

SHEPHERDSWELL WITH GOLDRED PARISH COUNCIL

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DRAFT

Minutes of the Council Meeting held on the 19th February 2020 in Shepherdswell Village Hall at 1930hrs.

PRESENT

Cllrs K Roberts (Chairman), A Barter, J Bulaitis, B Crush, M Elgar, M Harris, M Ovenden, E Stockley, L Symes, C White and C Tearle (Parish Clerk).

IN ATTENDANCE

Cllr G Lymer (KCC), and 10 members of the public.

Reports

Please refer to Appendix A.

13/2020 Change of Agenda Order

Cllr M Ovenden moved a resolution to suspend the Standing Orders to move agenda item 12 to 10. It was resolved to agree to this by 6 votes to 4.

14/2019 Apologies of Absence

Cllr M Harris and J West (Community Warden).

15/2019 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the 15th January 2020 were approved and signed.

16/2019 Declarations of Interest

Cllr C White – OSI item 20/2020.

17/2019 Public Participations Limited to Items on the Agenda

S Tanner complained that she had not received a Housing Needs Survey and said that she thought the Parish Council is responsible for providing safe parking.

Mr N Baker re-iterated that car parking cannot be taken in isolation when considering the problems of Cox Hill Rd.

Clarification was also sort on the definition of “three clear days” when it comes to publishing council agendas. The Parish Clerk gave an explanation.

18/2020 Clerk`s Report

- a) To inform you that we have received a Freedom of Information request about the village hall car park relating to a request for the Council Minutes from 1989.
- b) To note that the meeting for Parish Councillors at DDC on the Emerging Local Plan is now planned for 17th March in the DDC offices at 2pm. It will be limited to two councillors. It was resolved to appoint Cllrs K Roberts and M Elgar to attend and report back with Cllr A Barter as reserve.

19/2020 Finance

It was resolved to approve the schedule of payments and bank balances.

Balances as at the 3 rd February 2020	£
Current A/C	5,892.98
Business A/C	51,300.69

Income

Bank Interest	10.22
M Wright (Hairdresser)	260.00
KCC Highways (Coldred Verges)	514.00

Expenditure

C Tearle (Salary Jan)	604.83
C Tearle (Expenses Jan)	136.99
Harmer & Sons (Jan)	1013.00
K Beale (Small Works Contractor Jan)	313.00
USS (H/Hall Parking Bays)	649.20
GK Graphics (Car Park Disabled Signs)	168.00
SVHC (Jan/Feb)	178.00
Shepherdswell Village Green Association (Christmas Lighting)	140.97
DDC (Cricket Club Planning Application)	117.00

20/2020 Parish Council's Website

Mr L Lyons who currently is employed by the Council to look after its email accounts and website, gave a presentation on the changes and new obligations the this Council would have to comply with from September 2020. Please Appendix A. It was resolved to go out to tender.

21/2020 Community Land Trust

Mr M Cobb gave an overview of the recently conducted Housing Needs Survey completed by Action for Communities in Rural Kent and the pre-application planning that has gone to DDC. Please see Appendix B

22/2020 Shepherdswell Village Hall Car Park

The following resolution on village hall car park was proposed by Cllr J Bulaitis and seconded by Cllr M Ovenden:

Following the decision taken at the January meeting to open the barrier in the Village Hall Car Park for a trial period, the Parish Council agrees to establish a Commission to review and propose solutions to the car parking problems around the Village Hall.

The Commission will monitor and evaluate the outcome of the three-month trial agreed at the last meeting.

The Commission will hold meetings with residents and users of the Village Hall, seeking to draw up a proposal or proposals to be considered by the Parish Council. It will aim to find a solution that balances the needs of residents, of hall users and also attempts to mitigate the safety issues on Cox Hill.

The Commission will be made up of: i) up to three members of the Parish Council; ii) up to three members of the Village Hall Committee; iii) up to three representatives of residents of the Cox Hill neighbourhood.

A lengthy debate followed when it was pointed out by Cllr M Elgar that all planning have conditions that parking is linked to use of the village hall and the Parish Clerk referred to the Restrictive Covenant between the Church Commissioners and the Parish Council which states: “for the construction of a Village Hall and for its subsequent use as such Village Hall together with associated car parking”.

It was resolved to approve the resolution with Cllrs T Barter, J Bulaitis and C Johnson representing the Council. This Commission was to report back by the 20th May 2020. Cllr J Bulaitis was to call the first meeting.

23/2020 Recreation Ground Facilities

Cllr M Elgar gave a report on the progress to date which included a meeting with the DDC Principle Infrastructure Planner.

It is apparent there are some grants only available which are dependent on the proposals for improvement being in the DDC Emerging Local Plan such as from the Football Foundation. We therefore need to react quickly to any proposals which emerge next month.

24/2020 Wildflower Zones

It was resolved to apply to KCC Highways for licenses to plant the verges to facilitate this project.

25/2020 Kent Downs AONB Tree Packs

It was resolved to accept this offer and involve Mr P Cooper.

26/2020 Grounds Maintenance Contract

The current arrangements come to an end in March. It was resolved to go out to tender with a minimum of three quotes.

27/2020 Kent Association Of Local Council (KALC)

Members noted the reports previously circulated.

28/2020 Matters of Interest/Items for the Next Agenda

- a) Stagecoach
- b) Pre-determination in relation to planning

29/2020 Date of the Next Meeting

This will be on the 18th March 2020 in Shepherdsweil Village Hall at 1930hrs.

Appendix A

Parish Council website – conforming to the new Digital Accessibility Rules

Background

The Government has committed to the implementation of the EU Accessibility Directive for all public sector websites. In short this sets out a series of measures that must be taken to ensure websites are accessible to people with a range of disabilities. The deadline for existing websites to comply with this

directive is September 2020. The standards used are based on the W3C initiative (WCAG 2.1). The directive requires public sector organisations to implement, test and show ongoing commitment to these standards.

All websites will need to publish (on the website) an Accessibility Statement. This states a commitment to the directive and lists any deficiency that may currently exist. The ICO accepts that the financial burden of completely complying with all aspects of the directive may be unreasonable for some small organisations initially but expects that they will work towards this. It is also expected that organisations will offer to supply information in an alternative, appropriate form where the website does not currently do that.

Although some websites are excluded from the requirement the Shepherdswell with Coldred Parish Council website does not fall into this category.

There are many elements to the regulations **which, to comply with fully**, a website would need to adapt but the most important and most needed ones are reasonably straightforward. These include:

- all content being machine readable for those with visual impairment who employ a device or software to convert the text **into** speech;
- text being of sufficient resolution to still be readable when magnified to at least 300%
- the contrast between text and background being set to an agreed level
- a text based description embedded in all images
- the website being navigable by use of the keyboard only
- links and buttons being clearly labelled and easy to find
- all documents created by the Parish Council and published on the website must be formatted so that screen readers can identify **Headings, Sub headings, Lists** etc
- the inclusion of an Accessibility Statement

Other elements such as allowing the user to change the font, the colour scheme, the hover response of links etc are also in the guidelines and may be more difficult to implement.

It should be stressed that whatever provider is chosen to ensure compliance, the onus of much of the work will lie with those providing information, doing so in a compliant manner. Compliance of information and documents provided by third parties and published on the website are not the responsibility of the PC. **Compliance of most archived documents on the site** is not required by the legislation. The organisations offering to host the websites will not provide reformatting of documents etc as part of the contracts they are offering.

How does this directly affect the Parish Council?

Currently the PC website is hosted by EIS Ltd at no cost to the council. It is not currently fully compliant with the directive and would need considerable work to rectify this. EIS have announced that from September they are no longer interested in hosting our website so the PC will have to find alternative arrangements. The costs of hosting after that point will fall to the PC as will the costs of obtaining a compliant website or paying to have the current website adapted.

What are options available to the Parish Council?

1. Do nothing

If we do not take any action the PC will cease to have a website from September 2020 as EIS will stop hosting it. I am not sure there is a legal requirement for a PC to have a website but as Shepherdswell with Coldred PC have had one for some time and assume that people use it to get information about Parish Council business and other matters it would seem to be a retrograde step to simply abandon it.

2. Host the existing website elsewhere

In theory, this could happen as the current website is based on a free Wordpress template. It is likely that some elements of the design could be claimed by EIS and they may wish to charge if we used that design. If we wanted to simply 'port' the existing website to another host we would also be looking at obtaining a backup copy of all information currently on the website from EIS and reinstalling it at its new location. The charge for this would be in the region of £400 (for the back up only, not the re-installation) if EIS are contracted to do it – but a review of how much of the existing data actually needs to be on a new website might reveal that a less expensive solution would be possible – this assumes that digital copies of all minutes and financial audits exist with the Parish Clerk.

The more important consideration here would be that the old website in its new location would not be compliant with the Accessibility directive

a. What happens if we publish a non-compliant website?

Aside from moral or ethical issues regarding a duty to make information available in a form that can be accessed by those with disabilities, the ICO (Information Commissioner's Office) could take action against the PC. Exactly what those actions might be is not yet clear but, at the very least it would be notice of failure to comply and a requirement to do so within a given time frame and at worst a large fine.

The size of the fine and the detail of any requirements imposed on the PC would almost certainly be dependent on the degree to which the website was compliant, whether efforts were being made to rectify deficits and whether it was considered reasonable to incur large costs to implement some aspects of the guidelines if it was not apparent that anyone would be at a serious disadvantage if those aspects did not exist.

In my opinion, the ICO is looking to encourage Public Sector organisations to work with them towards a goal of full compliance rather than to inflict heavy fines for not doing so.

3. Use one of the commercial organisations offering to host a compliant website

There are a lot of companies who are pitching to take over the running of Parish Council websites. In particular, this PC (and all other Kent PCs) are receiving a lot of publicity from Cantium Solutions Ltd, a company wholly owned by Kent County Council. The points below are based mainly on the Cantium offer.

a. Advantages

Design, implementation and maintenance (platform only) would be taken care of by these companies.

There would be Service Level agreements in place for support and these companies are guaranteeing that their websites will be fully compliant with the Accessibility directives and tested to prove this.

Background protocols and software which keep the websites running would be kept up-to-date as part of any contract.

Back up management would also be provided in the event of a website going down, becoming corrupted or being hacked.

If a large number of PCs take up this offer there may be a degree of leverage to ensure the service is appropriate to needs.

b. Disadvantages

The initial costs are quite high (around £1000 for the first year) and ongoing costs would not be inconsiderable (£670+ per annum).

Adding updated information to the website (minutes, agendas, public notices etc) would not be included in the above pricing

Cantium require a sign up for a minimum of three years

Hosting would presumably be on their own servers (or more likely virtual servers from Amazon, Microsoft etc) which might mean the ShepherdswellColdred-PC.gov.uk domain currently in use for email services could not be used for the new website.

Some facilities which might be of interest to the Parish Council would not be available as standard (eg stats regarding website traffic and where it comes from)

It is not clear how 'customised' each website will be for each of the Parish Councils taking up the offer. Changes to the design of the website, away from the template provided, might incur further costs.

The requirement to sign up for three years in advance and by a given deadline (currently the end of February 2020) mean that Parish Councils have to take on trust the product and service which will be delivered.

4. Design and build a compliant website and host it under our current agreement for email services

The email services and .gov.uk domain currently used by the Parish Council are hosted in the UK by a company called Besthosts (hosting of .gov.uk domains is controlled by the government and limited to approved providers). As part of that service the Parish Council already has available webspace which is currently unused as EIS host the website.

The current Shepherds Well with Coldred Parish Council website is based on a free website content management system (CMS) called Wordpress. This is what is known as an open source application which means that anyone can customise their copy of Wordpress in any way they want and even sell or give away those customisations to others. Over 30 per cent of all websites on the entire world wide web are run on Wordpress.

Currently I update the Parish Council website and make minor changes to the layout and appearance. The amount of customisation that can take place is limited as EIS host the website and have it 'locked down' basically so people who do not know what they are doing can't break it. Although I would not describe myself as a Wordpress expert, author or designer I do manage and have designed Wordpress websites for individuals and organisations for many years. There is a very large community of Wordpress users out there in cyberspace and knowledge is freely available. Once up and running Wordpress websites tend to be stable and reasonably secure (if properly configured). In the unlikely event that I was not able to solve a problem that arose with the website, or I was no longer available, some help would be given under the PC's current contract with Besthost and there are many freelance Wordpress experts available who would troubleshoot problems on a one off basis.

If the PC wanted to go down this route I could design a new website which would be broadly compliant with the accessibility directive and host it under the current arrangements. This would mean that the new website would have the address of www.shepherds Well Coldred - pc.gov.uk. Although initial costs would be around £500 the ongoing costs would be much smaller as the PC already pays for the hosting. It is possible that additional space and bandwidth would be needed but the cost for this would be an increase in the region of tens of pounds a year rather than hundreds

c. Advantages

The website would use the Parish Council's own existing 'shepherds Well Coldred - pc.gov.uk' domain giving users confidence it was genuine and official

Running costs would be minimal compared with the Cantium offer (most likely an increase from £70 to around £100 for hosting plus potentially some updating and version control of underlying software on ad hoc basis)

Design of the site could be influenced by what the PC wants and ongoing 'tweaks' would be possible. I would suggest a review of what the current website provides and analysis of how useful this is and what other information, if any, could be provided

Accessibility standards could be 'phased in' – screen reader compatibility, re-sizing of text, keyboard navigation, recommended contrast levels between text and background etc would be available at launch of the website. Other enhancements – the ability for users to change colour schemes 'on the fly', changing the way links appear etc – could be added at a later date if it was seen that there was a demand from users for this (or if the ICO insisted these things were implemented).

Having complete control of the website and its platform would allow the PC to gather

statistics on the number of people accessing the site and the information they were interested in.

The option to move to a different solution would be possible at any time if the PC felt the arrangement was not satisfactory. I would not tie the PC into a fixed length contract. I have worked for the Parish Council (and others) for some time and have demonstrated my reliability and skill levels. I already update information on the website and would be able to continue to do that within a website I had built – of course I could, and would recommend that I did, train others to do this.

d. Disadvantages

I am an individual freelancer and cannot offer the range of services some larger organisations might be able to.

The website would be hosted by a third party (current email providers BestHost) and hence dependent on their continuing existence and provision of good service (I have no reason to believe the good service we have had so far would not continue).

In the event of a major outage coinciding with my temporary unavailability (illness, holidays, other commitments) I do not have a team behind me to step into the breach. Inevitably this would cause some delay in rectifying such a problem – though I would stress that such a scenario whilst not impossible would be unlikely. Many issues can be dealt with remotely from anywhere in the world where there is an internet connection.

5. There are several other organisations specialising in providing Parish Council and similar websites. I have spoken to a couple of these but not been impressed by their responses or prices. It seems that most have an out-of-the-box solution that encompasses both hosting and maintenance of their existing design and this is not necessarily the best fit for Shepherdswell with Coldred Parish Council

Conclusions

The Parish Council does need to make a decision on what path to take regarding the website. The deadline for compliance with the new Accessibility guidelines is 1st September 2020. Cantium have set a deadline of February 28th for PCs to sign up. Other than as a sales technique I can see no justification for this deadline and doubt whether a PC wanting to sign up after that date would be turned away. Cantium have also said they will only offer this service if a minimum of 100 PCs sign up but anyway I believe they have more or less reached that goal.

My feeling is that the Parish Council do not need to be railroaded into taking an expensive solution to the need for changes and should take a measured approach and a staged roll out responding to the needs of the local community.

As the Parish Council already own the domain ‘shepherdswellcoldred-pc.gov.uk’, and web space is already included in the annual fee for that domain, it would seem to be sensible that a new website should adopt that address and make use of the web space. Cantium have not made it clear whether they will take over the ‘kentparishes’ web addresses but if so they may be willing to set up and automatic redirect to any new URL the PC chooses to use.

I am happy to answer any further questions on this issue and to help broker a deal with any provider should this be the decision of the Parish Council.

Appendix B

SUMMARY OF SHEPHERDSWELL CLT HOUSING NEEDS SURVEY

General

- 29% response rate to the survey
- 76% of respondents who answered the question (70% of all respondents) said they would support a development of affordable housing for local people provided by the CLT
- At the time of writing the report, the cheapest property found available to buy in the parish was a 3 bed bungalow for £290,000 – would need a deposit of £43,500 and income of £70,429 to buy this property as a first time buyer.

- There were no properties found available to rent in the parish

Housing Need

- The need for a total of 15 affordable homes was identified – 3 of those homes were required for older households
- The need for 12 open market properties for older households was also identified so that they could downsize/move to more suitable housing for their needs.
- The total need, tenure and size of property identified by the survey is below -

Rented accommodation:

5 x 1 bed (3 for older households; 2 of whom said they would prefer 2 bedrooms)

5 x 2 bed

1 x 3 bed

Shared ownership:

3 x 2 bed

1 x 3 bed

Open market housing for older households:

9 x 2 bed

3 x 3 bed

The CLT Proposes to develop:

Rented accommodation:

2 x 1 bed flats

2 x 2 bed flats 3 x 2 bed houses

1 x 3 bed house

Shared ownership

1 x 2 bed house

1 x 3 bed house

Open market

2 x 2 bed detached bungalows

1 x 3 bed detached house/chalet bungalow

Appendix B

Cllr G Lymer (KCC)

Public Health England are working to make sure the Coronavirus is contained.

The Lower Thames Crossing will now be east of Dartford after some design changes and have no link to the M20.

There is a need for a radical overhaul of the Community Charge system.

With our departure from the EU shortly, it is hoped to set up liaison officers from the UK, France and Belgium to facilitate the flow of traffic.

Cllr L Keen (DDC)

She is meeting with DDC officers over the Emerging Local Plan on the 2nd March.

The DDC Community Charge increase will be £4.95, the maximum allowed before a referendum with an increase in facility. The Rate Support Grant from government is now £50K.

She has had to deal with issues around Coxhill traffic lights and building at 45 Eythorne Rd, Shepherdswell.