



Minutes of the Meeting of Loughton & Great Holm Parish Council held remotely on Monday 21 September 2020 at 7.30pm

Location: held virtually by zoom technology.

Councillors present: Councillors Todd (in the Chair), Altieri-Douglas, Bailey, Feeney, Howe, Hoyle, Nayee, Nolan, Sargent.

Staff : Philip Compton (Parish Clerk)

Members of the public present: 2

Cllrs were reminded all the rules about code of conduct at meetings applied to virtual meetings, and upon request by Cllr Nolan the Clerk confirmed the meeting would be recorded.

FC61/20 Apologies: Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Dyer.

FC62/20 Declarations of interest: There were no declarations of interest.

FC63/20 Public participation: Members of the public were invited to speak on agenda items they considered pertinent to their particular interests. In order to facilitate public participation agenda item FC67/20 was taken first.

FC67/20 Allotment Hops Structure: The Clerk had requested plot holder 12b to reduce the size of his hops structure down from 10 feet high to approximately 8 feet high, on the grounds that it posed a health and safety concern if it were to collapse. The plotholder appealed the request and Councillors were therefore requested to decide on whether to keep the structure to 10 feet high or insist that it be reduced to 8 feet high. Both members of the public and Councillors were provided with the opportunity to state their opinions and ask questions. Councillors expressed concern over the possibility of the hops casting shade over neighbouring plots, and the possibility of the hops themselves catching the wind and therefore helping to contribute to the structure being blown over in high winds. Plotholder of 12b assured Councillors the structure was firm and wind passed through it.

Action: A vote was held:

Those in favour of cutting the structure back to 8 feet high: 4

Those against: 3

Abstain: 2

The Clerk would communicate with the plotholder over the practicalities of cutting back the structure to a maximum height of 8 feet.

All members of the public left the meeting at this time (7:55pm).

FC64/20 Thames Valley Police: The crime statistics report from Thames Valley Police was noted.

FC65/20 Minutes of the last meeting:

Action: Minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2020 were approved as an accurate record of the proceedings of that meeting, and the Chair agreed to sign them (and those of the June Full Council meeting), and provide them to the Clerk, for his records.

FC66/20 Committee meetings: Minutes of Committee meetings (see below) were all on the Parish's website in draft and were noted.

- a) Premises Committee Meeting 02 September 2020
- b) Planning Committee Meeting 07 September 2020
- c) Finance and Staffing Committee Meeting 14 September 2020

FC68/20 Payments:

Action: Monthly payments were authorized and current bank balance of £135,436 noted. Councillors noted all core payments made in August, and the expenditure on Pavilion drains - £996 (under the Parish's Financial Regulation 4.5), and electricity at the Pavilion (£3,267). The Clerk confirmed the Parish's part of the building now conformed to all electrical requirements, and this would satisfy insurers, in the event of a fire caused by electrical fault. Councillors also noted pay increases to staff members backdated to 01 April 2020.

FC69/20 Small Business Grant Scheme: The Clerk explained the Parish Council was eligible as it was in receipt of Business Rates Relief for the Community Centre, funding was therefore offered to offset losses on account of lack of income from the Community Centre.

Action: Councillors ratified the electronic approval of the Small Business Grant Scheme application, noting the money had been received and was included in the current bank balance.

FC70/20 skip at allotments:

Discussion: Councillors were requested to consider approving unbudgeted cost of a skip at the Greenhill Close Allotment Site (cost £282), and agree which line (in the accounts) it was to be allocated. Councillors considered it would be a generous measure to provide a skip, as people with gardens tidied up their own mess, and any refuse taken to a tip. The Clerk explained some of the debris was caused by work to the communal area, adjacent to the car parking space, and to fence repairs that had happened.

Action: A vote was held:

Those in favour of paying for a skip: 6

Those against: 2

Abstain: 1

The Clerk and the site representative would organize for a skip in October.

FC71/20 Allotment Rent for 2020-2021 and Allotment Rules: Councillors considered the level of rent for 2020-2021, referring to a report as compiled by the Clerk, which showed rent versus expenditure and market comparables across sites in Milton Keynes, broken down into pence per metre. Councillors noted at 16p/metre, the Parish's allotments were amongst the cheapest in MK.

Action: It was unanimously agreed to increase the price of plots by £1 per half plot, (from £11 to £12), and £2 per large plot (from £22 to £24), and linked prices for those living out of Parish. Councillors approved amended allotment rules, subject to wording on structures, which would be worked upon by the Clerk, Cllr Sargent and Cllr Nolan over the next week.

FC72/20 Accountability and Openness in Ashpole Furlong play area project application by the Chair:

Cllr Todd relinquished the Chair to Cllr Nolan for this item.

The Clerk stated that upon request from the Chair he had sought advice as to whether the agenda item should be discussed at Parish level or considered by Standards Committee at Milton Keynes Council (MKC), and the response from the Acting Head of Legal Services at MKC was that the matter could be discussed at Parish Council level, but that Parish Councillors were not entitled to resolve whether the code of conduct had been breached, as this was a matter for a Standards Committee at MKC to discern. Cllr Nolan stated she had also sought advice from Standards at MKC. The item was therefore discussed but no finding was made on it. The Clerk advised this matter was best discussed in confidence.

Cllr Nolan considered the agenda item improper as it involved discussing the code of conduct, which was outside the jurisdiction of the Parish Council, and this sentiment was echoed by Cllrs Todd and Altieri-Douglas.

Cllr Bailey commented that the Ashpole Furlong Play Area project had not been properly discussed by Councillors, and this, combined with SLCC advice, necessitated a discussion over principles of accountability and transparency. Cllr Bailey requested survey results as mentioned in the grant application, alongside other evidence of community consultation.

In summary Cllr Bailey expressed his concerns along the following lines:

- an application for a Communities Foundation award for £50k had been successful.
- there appeared to be a weak audit trail, the purpose of which would be to show due process was followed
- the 47-page grant application form was not circulated with the Parish Council in the months before its completion nor for eleven months afterwards.
- alongside MKC the secondary contact was Loughton & Great Holm Parish Council, however the Chair was the signatory, and not the Clerk
- on page ten of the application form it mentioned that 'local consultation has been grass-roots and let[d] by Loughton & Great Holm Parish Council'
- no resolution from the Parish Council sanctioned the community consultation
- at all times - as a Parish Council - Councillors have to adhere to the highest standards.

Cllr Todd expressed his opinion as follows:

- All members of the Parish Council and the Clerk had been made aware that MKC were proposing to refurbish the play equipment in the children's play areas since 2017, which had been reported to them by updates at meetings and via email.
- The Parish Council had included the project in its business plan in 2018, so it was aware of it and supported it at that time.
- he had circulated to all Councillors and the Clerk the proposed design of the play area which he had been sent by MKC in November 2018, and had invited Councillors to comment and response from Councillors had been in strong support of the design. No one had expressed any concerns about it.
- The Parish Council had included a contribution to the cost of the project of £7,500 in the 2019-2020 budget. All members present had been party to that budget and were aware of the project and had approved the budget.

- he considered payment of the contribution by the Parish would require a resolution of the Parish but the Parish had not been asked for any funds yet.
- He considered MKC had made the application for a grant from WREN of £50k towards the cost of improving the play area in the Parish.
- he had been sent the grant application by MKC and had been asked to sign it to endorse the project.
- Neither the current Clerk nor any previous Clerk had advised him it must be signed by the Clerk. As such he had signed it as he had been asked and he considered it his duty as part of implementing previous decisions of the Parish Council.
- The proposed refurbishment of the play area had been publicised widely including on the website/facebook, in the local media, in local newsletters. He considered all responses received had been considered, and that there was overall strong local support for refurbishing a dilapidated play area which was 30 years old and was at the end of its life.
- It was good that WREN had awarded a grant towards their costs of £50k towards refurbishing a play area in the Parish.
- It was disappointing that members of the Parish Council were discussing breach of the code of conduct when members were working to improve facilities in the Parish for local children.

Cllr Todd resumed the position of Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

FC73/20 Ashpole Furlong Play Area: The Clerk had sought advice from the SLCC (Society of Local Council Clerks), and from BucksALC, (Buckinghamshire Association of Local Councils), who had advised that although the project was in the business plan, as there appeared no resolution to proceed with the project, this should be considered for retrospective approval at a Full Council meeting. Councillors therefore considered the following:

- 1) approval of the Ashpole Furlong Play Area project in Loughton and associated cost (£7,391)
- 2) retrospective approval of the Chair's application to grant scheme (FCC Communities Foundation for £50,000).

Discussion: The Chair considered the item was premature, the Parish had not committed to expenditure and the project was an MKC project and could go ahead without the Parish's involvement. The Clerk stated the Parish Council was joint signatory on the application and it was therefore in partnership with MKC on the project.

Cllrs Sargent and Howe considered they were not averse to playgrounds in principle, only they had not been provided with the opportunity to comment openly on the Ashpole Furlong Play Area project, where they had safety concerns on account of the proximity to the Ashpole Furlong Road, which were not adequately provisioned for in the current plans. Cllrs Sargent, Hoyle and Howe expressed concern over the likely inconvenience to residents caused by out-of-parish visitors using the playpark and parking on residential streets, given the lack of any off-road parking.

Action: The Chair requested the vote was recorded, and the two matters were voted on together:

Those in favour: 4 (Cllrs Altieri-Douglas, Nayee, Nolan and Todd).

Those against: 5 (Cllrs Bailey, Feeney, Hoyle, Howe, Sargent).

The motions failed and the Clerk would inform the Strategic Landscape and Countryside Manager at MKC accordingly.

FC74/20 Premises risk assessment in light of covid-19 compliance: The Clerk had prepared a draft premises risk assessment document which was focussed around measures against the spread of covid-19.

Action: The premises risk assessment was approved subject to amendments to be made by Cllr Todd in light of covid-19

FC75/20 Website Compliance:

Action: Councillors noted the Clerk and Cllr Nayee had completed website compliance measures as requested by domain management at cabinet-office.gov.uk.

FC76/20 Restoration of Interpretation boards at the Green, Loughton: Councillors considered requesting approval from The Parks Trust to restore an interpretation board at The Green, Loughton, and to obtain quotes for work.

Action: The Clerk would communicate with the Parks Trust and request permission to restore the Interpretation Board.

FC77/20 Millennium Meadow benches: It was on the agenda to consider the removal of benches to deter anti-social behaviour in the area (£150 each + vat).

Action: The Chair wished to know who had put this item on the agenda, and it was confirmed Cllr Nolan had requested removal of the benches in the past, and the quote from Serco had taken time to come in which is why it had 'missed' a meeting. Councillors considered the Millennium Meadow needed a more thorough, overall review, and agreed to defer this item.

FC78/20 Autumn landscape review:

Action: Councillors noted there would be autumn landscape reviews with the Serco official in attendance, the Clerk, one Councillor and one member of the public for each part of the Parish (on Wednesday 23 September and Wednesday 14 October for Loughton and Great Holm respectively).

FC79/20 Railing around Sports Pitches in Loughton: The Clerk requested authorization for expenditure on replacing rotten posts (50x posts, £25/each to replace = £1,250).

Action: It was noted that Cllr Nayee and the Clerk were reviewing possible netting arrangements in order to improve health and safety near the Pirate Park playground and this project should be considered alongside post replacements, as they were interlinked, and so the item was deferred.

FC80/20 Cycling on the Redways: Councillors considered dangerous cycling on Redways, noting however that dangerous cycling was already an offence under the Road Traffic Act 1988, and that any dangerous cycling should be reported to the police.

FC81/20 Reports from members:

- a) The Chair informed those present he had attended a virtual meeting of the Parish Forum. The meeting focussed on two points; one on covid the other on the impact of covid on MKC. On covid within Milton Keynes the rates of infection were still comparatively low, and regarding the effect it was having on MKC, there were financial implications and this would likely lead to more cuts in future.

- b) Cllr Hoyle had attended a virtual meeting of the Shenley Leisure Centre Trustees on 26 August, feedback was that it had been beginning to pick up, bar sales had increased, and then uncertainty had crept in more recently. The Sports Hall was going ahead.

FC82/20 Items for the next agenda. Councillors were reminded to contact the Clerk and follow the rules as set out in the Parish's Standing Orders for items to be requested on the agenda for the next meeting.

Date and time of Next Meeting: Monday 19 October 2020 at 7.30pm

The Meeting was declared closed at 10:30pm.