

FURNEUX PELHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual Annual meeting held on Thursday, 6 May 2021, at 7:05 pm

Present: Cllr S Bratt, Cllr R Gale, Cllr R Rodrigues, Cllr H Smart, Cllr T Langlois and Cllr E Wills*.

* Following co-option (Minute ref: 21/40)

In attendance: F Forth, Parish Clerk and 8 members of the public.

Note - this meeting was preceded by the Annual Parish meeting which provided an opportunity for the Chair to reflect on the year just gone and for residents to raise issues. Relevant points have been incorporated into these Minutes, primarily items 21/32 and 21/53.

21/32) Report from the Parish Council

Cllr S Bratt, as Chair of the preceding year, read his report which reflected on some of the main events within the village and the issues considered by the Parish Council. (Full report at Appendix A)

21/33) Chair

RESOLVED that Cllr S Bratt be duly re-elected to the office of Chair of the Parish Council for the ensuing civic year. Cllr S Bratt agreed to sign his declaration of office form following the meeting.

The Chair thanked fellow Cllrs for their support.

21/34) Vice Chair

RESOLVED that Cllr H Smart be duly re-elected as Vice Chair of the Parish Council for the ensuing civic year.

21/35) Apologies

None.

21/36) Declarations of interest

None.

21/37) Chair's announcements

The Chair reported that after the last meeting, the Chair of Berden Parish Council had been in touch to request that Furneux Pelham Parish Council support its objection to the proposed solar farm at Battles Farm. Following an email discussion, Cllrs voted to not support this objection.

Note - this was a developer consultation and not a planning application consultation.

21/38) Adoption of previous minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 4 March 2021 be accepted as a true and accurate record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

21/39) Report on outstanding matters

An update in relation to the following outstanding matters was provided:

- pallets yard - Cllr G Williamson (EHC) reported that East Herts are still looking into the legal options regarding this site;
- road signs and marking - Cllr B Gale reported that the expected replacement of warning signs had not occurred. However, although not requested, 30 mph signs had been installed at East End. In addition, it has not yet been identified if "school" signs are classed as warning signs.
- Parish EV (electric vehicle) charging community hubs project - see item 21/43 below
- Allotment fence - the Chair reported that a request for quotes for the allotment fence repair had been made in the May edition of "The Pelhams" community magazine;
- vacancy - see item 21/40 below
- Barleycroft End - see item 21/42 below; and
- Parish Council responsibilities - the Clerk reported that the details for a permanent entry in the Pelhams magazine were still being developed and would be in the magazine as soon as possible.

21/40) Vacancy

The Chair welcomed Eddie Wills to the meeting. Eddie briefly outlined his background and reasons for wanting to join the Parish Council. Following this, it was RESOLVED to co-opt him as a Parish Councillor and he indicated his willingness to sign the appropriate governance documents with the Clerk after the meeting.

21/41) Councillor responsibilities

Following discussion, RESOLVED that Councillor responsibilities would be as followed:

- Cllr S Bratt Business | Waste
- Cllr B Gale Footpaths | Highways
- Cllr T Langlois Social Wellbeing
- Cllr R Rodrigues Environment | Energy
- Cllr H Smart Planning | Common Land
- Cllr E Wills Community engagement

21/43) Parish EV (Electric Vehicle) charging community hubs project

Cllr B Gale reminded those present that at the last meeting, he had reported that the next step in the project was for a site visit to the Parish Council car park to assess suitability, costs etc and this had not yet occurred. Cllr G McAndrew (HCC) stated that these are taking place in the coming 2-3 weeks.

The importance of having charging points in a rural setting were discussed. Cllr G McAndrew (HCC) highlighted that it was one of the topics at the East Herts Town & Parish Engagement event on 2nd June.

21/44) Book swap shelter

The Chair reported that the owners of The Brewery Tap had queried whether the bus shelter at the pub could become a book swap scheme. Following discussion, it was agreed that Cllr B Gale would discuss the practical aspects of this proposal with the pub owners with a view to them managing the scheme using plastic boxes, as opposed to shelves, in the first instance. Concerns had been raised regarding the nature of the literature and the risk that the area could become a location for dropping off unwanted items.

21/45) Internal controls

a. Internal Audit

The Clerk reported that the Annual Internal Audit review had been completed for the 2020/21 financial year, and that this is recorded on page 4 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return. The review concluded that the Parish Council had the expected controls in place and no recommendations were made. It was agreed to note the review.

b. Review of effectiveness

The Clerk reported that the effectiveness of the internal controls in place from April 2020 to March 2021 had been reviewed and no issues had been identified. This review underpins the Annual Governance Statement for the last financial year which is part of the next agenda item.

RESOLVED to approve the review of effectiveness of internal controls for 2020/21.

21/46) Annual Governance & Accountability Return

Firstly, the Clerk reported that the unapproved Annual Governance and Accountability Return and detailed accounts were available on the Parish Council's website. [www.furneuxpelham.org.uk/accounts]

a. Annual Governance Statement 2020/21

The Clerk highlighted that the Annual Governance Statement, detailed on page 5 of the Return, reflects that the Parish Council has a system of internal control in place, as highlighted by the review of effectiveness considered under the last agenda item. Following consideration, RESOLVED to approve the Annual Governance Statement 2020/21.

b. Accounting Statements 2020/21

The Clerk highlighted that there are two versions of the accounting statements: very summarised version, detailed on page 6 of the Return, and the detailed accounts. Following consideration, RESOLVED to approve both formats of the Accounting Statements 2020/21.

c. Declare the Parish Council exempt 2020/21

The Clerk explained that the Parish Council now has the option of not being subjected to an external audit as its total income and total expenditure are below £25,000, although it can opt for an audit if it wanted to. On the basis that no audit will be undertaken, the Parish Council is required to formally declare itself exempt.

The certificate of exemption, detailed on page 3 of the Return, demonstrates that the Parish Council is below the required threshold. RESOLVED to declare the Parish Council exempt from a limited assurance review.

For completeness, the Clerk highlighted that the Parish Council had to comply with the requirements of the Transparency Code, covered below.

d. Period for exercise of public rights 2020/21

The Clerk explained that the inspection period, during which local electors can inspect the supporting accounting records and ask questions, is still required even though no external audit is being undertaken. In addition, an objection, relating to the accounts, can be raised with the external auditor.

Full details of the rights of a local elector are detailed on the website and the inspection period will be from the 3rd June to the 14th July. This was noted.

e. Compliance with the Transparency Code

The Clerk confirmed that the requirements of the Transparency Code had been complied with, as demonstrated by the documentation available on the Parish Council website.

21/47) Finance

a. Update on current financial position

The Clerk explained that a financial statement had not been circulated as there had only been two transactions so far this year: receipt of 50% of the precept and the payment of the subscription to HAPTC.

b. Expenditure

The Clerk highlighted that there were no expenditure items for approval this month. However, the insurance needs to be renewed on 1st June and the agenda included the proposal that approval be given to obtaining and paying the insurance renewal provided the premium was not more than £300 bearing in mind that the premium for the prior year was £291.20.

Just prior to the meeting, the renewal documentation had been received from the existing insurer with a renewal premium of £264.29. Whilst the renewal documentation had not been reviewed in detail, it had been noted that the policy underwriter had changed to give the lower premium. RESOLVED to approve the renewal premium subject to the Clerk confirming that the policy remains appropriate for the Parish Council's needs.

21/48) Police

The Clerk reported that PCSO Leon de Bruyn had been unable to attend the meeting, but he had provided the following information:

- no reported crimes over April; and
- local policing priorities for the current quarter relate to reducing agricultural plant theft and speeding.

In addition, he had reported that ECHO had also identified other issues that are not the responsibility of the Police to deal with such as wider pavements, poor traffic signs and improved or increased traffic calming measures. As ECHO is a one way only reporting mechanism, the Police had passed this information on to Highways to deal with so residents can be assured that action is taken.

The Clerk reported that the first quarterly liaison meeting between the police team and the parish clerks for the local area had taken place, on 31st March.

The meeting covered crime rates, the importance of reporting on ECHO, how the police are working more closely with East Herts Council in relation to fly-tipping and the type of work they have been undertaking: speed checks (an ECHO priority); vehicle stop and checks (caught a van load of stolen catalytic converters) and getting to know the local back tracks using quad bikes or ATV (All Terrain Vehicle) as the 2 Police Constables are new to the team.

Finally, the Clerk highlighted that a local WhatsApp group was being established to enable messages to be passed around the local area quicker. Membership to be Clerks plus a Cllr. It was agreed that the Chair would be Furneux Pelham's nominated Cllr.

21/49) Update from East Herts Council (EHC)

Cllr G Williamson (EHC) provided an update on the following matters:

- the Environment Agency requested that awareness is raised at the Brewery development that further property flood resilience work had been undertaken;
- charging for green waste from 1st April in order to keep the service going had been more successful than expected; and
- aiming to have weekly food waste collections from 2023.

21/50) Planning

The Clerk reported that since the last meeting, 2 applications had been considered and 2 applications granted permission. In addition, a planning application had been received prior to the meeting for the construction of a 50MW battery energy storage system facility and associated access, landscaping and other infrastructure works at Land At Greens Farm East End Stocking Pelham which would be circulated afterwards.

Details of all applications are on the Parish Council's website and those since the last meeting are detailed in Appendix B.

Finally, the Clerk reported that a letter had been received from East Herts Planning which highlighted that the Planning Department was short staffed, had too much work to do, were changing their priorities and there would be a long wait for any action.

21/51) Councillor updates

None.

21/52) Clerk's information

The Clerk reported on the following matters:

- there will be weekend road closures of the A120 throughout May and for the first weekend in June to enable the two roundabouts to be constructed;
- East Herts Council are being subjected to a boundary review and initial details of that review were circulated to Cllrs following the meeting attended in March;
- initial work is being undertaken by HAPTC to consider the impact of local government reorganisation in Hertfordshire; and
- in recent months, licence applications have been received. None of these have related to premises in the parish therefore these have not been circulated to Cllrs. In addition, the Parish Council is not a consultee like it is on planning applications.

21/53) Residents' comments

Allotment Facebook page

For information, a resident reported that the Allotment Facebook page was being reawakened.

Solar Farm at Battles Farm

In response to questions from a resident, the Clerk confirmed that the Parish Council had been contacted by Low Carbon Energy regarding the proposed solar farm at Battles Farm. This information had been circulated following the last meeting where the matter had been raised by Cllr B Gale (item ref: 21/27). The Clerk also confirmed that she had not been contacted by the "Stop Battles Solar Farm" campaign and nor had the Parish Council formally considered joining this campaign. In addition, it was confirmed that the Parish Council had decided to not support the local objection to the proposal, led by Berden Parish Council, as reported by the Chair in his announcements (item ref: 21/37)

Barleycroft End (from Annual Parish meeting)

Residents highlighted the importance of dealing with speeding along Barleycroft End and, in general, accepted that COVID had impacted on progress. Residents would like to see the speed limits reduced, near the pallet yard and where children play football; the installation of flashing signs and the Drive Safe Scheme.

Cllr G McAndrew (HCC) stated that with lock down easing, Highways officers are now able to undertake site visits and were in the Pelhams last week looking at various matters.

The Chair outlined the current position on the Drive Safe Scheme, as previously reported to the Parish Council, namely the police feedback on the proposed three sites and need for training.

A resident raised the possibility that the pub could encourage its users, in its advertising, to be considerate in where they park and how they travel through the village.

The Clerk highlighted the importance of undertaking a traffic survey, clarifying that these had been suspended due to COVID which had resulted in a backlog existing now.

Whitebarns Lane (from Annual Parish meeting)

A resident provided an update on the action being taken to get Whitebarns Lane maintained.

Note - the Parish Council investigated this issue up to March 2020 when it was decided that no further lines of investigation remained. Consequently, matters reported previously have not been repeated.

Following the submission of a formal complaint to Herts County Council (HCC), a final response was received from HCC's Director of Environment and Infrastructure (15th January 2021) that stated if HCC had ever resurfaced the Lane it had been a mistake.

Following receipt of that report, a complaint was lodged with the Local Government Ombudsman. A draft response from the Ombudsman was recently received which cannot be discussed but the implication is that residents may have to go to court as they have documentation to prove that the Lane was adopted.

21/54) Next meeting

Confirmed that the next meeting of the Parish Council would be held in person on 1st July 2021 at 7pm in the Village Hall. It was noted that those attending would be required to comply with whatever COVID rules were in place at that time.

The meeting ended at 8:43 pm.

Report for Annual Meeting 6th May 2021

The Parish Council has met on six occasions over the past twelve months using a virtual platform.

The Parish Council had two vacancies for several months until one of these was filled by the co-option of Romilda Rodrigues. There is the prospect of the remaining vacancy being filled very shortly.

In January 2020 'The Pelhams' community magazine was launched with financial guarantees provided by both Furneux Pelham and Stocking Pelham Parish Councils. On behalf of the organising team, I am pleased to report that all production costs have been covered by advertising revenue and consequently the guarantees have not been needed. Our objective to build the identity of the Pelhams has been greatly enhanced by the content provided by residents of both villages and feedback has been very positive. We are particularly grateful that the team of volunteers has not missed a single month's delivery.

The village Welcome Pack continues to be well received and valued by incoming new residents.

Several Parish Councillors and the Clerk have been involved in launching a multi-parish approach along the Ash Valley to support the social well-being of residents. Gift parcels have been distributed on a targeted basis at both Christmas and Easter and the Parish Council has funded a Pelhams Helpline mobile number, manned by volunteers, to provide advice and guidance. Funding for a hot supper for older residents has been secured by a Parish Councillor and will be organised as soon as rules permit.

A number of issues remain unresolved. These include the surfacing of Whitebarns Lane and the unauthorised expansion of the pallet yard into the neighbouring field. Despite much time and effort by residents, neither of these has been satisfactorily addressed yet. The issue of speeding along Barleycroft End has been held back by COVID regulations, but we expect this to be progressed with urgency as soon as restrictions are lifted.

On the subject of roads, a comprehensive survey of missing road signs by two residents has been provided to Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and we are assured that these will be replaced on a prioritised basis, though nothing has yet appeared. In contrast, several missing footpath signs have been replaced and the route of a footpath has been clarified near to The Wash. The Parish Council is also working with HCC to investigate provision of electric charging points in our car park adjacent to the village hall.

Nearly all of the allotments have been taken for this season, and our thanks are due to those who have organised letting, maintenance and collection of fees in the past year.

The Salvation Army clothing bank in the car park continues to be well used and provides a small income to supplement Council funds.

The Parish Council has used its accumulated reserve to support the building of the village playground and the Furneux Stores, both in the Brewery Tap garden. We could not have known how vital both would be in the darker days of lockdown and we hope both will prove to be even greater village assets in the future.

The funds that the Parish Council raises from your Council Tax ('The Precept') has been maintained at £4000, which is the lowest in the county for a village of our size.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the residents involved in making this a better village in which to live and work and our Parish Clerk, our Vice-Chair and fellow Parish Councillors for all their efforts and support.

APPENDIX B

Application number	Proposal	Action
<u>3/21/0100/FUL</u>	Erection of 1 three bedroomed dwelling with associated landscaping and parking at Land adjacent Village Hall Parking, Violets Lane	Permission granted
<u>3/21/0445/HH</u>	Front extension to enlarge entrance hall with roof light, ground floor side extensions with roof lights at The Old School House, The Street.	Application considered
<u>3/21/0478/FUL</u>	Change the nave, aisles and chapel roof material from lead to terne coated stainless steel at St Mary's Church.	Permission granted
<u>3/21/0797/VAR</u>	Variation of condition 2 (approved plans) of the planning approval 3/18/1479/FUL: Construction of 3 bedroom house: Condition removal - change to fenestration and relocation of chimneys at Land Adjoining Wych Elm Cottage, Barleycroft End.	Application considered