

FORTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Meeting held Wednesday 10th March 2021 at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom

PRESENT: Cllrs: E De Quincey (Chair), D Toon (Vice Chair), D Carver RFO;
Cllrs: P Hammond, S Spencer, S Tomkinson.

Borough Cllrs: P Farrington, M Smith & County Cllr M Winnington (Cllr Winnington left after Item 6 on the Agenda)

The meeting was attended by members of the public, David Alder and Philip White representing the Support Group for the Red Lion.

C Little (Clerk).

1. Apologies for Absence

Cllr L Bayton sent apologies which were accepted.

2. Declaration of Councillor's Personal Interests

None.

3. Minutes

1. Parish Council Meeting - 18th November 2020

Minutes had been looked at thoroughly, some amendments had been made after the Clerk missed a section of the meeting when the Zoom link was refreshed. Clerk confirmed that the actions had now been completed. The minutes, as amended, were approved and would be signed by the Chair.

2. Planning Meeting - 3rd March 2021

The Chairman advised that following the planning meeting held on 3rd March which had included the item: **21/33760/FUL, Land North of Humesford Brook, Radmore Lane, Gnosall**, there have now been 3 objections from neighbours in the vicinity of the proposed development. The clerk confirmed that the parish

council had only raised a concern about lighting to SBC. Cllr Smith advised that the neighbours' concerns were:

- How tight it would be turning into the yard from Radmore Lane.
- Additional volume of large vehicles would exacerbate the deterioration of an already poor road surface.
- The proposed stables appear large for the number of horses that can be accommodated on the land.

The Clerk made a further submission to SBC including these additional points on 11th March 2021.

The minutes were approved and would be signed by Chair.

4. Financial report and authority for payments

1. 2020/2021 Quarter Four

The financial statement dated 2nd March 2021 was presented. It balanced to the latest bank statements received.

Account	£ p
Current @ 02 March 2021 (phone)	110.00
Reserve @ 02 March 2021 (phone)	1018.42
TOTAL	£1128.42

The council approved and the chairman agreed to sign the financial statement.

ACTION: RFO & Chairman

2. Precept Payments Approved

Precept Payments	Budget	For Approval
Clerk's Salary – quarter 4	£109.77 (gross)	£87.77
PAYE as calculated by the payroll provider	nil	£22.00
Clerk's Expenses – quarter 4 - TBA	£15.00	nil
SPCA subscription 2021/22	£98.69	£99.00

The council approved the above payments and authorised the RFO to make them.

ACTION: RFO

3. Concurrent Grants

The Council was reminded that concurrent grant (£270.00 already received) had to be properly disbursed before the end of the financial year (31 March 2021) otherwise it would be forfeit and have to be returned to Stafford Borough Council. The Council had received just one application, a letter from the Assistant Warden of All Saints Church, asking for financial assistance in respect of both building maintenance and burial ground upkeep. Councillors agreed the application should be supported due to the importance of both the church and burial ground to the community.

Cllr Spencer asked for a further week for the Parish Hall committee to consider if it might ask for a grant this year. Councillors agreed to this delay and will make final decisions on grants next week, after 17 March.

ACTION: Cllr Spencer & Council

4. Accountability and Governance

The RFO said that he would again certify the Council as being exempt from requiring a limited assurance review (external audit) enabling him to complete the Annual Governance and Accountability Return part 2 (AGAR) once it is received.

The deadline for completion and approval of the AGAR is expected to be early July 2021 although the documentation has yet to be released. In practice this will mean that the council must be in a position to approve the AGAR at its next meeting in May. The RFO expects to be able to arrange our own internal audit, hopefully with Robert Watson Jones and to complete the AGAR within the required timescale.

ACTION: RFO

5. Update on A519 Safer Road Campaign

Flooding on the way out of Sutton towards Forton (ref 4218470) has been addressed. It was noted that a reasonable job had been done patching up the grid outside Bank Farm, however the council workers had not cleared the drain and so

that raised concerns as to how long the new tarmac will last (and whether it would resolve the flooding).

Cllr Toon advised that the response from Amey, SBC's contractors, (ref. 4218469) following Cllr Winnington's efforts to resolve the flooding issues of the road and Mark Armitage's cottage had been disappointing. Their generic email had not addressed the issue and had stated that this would be dealt with during routine drain cleaning at some point in the future. (The problem raised was the blocked drains, the inability of the drains to take the amount of water they received and the fact that Mark Armitage's cottage had consequently been flooded out on a number of occasions).

Cllr Winnington added that the stance taken by Amey on the bridge was disappointing. He also stated that the time spent mapping out every single gully meant that there was now a backlog. Gully clearance is now taking a lot of work.

ACTION: Clerk to prompt Cllr Winnington to find out when the A519 work is scheduled.

6. The Red Lion Sutton

Members of the public had set up a Support Group to save the pub. Phillip White and David Alder are part of the group and attended the meeting to provide an update.

Phillip confirmed that the ACV application had been submitted and SBC has 8 weeks to deal with this. It will be reviewed by an independent examiner. If the decision goes against the application, there is then a 28 day period in which the applicant may appeal the decision which would be dealt with by a Tribunal Hearing before a Judge. Phillip had written to Bill Cash MP who he said had been very supportive to date. Bill Cash had written to the Staffordshire County and Borough Councils and agreed to update Phillip when he had received a response(s).

The Support Group had been working hard at collating support and testimonials. They had to date around 130 questionnaire responses and 30-40 multi-page references/letters of support. It is believed that it might be worth making this into a

portfolio of papers to present to the Council as this would potentially have more impact than a few emails.

Regarding the Parish Council's role in this application, only certain groups can request items for inclusion on an asset register. The Parish Council being one such body had made the application on behalf of the Support Group. The decision regarding the appeal about the decision to make the pub a community asset will come from SBC Legal Department and the Parish Council should respond. The Parish Council is essentially the intermediary. The Support Group will liaise with the Parish Council before the Parish Council communicates with SBC.

The reason the information is being collated, is that it supports the ACV text. For example, the application cites 'local village support' and the Support Group now have 130 questionnaires demonstrating that support. The documentation backs up the claims.

Cllr Farrington felt that compiling the papers into a portfolio was a good idea as it helps to illustrate the number of individual supporters. If the decision needs to be appealed, the papers can be scanned in and this is definitely something the Support Group should contemplate doing.

Cllr Winnington made reference to an article by Jonathan Warren which highlights that there is quite a push in central government for pubs to be saved because of their community impact and Covid has shown how important they are as a social hub.

Cllr Carver was concerned that upon reading some of the emails between the Support Group and the Parish Council because they sometimes read as though the Support Group might be expecting financial support. The Support Group confirmed that they were not expecting funding from the Council. They intend to be self-supporting in this regard and have already paid independently for legal advice.

Cllr Carver noted that he had not received any material from the Support Group to enlist his support for the Red Lion. The Support Group representative said that this had been posted on the notice boards but it was noted that there was nothing on any of the Parish Council noticeboards in Meretown, Sutton or Forton.

The Chairman agreed to share the Support Group link via email to Councillors.

ACTION: Chairman to forward the link to the survey so Councillors may complete their own feedback.

Cllr Spencer asked:

1. What's expected of the Parish Council? He noted that the Parish Council had made the application so was he right in assuming it would have the greater responsibility. Will the information required to support/defend the decision be presented to the Council?
2. Even if the process is successful – what is trying to be achieved?

David Alder from the Support Group confirmed that what has been gathered by the group, is entirely at the Parish Council's disposal. The decision will have to be defended by the Applicant and so the information is to support the response. He had contacted consultants, Dale Ingram, independently and taken advice (which is why this course of action was being followed).

In terms of the future, there is interest from a number of parties to try and acquire/keep the pub as a pub, for the community.

The Parish Council has a responsibility. There is a lot of behind the scenes work being carried out on the premise that the Parish Council will be pro-active. Philip White confirmed that at this stage they are merely waiting for the review by the District Council. The Parish Council Clerk can expect a letter which will trigger the next step.

ACTION: Clerk to contact Council to confirm we have the information if needed.

Councillors thanked David Alder and Phillip White for their hard work in collecting and presenting this information and for attending the meeting to provide their update.

David and Phillip then left the meeting.

7. Spoil left by the dredging of Strine Brook alongside Meretown Lane

Cllr Carver explained that this relates to Meretown Lane running north from the A518 towards Forton. At the A518 end of the lane, Strine Brook runs northwards on the eastern side of the lane then crosses beneath the lane to run northwest

towards the canal. Around a month ago the brook was dredged. The spoil has been heaped on the western verge of Meretown Lane between the lane and the brook/ditch. Much of this dredged material consists of litter and rubbish, tipped over the years. It is a most unsightly array of bottles, cans and tyres all embedded in the mud. Cllr Carver had contacted the Environment Agency but they advised they had not been responsible and it would be a matter for the land owner. It is not known who the land owner is. Cllr Carver also confirmed he had approached Stafford Borough Council, Street Scene who were also unhelpful. However; the litter is on the public highway and normally Street Scene would act. Cllr Carver wondered if the rubbish was bagged, would Street Scene then help.

ACTION: Cllr Carver agreed to contact Mick Bailey at Stafford Borough Council to check if bagged rubbish would be collected. If so a volunteer group to be arranged.

8. Volume of walkers through Forton

Cllr Hammond had noted the volume of walkers through Forton had significantly increased during lockdown. This was seen as a positive, as it is nice to see people enjoying the countryside. Councillors mentioned that a lot of stiles and fences were in need of repair.

Cllr Smith noted that he had been using “On The Map”:

<https://apps2.staffordshire.gov.uk/WEB/OnTheMap/RuralAccess> to report issues to the County Council and this had proved useful and things were being actioned.

9. Clarification on calling a formal meeting re planning

The clerk asked for clarification on when it was necessary to call a formal meeting to make observations on planning applications. Cllr Smith said that different parishes do things differently. Some just require individual comments to be submitted to the clerk and others insist on a meeting. Fundamentally it would be determined by how contentious the plans were. Cllr Farrington confirmed that Borough Councillors had responsibility to call in cases if required and it was important to note that you can register to support as well as to object.

10. Any other business

Cllr Toon stated that if the council are going to resurface the A519 as they said they would be this year, it may be a good idea to try and coincide this with a litter pick to clear the hedge banks on the narrow parts of the road, which would be dangerous to walk otherwise. It would be a prime opportunity to do this whilst there are traffic lights.

ACTION: Clerk to write and ask re the opportunity identified/ get clarification on whether this can be done

11. Correspondence

The clerk confirmed that an email had been received, via the parish website, regarding a pond in a garden flooding a neighbouring footpath. Cllr Smith confirmed that he had also received a call about a large newly built pond in a garden at the Old School House near Radmore. It is alleged that the pond is now causing flooding of the adjacent footpath and causing a blockage. Cllr Smith had looked into this to establish if planning permission is required for ponds, he made reference to the difference between using machinery for excavation or a hand shovel. Depending on the size of the pool and the nature of the obstruction he believes this issue might come under the County Council. Cllr Farrington said that if the issue is an obstruction on a footpath (e.g. flooding) then it would be a matter for the County Council, if not it may be necessary to refer to the Environment Agency.

ACTION: Clerk to carry out site visit to identify actual issue and escalate as appropriate.

Date of Next Meeting: 12th May 2021

The meeting was closed by the Chairman at **20:08**