



PARISH COUNCIL OF SANDHURST, KENT

Please reply to Julie Horan, Parish Clerk, Old School, Back Road, Sandhurst, Kent TN18 5JS 01580-850273

Approved Minutes Parish Council Meeting 12 March 2024

In Attendance:

Cllr Mel Phillipson (Chairwoman) (MP)	Cllr David Rogers (DR)
Cllr Mark Griggs (Vice-Chairman)	Julie Horan (Clerk) (JH)
Cllr Christopher Robinson (CR)	Borough Cllr Godfrey Bland (GB)
Cllr Katherine O'Neil (KO)	Borough Cllr Ellen Neville (EN)
Cllr Paul Phillipson (PP)	Members of public - 2

Item:	
1.	Apologies for absence
	Apologies were received from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cllr Adam Kerry (AK) County Cllr Sean Holden
2.	Declarations of interest
	Councillors were reminded that they must inform the Monitoring Officer of any changes to their Notification of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> None reported.
3.	Approval of minutes
	To resolve that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 13 February 2024 are a true record of the meeting. Members were reminded the only issue relating to the minutes that can be discussed is their accuracy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approval will be carried over to the next meeting, as a small inaccuracy was identified which needs to be corrected. <p>To resolve that the Minutes of the Planning meeting held on 27 February 2024 are a true record of the meeting. Members were reminded the only issue relating to the minutes that can be discussed is their accuracy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PP proposed; KO seconded - Agreed by those present that the minutes were a true record of the meeting.
4.	Councillor intervention

	<p>EN reported that she sits on the West Kent Rural Grants Committee, and there is a large sum of money available (over £330,000) for awards following applications from Charitable Organisations, Community Organisations, Rural Businesses and Parish Councils. The grants, which range from £1.00 to £25,000, are awarded for something that benefits the community as a whole.</p> <p>GB reported there was no decision yet regarding MOT Centre on Silverden Lane. JH had asked a question regarding the allocation of s.106 money to the development in Birchfield, Hawkhurst, but the queries have since been resolved.</p>
5.	Finance and accounts
	<p><u>Accounts</u> To approve accounts retrospectively for payment from 1 February 2024 to 29 February 2024. To receive details of receipts 1 February 2024 to 29 February 2024.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DR proposed to agree payments and receipts for January; CR seconded - all present agreed. <p>To note the bank reconciliation at 31 January 2024 and 29 February 2024</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MG confirmed the reconciliations for both months had been checked. <p><u>To review forecast</u> Income/expenditure appears to be running in accordance with the forecast and on target. The forecast for the end of March 2024 is quite different as the planned spending has not happened, but the sums will be spent in the few months following year end. There are other planned items, which have not yet started for various reasons, which will be rolled over to the next financial year.</p> <p><u>Charitable Donations:</u> As agreed at the November meeting, to be paid by the end of the month.</p> <p><u>Outstanding Allotment Rent</u> As requested at the February meeting, the tenancy for the plot in which the rent was still outstanding has been terminated. JH to contact AK to ask that the plot is trimmed and covered until a new tenant is found.</p>
6.	Annual Review of Documentation
	<p>All have been reviewed and minor amendments made: Standing Orders Financial Regulations Financial Risk Assessment Asset Register Statement of Internal Control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MP proposed to accept the documents as reviewed and amended; PP seconded - all present agreed
7.	Climate Emergency Declaration
	<p>Statement read out by MP – Appendix 1 Statement read out by KO – Appendix 2 There was a wide-ranging lengthy discussion regarding this matter and various comments were made both for and against declaring a climate emergency, including that:</p>

Signed:.....

Dated:.....

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More information regarding the cost/workload was needed. • What resources/funding are available? • All thought valuable points were raised by both MP & KO in the statements they made. • Generally felt that it was not the right time to Declare a Climate Emergency. • Environmental issues were important, and anything done to support the environment was a positive. • Declaring a Climate Emergency at this time would be just words with no actions. • The initiative needs to come from government and borough council. <p>A vote was taken on whether Sandhurst Parish Council should Declare a Climate Emergency:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Against – 4 votes (MP, PP, CR, DR) For – 0 votes Abstained – 2 Councillors (KO & MG)</p> <p>Sandhurst Parish Council will not Declare a Climate Emergency at this time.</p> <p>KO will draw up an Environmental Policy for discussion at the next meeting and explore the possibility of gathering an Environmental Working Group together to work on environmental issues.</p>
8.	Pavilion/OSH/Car park
	<p>The quote comparison was discussed. All the works, external redecoration of Old School Hall and boarding Old School Hall kitchen loft will be placed under one contractor. DR had contacted Contractor C to double check costs to be told he is now unable to undertake any of the work due to a health condition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DR proposed approval be given to appoint Contractor B to undertake all items, once weather improves ; CR seconded – all present agreed <p><u>Legionella Checks</u> DR contacted contractor G and asked to requote: that quote has not yet arrived.</p> <p><u>Internal Plans for OSH</u> MG met with local architect Jeremy, a plan has been drawn up of the existing layout, and options were discussed. MG to contact Jeremy for plan of proposed new layout to enable costings to be obtained.</p>
9.	Old Orchard Play Area/Playing Field Adult Gym Equipment
	<p><u>Old Orchard Play Area</u> One set of quotes received, CR meeting another supplier on 23rd March, and a third quote will be required.</p> <p><u>Play Area Signs</u> JH to contact George Harding</p>
10.	Website Redesign
	<p>Colour of website has now been agreed. JH has requested councillors look at website content and review.</p>

11.	Affordable Housing Commuted Sums
	EN circulated a document after the last meeting which raised some questions, DR confirmed that all those questions have now been answered.
12.	Speed Watch Report
	Due to the lack of availability of volunteers and the weather, there were no Speed Watch sessions during January. February was a little better: there were two sessions. The group should be back to normal strength for March. As of 20 th January 2024, the annual running total logged by Sandhurst Speed Watch for people speeding through the village was 1,067.
13.	Neighbourhood Plan
	KO reported that the draft plan is nearly ready.
14.	Allotments
	Nothing to report back from the Allotment Committee.
15.	Planning
	Application: 24/00510/FULL Proposal: Provision of solar PV system with solar PV panels fixed to south facing pitched roof Address: Sandhurst Social Club, Back Road, Sandhurst, Kent, TN18 5JX There is no issue with the solar PV system, the only concern is where the inverter is being positioned as it is not shown on the drawings - clarification is required. Once the meeting was closed JH updated Councillors on the non-compliance of an appeal decision (confidential).
16.	Correspondence to the clerk
	Bench on Bodiam Road is rotten and needs replacing
17.	Public intervention
	None
18.	Date of Next Meeting
	12 March 2024

Melanie Phillipson
Chairwoman, Sandhurst Parish Council

CC: For Information
County Cllr Seán Holden
Borough Cllr Godfrey Bland
Borough Cllr Ellen Neville

Signed:.....

Dated:.....

Appendix 1

Observations in response to request for Sandhurst PC to declare a climate emergency.

I have some strong reservations re the utility of the PC making a climate emergency declaration.

My understanding is that the notion of a climate emergency is primarily associated with the expression of an urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and become "carbon neutral" by a certain target date (usually 2030 or 2050).

The UK has seen a proliferation of declarations of local climate emergencies. However, the majority of local authorities who have declared a climate emergency, including Tunbridge Wells, have failed to create or publish action plans to tackle climate change.

There seems to be a great deal of scepticism about what is possible, including general recognition from the councils themselves and people more broadly, that the councils can only do so much.

The Environmental Law Foundation has looked into climate emergency declarations made by local authorities in the East of England and observed that there was little indication that they were influencing decision-making in any way.

Some local authorities have rejected the call to declare a climate emergency on the basis that making such a statement represents virtue signalling or political posturing. I would endorse that position.

I feel that pragmatism is important - we have to be realistic about what the PC can actually do. Sandhurst is a relatively small village, with a small, currently under-strength, Parish Council, and a limited budget which is already stretched to the limit in terms of what has to be done with the income received. The PC does not have the ability, never mind the financial or other resources, to implement stringent action plans.

Personally, I am strongly opposed to the making of a political statement simply because it is fashionable or because others have done so. I do not see the utility in making statements and/or adopting policies which cannot be backed by effective action.

The epithet "climate emergency" is, in my opinion, divisive and political, and I am not content with bringing the largely administrative work of the PC into the political arena. The PC currently works well as a body because it is not overtly political.

Moreover, I am concerned that by making a statement declaring a climate emergency and committing the PC to become carbon neutral by a certain date, the PC would simply be setting itself up to fail, leading to disappointment, frustration, and feelings of disenfranchisement by residents who would expect to see action which, for whatever reason, is not within the PC's ambit. Residents expect and deserve honesty in terms of what the PC can and cannot do. Creating a false expectation would not help anyone.

I would like to stress that declining to make a climate emergency declaration would in no way mean that the PC is oblivious to, or opposed to, environmentally sensitive issues. The PC already takes environmental issues into account in all of its decision-making – such as working to plant trees, conserve energy and water use, and preserve green spaces wherever possible. It already takes account of environmental issues when considering planning applications, and makes comments to the Planning Department where appropriate in connection with those aims. The PC has no power to direct the implementation of carbon-reducing measures in planning applications, or to grant or refuse planning permission on the basis of such measures.

The statement from the Neighbourhood Plan Environment Group (NPEG) sets out two objectives: that Sandhurst should become (i) a low carbon neighbourhood in the future for its residents and, (ii) a richly biodiverse neighbourhood for wildlife.

Meeting those aims does not necessarily require the making of a climate emergency declaration by the PC.

Moreover, the NPEG statement sets out that in 2019 Bath & North East Somerset Council made the following statement: "A key first step for a parish council seeking to take action would be: to declare a climate emergency, make climate change a parish council priority, and set up an action group to discuss ideas and initiatives".

I have a number of comments to make in response to that.

First, I would reject the suggestion that climate change should be a parish council priority. Our current priority, and issue of paramount importance in all that we do as a parish council, is the maintenance of village assets and management of the finances to ensure that everything that the PC is statutorily bound to do is performed and adequately funded. Feedback from residents consistently indicates that their priority issue and concern is that of speeding through the village/traffic matters. As I've already stated, Sandhurst is a small parish council with limited resources and powers, and I'm not convinced that it would be appropriate to prioritise anything else.

Secondly, re the call for the PC to set up an action group to discuss ideas and initiatives, I would like to emphasise that the PC currently has two long-unfilled vacancies for councillors. I would be reluctant for the PC to assume any greater responsibilities than those presented by the current, statutory requirements, or to ask or expect our current serving parish councillors to step up and take on additional onerous tasks and responsibilities, including the creation and operation of a climate action group. If anybody within the village feels strongly that this is something they want to see in the village, there has been ample opportunity for them to seek to join the parish council in order to facilitate that. That possibility remains open for anyone who wants to assume responsibility for a climate action group to liaise with the PC.

It has been suggested that the PC's making of a climate emergency declaration is a "no-brainer", or that it's "just words", and that committing to meeting carbon-neutral targets sends out the right message. I disagree.

The fact that a local authority could make a declaration, or that it would be easy to do so, does not mean that it should. For the PC to make a climate emergency declaration in the

knowledge that it would, in practice, be unable to act on it in any meaningful way would be disingenuous and sends out the wrong message.

Personally, I could not support the implementation of anything that puts an impossible burden on the PC. Adopting an understanding of reality, and expressing honesty and openness re that reality, even if it is unpalatable, is of vital importance if the PC is to operate in good faith and maintain the trust of Sandhurst residents. Empty gestures are not useful: the making of the declaration sought would, in my view, amount to an empty gesture.

For those reasons, therefore, I would oppose the PC making a climate emergency declaration at the current time.

Mel Phillipson

5th March 2024

Appendix 2

When the issue of the council being asked to call for a climate emergency declaration was raised, I must admit that I suddenly got the image of sea levels rising significantly and boats coming up the Rother to Bodiam Castle and thinking – well there’s not much we can do to stop that! I have since learnt that the term is almost intimidating and quite off-putting and doesn’t really convey what it is aiming for.

We all know that our carbon emissions are greater than they should be and that there is so much energy wasted especially in a place like Sandhurst where a goodly proportion of our houses are listed buildings and therefore cannot benefit from a lot of energy saving schemes. We haven’t been helped by losing our No5 bus which means that more cars are travelling on our roads for as simple a thing as collecting a prescription.

I don’t have the statistics to hand but when the energy companies started what are known as savings’ hours and published how much energy was saved by a lot of us turning things off for an hour or a half, it was really quite amazing. But do we just stop there and complacently say that I turned off my power yesterday for an hour or= dare I say it? - I have just bought an electric car therefore I’ve done my bit?

And then is it so wrong to look to a date by which some measures should be achieved or do we just ignore it all and hope that it will go away or leave it for other generations to attempt to solve? Is it political posturing to try to show a willingness to act when and where we can? Mel has said that TWBC whilst declaring a climate emergency have failed to create or implement action plans for change. In fact, TWBC are keeping to their aim of 2030 and have declared that they will be leading by example by looking to support parishes in the lead up to 2050. They have a Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) and have recently appointed a Sustainability Manager who is combing through an immense amount of actions to implement easily (like the type of coffee bought and running their waste vehicles on HVO) and not so easily (crematorium furnaces).

There has to be a start somewhere.

If TWBC are looking to support parishes that does not suggest that we would be on our own or have to fund it all. If we make this declaration funding will be obtainable through council reserves, government grants, loans and community bonds to invest in renewable energy.

If someone in the village came forward to offer an area to develop a major ground heat source or a field of solar panels, would we reject it out of hand if grants were available to fund it? If grants were to be made available for a means of insulating our grade 2 listed houses, would we not want to be first in the queue rather than towards the tail end as we have been with the funding of the Neighbourhood Plan and therefore concerned at the end of each year as to whether the Secretary for Levelling Up will continue to give support to the scheme?

Mel suggests an extra burden for the Parish Council which already has two vacant places. Could I ask how many councillors have been burdened by the work undertaken on behalf of our Neighbourhood Plan? Apart from Mel herself who volunteered. Why should work on a climate emergency action plan be any different? I would hope that once the NP is completed, there would be interest from some of our steering group to continue. I would certainly be willing. Mel mentioned that there would be little help or interest to come from the residents. I remember 18 months ago the council’s reaction when help to restart the NP was offered. The word apathetic was used to describe the residents and yet within a month we had a steering group of 8 which over the next six months grew to 15. Is it not possible that by adopting a forward-looking policy our council might actually attract new members? I see our role more as an educator. To set an example where we can and make the residents aware of what we can do especially with the help of the Borough Council. Yes, our role as a PC is to handle assets and finances but surely we also have to look to promoting the wellbeing of our parishioners and a sustainable future for them.

Signed:.....

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We could start by looking at our procurement policy. Our energy suppliers are classed as green energy suppliers, but are there other items of expenditure we should be looking into? Perhaps a proposal for the council to look towards declaring a climate emergency when more information regarding help and support from higher levels of government is received, is one we could consider rather than just rejecting the idea out of hand.

Climate, energy, sustainability and carbon understanding needs to be embedded in the whole authority, across tiers, staff and systems.

Carbon literacy is defined as, "An awareness of the carbon dioxide costs and impacts of everyday activities, and the ability and motivation to reduce emissions, on an individual, community and organisational basis". All Elected Members and staff have a role to play in delivering Net Zero. It is our responsibility to make decisions that affect and safeguard our community today and tomorrow. Let's not be carbon illiterate. There is no planet B.