



Slindon Parish Council

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Slindon Parish Council

Held 'Remotely' via Zoom Software
On Monday 14th December 2020 at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Councillors Niki Adamson (Chairman), Barbara Brimblecombe, Jan Rees, Peter Fenton, Derek Thomas and Paul Wilkinson.

In attendance: Sarah Linfield BSc (Hons), CiLCA (Parish Clerk/RFO)

Katie Archer – National Trust, Lead Ranger

104. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

105. Public Participation

There were no members of the public present.

106. Apologies for Absence

Not applicable, all Parish Council members present

107. Minutes from the Council Meeting Held On 16th November 2020

It was **Resolved** - to approve the minutes of the meeting as a true record of the decisions of that meeting and the Chairman be authorised to sign them. (N.B. The meeting scheduled for Monday 30th November did not take place).

108. Chairman's Report

Councillor Adamson kept matters brief as most points were covered elsewhere and there was the important business of agreeing the budget and setting the precept on the meeting agenda. Looking forward to a return to face-to-face meetings, and reflecting how important Zoom had become, with its security measures being improved to address wider concerns, Councillor Adamson also encouraged the use of the local WhatsApp group to stay in touch – the administrator is Mark Ford. Councillor Adamson wished everyone a Happy Christmas and a positive and peaceful New Year.

109. West Sussex County Council Matters

There was no representation on this occasion.

110. Arun District Council Matters

There was no representation on this occasion, although Councillor Catterson had sent her apologies as she already had a meeting.



111. National Trust Matters

Katie Archer, Lead Ranger spoke regarding

- Essential ash dieback work on Baycombe Lane and by Downes Barn. All to be carried out by Beechdown Arboriculture- so a small operation with little disturbance, no road or path closures required.
- Forestry work now completed (Northwood area), however path and track reinstatement will take a while to happen as it relies on a significant stretch of dry weather- it may continue into the spring and although it looks pretty ugly it is essential for public safety.
- Hedge laying on Mid (Mud) Lane will be undertaken by the Ranger team this January, a continuation of the work carried out over the last two winters. It gives a lot better light to the path, widens the access for horse riders and creates a denser hedge for nesting birds and small mammals.
- Car park closures (Park Lane and Dukes Road) this January for repairs to potholes and to tidy the vegetation – it will only be a morning each and not together - details to be circulated nearer the time. The pothole on Park Lane – highlighted by Councillor Adamson – could not be fixed as part of these works as it is on the WSCC Highway.
- Work has started on Courthill Farm House, albeit the local team had no direct involvement. It will be just one residential dwelling once finished and will include the service range (the old shoot and farm office buildings). It will be available to let via Henry Adams.

Councillor Rees highlighted that the National Trust lamp by the pond still was not working, which Katie undertook to pursue, and Councillor Adamson agreed to find out which of the two lamps in Sunnybox Lane was faulty.

112. Slindon Recreation Ground and Sports Pavilion

- i. The Council had taken advice from its solicitors and approved a letter dated 24 November to Slindon Sports Association (SSA) setting out its responsibilities as trustee of the Recreation Ground, a registered charity, and of the options at expiry of the current lease in February 2021.

A response had been received from the Sports Association after the agenda had been issued so, although the requisite 3 days' notice for a decision could not be met, the Council still had the opportunity to discuss matters.

The email from the SSA which had been circulated to council members confirmed that they were seeking a 10-year licence and, once determined, to discuss liability and costings to ensure the safety and upkeep of the pavilion.

The letter stated that it was always their intention that the Recreation Ground was for the use and enjoyment of all and referenced the work that had taken place in the past to maintain the area and of plans for the future.



Councillor Adamson spoke in support of a 10-year licence, of a commitment to sport in the parish, her confidence in the SSA to meet future costs under the current Chairmanship and of the enthusiasm amongst nearby residents to support the future of the SSA - Councillor Brimblecombe wondered whether this might extend to the pavilion. Councillor Adamson confirmed that the cricket and stoolball teams come from Slindon whilst the youth football teams come from Barnham and Bognor.

Councillor Rees felt that the SSA needed to demonstrate how they would meet future obligations with regards its upkeep.

Councillor Wilkinson did not feel that the Association would be able to provide their last 3 years' accounts/financial information and proposed that if the SSA wished to use the pavilion then they needed to carry out the necessary repairs, using their COVID-19 small business grant or alternatively the pavilion would need to be closed down. The Clerk reminded the Council that the Sports Association were adamant that the stoolball and cricket teams needed this facility.

Councillor Thomas spoke regarding the importance of the SSA continuing to maintain pavilion to a satisfactory standard for the duration of a 10-year licence if granted and the Clerk believed that the existing agreement had made provision to safeguard its property and that any future arrangement would also need to do so.

The Clerk advised the Council that

- any future agreement needed to assign clear responsibilities for the upkeep of the recreation ground, the sporting infrastructure and pavilion supported by evidence that the Sports Association could meet their obligations.
- as trustee of the Recreation Ground charity, it must act in the best interests of the charity and comply with its governing document - the Inclosure Award - to provide a recreation ground for the inhabitants of the parish.
- it must be satisfied that it is acting in the best interests of the parish and a survey might be a good way to explain the current position to residents and seek residents' views.

It was generally acknowledged that the Council must have appropriate representation on the Sports Association's Committee, which had lapsed in May 2019, and undertake regular due diligence checks as landlord as part of its General Risk Assessment.

The Recreation Ground has always been the most extensive and expensive of its responsibilities and members of the Council were in general agreement that a 10-year licence could balance the obligations of the Parish Council with the Sports Associations' wishes, albeit there was still further work to be done to successfully conclude matters.



The Council agreed to reflect on its discussions and in the meantime the Clerk was instructed to draft a letter to the Sports Association to understand exactly what its proposals were to bring the pavilion up to standard and how they would fund maintenance in the future. The letter would highlight conditions relating to 'premises not in use due to seasonal closures' contained within the Council's insurance policy, already shared with the SSA, to ensure they are met.

- ii. At the request of Councillor Wilkinson, the second invoice of £725 + VAT from the solicitor relating to specific advice on the Inclosure Award for the Recreation ground had not been paid pending further discussions. He felt it was "remiss" of the Council to have allowed the work to be done without knowing the actual cost. When the Council met on 14th September 2020, it agreed that it would contact its solicitor once it knew what plans the Sports Association had for use of the facilities when the current lease expired which is what happened. Whilst it is unfortunate that the solicitor did not quantify the estimated cost of this work before completing it as requested, the Council were aware of his hourly rate and the Clerk felt that the total cost of £1375 + VAT, of which £650 has already been paid for initial advice, was reasonable, equating to just under six hours work by a specialist in parish council matters. The Clerk had also addressed the position in writing to members (email dated 1 December 2020) and the relevant meeting dates and minutes (in parenthesis) are 13.7.20 (31), 10.8.20 (44.2), 14.9.20 (60) and 12.10.20 (79). It was **Resolved** - to pay the second invoice (listed within the payment schedule).
- iii. Whilst the solicitor had offered to keep his overall estimate of £2000 for drawing up an agreement to include the advice provided with regards the Inclosure Award - linked to concerns already raised by the Clerk (point ii) - Councillor Wilkinson still felt the hourly rate was expensive. He is keen that the Council engage directly with the Sports Association to keep costs down as the solicitor had identified that managing the negotiations between parties meant a licence would not necessarily be cheaper than a lease. Councillor Brimblecombe believed that the Council should stay with its existing solicitor to avoid duplication of work and cost, although as the Council has yet to decide how it will proceed with any agreement, a final decision on who to appoint to draw it up was deferred.

Katie Archer left the meeting during the budget session.

113. Budget 2021/22

The Clerk explained that the deadline for submitting the precept to Arun District Council is 7 February 2021 so that if time did not permit the Council could review the draft budget now and complete the process at its January meeting.

Councillor Wilkinson quizzed the Clerk regarding the tax base advised to the Council for 2021/22, and why some Councils in Arun had a higher Band D rate than others.



The Clerk explained that the tax base is the number of households that will pay for the precept, expressed as Band D equivalents – Slindon's is advised by Arun District Council and it is not negotiable.

Band D council tax is the standard measure of council tax and is the council tax payable on a Band D dwelling occupied as a main residence by at least two adults, after any reductions due to discounts, exemptions or local council tax support schemes.

Households in other council tax bands are set as a proportion of the Band D so for instance a Band H property is equivalent to 2 Band D properties and will pay twice the Band D rate.

The Clerk had anticipated that there might be a question regarding the process and undertook to share a useful government link and relevant legislation.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/905425/Council_tax_levels_set_by_local_authorities_in_England_2020-21.pdf

The relevant legislation is contained within Local Government Finance Act 1992
[Local Government Finance Act 1992 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/15)

The Clerk confirmed that the average Band D figure for 2020/21 of £69.89 related to England.

Councillor Wilkinson enquired regarding the Band D figures for other Town and Parish Councils in Arun, and although the Clerk was able to comment specifically regarding Clapham as their Clerk, the Band D rate depends on the level of services and facilities provided by that Town or Parish Council, met through the precept and spread over their tax base.

Councillor Wilkinson also queried how VAT was treated in the budget and whilst the Clerk confirmed that standard accounting practice was to include projections net of VAT, the majority of budget projections for 2021/22 involved quite small sums and the Council paid VAT in one financial year and reclaimed it in the next.

The Clerk confirmed that the cash book system which operates has a column for gross payments, another for VAT and a net position, with a receipts and payments system operating with a separate line for VAT. The budget planner produced each month shows net spend against budget.

Councillor Rees spoke regarding the number of facilities which the Council provides and of the voluntary work undertaken by Councillors putting up signs and undertaking general repairs, which in her previous parish would have been met through the precept.

The Council reviewed each line of the budget, which had been updated to reflect feedback received since the draft figures were first issued in November and questions addressed in the interim.



Clerk's Salary – it had been pointed out that it was unlikely that the public sector workers' pay would increase and the figure was reduced to reflect this.

GDPR Compliance/IT – the budget to replace the Clerk's home class lap top purchased in May 2018 with a business one and acquire a basic laptop for a Councillor was removed.

Grants for the Community – a figure of £500 was substituted, considered sufficient based on previous awards.

Hall Hire – It was **Resolved** that the standing order for the hall subscription be cancelled. The new hire rate is now £25/per booking including heating (rather than previous hourly rate plus heating costs).

Legal Fees – an annual budget of £250/per year 'ear marked' for this purpose would ensure that the Council had made suitable provision for future years.

Councillor Wilkinson's view is that the current legal costs are excessive in relation to the both the lease of the Recreation Ground and the Allotments, leased from the National Trust, and unhappy they had not been adequately budgeted for in setting the 2020/21 precept.

The Clerk took up the role of Clerk in May 2019 and when she became aware that the Recreation Ground lease might not be consistent with the Council's charitable objectives, she informed the Council by email (April 2020), as face-to-face meetings were suspended due to the pandemic. The 2010 National Trust Lease fell due for renewal in February 2020 and no provision had been made for any legal fees in the budget for 2019/20 nor in any previous 3-year projections, with only £150 spent so far.

The Clerk felt that sound legal advice was essential, highlighting the various deficiencies in creating the existing lease to the Sports Association, the need to put things right now.

Further, the Clerk confirmed the Council's agreement to appoint a solicitor for the Allotment Lease when it met in March (9.3.20 minute 20/207 'Clerk's Report National Trust Allotment Lease Review 2020').

Recreation Ground and Top Field – adult gym units and play equipment are subject to a visual inspection by Arun District Council each month although the insurers recommend an annual inspection – ROSPA do one - and the adult gym equipment needs an annual service to meet health and safety and manufacturer's guarantee requirements.

Top Playing Field – replacing ageing play equipment and even quite minor repairs are quite costly, although the budget was reduced to £1500 on the basis that it might be possible to obtain a grant from the South Downs National Park.



Recreation Ground - maintenance, hedge, fencing and tree work – Councillor Wilkinson felt that the projected spend between now and the end of the current financial year and the budget provision for next year was excessive.

The Clerk advised that an annual ground level inspection and full inspection every 3 years was good practice. There was no annual inspection in January 2019, one was done in 2020 and a full inspection was due next month at an estimated cost of £750, confirmed by an arboriculturist.

The Clerk felt that the budget provision for 2021/22 was both prudent and a reasonable estimate based on past works undertaken, the number of trees (circa 50) and that tree surgery is a specialist area so even relatively minor works could be quite costly. A quote had now also been received for additional hedge trimming at a cost of £250.

Recreation Ground - the Pavilion – no allowance was made for this although the existing earmarked reserves included an allowance for works should they be required.

Subscription – the Clerk said that she would forgo the LCR subscription, saving £17 p.a.

Tree Surgery – Councillor Wilkinson pointed out that tree surgery was also included within the Recreation Ground budget line and, whilst the two lines can be combined in future, the overall budget provision was considered a reasonable estimate to include regular surveys and any work that might be identified to ensure tree safety.

Waste bins – in July 2020, the Council had instructed Arun District Council to install 3 additional bins (2 dog, one general waste) although there had been no progress despite regular chasers. A suggestion had been made that the outstanding order could be cancelled to save money although the consensus was that the parish requires the additional bins, to be emptied at annual cost of £1500. Arun District Council had offered to waive the collection charges for the new bins although clarification has been sought on when this will take effect and the period it would cover, given they have yet to be installed.

Website Compliance – the Clerk undertook to complete the accessibility checks at a saving of £299/per annum to save money.

External Audit - the Clerk explained that an external audit would be required at a cost of c£250 if expenditure exceeded £25000, which is the projected outturn at the end of the current financial year.

Precept Setting

There is no cap on precept increases, although parish councils are generally urged to exercise restraint in setting their precepts, and the Clerk advised that it would need to reflect the level of services and facilities it provided.

Councillor Rees spoken regarding the modest increases in the precept over the last few years and the Clerk also advised that the precept had previously been subsidised by use of general reserves, including last year, which was not sustainable in the long term.



It was **Resolved** to approve

1. The forecast expenditure for 2021/22 of £18518
2. Finance of the budget expenditure of £18518 through a precept of £18179 (an increase of 7% compared with 2020/21) with the balance to be met from general reserves.
3. The precept calculation for a Band D taxpayer for 2021/22 to be £64.01, an increase of 8% on that for 2020/21 (£59.27) based on the (reduced) tax base of 284 (compared with 287 in 2020/21).
4. The precept for the financial year 2021/22 will be £18179 (£64.01 x 284) to meet the budget set out for 2021/22.
5. Finance of overspend within the 2020/21 budget through the use of funds accumulated in recent years in respect of essential and unexpected costs, primarily the Recreation Ground lease and the new accessible website, replacing the 2012 site which did not comply with current legislation.

The motion was proposed by Councillor Thomas, seconded by Councillor Brimblecombe with Councillors Rees, Fenton and Adamson voting in favour.

Councillor Wilkinson did not support the motion on the basis that he felt that further cost savings could be achieved to reduce the precept although he did not provide any additional details.

114. Finance Reports

i. Reconciliation

It was **Resolved** - to note the Bank Reconciliation at 30 November 2020 - to be signed by Councillors Adamson and Brimblecombe after the meeting - and budget monitor.

ii. Payments

It was **Resolved** - to note and approve payments, including any authorised outside the meeting under its Financial Regulations.

Councillor Wilkinson enquired whether the Coronation Hall committee had acknowledged the Council's contribution towards the refurbishments, and the Clerk confirmed that although they were aware of the award and were most appreciative the cheque had not been delivered yet - Councillor Adamson has this in hand.

iii. General and Earmarked Reserves

No changes, to be kept under review to ensure appropriate level of general reserves to meet contingencies.



Finance reports are posted separately to the Parish Council Website as Monthly Reports under the Finance and Risk section and the Budget for 2021/22 will be posted under 'Precept and Budget'.

115. Highways Matters

- i. Slindon's PCSO had reported her concerns that an off-duty colleague had seen a member of the public standing by the speed indicator sign on the A29, taking photographs of the cars travelling southbound and she was keen to speak to this individual regarding their actions.
- ii. The A27 Arundel Bypass Preferred Route - was announced in October 2020 with the Grey route (Option 5BV1) being chosen.
- iii. Pothole Reporting – West Sussex County Council are piloting a new online form for reporting potholes, accessed using - [Report a pothole online - West Sussex County Council](#) to improve the experience of reporting a pothole and have developed an interactive map displaying all reported potholes and the option to subscribe to receive future updates. As this form is a trial, they are also welcoming customer feedback as part of the reporting process to continually improve the service.

116. Risk Matters and Governance

- i. Pond Risk Assessment – it was **Resolved** - to approve the updated assessment.
- ii. Privacy Statement – the privacy statement had been updated and was noted.

117. Clerk's Update

- i. Correspondence had been received covering blocked drains in Reynolds Lane, youngsters fishing in the pond, speed and volume of traffic in the parish and suggestions regarding the use of the field by Coronation Hall for parking which had been passed to Katie Archer at the National Trust to reply as owners of the land.
- ii. West Sussex Association of Local Councils AGM
The Board had decided at its meeting on Monday 23 November that the AGM on Wednesday 2 December 2020 should not proceed to avoid concerns about the validity of a meeting on 2 December and any resolutions passed leading to legal and practical issues for the company. In view of the seasonal break and the requirement for 21 days' notice, the AGM is now likely to take place next February and a new notice of AGM will be issued in due course
- iii. Allotments – there had been no further contact from the National Trust.
- iv. Playground & Adult Gym Inspections – the Clerk thanked Councillor Thomas for adjusting the swing seat and confirmed that no further inspection reports had been received since the Council last met.
- v. New bins – the Clerk continued to contact Arun District Council and there were no further updates to report.
- vi. Operation Watershed -
 - Ecology Report commissioned and paid for by the South Downs National Park was due to be received before Christmas.



- CCTV/ Jetting Drainage Survey paid for by Arun District Council at a cost of £3000 had been circulated to members and during the process it had been possible to remove some roots blocking the drains.
- Silt Survey to assess contamination levels and depth took place on 23/11/20, the test results were complete, and receipt of the report was imminent.
- Willow tree removal – one quote had been received, another was awaited, and two other tree surgeons had indicated they had no interest in doing the work. Councillor Adamson kindly offered to obtain some quotes although the Clerk had had now sourced two further contractors.

118. Planning Matters

i. Planning Application

SDNP/20/04963/HOUS - Wood End Cottage London Road Slindon BN18 ONG - Dormer windows to existing roof.

It was **Resolved** that 'no objection' be recorded.

ii. Pre-Application – Aldingbourne Parish

SDNP/20/04843/PRE - Slindon Bottom Gravel Pit Slindon Bottom Road Fontwell West Sussex BN18 OSN - the restoration of Slindon Bottom Gravel Pit utilising site derived and imported inert material.

No further action was required at this time, the Clerk has 'tracked' the application for updates.

119. Date of Next Ordinary Meeting

The previous meeting scheduled for Monday 30th November 2020 had been cancelled and the next ordinary meeting will take place on Monday 11 January 2021. A list of meetings scheduled for 2021 has been published on the Council website.

The meeting ended at 9.34 p.m.

Signed as a true record of the meeting

Dated