

# ALTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of meeting at the Coronation Hall, 7.20 pm, May 9, 2019

**Present:** Steve Hepworth (Chair), Polly Carson, Ben Owen, Robert Carpenter Turner, Alex Oliver, Mike Golden, Richard Heacock, Debby Lester (Responsible Financial Officer), Charles Reiss (Clerk). In attendance: Cllr Paul Oatway. Apologies: none.

Minutes: The minutes of the previous two meetings (March 7 and April 4) were agreed and signed by the Chair.

Matters arising: none

**030/19 Annual Governance Statement:** Debby Lester (RFO) reported that the annual audit had been completed, and checked independently by Arthur Johnson. As required, she put a series of questions regarding the audit to PC members. Each was answered satisfactorily. Having been approved by the Parish Council as a body, the audit was signed by the Chair and by the Clerk.

**031/19 Accounting Statement and Certificate of Exemption:** The Accounting Statement was presented by Debby Lester and signed by her as RFO and by the Chair. The Certificate, confirming that Parish Council expenses are below £25,000, was signed by the Chair.

**032/19 White Horse maintenance / grant:** Paul Oatway reported that Wiltshire Council has no budget allotted for this purpose but suggested Pewsey Community Area Board might contribute. Members again queried why this very small Parish Council, which is neither landowner nor tenant, should be responsible for both maintenance and costs of a nationally-important monument. The main expense – re-chalking - when last carried out in 2009 had cost £25,000. Cost pressures are much increased because the monument is in a heavily-protected area designated one of the most important chalk downland sites in Europe, denying vehicle access. Although the next re-chalking could be up to five years away, members felt strongly that it was not reasonable or practical for the parish to bear this recurring cost on top of regular care expenses. Options for grant included New College, Oxford, as landowners, and support of Tim Carson on that aspect was welcomed. Members and PO agreed to continue to pursue possible funding streams.

**033/19 Community Infrastructure Levy:** Grant available, based on the population of the parish, could be up to £11,800. However, possible uses seemed limited, for example playground refurbishment; and it appeared

that any grant, levied on developers, might be tied to the development area.

- 034/19 Playground repairs:** Alex Oliver reported a very poor response to requests for quotes, possibly because the job was so small. Agreed that he approach Wicksteed Playgrounds as the original installers.
- 035/19 PC representative Robert Pile Memorial Trust:** after discussion, suggested that Polly Carson, already Clerk to the Trust, should also serve as PC rep. Proposed Alex Oliver, seconded Steve Hepworth. Agreed unanimously.
- 036/19 Neighbourhood Plan, personnel:** AO reported so far two or three residents had expressed interest, forming a good core. He would like to have a representative from each village. He had drafted a process map and the next step was to agree with Wiltshire Council the area to be covered and a timetable. They would then allocate an officer to assist.
- 037/19 Canalside war memorial/RAF bunker – access:** BO reported that one stile leading to the war memorial needs replacing. SH to follow up with David Carson. Mr John Dunford, speaking with the consent of the Chair and as owner of the bunker site, said there was no legal right of access since it was private land. However he was very ready to allow access on an informal basis provided he would not be held liable for any accident. He intended to replant hedges and flowers, and RAF cadets from Devizes were keen to do restoration work on the structure. Members thanked Mr Dunford for his clarification and for continued access to the wartime bunker and RAF memorial as an important part of the parish history. They suggested that, with his consent and with arrangements and costs covered by the PC, a sign should be placed to make clear access was via a "permissive path" not a public right of way. Proposed Steve Hepworth, seconded Mike Golden. Agreed unanimously.
- 038/19 Parish Council vacancy – procedure:** the Clerk reported that a vacancy would officially arise at the end of the current meeting with a letter of resignation from PC member Ben Owen. On receipt, Wiltshire Council would issue a Notice of Vacancy which must be displayed for 14 working days. During that time an election could be called by signed request from 10 parish residents. The cost, to be borne by the parish, would amount to approximately £2,000. If no election called it would be open to the PC to co-opt.
- 039/19 Diversity, opportunity, transparency and representation on Alton PC:** *Background: the document on these topics issued the day before had been seen by some as criticism of the Clerk. Alex Oliver, in an email circulated immediately before the meeting, said he had no such intention and apologised.*

Charles Reiss asked consent to leave the meeting to allow free discussion. He completely rebutted any apparent criticism but in the circumstances wished to put his position as Clerk in the hands of PC members. It was healthy to review the position of officers, as the PC had last done on his initiative two years ago. He then left the meeting. Mike Golden took minutes.

In discussion some members voiced strong concerns at the system of co-opting new members, saying it was not open enough and too narrow. Others felt strongly that it was openly and properly conducted. Members suggested the detailed proposals published by AO only the day before merited more time to be properly considered. Three motions were then proposed by Robert Carpenter Turner, seconded Polly Carson: 1) That the Parish Council fully accepts the apology offered by Alex Oliver. 2) That the Parish Council requests Charles Reiss to continue as Clerk. 3) That Alex Oliver prepare a list of diversity issues to be discussed at a future Parish Council meeting. All three motions were agreed unanimously. CR, informed when he rejoined the meeting, accepted the apology.

Any other business:

**040/19 Cheques:** DL presented the following cheques for signature: Wiltshire Association of Local Councils annual subscription £99.77; Speed Indicator Device, Manningford PC, £500; Community First Trading (insurance) £600.62; plaque for memorial oaks, Ben Owen, £35.80.

**041/19 Resignation:** Ben Owen thanked members and officers for his thoroughly enjoyable time on the PC. Members thanked him in return.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 8.53 pm.