

# FURNEUX PELHAM PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes** of the Parish Council meeting held on Thursday, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 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.

**In attendance:** F Forth, Parish Clerk and 20 members of the public.

Prior to the meeting starting, the Chair highlighted that there were a number of specific items on the agenda to be dealt with and the opportunity for the public to comment would be restricted to the specific "Residents' comments" agenda item.

## **21/75) Apologies**

Apologies were received and approved from Cllr R Rodrigues and Cllr E Wills

## **21/76) Declarations of interest or dispensation requests**

None.

## **21/77) Chair's announcements**

The Chair highlighted that the Parish Council was hugely pleased to accept the gift of land by Albury Road which was in fact called "King's Dell". The future use and restrictions placed on the land by the giftees would be covered later on the agenda. (Minute ref: 21/81)

In addition, the Chair reported that Gigaclear had now decided to equip the village with fibre broadband but not the entire village, only the main body of it.

## **21/78) Adoption of previous minutes**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 26<sup>th</sup> June 2021 be accepted as a true and accurate record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair. The Chair highlighted that these minutes related to the Parish Council passing a resolution to receive a gift of land.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021 be accepted as a true and accurate record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

## **21/79) Report on outstanding matters**

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

- pallets yard - nothing further to report at this stage;
- road signs and marking - Cllr B Gale confirmed that these items had been reported in Highways fault reporting system some time ago but would

re-submit this information. It was also raised whether ford could be declassified as a road given the issues faced by some drivers following SatNav;

- Parish EV (electric vehicle) charging community hubs project - Cllr B Gale confirmed that no site visit had been arranged as yet, the expected next step in this project;
- Allotment fence - covered as part of the specific allotment agenda item - 21/82;
- Barleycroft End - the Clerk reported that Highways were meeting with 2 residents regarding speeding on Barleycroft End on 16<sup>th</sup> September;
- Book swap shelter - this project is being progressed by The Brewery Tap and will be established in due course;
- Whitebarns Lane footpath - the Clerk confirmed that the letter requesting that Herts County Rights of Way maintain the access route to Whitebarns Lane as a "functional" route had been sent in early August.

#### **21/80) Solar farms and battery facilities**

A representative from "Protect the Pelhams" (PtP) provided an update on solar farms and battery facilities. The salient points made were:

- many local supporters for PtP;
- number of meetings had taken place since the beginning of July, within the parish and neighbouring area. A further meeting was taking place on 6<sup>th</sup> September and the Parish Council were invited;
- lesson to learn from the Thaxted scheme where the promised community benefit was not received as the interest in the solar farm was sold on;
- investigations are taking place to clarify the risks associated lithium batteries and the impact on local infrastructure, especially roads;
- survey being undertaken to gauge views locally; and
- perception that the Parish Council does not represent the parish and has not been open and transparent regarding its meeting with Renewable Connections.

The Chair and Cllr H Smart both reiterated the action taken by the Parish Council, namely the focussed objection to the planning application for the battery facilities at Greens Farm, supporting neighbouring parishes by co-signing a further objection letter, letters to local MPs and considering financial support to the production of a booklet for Development Management Committee members. Currently, the Parish Council is gathering information to inform its view for when a specific planning application is received for Violets Lane. In terms of the meeting with Renewable Connections, as previously

reported by the Parish Council on its website and Facebook page, this was a briefing on an initial proposal.

The Chair thanked the PTP representative for the update and the invitation to their next meeting.

### **21/81) Gift of land**

The Chair stated that the Parish Council were grateful for the gift of land although not yet sure what to do with it as yet and ideas had been sought via the latest "The Pelhams" magazine.

In addition, the Chair highlighted that the gift of land had some conditions attached to it:

- the Parish Council is to maintain ownership for at least twenty-one years and
  - to only use the field for certain specified purposes: the amenity of residents, agriculture or grazing.
- Note - proper planning permission would be required for any stables or shelters.

It was noted that these conditions were attached to the land and transferable to any subsequent owner or if the land were leased so villagers should feel that the land was protected.

The Chair reported that there had been two suggestions to date:

- graze with sheep; or
- lease to the Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA).

It was noted that a significant amount of work would be required by the RDA if it were to be leased to them.

### **Immediate improvement works**

The Chair stated that the existing gate was in a poor state of repair and a quote had been received to replace the gate and posts, as well as clear the roadside entrance of £650. RESOLVED to accept the quote from Country Garden Care for £650.

### **21/82) Allotment**

The Chair thanked Sarah Wright taking on managing the allotments.

Sarah reported that a quote was still being sought for the fence repair and the foliage around the fence would be trimmed. In addition, approval was sought to purchase black sheeting for vacant lots (£72) and to treat some rust in one corner of the metal shed (£7). Reimbursement of these costs was agreed.

## 21/83) Governance documentation

The Clerk reported that all the Parish Council's existing governance documentation had been reviewed to ensure it remained "fit for purpose" for the Parish Council. In addition, it was noted that Government COVID-19 guidelines are additional to the Parish Council's documentation and should be followed.

The Clerk highlighted that all of the Parish Council's governance documentation is available on the website and amendments were required to four documents (see below) with the remaining documentation requiring re-approval.

The four documents being amended, and the reasons for the amendments, are as follows:

- Code of Conduct - the previous Code of Conduct was adopted in 2012, following the passing of the Localism Act 2011 and a complete revision of the Code was undertaken by the Local Government Association in 2020. The revised Code is intended to apply at all levels of local government, to remove any differences between tiers, so there may be some references that are not necessarily applicable to the Parish Council but remain as linked to the legislation itself. This Code is more user friendly and provides clarity on a number of conduct issues, how Cllrs are expected to behave, particularly expanding on the disclosure of interest's requirements so that business is undertaken in an open and transparent way. It covers such matters as being respectful, to not bully, harass or discriminate against any person, be impartial, abide by confidentiality requirements, to not act in a way that would bring the Parish Council into disrepute or use position for any gain and, as already stated, to declare interests. It provides explanations of what these points mean as well as what Cllrs should expect from members of the public such as being treated with respect. The Local Government Association has now issued guidance to support the Code and this will be shared with Cllrs after the meeting;
- Standing Orders - proposed changes effectively "tidy up" the document in a couple of places by correcting references and also reflect that the UK left the European Union (EU);
- Financial Regulations - proposed changes reflect the UK left the EU, the process the Parish Council would need to follow to let contracts and so that the Regulations are in line with what happens in practice in a number of areas; and

- Risk register - proposed changes more accurately document the process or arrangement in place, providing better support for the assessed levels of risk.

RESOLVED to approve the governance documentation on the basis of a new Code of Conduct, revised Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Risk Register and no changes to the remaining governance documentation detailed on the website.

**21/84) Finance**

a. Update on current financial position

The financial statement for the current position was noted.

The Clerk reported that the New Homes Bonus is no longer being paid. Whilst the Parish Council did not include this sum in its budget, as encouraged by East Herts Council, it was a useful sum for capital projects. Although not advertised, there is still a pot of Bonus to bid from with bids being limited to the amount of the last New Homes Bonus awarded.

b. Expenditure

RESOLVED to approve the following expenditure:

Village Hall, Hall hire	£41.00
Major Barclay Farms, Allotment rent	£100.00

Cheques and supporting documentation will be signed after the meeting.

The Clerk also highlighted that the ICO registration fee of £35 was being paid this month by direct debit.

c. Bank mandate

The Clerk highlighted that the financial regulations require the Parish Council to keep its bank mandate under review. Currently, the Parish Council banks with Barclays and there are only two authorised signatories. Even without COVID, dealing with High Street banks had become more difficult and the Parish Council could not move to online banking with its existing bankers.

Whilst there would be a cost of £6 per month, the Clerk recommended that the Parish Council moved to online banking, specifically with Unity Trust Bank. Unity Trust Bank were recommended as the online controls replicate the existing controls regarding payments so separation of duties remain. In addition, this bank was easy to use and support, by phone or online, was very accessible.

RESOLVED to approve the following changes to the Parish Council's bank mandate:

- appoint Unity Trust Bank as the Parish Council's bankers;
- approve all Cllrs as signatories;
- approve administrative access for the Clerk; and
- approve the closure of the Barclays Community Account.

### **21/85) Police**

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

- criminal activity in August had been fairly low across East Herts rural areas however road side speed checks had been increased in areas highlighted through ECHO by local residents, namely Much Hadham, Albury and Stocking Pelham;
- high visibility rural off-road patrols had been conducted using the quad bikes and the ATV with no offences being reported. This had been extremely well received from farmers and landowners during their busy harvesting period; and
- no specific crimes reported for Furneux Pelham.

In addition, the Clerk reported that the quarterly liaison meetings between the Clerks and Police in the local area had been suspended for the remainder of the year. This was due to a change in management within the police and these meetings are expected to restart in the New Year.

Finally, the Clerk highlighted that some key messages from PCSO Leon de Bruyn had been included in the latest edition of "The Pelhams" magazine: making use of What3Words, remembering that you cannot ask questions via ECHO and any incidents need to be reported via 101 or 999 if an emergency.

### **21/86) Update from East Herts Council (EHC)**

Cllr G Williamson (EHC) stated, in terms of solar farms, that he had been liaising with the EHC's Head of Planning regarding considering individual applications as and when received but also considering in conjunction with other such applications made. In addition, he confirmed that EHC were liaising with other districts where planning applications crossed areas, for example with Uttlesford District Council, and that no planning applications had been determined as yet.

The Chair suggested that the piecemeal approach to the development of solar farms and battery facilities avoided demonstrating a huge cumulative impact.

Cllr G Williamson reiterated that EHC were trying to avoid that and working across districts to look at the wider picture. It is recognised that solar panels are needed for the battery facilities so these applications cannot be determined in isolation.

**21/87) Planning**

The Clerk reported that since the last meeting, 1 application had been granted permission.

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

**21/88) Councillor updates**

None.

**21/89) Clerk's information**

None.

**21/90) Residents comments**

Whitebarns Lane

A resident provided an update on the action being taken in relation to the poor state of Whitebarns Lane. The Ombudsmen is still investigating the complaint that has been raised with them. In addition, the resident is still pursuing action from Herts County Council's Rights of Way team as the state of the Lane is dangerous for users, especially those pushing prams over potholes.

Planning enforcement - Whitebarns Close

Attention was drawn by a resident that East Herts Council's Planning Enforcement Team had been requested to enforce a planning condition imposed on a property in a garden adjacent to theirs in Whitebarns Close.

Solar farms

A resident commented that the National Planning Framework requires that community views are taken into account. The Chair noted this and reminded those present that the Parish Council needs to take views into account from all residents, including those that are not concerned with solar farms or even support them. The strong opinion against solar farms has been heard but as yet, there is no planning application to consider.

Gifted land

A resident queried whether the Parish Council would receive the funds for any future sale of the gifted land. The Chair confirmed that would be the case

however the intention was for the Parish Council to hold the land in perpetuity. In addition, the Chair highlighted that there are covenants in place on the land to restrict its use.

**21/91)            Next meeting**

Confirmed that the next meeting of the Parish Council would be held on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2021 at 7pm in the Village Hall.

The meeting ended at 8.26 pm.

**Planning applications since the last meeting detailed below:**

**3/21/0445/HH** - Front extension to enlarge entrance hall with roof light, ground floor side extensions with roof lights at The Old School House, The Street: **Permission granted**