

ELDERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of Eldersfield Parish Council held on 12th March 2024 at Eldersfield Lawn School, commencing at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Mrs C Joseph (Chairman), M Barton, Mrs W Burr, Mrs D E Holt,
Mrs T Owen

In Attendance: District Councillor Mrs Jennie Watkins

**Members of the
Public:** 1

1. Apologies for absence

None

2. Members' interests

None

3. Adoption of the Minutes of the previous meeting

The draft Minutes of the meeting held on 9th January were accepted as a true record of that meeting and were signed as such by the Chairman of the meeting.

4. Matters arising

None

5. Report from District and County Councillors

The District Councillor, Jennie Watkins, reported that

- Discussions were continuing between herself, the local Member of Parliament and West Midlands Ambulance Service about the appropriateness of protocols surrounding the use of defibrillators in rural areas;
- A public meeting called by Pendock Parish Council to discuss and vote on a proposal to build additional housing had concentrated on the benefits to the School and no vote had been taken;
- Grant money available at the district councillor's discretion will be doubled from £500 to £1,000 for the year starting 1st April;
- MHDC's planning department had a heavy backlog of work, with some building control tasks approximately five years old.

6. Report from the Parish Footpaths Officer

The Parish Paths Officer was not present but the Chairman reported that she had reported a number of issues to WCC. However she (the Parish Paths Officer) had accepted new work responsibilities and the time available to her for monitoring parish paths was reduced;

accordingly she was keen to find a replacement. Anyone interested in taking on this post is invited to contact the Clerk.

7. Public Comment

Two points were raised:

The charge levied by MHDC for green waste collection was the highest in the West Midlands and constituted a stealth tax. The manner in which it was set, without public consultation, was not transparent. It was suggested that because the last MHDC accounts to be audited were those for 2019-20 the public's trust in MHDC's ability to report its financial position was now more a matter of faith than of judgement.

The District Councillor commented that last year the green waste collection account showed a surplus of £297,000 which was applied by MHDC to subsidise other projects. She said that MHDC's overall budget – including green waste collection charges – was set by a few members of the Executive Committee and that district councillors had no right to amend that budget. She noted that MHDC's reserves were twice the level recommended by the government and that despite this council tax had been increased for the year commencing 1st April 2024.

The question was then raised of an advertisement which had appeared on Facebook of a person claiming to have all necessary permissions to collect and dispose of scrap in Corse Lawn despite the fact that there is no evidence of any such planning permission having been given; the District Councillor was invited to investigate. She undertook to do so.

8. Neighbourhood Plan

The Chairman reported that the importance of the matter had been highlighted by the recent public meeting within a neighbouring parish. She was awaiting the provision to her of a Neighbourhood Plan of a small parish from which it would be possible to draw lessons relevant to the potential creation of a Neighbourhood Plan for this parish.

9. Defibrillator

The comments made earlier in the meeting were noted and it was agreed that no further action should be taken until the outcome of those initiatives was known.

10. Council Shed

Council accepted that it needed to decide the future of the facility under which it hired out crockery, tables and chairs. The PCC and School are allowed to use these items for free, but others who hire these items – most of whom come from outside the Parish - are charged, with annual income to the Council amounting to approximately £150 pa. The shed in which this equipment was stored had now come to the end of its economic life. Cllr Barton had investigated the possibilities of replacement: a metal shed was likely to cost £3,500 but additional funds would be required to provide a firm base, if not a floor. Alternatively, a shipping container might be available for hire, at approximately £350 pa.

It was agreed that further discussions would take place with the Head Teacher and that any decision would be deferred to a future meeting.

11. Speeding

Correspondence had been received from Parishioners who were concerned about speeding within the Parish with the A438 in Long Green being especially mentioned.

It was recognised that coordination and cooperation with Longdon Parish Council, with whom the Parish shared a boundary at Long Green, would be beneficial.

The Clerk undertook to contact Longdon Parish Council with a view to developing a joint plan.

12. Church Grant

Council noted that the Parochial Church Council of Eldersfield Church had applied for a grant of £147 to assist in defraying the costs of a community event to be held at Easter and further noted that the requested grant was for the purchase of Easter eggs and craft materials principally for the use of children who, it was hoped, would attend this traditional community event.

The Chairman commented that it the Council was keen to assist in promoting community activities but did not wish to fund them in their entirety; the application from the PCC made no mention of the overall cost of the event and therefore the Council was unable to judge the importance of its role.

Despite the foregoing, it was **RESOLVED that a grant of £147.00 be made to the Parochial Church Council of Eldersfield Church to purchase the items requested.**

The Clerk was instructed to inform the PCC that information sufficient to satisfy the Council on the application of its policy should accompany any future applications.

13. Marquee

Council considered a proposal that the marquee be offered for sale to the Parochial Church Council of Eldersfield Church at a price of £1.

They complimented the PCC on the use of the marquee which had had a marked and highly positive impact on the development of community spirit within the Parish,

Councillors recalled that the marquee had been purchased by the Council and had been hired to the PCC under a contract of bailment which provided *inter alia* that the PCC accept all risks inherent in the ownership and operation of the marquee, and that it be used only to facilitate community events within the Parish. It was suggested that the proposal to transfer ownership to the PCC did little more than convert what was *de facto* into *de iure*.

Concerns, however, were expressed that the PCC would be gaining ownership of an asset worth some thousands of pounds and with unfettered title would be able to dispose of the asset and deploy the proceeds for purposes not previously envisaged by the Council. Accordingly it was proposed that any purchase by the PCC of the marquee should be subject to a condition that, should the PCC sell the marquee, it would be required to pay a part of the gross proceeds to the Council according to the following scale:

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| Within 12 months of purchase: | 100% |
| Between 13 and 24 months of purchase: | 75% |
| Between 25 and 36 months of purchase: | 50% |
| Between 37 and 49 months of purchase: | 25% |

It was resolved that the Clerk be authorised to effect a contact sale of the marquee to the Parochial Church Council of Eldersfield Church at a price of £1 subject to the above conditions.

14. Lengthsman

Council noted the report from the Clerk on the services provided by the Lengthsman since the last meeting and that he had submitted invoices totalling £640 (£256 Dec; £256 Jan; £128 Feb). Council **RESOLVED that these invoices be paid in the amount of £640.00.**

15. Litter Picking

It was noted that the grant of £100 received from the District Councillor's budget had been applied to the purchase of litter picking equipment.

Council noted the invoice for £143.28 received from The Helping Hand Company in respect of the purchase of that equipment and **RESOLVED that the Clerk, who had paid the invoice from his personal account, be reimbursed £143.28.**

The Chairman commented that the next litter-picking exercise would take place on 23rd March.

16. Authorisation of Disbursements

It was **RESOLVED that the following disbursements be made for goods and services:**

| | |
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| £121.95 | J L Gabbott |
| £143.28 | J L Gabbott (re invoice from The Helping Hand Company) |
| £78.40 | HMRC |
| £640.00 | Jeremy Moore (£256 Dec; £256 Jan; £128 Feb) |
| £147.00 | Parochial Church Council |

17. Future Meetings

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Council be held on Tuesday 7th May 2024, commencing at 7.00 p.m. in Eldersfield Lawn School

18. Any other business

None.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.44 p.m.

JLG
18.3.24

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The District Councillor, Jennie Watkins, reported that

- Discussions were continuing between herself, the local Member of Parliament and West Midlands Ambulance Service about the appropriateness of protocols surrounding the use of defibrillators in rural areas;
- A public meeting called by Pendock Parish Council to discuss and vote on a proposal to build additional housing had concentrated on the benefits to the School and no vote had been taken;
- Grant money available at the district councillor's discretion will be doubled from £500 to £1,000 for the year starting 1st April;
- MHDC's planning department had a heavy backlog of work, with some building control tasks approximately five years old.

6. Report from the Parish Footpaths Officer

The Parish Paths Officer was not present but the Chairman reported that she had reported a number of issues to WCC. However she (the Parish Paths Officer) had accepted new work responsibilities and the time available to her for monitoring parish paths was reduced;

accordingly she was keen to find a replacement. Anyone interested in taking on this post is invited to contact the Clerk.

7. Public Comment

Two points were raised:

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The District Councillor commented that last year the green waste collection account showed a surplus of £297,000 which was applied by MHDC to subsidise other projects. She said that MHDC's overall budget – including green waste collection charges – was set by a few members of the Executive Committee and that district councillors had no right to amend that budget. She noted that MHDC's reserves were twice the level recommended by the government and that despite this council tax had been increased for the year commencing 1st April 2024.

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It was agreed that further discussions would take place with the Head Teacher and that any decision would be deferred to a future meeting.

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