

NORTH HORSHAM PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON-LINE ON TUESDAY 24TH NOVEMBER 2020 COMMENCING AT 6.00pm

Present: Councillors: - A. Britten (Chairman), Mrs K. Burgess, P. Burgess, M. Cockerill, J. Davidson, Mrs R. Ginn, Mrs J. Gough, R. Knight, D. Mahon, R. Millington, T. Rickett B.E.M.*, D. Searle, A. Shine*, J Smithurst, S. Torn, R. Turner (Vice Chairman), I. Wassell and Mrs S. Wilton.

* denotes absence.

In attendance: Parish Clerk - Pauline Whitehead BA(Hons) FSLCC, Deputy Clerk – Vivien Edwards.

FC/528/20 Public Forum.

There were fourteen members of the public in attendance.

Seven people spoke in support of the value of the iconic, veteran oak at Earles Meadow especially in respect of its biodiversity and the importance it holds in the history of North Horsham and the wider, surrounding area. Its importance is endorsed by it being part of the North Horsham Parish Council logo. It was suggested that an information board produced with input from young people in the parish would enhance understanding of the iconic status that the veteran, oak tree holds in the identity of North Horsham and explain how it supports the environment around it.

FC/529/20 Apologies for absence.

Cllr Rickett B.E.M. was not in attendance. Cllr Shine was not in attendance due to technical issues.

FC/530/20 Declarations of interest.

There were no Declarations of Interest.

FC/531/20 Veteran Oak at Earles Meadow

Councillors considered a report from Mr W Jones, the Senior Arboricultural Officer at Horsham District Council (HDC) who inspected the veteran oak at Earles Meadow with his colleague from HDC on 4th November 2020.

It was noted that between May 2015 and July 2019 the Parish Council had spent £5,700 on the veteran oak. A significant amount of the money had been spent on expert, professional advice and work that had been recommended to prolong the life of the tree. Regrettably, the tree shed a large bough due to 'summer drop' in 2019 and urgent work had to be

undertaken to the tree to ensure that it was not compromised and that infection did not enter the tree through the wound.

Experts' advise that the tree is approximately 250 years old and classed as a veteran tree, but with appropriate management it could live for a very long time and become an ancient tree. Ancient trees are considered to be of national importance as they are part of the heritage of the UK.

In October 2020 urgent work was required to remove a large bough that had broken away from the veteran oak. The cost of this, plus a temporary cordon 21 metres around the tree for public safety cost £1,003.

It had been hoped that the work that had been done would reduce the pressure on the tree, but the diligent work of the tree surgeon who expended significant time monitoring two cracks, prompted him to make contact with HDC Senior Arboricultural Officer. This resulted in his site visit on 4th November 2020 and the subsequent report which recommended bringing forward work to reduce the crown of the tree all round, by up to 3m laterally and to 4m in height, improve the bracing and to provide suitable fencing at a distance of 21 metres from the trunk to ensure public safety. The cost of the work is approximately £6,700.

Councillors carefully considered the information they had been given. It was observed that the Parish Council had a duty of care to members of the public and that it was important that a suitable fence which made it clear that no-one should enter the area around the tree should be installed. A gate would be required to allow access for authorised work. It was suggested that acorns or small saplings from the tree should be collected and planted so that there was a replacement for the future. This could be an activity that young people in the parish could get involved in. It was also observed that significant work that wouldn't support the future of the tree was unlikely to be agreed by the Planning Authority as expert advice indicated that this tree could be managed safely into the future.

Councillors were invited to vote to indicate their support for the future of the tree and it was RESOLVED unanimously to reduce the crown of the tree all round, by up to 3m laterally and to 4m in height, improve the bracing and provide suitable fencing to ensure public safety at a cost of approximately £6,700. The urgent pruning and bracing work would be undertaken at the earliest opportunity, but it was recommended that the Property Committee should have the chance to discuss fencing options before any work associated with that was started.

All except one member of the public left the meeting.

FC/532/20 Value for Money Report commissioned by West Sussex Association of Local Councils (WSALC)

The Council had previously been informed about a proposal put forward by WSALC to undertake a Value for Money review on the services provided by the Surrey and Sussex Association of Local Council (SSALC). SSALC provides advice and support for East Sussex, West Sussex and Surrey.

North Horsham Parish Council had the opportunity to put forward a view on 4 'special resolutions' that were being put forward at the forthcoming WSALC Annual General Meeting on 2nd December 2020 (the meeting had been postponed from 10th November 2020). The Council had nominated two Councillors, Cllr Britten and Cllr Mahon to vote at the AGM, but they needed greater clarity on the Council view. Correspondence relating to this matter had been circulated by the Clerk on an ongoing basis, but councillors were specifically directed to:-

- An organisational diagram.
- Progress on the strategy review adopted by the SSALC Board dated 14th November 2019.
- Report brief for Professor Colin Copus (De Montfort University) who had been commissioned by WSALC to undertake an independent review.
- Letters from WSALC Board of Directors August 2020 and 28th October 2020.
- Letter from the Chairman of the Horsham Association of Local Councils (HALC) 22nd September 2020.
- Letter from Tony Steer, director of WSALC and Chair of the Mid Sussex Association of Local Councils.
- Redacted e-mail between WSALC and member councils who expressed their concern at how events were unfolding.
- The agenda for the WSALC AGM to be held on 2nd December 2020 which contains a special resolution on which Parish Council representatives will be invited to vote.

The discussion that ensued noted that it would be considered good practice to undertake an organisational review, especially as the organisation had been in existence for around 6 years and noted that SSALC had already initiated this. Should the WSALC commissioned report following an independent review at a cost of £7,000 be completed, it could offer some helpful insights into how services could be improved and give better value for money. It was observed that the background research

for the report had started and presumably costs had been incurred, so seeing the findings to date could also be useful. It was suggested that whilst representative can only attend the AGM, they should keep an eye on key issues throughout the year, especially as communication with member councils to date has been relatively poor.

In order to allow the Parish Council representatives on WSALC to vote at the WSALC AGM on 2nd December, the Council voted to decide a Council view on the four special resolutions in respect of the current value for money study tabled at that meeting.

The Council RESOLVED to support all four of the resolutions below.

- a) the Company Directors cease to progress the current value for money study.**
- b) the Company Directors work constructively with SSALC to conclude the current strategic review which includes a value for money element.**
- c) the company Directors establish a clear mechanism for engaging Parish Councils in West Sussex in studies that fall outside of the SSALC operational framework**
- d) that the current Chairman and Vice Chairman of WSALC stands down.**

FC/533/20 Date of next Council meeting.

The next Parish Council Meeting will be held on Thursday 14th January 2021 (Scheduled).

There being no other business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 7.15 pm.

..... Signed

.....Dated