

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on  
Tuesday 13th February 2024 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall

Parish Councillors present: Cllrs Geoff Thomas (GT), Sonia Plato (SP), Lynda Roller (LR), Sue Laimbeer (SL) and John Goddard (JG).

County/district councillor: Chas Pearce, RDC and Cllr Kathryn Field, ESCC

In attendance: Gilly Lowe, Parish Clerk and 1 member of the public

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### 1. Public Questions

Will Kemp handed out copies of a newly produced information booklet from the Combe Valley Countryside Park. The organisation is in good shape, but awareness has always been an issue, and the booklet is intended to promote the site.

He then asked why work has stopped on the site at Chapel Hill. CP said that work had begun before the planning permission expired, and it is currently being investigated by Rother's planning department. WK asked if a condition should be added to permission granted that insists once started, work must be completed. GT suggested asking the planning dept. for an update and expressing the concerns of a resident. The clerk will follow up. Finally, WK asked about the works that are continuing at Woodland Way when he thought permission had been refused. GT said one application had been refused, but a previous application had been granted, so work could be ongoing. SP mentioned that a couple of neighbours have expressed concern that living accommodation has been created. The clerk suggested that they report it to Enforcement.

### 2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Jill Mitcheson.

### 3. Declaration of Interests

Received from:

Cllr Thomas – Village Hall Committee

Cllr Roller – Member of the Crowhurst Environment Group

Cllr Plato – Youth Club & Crowhurst Environment Group

Cllr Laimbeer - Annual Fayre Committee, Horticultural Society & Crowhurst Environment Group

### 4. Adoption of Minutes

The Chairman was authorised to sign the minutes of the additional meeting of the parish council held on 8<sup>th</sup> January and the Ordinary Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> January as true and correct records.

### 5. Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting

5.1 Sandbags – The clerk has taken photos of the pile of sandbags and counted approximately 30 and will contact the Environment Agency about their removal.

## 6. Representations from District & County Councillors

Cllr Chas Pearce. RDC reported on the budget consultation. Social media together with a petition about the closure of public toilets had meant a good response and interestingly 67% of respondents were in favour of increasing council tax to help fund services. The proposed increase of 5.9% for Band D is subject to approval at the next full council meeting. As mentioned in January, the financial situation has deteriorated due to a trebling of demand for temporary accommodation. Empty homes & 2<sup>nd</sup> homes will be subject to council tax which should raise approximately £380k but not until the '25/'26 financial year. CP had attended the Friends of Combe Valley presentation day which was excellent. He echoed the usefulness of the information booklet distributed by WK and said that spreading the word is key. A considerable amount of CIL money has gone to the CV CIC, and it is in good financial shape.

Cllr Kathryn Field, ESCC confirmed that the budget has been set with a 5.99% increase. 2.99% is for Adult Social Care (ASC). Balances couldn't be carried over and had to be spent meaning that £9m of reserves has been used. The Ofsted Report of the Children's Services Dept. was "good with outstanding features". KF had been to see the looking after cared for children in action and was very impressed. There will be a peer review of ASC later this month. A new Director of Children's Services has been appointed.

## 7. Town & Country Planning

### 7.1 RR/2024/148/PN3 – Hill House Farm, barn at adj land – Crowhurst Lane, TN33 9BU

*Proposal: Application to determine if prior approval is required for the change of use of agricultural building to flexible commercial use for non-agricultural storage (Class 8B).*

This was a prior notification, so for information only.

### 7.2 RR/2024/86/P – 16, Blacksmiths Field, Crowhurst Road

*Proposal: Single storey rear extension to provide a bedroom.*

LR had been to visit the site and talk to the applicant and proposed supporting the application. Members agreed to submit the following comments online:

Crowhurst Parish Council supports this application as the applicant has taken advice about materials used, the rear extension will not be overlooked by any neighbouring property and there is a genuine need for the ground floor bedroom. If permission is granted, the following conditions are requested:

1. No or limited external lighting (downlighters only) to protect dark skies as detailed in policy CE32 (v) of the Crowhurst Neighbourhood Plan.
2. Any new hard-standing to be made of a porous material to limit run-off (see policy CE5 of the Crowhurst Neighbourhood Plan).
3. The Crowhurst Neighbourhood Plan Design Guide is followed regarding building style and materials used.

## 8. Financial Matters

- 8.1 The financial report to 31<sup>st</sup> January had been circulated and was approved by members.
- 8.2 The payments report for February was considered and approved.
- 8.3 The bank reconciliation to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024 had been circulated. It was approved by members and signed by the Chairman.
- 8.4 The approval to purchase a new double bin was deferred to the next meeting.

## 9. Recreation Ground

- 9.1 JG had carried out the monthly inspection and said that there were no new issues. The bollard lights are still in need of stabilising and the fencing by the grit bins needs a spur. The clerk will report this to the handyman and chase him about the lights. The gate to the picnic area had been kicked off, but JG was able to repair it. There is mole activity in the play area and the wood chips need raking.
- 9.2 The clerk will chase for an update from the handyman.

9.3 Tennis court / MUGA update. SP and the clerk will attend a Zoom meeting with a contractor about the tennis court refurb and MUGA markings which would be an alternative quote together with a fencing contractor to repair the fence. They will then have final figures and can apply to the Sports for All National Lottery fund. GT asked about the post holes for a tennis net, and how they are made safe for other users. The clerk will verify.

9.4 GT and the clerk had met with the Youth Club and pre-school and clarified the insurance situation which arose following the request to extend the outdoor art area at pre-school. They have sent copies of their respective insurance schedules. In the future, the pre-school will approach the Youth Club first as their landlord about any proposed alterations.

9.5 The tree surgeon had worked on the priority trees today. All necessary works barring the dead wooding and crown lifting to one large oak were completed. He will inform the clerk of a date when he can return to finish the work.

## **10. Parish Meeting – Sandrock Hill**

The clerk confirmed that the meeting has been publicised in the Crowhurst News, on the website, via the village email list and with publicity boards. GT reminded members that the Parish Meeting is not an opportunity to discuss other ideas or solutions. The clerk will prepare approximate associated costs and images of the bollards so that residents attending will be fully informed. The payment of £75.50 for the publicity boards was approved.

## **11. Local Transport Plan**

SP had attended the Battle information meeting about the above consultation and felt that it was important to respond as a council. It covers 4 main areas – connectivity, health & well-being, the environment & active transport. There are various aims & aspirations. The Flexibus scheme and keeping the train station were the main issues – it must be stressed that the station is vital and used by many people. Disabled access, known as ‘wheeling’ is important too.

GT had examined the consultation and printed off some maps and was surprised to see that Crowhurst’s train line is not included. He suggested that connectivity is highlighted in any response. There will be a staggering increase in the over 60’s population in the coming years. The deadline to respond is 25<sup>th</sup> February and GT offered to respond on behalf of the council, and include the comments made by members.

## **12. Meeting with Highways**

GT, SP & the clerk had met with Highways representatives for the SLR meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> February. The trees overhanging Chapel Hill had been inspected by the Highways Steward, and one that is marked with an orange dot will be further reported for work. The landowner was given a letter recommending works and the clerk will follow up with Anthony Becvar about possible enforcement.

## **13. Dark Skies**

SP had previously circulated an email about the Dark Skies project which is following on from the success of the festival last year. Natural Landscape (formerly HWAONB) are keen to apply for an international dark skies certificate. The checklist is quite extensive. SP had spoken to the NP Review Group who confirmed that certification is something they can work towards, but it is too late to include in the NP review at this stage. Members agreed unanimously for SP to attend a meeting in March about the international initiative.

## **14. Flood Alleviation**

Tracy Hoad had provided an update from Dean Morrison. The government has recently announced new schemes and payments for landowners to compensate them for land they give over to flood management and for maintenance which he implied could be very helpful. However, they’re yet to

publish the technical requirements or set up the system to apply. He hopes to pick up the project again mid-February to develop a longer-term plan and clarify the steps that will be needed. At the same time he will look at the dozen leaky dam projects planned upstream with others he has in development and hopes these will address a lot of the problem at source.

### **15. Annual Parish Assembly 2024**

The clerk confirmed that Andrew Mead, Head of Waste & Recycling at Rother will attend as a guest speaker. Some nominations have already been received for the Community Award.

### **16. Community Map**

SP confirmed that Network Rail are arranging to cut down the trees growing out of the brick planter, and then the framed Community Map can be installed. The clerk will sign a licence agreement on behalf of the parish council to agree to maintenance of the map in the future (see January meeting minutes), and volunteers together with the Horticultural Society will look to improve the area. GT suggested that SL check with the Society. SP said that Andy Pope is keen to hear about other ideas and projects and she confirmed that only 5 copies of the smaller map remain to sell.

### **17. Warm Space**

LR circulated figures for donations, and expenditure. There are now quite regular numbers attending of approximately 25, and it is proving to be successful. Maureen Collins has been invaluable, and her husband is offering transport for those who would like to attend. LR will distribute flyers at the church coffee morning, and jumble sale about the First Aid demonstration by Lee Oldridge taking place this Sunday (18<sup>th</sup> February). She also plans to organise a discussion about plans for next year which will include a survey of those who have attended and been involved. Again, LR wanted to offer thanks to all those who give up their Sunday afternoons.

### **18. Councillor Updates on External Bodies**

18.1 Village Hall Management Committee – GT reported that as expected, due to the type of construction, the VH can't have insulation in the walls or roof, so funding for that has been withdrawn. The Infrared heaters and double glazing will go ahead. GT plans to write to Rother asking if they will match fund that element. The recent power cut was an external problem and was temporarily repaired. The full repair should be done this week.

SP said that the Youth Club is going ahead with internal insulation and insulation in the roof. The grant was increased to £9k and the work will be carried out in the Easter holidays. This should reduce the amount of electricity used for heating.

18.2 Policing – Sussex Alerts have commented on the success of the student magazine to engage with young people, the Anti-social behaviour action plan has a hot spot response pilot scheme and the Rural Crime team seized 4 stolen caravans. The clerk confirmed that the PPAF funding application for the pre-school vandalism had been resubmitted.

18.3 Combe Valley Countryside Park – See earlier items for update. The next board meeting is taking place next month.

GT suggested that these standing items should only be included on the agenda when there is news to report. Members agreed, and the clerk will adjust the agenda accordingly.

### **19. Parish Clerk Position**

As the clerk is relocating away from East Sussex, there will be a vacancy for a clerk on the ground. The clerk will advertise the vacancy in the Crowhurst News and on the website and prepare a job description. There is the opportunity for a long handover/transition period.

**20. Clerk’s Report / Information for Councillors / Future Agenda Items**

20.1 Belmont Healthcare had requested a meeting with parish councillors to discuss the care home and the wider community. The clerk will arrange a meeting with GT and LR at Edendale Lodge.

20.2 ESALC training dates – the clerk will resend the email with details of various training courses.

20.3 NP Review – following the recent consultation, ESCC has suggested an amendment to the vision statement as follows:

*“maintain the village’s rural character by protecting the countryside and environment around its boundaries, promoting, maintaining and enabling healthier lifestyles, community spirit and enhancing infrastructure, facilities and services for residents of all ages and abilities.”*

As the PC approved the initial aim so any changes should also be approved. The NP does promote healthy lifestyles within its policies, so the addition of that to the Vision does not change the goal of the NP. The Chairman read the suggested alterations, and all members approved the amendments. SP will report back to the NP Review Group.

20.4 A report has been received about a tree that has come down in Plough Lane, about half-way along, that is difficult to pass and is diverting water and debris making it dangerous to use. The clerk will report it to the Rights of Way team at ESCC.

20.5 SP reported that the litter pick last Sunday collected 14 bags of litter, more than ever before, including some larger items such as a fridge and car parts.

20.6 The revised Grass Cutting Options had been circulated to all members, and they agreed to take the new option for an Environmental Enhanced Service (reduced rural service). This will mean that excluding single track lanes, the first cut at the start of the season will be only visibility cuts for safety at junctions and on the inside of bends where sight lines between road users may be obscured by vegetation. The second cut later in the season will be visibility plus a 1-metre-wide swathe along the verge.

**21. Date of Next Meeting:**

The next meeting of the Parish Council will take place on **Monday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2024** at 7.30pm in the Village Hall.

Meeting closed at 9.20pm

Signed by .....

Date: