we're able to ask a more open question, asking for suggestions rather than a specific thing when putting things to the public, Councillor Weber agrees with this. Councillor Richard Small agreed but suggested that this may result in having numerous ideas which isn't what we wanted. This was a specific request that was put to the Parish Council by a resident. Councillor Holloway suggested that we could put something out in the Dickens Heath Directory so that we reach more of the residents. Councillor Richard Small stated that lots of kids love ping pong he has had discussions with kids locally – the action that was agreed was to put out a request for residents' views. This was exactly what went out to the public. Councillor Richard Small stated that he believes that certain individuals just don't want to see the Table Tennis Table happen and this is why there has been an issue, he stated that we did the poll to get an idea of resident's views on it, not for Councillors to go on social media and give their personal views (Councillor Holloway). Councillor Small stated that this is what is driving Councillor Holloway's objections to the poll that was put out, her views on the Table Tennis table, as she doesn't agree with it personally. 77% of residents that responded want the Table Tennis table. A member of the public tried to join in the conversation and was reminded that it is a closed session. Resident continued to speak. Resident spoke about a neighbourhood plan and that there would need to be a referendum on a table tennis table to ask the views of those that would be affected. Councillor Richard Small asked if we had a referendum to put park benches on the Village Green. Councillor Richard Small feels that there is a lot of negativity around this issue which was just a simple process of putting out a request to capture views on a table tennis table. He stated that if you look at the Facebook post and the comments that it generated you can see the negativity from four people driving this. If the poll had come back to say 77% of people didn't want it, that would have been the end of the matter, but we can't now go back and start picking at the way it was done, it was decided at the last meeting how to get the opinions. Resident interrupts again and speaks about a neighbourhood plan. Councillor Mike Small pointed out that we weren't discussing a

neighbourhood plan. We were talking about a table tennis table which was a request from a resident, he explains to the resident that the Councillors discussed the suggestion from the resident at previous meetings, but they felt they couldn't decide and thought the best course of action was to ask the residents, which is what has happened, this is what we're now discussing. Resident continues to interrupt Councillor Mike Small while he is trying to speak and Councillor Mike Small becomes frustrated, states that he has listened to the resident's point and asks him to let him speak. Councillor Holloway stated that she is leaving as she can't listen to the arguing. Councillor Richard Small said that was fine... Councillor Holloway was the one that instigated all of the negativity and maybe it would be best that she leaves the meeting. Councillor Holloway states that she wasn't being negative. She doesn't like listening to the arguing and asks Councillor Richard Small why he didn't let the resident finish speaking, Councillor Richard Small stated that he had already reminded everyone that this is a closed meeting.

A vote was taken by the Parish Councillors. Councillors Mike Small, Richard Small and Liz Woodus all voted for the Table Tennis table. Councillors Dave Easterby and Maureen Holloway voted against. Councillor Weber abstained.

Councillor Holloway left the meeting.

Wi-Fi Security

Councillor Weber has looked into the Wi-Fi in the Library because of concerns that it isn't secure. Solihull Council have advised that we shouldn't really be using it for confidential information. Some things have not been done by Solihull Council that would make the Wi-Fi more secure, but reasons for those decisions have been given by Solihull Council and those issues can be mitigated fairly easily. Councillor Richard Small stated that the risk is fairly minimal, but it is a little worrying that Solihull Council haven't taken those steps to make it safer. Councillor Adam Weber suggested that we write an article for others in the village to raise awareness of Wi-Fi security in the library and other public places such as coffee shops. He also stated that he is happier now that he has been able to discuss the Wi-Fi with the tech team at Solihull Council.

Working Better Together and New Technical Sub Committee

Councillor Weber presented his ideas for this including modern technology to help us work better.

- Email Addresses it was agreed that we will move to in house email addresses - org.uk this is partly because it's a risk using the emails we have at the moment, there is no control when someone leaves etc.
 - Website renewal - Councillor Weber can help with this and it will be better value than we have looked at before as it can be done in house as he has the skill set.
 - Collaboration -we have emails/documents all over the place, he recommends Google Workspace as it will provide the facilities we need. Online meetings, audit trails, vote online etc.
 - Online Document Store – We need to have everything in one place so that we can share things easily.
 - Improved minutes process – Word can record the meetings and transcribe the information. We must advise everyone that they are being recorded.
 - Online engagement – this should improve on our communication with the residents.
- Councillor Richard Small asked if it could be a working group would rather than a sub-committee as it is a lot less administration. Councillor Weber agrees with this. All in favour of a 'Technical working group'. All in favour of changing email addressed now to org.uk. Councillor Easterby and Councillor Richard Small expressed an interest in getting involved with the working group.

Minute 270 (2023/24) Finance and Risk Committee

Councillor Easterby gave an update on the Finance and Risk Committee, he is planning to have a meeting over the next few weeks and will circulate the Terms of Reference prior to the meeting.

Minute 271 (2023/24) Communications and Events Committee

Update

Councillor Connolly-Dowson gave a full update at the last meeting and will update again at the next meeting.

D-Day celebrations

Councillor Easterby questioned if there was a national event that will be lighting a beacon, we haven't received any correspondence regarding this. Councillor Woodus wondered if we should join in with the Parkinsons event rather than having a separate event as the dates are very close together. The Councillors agreed that Councillor Connolly-Dowson will contact Parkinsons organisers to see if this is possible. There is going to be a meeting over the next few weeks, date to be advised by Councillor Connolly-Dowson. Councillor Mike Small pointed out that we really need to start organising as it's getting close, he feels that we should have the dates in the diary at the beginning of the year.

Minute 272 (2023/24) Tesco Car Park

Rota for Car Park inspections. Councillors Easterby, Woodus and Mike Small agree to volunteer for this.

Minute 273 (2023/24) Councillors' Action Log and Clerk's Update

This will be discussed at the next meeting.

Minute 274 (2023/24) To Consider Village Areas of Interest

Youth Club at Community Hub

Councillor Richard Small updates that the funding has been agreed from Solihull Council and they are hoping to have the youth club up and running by May. It will be for two different age groups, 11-14 year olds and 15-17 year olds. It is in collaboration with Solihull Council, it would be great to have an event for the opening night, and possible an A5 flyer for the Dickens Heath Directory.

Library

Councillor Mike Small updated that from the £500 budget for the Library £290 has been spent so far. Cathy has requested to have regular meetings with Councillor M Small every couple of months to make plans for what to do going forward. Bailie Carlton from Solihull Council will be here at April's meeting to speak about the possibility of getting more hours for the library.

Flooding

Councillor Richard Small explained that flooding will be a separate ongoing discussion with Solihull Council.

Welcome Gates

All agree to take no action on the welcome gates at Rumbush Lane/Braggs Farm lane as the damage is very minimal and only noticeable at night.

Fly Tipping in Tesco Car Park

All agree action should be to invite Centrick to the next meeting to discuss this and other matters.

Minute 275 (2023/24) To Consider Planning Applications

Pre-Application Consultation for Proposed Vodafone telecommunications installation - CS308199 VF23771 Rumbush Lane adj to Cleobury Lane, Tidbury Green – Councillor Woodus agreed to go and speak to the residents near this site and make sure that they have been consulted on this.

Minute 276 (2023/24) Financial Matters

Proposed by Councillor Dave Easterby, seconded by Councillor Liz Woodus, **Resolved** that the payments in Appendix I of the February 2024 agenda be approved – 16 payments for February totalling £5895.24.

Meeting ended 9.25pm

Next Meeting : Tuesday March 12th 2023: 6.30pm in the Library