

**Minutes of the Shevington Parish Council
Policy & General Purposes Committee Meeting
Held Wednesday, 3 March 2021
7pm Virtual Meeting**

Present: Councillor Ira Whiteley (Chairman), Councillors William McKnight, Christopher Horridge, John Whiteley, Michael Grimes, Michael Crosby, Vicky Galligan and Jessica Higham

Co-opted Committee Members: Mrs Eileen Longmore and Mr Brian Lomas

No members of the public were present.

In Attendance: Mrs K Pilkington (Clerk to the Council)

1. Apologies

Cllrs John Ball and Vicky Galligan
Dist Cllr Janet Brown

2. Declaration of Interests

None

**3. Minutes of the Last Policy & General Purposes Committee Meeting
(3 February 2021)**

Resolved: The Minutes of the Policy & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on 3 February 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

4. Village Issues

National Forest Scheme

A Co-opted Committee member drew the Committee's attention to Wigan Council's project to plant one million trees (mostly whips) across the Borough and suggested that the Parish Council might wish to consider arranging for some to be planted at Vicarage Lane Fields. The project was part of the National Forest strategy and member reported that the officer responsible was waiting for offers of suitable locations to be proposed. This would be an agenda future agenda item.

Cleaning of Gutters

Another Co-opted Committee member asked whether there had been any updates on when the LA were due to be cleaning gutters in the area. The member reported that the company carrying out gas pipe improvements in Shevington Moor had created a mess in the roads where the work had been carried out. After a brief discussion, about how to deal with it, it was suggested that this could be reported to the LA via the 'Report It' app, which the member agreed to do. The Chairman would report it to one of the District Councillors

Cllr Bill McKnight joined the meeting.

Issues Reported to District Councillors

A member had recently been contacted by a couple of residents, who wished to raise the following issues:

- Electricity NW's contractor had been laying additional electricity cables at the top of Elnup Avenue – near its junction with Longbrook. The contractor had made a mess of the restitution of the grass at this location, leaving it very rough – too rough to mow. The resident's property adjoined the footpath from Elnup Avenue to Coach House Drive. The contractor had also dug up this pathway and had damaged the resident's rear fence in the process. When this was brought to the contractor's attention he refused to take any responsibility for it.
- A resident of Bankwood had reported that she had recently stumbled and fallen on one of the network of footpaths connecting Bankwood with Chisacre Drive. The fall had resulted in injuries to the resident's face. The injuries had required several stitches. The resident was of the view that the surface of the footpath was in a poor condition and needed inspection with a view to carrying out repairs.

Both matters had been reported to the District Councillors, who were taking them further.

5. March Newsletter

The text prepared for inclusion in the March edition of the newsletter was considered. An addition was made to the obituary for Barry King. Changes to a couple of paragraphs in the article about East Quarry were suggested and agreed.

Resolved: The text for inclusion in the March edition of the newsletter was approved.

6. Model Design Code (Consultation)

Information relating to this MHCLG consultation had been circulated to members in February. There was a brief discussion. The Committee agreed to leave a response to the consultation to Wigan Council's Planning Department. A member requested that NALC's response, once it had been published, be made available to the Council.

7. Right to Regenerate (Consultation)

Information relating to this consultation had been circulated to members in February. The Chairman would prepare responses on behalf of the Parish Council and forward the responses to the Clerk prior to the deadline of 13 March for submission to the MHCLG.

8. Annual Parish Meeting

The 2021 Annual Parish Meeting had been scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 17 March. Because of Covid restrictions it would have to take place virtually on that date. While most of the agenda could be followed virtually, there would be issues when it came to the presentation of the Community Service Awards.

By law the Annual Parish Meeting had to take place on a date between 1 March and 1 June (*inclusive*). At present the Government's plan was to allow outdoor gatherings of up to 30 people from 17 May. The possibility of holding it during the second half of May in an outdoor setting such as Shevington Recreation Ground was considered.

Resolved: It was agreed that, subject to Covid restrictions, the Annual Parish Meeting would be held in an outdoor setting on Wednesday, 19 May, when the Community Service Awards would be presented.

9. Opening of Bowling Green

Usage of the bowling green was discussed.

Resolved: The Committee agreed that the bowling green would be open for use for organised events supervised by Shevington Village Bowling Club as soon as Covid regulations permitted this. However, it would not be open for general use until Covid restrictions had been lifted.

10. Complaint to the Ombudsman re Environment Agency

A reply to an FOI enquiry sent to the Environment Agency about applications for a Water Abstraction Licence submitted by Maybrook Investments Ltd had been received and had stated:

"Maybrook Investments Ltd did submit an application in summer 2019 and very soon after made an amendment. Although there have been long periods of inactivity in the applicant submitting further information requested by the Environment Agency and further amendments made, the application was not withdrawn at any point. The Environment Agency has now received all the required documentation, the consultation period has closed and the licence is currently being issued."

The statement that the application had never been withdrawn was curious, as the information that it was withdrawn in March 2020 had originally been observed on the Environment Agency website by members. When the above was reported to the Council meeting in January, members agreed to consider lodging a complaint against the Environment Agency with the Ombudsman.

This was discussed further during the Council meeting in February. Members of the East Quarry campaign group were present at the meeting and had supplied further information about the campaign. This information had been circulated to members.

Information from the Citizens Advice Bureau about the circumstances in which complaints could be made to an Ombudsman, which Ombudsman was the appropriate one in relation to the EA, how long the process could take and what the Ombudsman's powers were had been circulated to members for the purposes of the discussion about lodging a complaint.

In this case it was the Parliamentary Ombudsman to whom a complaint should be submitted, if appropriate. The following advice was available from the Parliamentary Ombudsman's website:

“You should complain to the organisation first and give them a chance to put things right. When you get their final response, if you are not happy with how they have dealt with your complaint, we may be able to consider it. However, we can only consider complaints about government departments that an MP has referred to us, so you need to ask your MP to do this. This is a legal requirement.

As we are the final stage for unresolved complaints, we usually expect you to complain to the organisation you are unhappy with first. This is so that it has the chance to look into your concerns and, where needed, put things right for you.”

After a short discussion, the Committee concluded that there was nothing sufficiently substantial about which the Parish Council could complain to the EA and, consequently, to the Ombudsman, if they had exhausted the EA's Complaints Procedure and were not satisfied. Hence, it was agreed that, under the circumstances, the only thing the Council could do was to advise the East Quarry campaign group to follow the EA's complaints procedure, as advised by the Parliamentary Ombudsman. If the group felt they had a case and wished to do this, the Parish Council would be prepared to write a letter in their support. The Clerk was asked to inform the group.

11. Appointment of Recreation Ground Trustee

Resolved: A panel consisting of Cllrs Ira Whiteley, Mike Crosby and Jess Higham would hold informal meetings virtually with the applicants for the position of Recreation Ground Trustee on Wednesday, 17 March. The Panel would meet at 7pm and the meeting would be hosted by the Clerk.

12. Planning Applications

There were no planning applications to consider.

13. Dates of Next Meetings

31 March (Council); 7 April (Policy & General Purposes Committee)

CONFIDENTIAL ITEM

Resolved: That, in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it was advisable in the public interest that the press and public be excluded and they were instructed to withdraw.

There were no members of the public present.

14. Community Service Awards

The nominations for the Community Service Awards were discussed and selected.

Resolved: The recipients of the Community Service Awards were approved.

There being no further business, the Meeting closed at 8:05 pm.

Chairman

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