



NORTH HORSHAM PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF NORTH HORSHAM PARISH COUNCIL HELD AT ROFFEY MILLENNIUM HALL, CRAWLEY ROAD, HORSHAM ON THURSDAY 30th JULY 2026 COMMENCING AT 7.30pm

Present: Councillors: Mrs. K. Burgess, J. Dancer, J. Davidson (Chairman), Mrs. G. Davidson-Fernandez, Mrs. J. Gough, R. Knight*, D. Mahon, S. Raby, T. Rickett B.E.M., D. Searle, N. Simmonds, J. Smithurst*, S. Torn, R. Turner and Mrs. S. Wilton (Vice-Chairman)

* denotes absence

In attendance: Sarah Norman (Clerk)
6 Members of the Public
Dist. Cllr. Walters

FC/56/26 Public Forum

Several members of the public spoke during the Public Forum with the following comments made :

- The Horsham Society would support one Town Council. With the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) ongoing, and the possibility of a Unitary replacing the current County and District Council model, due to it's location Horsham is ideally placed to play a major role alongside places such as Crawley and Chichester.
- It is desirable for local parish/town councils to remain nonpolitical but there is a fear that this will not be the case in the future. It makes sense to have a combined authority to manage the assets, and this may also bring economies of scale.
- Horsham is too small to have two Councils for one town; they are each affected by the others' actions. NHPC does have the historical record of running a Council.

FC/57/26 Apologies for absence

The Council received apologies for absence from Cllrs. Knight & Smithurst.

FC/58/26 Declarations of Interest

It was **NOTED** that all Members who live within the Parish boundary and or receive the Members' Allowance already have an agreed dispensation to discuss matters relating to both as without the Dispensation, the number of persons prohibited from participating in any business would have been so great a proportion of the body transacting the business as to impede the transaction of the business (Min. FC/08/23 refers).

Cllr. Raby declared a non-Disclosable Interest as the Horsham Town Council Member for Kingslea Ward and stated that he would take part in the discussion but would not vote on the matter.

FC/59/26 Community Governance Review Consultation

The Clerk's report, including the link to the HDC Consultation, was **NOTED**.

Members then made the following comments :

- There was a feeling that North Horsham was being railroaded into the merger and that more time was needed to consider and to gather more evidence. North Horsham Parish Council has been in existence for 50 years and has been successful. There is concern about combining with Horsham Town Council (HTC) which has only been operating for 4 months. There may be an argument for a merger in the future but at the current time when the Council has decided whether it is for or against the merger, a strategy needs to be developed to explain NHPC's position.
- Could be described as a hostile takeover. With HTC only being in existence for 4 months, it was felt that HTC were looking at the NHPC assets. It would be wrong to allow a merger at this time. Maybe appropriate in the future but should not be decided on the basis of a 6/7 week consultation over the summer period when many are away. The current LGR was already causing enough disruption to local arrangements.
- NHPC is a very well-run Council and benefits the residents. A merger with the new Town Council could result in unintended changes.
- Their immediate reaction was that the Council's should merge but this was a little early. Would prefer to see some collaboration between the two councils moving forward and liaison with HTC. It would seem sensible to let HTC find their feet and then reconsider in 10 years' time.
- NHPC has in the past supported the creation of a Town Council for the previously unparished areas, but it is premature to make a decision on merging. NHPC has always been non-political. Parishes do not need to be and should look at matters from a personal/local viewpoint.
- NHPC has spent many years creating a good relationship with residents and provides an opportunity for them to be listened to. If a merger was to go ahead it was questioned whether residents would still feel this available to them and may not feel that a Town Council was as approachable.
- A merger could lose the goodwill of the residents of North Horsham.
- Impact on the Parish portion of the precept paid by North Horsham residents.
- Unfortunately, many residents do not know who the Parish Council are.

- NHPC has successfully undertaken large engagement events with the local community in the past, when big issues have come to the fore such as Mowbray or the football club relocation.
- The timing of this review, with the Town Council only recently being created, is unfortunate. There isn't a defined outcome for this process. It would make sense for North Horsham to be part of Horsham if this was being considered from scratch; need to have the buy in from local residents but could be persuaded.
- The possibility of a Unitary Authority does complicate the matter.
- It is possible to retain an area's identity and have devolved power. The weight of the argument is premature even if in the future it could be a good idea.
- It had been hoped to get more public to attend this evening, but thanks given to those that had taken the time to come. The most important part is to serve the community. Whilst it has been mentioned that one voice would be better than two, this does feel very rushed and questions have been raised over the report and consultation on which the public are being asked to make a decision. For example, the format of the questionnaire does not leave enough scope to truly capture residents' opinions; it is very black and white. Throughout the document sections seem to contradict each other. For example, the changes at Broadbridge Heath have had parameters applied that could also be applicable to the North Horsham situation but these have been ignored. It is not laid out to enable an informed decision. All of the comments made will be passed to the Clerk for circulation to Members.
- Speaking as a resident as well as a Councillor, the residents of North Horsham are going to be best served by an established Council rather than one that is only 4 months old. More time is needed to thrash any merger out.
- NHPC has been nonpolitical, as are most parishes, and rather is local residents doing their best. Residents may well not welcome politisation of their local council.

It was then proposed by Cllr. Rickett and seconded by Cllr. Burgess and subsequently **AGREED** unanimously (with Cllr. Raby abstaining due to his declaration of interest) that a Working Group be formed to agree communications with the residents about the Parish Council's viewpoint on the matter. It was **AGREED** that Membership would be Cllrs. Burgess, Davidson-Fernandez, Rickett and Torn.

It was also **RESOLVED** that due to the exceptional circumstances and the very tight timescale, the delegated authority process would be followed with the Clerk in liaison with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council together with the Chairman of the Finance & Administration Committee.

Members then **RESOLVED** unanimously (once again with Cllr. Raby abstaining) that the Council support Option 2 of the Consultation and that North Horsham and the Town should retain their own Councils, with the amendments to the North Horsham boundary as referred to in the consultation documents.

The Clerk advised that she would now prepare a response to the Consultation document, based on the comments raised, and this would be ratified at the next scheduled Full Council meeting on 3rd September. The Clerk stated that versions would be circulated before that meeting to gather any comments because as the deadline for the consultation was 7th September, no further amendments could be agreed after the September meeting.

Members **AGREED** that expenditure for any publicity material should be funded by the Publicity & Marketing budget and that this could be increased by a further £1,500 from General Reserves to give a total budget of £2,000.

The Clerk informed Members that the Council must comply with publicity Codes regarding any literature that would be distributed and the advice of WSALC would have to be sought.

Finally, the Clerk reminded Members of the importance of checking emails regularly because, as part of the delegated process, their approval of any publicity would be sought before liaison with the Councillors identified and without a majority of members giving their approval, there could be no progress.

There being no other business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 8.10pm.

Signed

Date