

FORTON PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING

held in Forton Parish Rooms at 7:00 p.m.

on Wednesday 22 November 2023

- 1 PRESENT:**
Councillors: S Spencer (Chair), P Hammond (Vice Chair), D Carver (RFO), A Hawkins, O Thomas.
- 2 IN ATTENDANCE:**
Clerk: Carol Little
Borough Councillor: Cllr Spencer
- 3 Apologies for Absence:**
Cllr Z Young sent apologies. Cllr Winnington did not attend.
- 4 Declaration of Councillors' Personal Interests:**
None
- 5 Minutes of Meeting Held on 19 July 2023**
- 5.1 Approval:**
Minutes were accepted and signed by the Chairman without amendment.
- 5.2 Matters Arising Not on this Agenda:**
- 1** The Clerk advised that she had been unable to locate access to the abandoned bed under the canal bridge nor could see it from the road. She confirmed that she had secured details of the landowner from the Canal Trust. She was given further instructions and agreed to visit again to take photographs to submit to the landowner.
ACTION: CLERK
- 2** The 40 mph sign on the A519 had finally been reinstated.
- 3** Pecuniary interest forms - Council has not chased these but Cllr Hammond confirms he had contacted the Council following the previous meeting which confirmed that if there were no changes - new forms did not have to be completed.
- 4** The septic tank discharge in Sutton - The clerk confirmed this had been reported but she had not heard further either way. She agreed to check the current position.
ACTION: CLERK
- 6 Parish Councillor Vacancy**
The Clerk advised there had been no interest expressed in the current councillor vacancy despite a poster being displayed on the notice boards. Cllr Hawkins agreed to give the clerk's details to a resident in Sutton who had previously expressed his interest in becoming a councillor. The clerk

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agreed to try and locate the poster so that it could be uploaded to the website.

ACTION: CLERK

7

Financial Report; Authority for Payments & Budget

7.1 Financial Statement 2023/2024 Quarter Three

The financial statement dated 10th November 2023 was discussed, approved and signed by the Chairman. The bank accounts were as follows:

Current Account @ 03 November 2023	£125.00
Reserve Account @ 03 November 2023	£1721.85
TOTAL	£1,846.85

7.2

Authority for Payments

Precept Payments	Budget £ p	Agreed to Pay
Clerk's Salary – 3 rd quarter *(net)	£122.85	98.25
PAYE	nil	24.60
Clerk's Expenses – 3 rd quarter	15.00	nil
Website maintenance Hugo Fox (repayment to DLC via expense claim)	122.28	
Website Domain renewal; 123-Reg Ltd. (repayment to DLC via expense claim)	28.78	
DLC total payment		151.06
SPCA Training Courses £36.00 & £90.00	300.00	126.00
SBC Uncontested Election Expenses	185.46	100.74

*The gross salary is £122.85 and PAYE was determined by the payroll service.

The council approved the above payments

ACTION: RFO

7.3

Budget 2024/2025

The draft budget for next year was discussed. It was based on a forecast to the year's end which indicated a precept balance being brought forward of £816.60.

Inflation, though falling, is still high at present, the Consumer Prices Index (CPI – All items) in September 2023 was at +6.3% and fell to +4.7% in October. Many of the services we purchase are not thought to be increasing by as much as this. It is believed that most organisations are trying to hold increases closer to 3%, so it is 3% that has been generally applied in the budget.

A significant new item is £122.28 for the maintenance of the website. This charge has been applied by our website developer, HugoFox Ltd. which hitherto has made no charge for this service. After shopping around and

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taking advice, this still appears the best and least costly option and is known as the HugoFox “Bronze Subscription”.

The budget, as drafted, requires a precept of £1,294.85 (including Council Tax Support Grant of £38.85 (last year £43.65)). However; it was agreed at the meeting to increase the Clerk’s salary from +4.7% to +6% which increased the precept requirement to **£1302.85**. The council authorised the RFO to ask SBC for this latter figure.

The general contingency remains at 20% (£300.67). The reserve of £315.42 is now the difference between maximum planned expenditure and the budgeted remaining bank balance.

Stafford Borough Council has announced its concurrent grant will remain the same as in recent years, **£270.00**. The council authorised the RFO to ask SBC for the maximum concurrent grant.

ACTION: RFO

The precept requirement for the last 5 years is shown below:

Year	Annual Precept £ p
2024-2025	1,302.85
2023-2024	1,229.65
2022-2023	1,045.46
2021-2022	1,110.83
2020-2021	1,072.27

The council then approved the budget as amended and the Chairman agreed to sign a copy once it had been redrafted.

ACTION: RFO & Chairman

7.4 Concurrent Grants

The council was reminded that any Concurrent Grants for the current year must be paid by 31st March 2023 or risk being forfeit to Stafford Borough Council. Councillors would encourage applications for consideration at the meeting next March.

ACTION: Councillors

7.5 Banking

To date, NatWest has said nothing more about dual authorisation of payments via its app, so the cheque book remains essential for the time being.

8 Matters Requiring Attention in the Parish

- 1** Councillors reported large pothole developing on the A519. Borough Cllr Spencer advised this was the County Council’s responsibility. The Clerk agreed to photograph and report the pothole. The Chair advised that although Cllr Winnington was not here to update us we should keep

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pushing for improvements to the road. Following a meeting in January 2023 councillors had been expecting resurfacing, the Clerk agreed to check with Highways to see when this would be taking place.

ACTION: CLERK

- 2 Cllr Hammond advised that no grit has been deposited at the lower end of the church wall. Cllr Carver confirmed that the grit bin in Meretown had collapsed. The clerk agreed to address both of these issues.

ACTION: CLERK

9 **Correspondence**

The clerk advised she had received a letter about concessionary bus passes and a poster to display on noticeboards. The Chair observed that we had no regular bus service. B Cllr Spencer asked if there was any interest in pursuing the return of a bus service but, as it had been so infrequent before is stopped, it was felt there would not be the support required to facilitate the change.

ACTION: CLERK

10 **Any Other Business**

10.1 **Red Lion, Sutton**

Borough Cllr Spencer informed councillors that the Planning Committee had unanimously turned down application to build houses on the site of the Red Lion. He stated that the Action group was looking to approach a developer. The committee had considered highway concerns, flooding, drains, countryside, massing of the area, and also noted that the requirement for that type of development was not met. The issues were not easy to overcome. Initially the application had been for 9 houses, then 6 houses. The fact that the original pub is now an Asset of Community Value was also a consideration and that stays on record for 5 years. B Cllr Spencer passed on thanks from members of the action group to the parish council for getting the ACV order and stated that action group was going to put forward incremental issues i.e. broken windows, dereliction, area unsafe etc. B Cllr Spencer confirmed there was nothing to prevent the developer reapplying for planning permission again at any stage.

11 **Date of Next Meeting**

Wednesday 13 March 2024

Meeting closed at 7:36 pm.