

# **FIRLE PARISH COUNCIL**

Minutes of the **FIRLE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING** held on **Tuesday 9 March 2021 at 7.30pm.**

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The meeting was held virtually under the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

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**Present:** Cllr Richard Gravett (Chairman), Cllr Andrew Barr (Vice Chairman), Cllr Liz Hill, Cllr Clare Partington, Cllr Edgar Symes, 5 members of the public, Andy Beams (Locum Parish Clerk)

**1. Apologies for absence**

None.

**2. Declarations of interest**

None.

**3. Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2021 were agreed as a true record.

**4. Adjournment for questions from the public**

The Chairman adjourned the meeting to invite questions from the public.

Ian Pepe (Chairman, Firle Community Association) spoke to provide an update on the Community Housing Project, which was moving forward slowly, with the hope things would start to progress faster over the next few weeks. He agreed to chase up details on the Firle specific element of the housing needs survey, which had been outstanding since August 2020.

He also thanked the council for providing funds to repaint the public telephone box and confirmed that the council had been advised about the Covid signs placed around the village, although this may have occurred during the transition period between Clerks, hence the information not being distributed.

**5. Wind turbines**

The Chairman invited Mike Leslie-Johnson to update the council. He provided an outline of the principles of the scheme and referred councillors to the application form for a grant to complete a feasibility study, circulated in advance of the meeting. He stated that resident's feedback was positive, and that the Firle Estate were happy to proceed to the feasibility stage. The application needed to be led by a community group, and it was suggested this should be the Parish Council.

Alistair Deighton (Firle Estate Manager) confirmed that the Estate were interested in the idea, and now sought the kind of detail which would be included in a feasibility study.

Councillors asked questions regarding the scope of the study, and whether the idea of turbines was compatible with the proposal from BHESCo. It was confirmed that nothing had been ruled out, and it was likely that the two schemes could operate in conjunction with each other.

It was pointed out that at no point had the Parish Council formally agreed to support the wind turbine scheme, and this would need to be resolved before the council committed to leading the grant application. There were concerns raised about the council's capacity to manage a project of this size, but it was confirmed that the council's lead role would be limited to securing the grant, and a community group could then be set up to move the project forward.

**RESOLVED:** Council agreed to gauge support from residents by publishing information on the council website and in the Parish magazine, and if this showed there was support for the idea, the grant application process would be considered at the May council meeting.

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## 6. Planning:

### 6.1 Applications for comment

Cllr Partington provided information on the two applications being considered.

Application Number	Address	Detail
<a href="#">SDNP/21/00376/LIS</a>	Dairy Farm, Dairy Farmhouse, Wick Street, Firle, BN8 6NB	Internal and external refurbishment works to main dwellinghouse
<a href="#">SDNP/21/00887/LIS</a>	Black Tile House, The Street, Firle, BN8 6NU	Removal part of a light weight, modern partition finished in plasterboard

**RESOLVED:** Council agreed to make ‘no comment’ on both applications.

### 6.2 Lewes District Council Local Plan – Land Availability Assessment

Cllr Gravett reminded councillors of the land availability assessment, highlighting the increase in housing targets for Lewes District. The Lewes District boundary ran along the north side of the A27, with the rest of the parish within the South Downs National Park.

Within the land availability assessment was a site of 442 hectares proposed for a possible solar farm. This did not mean that the solar farm would go ahead, or that it would cover the whole site if it progressed, but the council needed to be aware of the inclusion of the site.

Councillors discussed the principle and agreed that use of that site for housing development was unlikely due to the lack of infrastructure.

**RESOLVED:** Council agreed to respond by acknowledging the document and stating no objection to the inclusion of the site.

### 6.3 To consider the letter from Maria Caulfield MP regarding the Local Plan

A letter from the MP has been circulated to all Town and Parish Councils in the Lewes District, detailing her concerns at the potential increase in housing numbers due to LDC failing to update their Local Plan within the required timeframe. LDC have responded to the letter, refuting some of the detail and outlining their process for following the statutory guidelines laid down by central government for future housing numbers. The Clerk agreed to circulate the LDC response to all councillors.

## 7. Finance

**7.1 RESOLVED:** The council approved payment of the following invoices:

Payee	Reason	Amount
Firle Management Ltd	Rent of land 29 Sep 2020 – 24 Mar 21	£50.00
A Beams	Locum Clerk 25 Jan – 28 Feb 2021	£412.50

**7.2 RESOLVED:** The council retrospectively approved payment of the following invoices:

Payee	Reason	Amount
Mulberry & Co	Internal audit and AGAR preparation	£720.00
Information Commissioners Office (ICO)	Data Protection Registration fee	£40.00

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## **8. Council policies**

The Locum Clerk had circulated several policies in advance of the meeting, recommending the council adopt these to ensure they met legislative requirements.

**RESOLVED:** The council adopted updated versions of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Freedom of Information Policy, Complaints Procedure, and a Document Retention Scheme. These would all be published on the council website.

## **9. Councillor vacancy**

Cllr Gravett reminded councillors that Cllr Partington had resigned as a councillor and thanked her for her enormous contribution to the council over the last eight years, citing her passion, enthusiasm, loyalty and support and acknowledging that the council had been lucky to have her working with them. All councillors agreed and stated she would be deeply missed.

The Locum Clerk had circulated a copy of the correct procedure to follow to advertise the vacancy, along with a Co-Option Policy for adoption by the council.

**RESOLVED:** The Co-Option Policy was adopted, and the Locum Clerk was instructed to start the process of advertising the vacancy.

## **10. Website**

The Locum Clerk circulated in advance of the meeting a briefing note outlining the issues with the current website and confirming the council's wishes to both comply with relevant legislation and be able to communicate as clearly as possible with residents.

Councillors viewed the draft website via screen sharing, and agreed it looked clear and easy to understand, and was set up to contain the important information it needed.

Ian Pepe (FCA Chairman) suggested crosslinking the new council website with the FCA site, which councillors agreed was a good idea.

**RESOLVED:** The Locum Clerk was authorised to publish the site, making the necessary payment arrangements, and claiming reimbursement from the council. It was envisaged the site would be live by the end of the week.

## **11. Other items**

### **11.1 Millennium Wood**

Cllr Barr updated councillors with information from the most recent meeting and referred councillors to an email circulated earlier today containing the latest plans. The group had been renamed the Firle Tree Planting Initiative and were considering applying for a grant from the council at the next opportunity. The Locum Clerk was asked to respond, providing details of the application process which would be considered in the new financial year.

### **11.2 School Shaw**

Cllr Barr reported that the Firle Tree Planting Initiative were keen to plant in the area but following discussion with the Firle Estate this has been delayed until autumn.

### **11.3 Recycling bin collection in The Street**

Cllr Barr expressed his concern that after collection, the recycling bins were being left in the street and he felt they should be returned behind the gates of the properties, as used to happen. Cllr Partington pointed out that as it is a kerbside recycling service, this may not be possible. The Locum Clerk was asked to confirm the correct process with Lewes District Council.

### **11.4 Ditches and culvert at New Elms**

Cllr Barr reported that he had viewed the ditches and culverts, and while they had dried out, they needed clearing. Alistair Deighton confirmed he will raise the concern with the relevant tenants.

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## **11.5 Private track between The Street and Chalky Road**

Cllr Barr stated that the track was in a poor state of repair, that the signs were faded and that large vehicles were driving at excessive speed along it. There was also a damaged post and rail fence at the southern end of the track belonging to the council, and he suggested it needed replacing and the 'private road' sign reinstating on it. Alistair Deighton confirmed the track was on the Firle Estate repairs list, and action would be taken. Cllr Barr was asked to obtain a quote for the fence repair for future consideration by the council.

## **11.6 Village signage and traffic**

Cllr Gravett shared his concerns regarding the level, size and speed of vehicles along Chalky Lane and The Bostal, especially in the vicinity of the school. It was also note that the school warning signs were faded. Alistair Deighton agreed to speak to the tenants and production company with regard to the issues raised, and it was agreed Cllr Gravett would speak with Mike Hole regarding some additional signs.

## **11.7 Parish Council archives**

Cllr Gravett reminded councillors that he had inherited a four-drawer filing cabinet and four bags of council archive material, and there was a need to agree a permanent solution for storage of these items. It was suggested that records that need to be kept could be sent to The Keep, the ESCC archiving facility, and the Locum Clerk agreed to contact other local Parish Councils who have office accommodation to see if there was any space available for a filing cabinet.

## **11.8 Involvement and communication with the electorate**

Cllr Gravett reminded councillors that he was keen to contact all residents and businesses in the parish, to understand how they wanted communication from the Parish Council in future. He would compose a letter and circulate to other councillors for comment, and the Locum Clerk was asked to obtain a copy of the electoral roll for address information.

## **11.9 BHESCo revised plan**

Cllr Gravett reminded councillors that a lot of time had been spent reviewing the plan, and he understood it had now been scaled back to a small number of properties. Alistair Deighton confirmed, that subject to caveats, agreement had been reached to proceed with a pilot project for seven properties.

## **11.10 Additional car parking space for the village car park**

Cllr Hill stated that with Easter coming, lockdown restrictions easing and the pub re-opening soon, the concern over parking in the village was likely to continue. A suggestion was made that a temporary overflow car park, potentially just open for weekends, be considered, including appropriate fencing and signage. Cllr Partington pointed out that the council's insurance may need to be altered in the event of any extension to provided parking facilities.

Councillors discussed possible locations, and Alistair Deighton stated that there would be a need for planning permission for change of use, although extended permitted development rights could allow for a trial exercise.

It was agreed that a plan, including the costs associated with providing a temporary car park for a trial period, needed to be drawn up. A site meeting with Alistair Deighton was proposed, and Cllr Hill agreed to co-ordinate this.

## **11.11 Increasing the number of village/dog waste bins in the village centre**

Cllr Hill asked if the Locum Clerk had received any response from LDC regarding increasing the number of bins. The Locum Clerk confirmed no response had been received, and he agreed to chase up and circulate the answer to councillors.

## **11.12 Upgrade of the children's' playground in the recreation area**

Cllr Hill asked for details of when the quote for repair works was likely to be received. Cllr Barr confirmed he had been told it would be this week, and he would circulate the information once

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received. Cllr Partington pointed out that any repair work would need to comply with risk assessment and health and safety standards to receive the appropriate sign off before being available for use. Councillors discussed how the cost of the works would be split between the Parish Council and the Village Hall Playing Fields Committee, who were hoping to apply for grant funding for new equipment in the future.

**RESOLVED:** Council agreed to spend up to a £1,200 as their share of the costs of any repairs and subsequent inspection required.

### **11.13 Hugh Barnes memorial award**

Cllr Hill had circulated prior to the meeting some suggested designs and was keen to agree the details of the type of award. Other councillors confirmed these decisions had already been made at a meeting Cllr Hill was absent from, and it was agreed Cllr Barr would approach the preferred designer to confirm she was happy to complete the work.

### **11.14 Public footpaths and Rights of Way**

Cllr Symes asked a question relating to an overgrown path, as to whether it was a public right of way or not, citing his concerns over the project underway to ensure rights of way are protected. Alistair Deighton provided more background on the 2026 project deadline and outlined the two ways a path can be claimed as a right of way, either as current or historical use. Another option would be for the council to approach the landowner and ask for it to be designated as a permissible path.

### **11.15 Virginia Woolf statue**

The Locum Clerk reminded councillors that a request to discuss support for the statue had been received too late to be included on the January meeting agenda. Councillors considered the content of the request, agreed that Rodmell would be a more suitable location and authorised the Clerk to respond with that view to the original email.

### **11.16 East Sussex Clerks forum**

The Locum Clerk provided an update from the East Sussex Clerks forum held on 4 February 2021. The main discussion point was in relation to SSALC ceasing to exist from 31 March, and questions as to how/where Parish Councils in East Sussex would access support services. As yet, no clarification had been provided by the ESALC board. Councillors also noted that after many years of lobbying by residents, Bexhill will have its own Town Council from May 2021.

## **12. To note any items for information or inclusion on future agendas**

Cllr Partington encouraged the council to press for the Firle Estate to submit a retrospective application for the tree felling completed.

Cllr Symes restated how much the council will miss Cllr Partington's contribution, with all councillors agreeing how significant her impact had been during her time as a councillor.

## **13. To confirm date of next meeting**

The date for the Annual Meeting was confirmed as Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> May commencing at 7pm.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 11.10 pm.