

WESTHAM PARISH COUNCIL

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING OF

18th March 2019

held at the Amenity Hall, Stone Cross

193 Present

Councillors K Stevens, G Garner, K Saxby, G Parsons, T Bruce, G Walker, N Beaney and F Durling.

A Stevens (Clerk) and nine members of the public were also in attendance.

194 Apologies for Absence

Councillors T Comerford, R Perrin, P Marshall, J Blaker and A Lovell sent apologies for their absence which were duly accepted by the Parish Council.

195 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 18th February 2019 were read, confirmed as a true and accurate record and were then signed by the Chairman

196 Clerk's Report on Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting

The licence for the three bus shelters, two in Rattle Road, one in Dittons Road have now been received from ESCC and as it stands the shelters are expected to be fitted in May.

Enquiries indicate the road to the allotment is owned by BT and the Parish Council is now asking BT to repair the potholes there.

197 Disclosures of Interests

Councillor Stevens declared a personal interest in planning application WD/2019/0408/F. He did not take part in the discussions or the vote.

The meeting was then suspended.

198 Reports from the County Councillors

There were no reports from the County Councillors on this occasion.

199 Report from the District Councillors

There were no reports from the District Councillors on this occasion.

200 Questions from Members of the Public

Following claims on a social media website that the Westham Pond Working Group knew where the inlet pipe is at the pond residents asked if this was the case. Councillor Durling confirmed that whilst they had their suspicions, they do not know where the pipe is. The residents then asked the claims to stop because they are false and only start arguments and stop those who are working on the pond from getting on with it.

Mr Haffner asked the Parish Council to object to the planning application in Beggars Lane (WD/2018/2034/F) because;

- There are problems with the access.
- The building is too close to the windmill which is an iconic landmark and the mill is now virtually all surrounded by buildings.
- In 'plan speak' the 'aspect' of the building is an important consideration and now seems to be ignored by planners.
- The previous building was a dutch barn which was significantly lower.
- The new building has a curved roof, looks industrial and is out of keeping with the neighbouring buildings.
- When the development at Ketcham Corner was being considered and residents suggested it should be built here instead, they were told the Stone Cross site was rejected because only bungalows could be built there.

The meeting was then re-opened.

201 Reports on Committee Meetings held

There have been no Committee Meetings since the last Full Council Meeting.

202 Reports from Outside Meetings

Councillor Stevens attended the latest Wealden Road Safety Group Meeting. He brought up the issue of the increasing pollution levels in Westham High Street and at the Westham level crossing and requested signs asking drivers to switch off their engines whilst waiting at the crossing. He was told the issue is a Railtrack one and the scientific view is that unless vehicle engines are switched off for at least 2.45 minutes, switching them off is not beneficial. ESCC has agreed to look into the pollution levels in Westham and will report back in due course but warn it will take time. He asked if meter readings can be taken in the meantime and was told it was best to wait until all the roadworks have been done.

Councillor Durling asked for a reference for the 2.45 minutes quoted. Councillor Stevens said he will try and get something.

Councillor Saxby attended the latest Patients' Practice Group Meeting. The Group has now agreed its terms of reference. He also said one of the nurse posts has been upgraded and it is becoming common practice for doctors to share patients with other practices.

203 Westham Pond

i: to consider approving the Draft Management Plan – The Westham Pond Working Group produced the following report to clarify some items mentioned in the Draft Westham Pond Management Plan;

'Members of the team have years of experience with leading volunteer conservation groups and maintenance organisations. This includes training in techniques and risk assessment.

Evan Jones has a BSc Joint Honours Degree in Ecology and has carried out ecological survey contracts locally for ESCC at Newhaven Tidemills, Natural England on Pevensy Levels and on the former Crumbles Shingle Beach for Tarmac. He was Conservation Officer for the South East branch of the Marine Conservation Society and was involved in Sussex marine diving surveys resulting in the setting up of the Seven Sisters Marine Conservation Area and as a diver on ecological surveys in the Mediterranean for the University of Trieste. He is currently a member of the steering group for the Pevensy Farmers Cluster Group and

is working on a biological recording/photographic project on the Pevensey Levels. He has also recently been asked to advise Eastbourne Borough Council on aspects of conservation of Eastbourne's grazing levels. He is a published photographer, illustrator and writer on wildlife and conservation topics. He has also worked as a Biology Teacher and Lecturer for ESCC schools, Sussex University, field centres in the UK and an international college in Italy where he was also a diving instructor. As a result explicit risk assessment and management has been a constant in his professional life.

He has lived by the village pond and observed it with informed interest for nearly thirty years. He remembers the pond as it was many years ago when it was a wildlife haven where every spring large numbers of Toads and Frogs arrived to breed and he and his daughters helped them safely across the roads.

There have been at least 11 letters from residents which wholeheartedly support the February Draft Management Plan. There is much support for a wildlife area in the pond to compliment the amenity value and increase water quality.

There have been 4 with some small queries about the plan.

There have been 3 with more substantial queries. Including possible high costs, 3 of these asked for the inlet culvert to be investigated again plus advocated de-silting of the western end. One of these was also concerned about the removal of large fish

We will explain some of these queries below:-

High cost of plan.

A key element in this management plan is financial economy.

The organisational and material costs are minimal: Importantly they include the extension of the Parish council's insurance to cover volunteers. (Many organisations do this for their pond volunteers)

The involvement of local people as volunteers will reduce costs of ongoing maintenance very substantially.

There may be some necessary material costs eg for bought plants to reinforce an existing hedge or for protective materials for some plantings of aquatic plants.

The majority of the native plants used in the planting program will be sourced legally at zero cost through strong local contacts. Care will be taken to screen out any non-native species. This is a major saving over using a paid outside ecological contractor.

The cost of tree surgery will initially be substantial but this plan just advises on the bringing forward of this work which will in any case be necessary eventually.

If the cost of doing all advised work at once is daunting it can be phased over time.

Poplar and Willow trees grow very quickly. It is important to note that prompt action in this respect will save a significant sum in the long term.

As soon as trees are pollarded to an easily accessible height they can be pruned by volunteers at no cost.

They will also look more aesthetically pleasing and contribute less leaf litter to the silting of the pond if pruned.

Future Silting.

Increase in water quality, native plants (supplying dissolved oxygen) and native invertebrates increases the natural breakdown of leaves and silt. This should slow the rate of silting. The extraction of nutrients by aquatic plants as well as the reduction of silt disturbance by large fish will reduce the incidence of toxic algal blooms. The reduction of the volume of overhanging deciduous trees will reduce leaf litter input.

Trees.

Managing trees introduces more light to promote native plant growth.

Removing self-seeded saplings opens up views and reduces tree management costs in the future.

There is an emphasis in the plan of creating attractive views. Although pollarded trees look bare when first cut they soon grow back (within a year) to form traditional and very attractive tree shapes.

Augmentation of the hedge in the South West corner: gaps here can be planted with native species the residents nearby are very happy with this idea that will also be attractive and increase biodiversity.

Overgrown area behind garages: this can be discussed with residents in due course

Wildfowl: Ducks, Geese and Swans.

These will always be present.

Areas will be left where they can enter and exit the water.

It is now accepted ecological wisdom that, for a number of reasons feeding bread is not advantageous to health of the ducks themselves or to the pond environment and other wildlife and people using the area.

Should any of these birds seek to nest then there will be increased available nesting material wand sites around the pond as a result of the management plan's emphasis on rich aquatic plant life.

Introduced Carp.

It is generally recognised that large bottom feeding fish especially the non-native Carp normally have a very damaging effect on a pond of this size especially when they are of a size and number enabled by feeding (of ducks).

They remove aquatic and marginal vegetation and Hoover up smaller animal life to leave a biological desert.

In their search for food they erode the banks. In doing so they put silt and bacteria into suspension contributing to algal blooms.

Most are now gone. However any remaining will breed and grow to again damage the pond environment.

The plan follows the standard recommendation (from the August 2018 Ecologists report and from the Freshwater Habitats Trust amongst others) any remaining fish be removed (following procedure that complies with Environment Agency standards).

Other, smaller, native fish will be introduced to add to biodiversity and to attract birds such as Heron and Kingfisher.

Volunteers.

The plan is to begin with a small team of chosen volunteers at least while methods are trialled. Some residents have already put themselves forward. The draft Risk Assessment is being adapted for approval in the March PC meeting. Two members of the Pond working Party have many years' experience of leading teams of conservation volunteers.

The Undredged Part of the Pond.

The pond management plan takes maximum advantage of the still shallow western area of the pond as a great opportunity to increase biodiversity by creating a reed bed of several plant species there. Silt will be removed but in a phased, more economical way. In a program of ongoing work, in the future, this reed-bed can be selectively and incrementally excavated using contractors with small machinery and/or volunteers at relatively low cost. This work will be designed to create breeding areas for Toads, Frogs and Newts as well as a rich selection of invertebrates and attractive plants such as Marsh Marigold.

The concerns about the pond inlet and flooding in nearby gardens.

The issues surrounding flooding in nearby gardens and the inlet into the pond have been considered and going forward with this plan does not affect any future decisions taken regarding these issues. The plan can be modified should any actions be recommended in regard to these issues.

Monitoring.

The plan includes a monitoring program to inform future action and adaptations of the plan.

The Pond Management Plan into the future.

The plan is simply the accepted best available expert advice put into practice. It is a response to the current situation: If and when that changes the plan can be easily adapted. If any of the pond working group members cease to be involved, advice for the maintenance of management is readily available from bodies such as The Freshwater Habitats Trust, Sussex Wildlife Trust and the RSPB'.

This report will be published on the Parish Council's website in due course.

Councillors resolved, by six votes to two, to approve the Plan subject to a satisfactory timescale being received. It is expected the work will be carried out over a two to three year period. In the meantime any non-dangerous work which does not involve going into the water can go ahead.

ii: To consider approving the pollarding of the trees.

Councillors resolved to carry out the works to the trees alongside the 'private path' and those on the corner of Mortain Road. They will see how these look and then consider precepting for the work to the trees on the corner of Montfort Close (Quote 17586) when they set the budgets in November.

iii: To consider approving the Volunteer Risk Assessment

Councillors resolved, by six votes to two, to accept the Volunteer Risk Assessment subject to the approval of the insurance company.

204 Playparks

i: to consider providing a new playpark in Castle Bolton

The Plans for the new playpark should be with the Parish Council on the 19th March. Once received they will be circulated to the Parish Councillors for consideration at the next Full Council Meeting.

ii: to consider resurfacing the playparks in the Parish

Councillors resolved to recover the surface of the play area at Cherwell Close this year and the play area at Hamble Road in the following financial year.

205 Trees

i: to consider planting saplings at the rear of Darent Close

Councillors considered a request from a resident to plant saplings along the footpath at the back of Darent Close but they declined the request because they felt they would cause problems and expense for future Parish Councils.

ii: to update on the potential new trees for Hamble Road

At the January meeting Councillors agreed to plant twenty silver birches which were being donated by a local farmer in Hamble Road subject to the approval of the farmer.

However the Parish Council subsequently received price to plant the trees, complete with stakes, water tubes and rabbit spirals at a cost of £720 plus VAT. Councillors therefore resolved to only accept and plant ten of the trees. Councillor Parsons said she would like to be present when the trees are planted.

206 Questions from Parish Councillors

Councillor Bruce asked if the Parish Council has received a response to its recent email which asked where the buses will be diverted to when Pevensey Park Road is temporarily closed in June/July. It has not but any response will be circulated to councillors upon its receipt.

Councillor Durling reported that an apparently healthy tree has been felled at the rear of Glessing Road and stumps have been left which could cause future maintenance problems. The matter has been referred to ESCC for enforcement.

207 Planning Applications

The following planning application was considered;

WD/2019/0408/F - 27 Banner Way, Stone Cross, Pevensey, BN24 5FE - Replacement of existing conservatory with new rear single storey extension with mono pitch roof containing 3 No. roof lights – Westham Parish Council has no objections to this application on any planning grounds.

WD/2018/2034/F - Land adjoining Stone Cross Windmill, Beggars Lane, Stone Cross, Pevensey BN24 5EA - New 3 bedroom house with integral double garage and off-road Parking – Westham Parish Council supports the objections made by Stone Cross Mill. Councillors also said;

- There are problems with the access.
- The building is too close to the windmill which is an iconic landmark and the mill is now virtually all surrounded by buildings.
- The 'aspect' of the building is an important consideration and now seems to be ignored by planners.
- The previous building was a dutch barn which was significantly lower.
- The new building looks industrial and is out of keeping with the neighbouring buildings.
- When the development at Ketcham Corner was being considered and residents suggested it should be built here instead, they were told the Stone Cross site was rejected because only bungalows could be built there.
- Any decision should be delayed until the response from the Conservation Officers has been received.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.08pm.