

MEPPERSHALL PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL, MEPPERSHALL ON MONDAY 13TH DECEMBER 2021

PRESENT: **Councillors:** Thompson (Chair), Chapman, Crossley, Merryweather, Morgan, Parsons and Standbridge. Cllr Addy joined after item 721.a.i.

The Clerk: A Marabese.

Others: Ward Councillor Liddiard, and 3 members of the public.

The Chairman declared the meeting open at 7:07pm.

716. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- a. Ward Councillor Brown provided apologies that were received and accepted.

717. CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded all those present at the meeting of the COVID-safe meeting guidelines. The Chairman read the Parish Council notice and announcement in relation to meetings in connection to openness and transparency, and then advised those present of the following:

- a. To resolve to extend the meeting finish time beyond 2 hours.
Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved to extend the meeting finish time beyond 2 hours. Carried.
- b. Recent reported crime statistic for Meppershall for November show a reduction in reported incidents from 27 to 13.
- c. The Meppershall Village Hall AGM was held on Sunday 5th December and attended by Cllr Thompson as the MPC Representative. Unfortunately the meeting was poorly attended by residents with only 20 participating. There were no significant issues raised at the AGM. One new trustee was appointed during the meeting as an elected member of the committee. There are now 5 in total not including representatives from MPC or the Parochial Church Council (to be appointed in January). Two key questions were raised at the meeting concerning the financial provision of future capital expenditure and how to operate the village hall with as many hirers as possible. The AGM meeting lasted 34 minutes.
- d. A request has been made via the Chairman to add to the MPC January agenda a request for funds to purchase a defibrillator to be made available at the village hall. *The Clerk will add this to the next meeting agenda.*

718. MEMBERS INTERESTS

- a. To receive declarations of interest from councillors on items on the agenda and requests for dispensation.
Cllr Thompson declared an interest in agenda item 722.a.i.

719. PUBLIC SESSION

At this point (7:15pm) the Chairman suspended Standing Orders to receive reports from Ward Councillors, village organisations and to allow members of the public to address the Council in relation to items on the agenda or request matters to be discussed at a subsequent meeting.

Ward Councillor Liddiard advised the meeting that:

- New defibrillator – would welcome receipt of application for funding via Ward Councillor grant scheme.

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- COVID numbers – The number of recorded Omicron cases in CBC is now 22 confirmed and 4+ suspected. CBC are issuing a plea to all residents to get jabbed. The vaccination centre at Priory House is accepting walk ins. Over 2000 vaccinations were administered over the previous weekend.
- Festive season waste collections – Collections will be on Thursday and not Wednesdays over the Christmas and New Year holidays. Christmas trees can be recycled at local Tidy Tips or with recycled waste.
- Housing Allocation Scheme – MPC encouraged to respond.
- Community & Village Hall consultation – to be issued shortly by CBC.

The following questions were raised by members of the public:

- Is Cllr Liddiard available to attend a meeting with Cllr Dalgarno and MPC on 12th January?
Unfortunately not.
- Is there any update on the resurfacing of footpaths in Brookside and Brookmead? *Cllr Liddiard - Yes, 3 areas have been highlighted to the CBC Highways team for resurfacing and they include Brookside, Brookmead and Shefford Road. These will be added to their Asset Management Plan.*
- What does it mean 'added to the Asset Management Plan'? *The Asset Management Plan is a 'priority list' that includes Highways assets that require maintenance (repair or replace). Addition to the list does not guarantee work will be done but adds it to the maintenance plan and schedule.*

Standing orders were reinstated at 7:30pm

720. MINUTES

- a. To receive and approve distributed minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Meppershall Parish Council held on Monday, 8th November 2021.
Proposed Cllr Chapman/Seconded Cllr Morgan. Resolved that the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Meppershall Parish Council held on Monday 8th November 2021 are an accurate record of the proceedings and that they be signed by the Chairman. Carried.

721. PROCEDURES, CONSULTATIONS & LEGAL

a. Co-Option

- i. To consider any councillor co-option requests received.

The Clerk had previously circulated the application of Mr W Addy (present at the meeting) to all councillors and confirmed having spoken to him at length regarding the role. Councillors commented on how impressed they were with the application and felt that his skills would be beneficial to the Council.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved to co-opt Mr William Addy to the role of councillor at Meppershall Parish Council. Carried.

Cllr Addy signed a Declaration of Acceptance of Office before the Clerk and Proper Officer and was then asked to join councillors in deliberating the business of the meeting by the Chairman.

b. Procedures

- i. To re-approve Application for Financial Assistance v2.0
- ii. To re-approve Reserves Policy v1.0
- iii. To re-approve Document Retention Policy v1.0

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Proposed Cllr Chapman/Seconded Cllr Morgan. Resolved to re-approve MPC Application for Financial Assistance v2.0, Reserves Policy v1.0 and Document Retention Policy v1.0. Carried.

- iv. To approve Investment Policy v2.0 and actions required due to cash funds held by MPC.

Proposed Cllr Crossley/Seconded Cllr Standbridge. Resolved to approve MPC Investment Policy v2.0. Carried.

Proposed Cllr Merryweather/Seconded Cllr Addy. Resolved that the Clerk open another bank account for and transfer no more than £85k into it, and that members of the Finance Working Group and the Clerk be appointed signatories to the new account. Carried.

c. Consultations

- i. To consider response to CBC Changes to Housing Allocation Scheme consultation. Closes 18th January 2022.

Councillors considered to what extent the proposed changes to CBC's Housing Allocation Scheme would affect Meppershall residents. For new affordable housing allocations in the village, Meppershall residents should be given priority as they are people with local connections to the village. Councillors agreed that they would support changes that placed importance on local family community cohesion and looked after all generations of the community.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Standbridge. Resolved that the Clerk respond to the Housing Allocation Scheme consultation in support of proposed changes especially where the emphasis is on supporting residents with a local connection. Carried.

d. IT – Website and Email

- i. Cllr Standbridge to provide an update on gov.uk domain changeover. Cllr Standbridge reported that the gov.uk domain is now available and a changeover will take place in January 2022 (website first and then emails to follow). 477 people visited our website in the last month. The Clerk and Cllr Standbridge will schedule review of the MPC logo after the gov.uk changeover has been completed.

e. Centenary Field Parish Facilities

- i. Update from Clerk and Centenary Field Working group on handover of Centenary Field to the Parish Council based upon negotiated terms. Croudace are yet to confirm receipt of the Settlement Agreement and land transfer and send us a signed copy of the documentation however all funds have been received from them. The water meter has not yet been handed over.
- ii. To approve signing of Project Practical Completion Certificate. The Clerk confirmed that wording of the Project Practical Completion Certificate had been altered and approved by MPC Solicitor.
Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Morgan. Resolved that Cllrs Thompson and Chapman, together with the Clerk sign the Project Practical Completion Certificate as confirmed by the MPC Solicitor. Carried.
- iii. Update from the Clerk and Cllr Morgan on plans for works to Centenary Field. The Clerk and Cllr Morgan met with Sherriffs on 17th November and agreed the following:

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- Sherrifs to provide Clerk with an invoice for works completed to date on pitch (rolling, fertiliser and cutting). An additional cut will be carried out before w/e 26/11 so that grass is short for the winter and early spring.
- Due to weather conditions it would not be advisable to carry out landscaping and drainage works to CF until early spring March / April. This will require re-quoting as material costs have increased. When on site machinery will be secured in the pitch area.
- Revised quotes to be provided for all areas
- Heras Fencing – MPC to remove Heras fencing facing Village Hall and leave track fencing in situ. Sherriffs will re-install fencing as required prior to works starting.
- Area of MPC/MVH car park will be boarded for material to be deposited on. Amenity lands will not be usable until grass is re-instated. Topsoil removed for running track will be re-used to enlarge top left hand corner of track and to create the bunds. All other material will be deposited on site near hedge to avoid cost of removal.

f. Stocken House Green Space

i. Update from Clerk and Cllr Thompson

Emma Halpin of Ross Williams appointed as Solicitor acting on behalf of MPC. She has been liaising with Davidson's solicitors and working at pace and efficiency. Both The Clerk and Cllr Thompson have been impressed with the quality of communication and advice provided so far.

ii. To confirm approval of indemnity insurance as advised by MPC Solicitors.

MPC Solicitors have suggested purchasing indemnity insurance at a cost of £250 when the contract with Davidsons is completed. Indemnity insurance as opposed to searches has been suggested because of the potential for delay. An assumed indemnity cover amount of £500,000 is proposed which is bit of a stab in the dark. Ordinarily we would get insurance for the value of the property (if a house) as that is the potential maximum loss. Searches would cost more than this insurance. Procedures and legal working group consider this a prudent expenditure.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Parsons. Resolved that MPC purchase indemnity insurance via MPC solicitors regarding Stocken House Green Space. Carried.

g. Wry Close Allotment Track

i. To approve Licence Agreement between MPC and The Sugarloaf PH permitting the anchoring of a gazebo on the track.

The Landlord of the Sugarloaf has requested a 6 month extension to the previous agreement. Draft provided to council includes this but also the requirement for a review meeting should they wish to extend again in June 2022 (as a more long term solution would be required).

Proposed Cllr Parsons/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved to approve 6 month extension to Licence Agreement between MPC and the Sugarloaf PH permitting anchoring of a gazebo on Wry Close Allotment track with inclusion of review meeting in June 2022. Carried.

722. FINANCE

a. Grant applications

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- i. To consider request received from Meppershall Messenger for £750.
Cllr Thompson did not participate in this part of the meeting having previously declared an interest. Cllr Parsons took over as Chairman of the meeting for this agenda item.
The grant application was circulated to councillors with meeting papers. The £750 was requested to assist with the purchase of 100% recycled paper for future printing use.
Proposed Cllr Chapman/Seconded Cllr Morgan. Resolved to approve grant application of £750 to Meppershall Messenger (Local Government Act 1972, s.142). Carried.

b. Purchase Orders

- i. To consider Clerks attendance at the Practitioners' Virtual Conference 2022 taking place over Tuesday 15, Wednesday 16 and Thursday 17 February 2022. Cost £75.
Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved that the Clerk attend the Practitioners' Virtual Conference at a cost of £75. Carried.
- ii. To approve cost of traffic monitoring assessments as part of VAS installation suitability.
CBC Highways have advised that there is a £500 per site cost for traffic monitoring assessments. The Clerk has contacted the OPCC who have stated that *"The funds issued should be used to achieve the outcomes mentioned in your bid, it will be for your project to decide how the money are spent to delivery those outcomes"*. Therefore it is assumed they can be used for payment of traffic monitoring. Monitoring will be conducted prior to Christmas at the following locations:
 - The entrance to the village on Shefford Road,
 - High Street Heading towards the School between Fowlers Drive and Gregory Close,
 - Fildyke Road heading towards High Street Between Chapel Road and Lyspitt Common and,
 - At some point between 32 Shefford Road and the location of the existing VAS on Shefford Road (to replace this VAS).

The Clerk was asked to confirm with CBC who would be responsible for VAS maintenance post installation.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved to approve £2000 cost of traffic monitoring assessments as part of VAS installation suitability. Carried.

c. Precept 2022-2023

- i. To review draft 2022-2023 budget
This item will be deferred to the next meeting. The Clerk was asked to arrange a Finance Working Group meeting on 4th January at 10am to review the draft budget prior to presentation at the next meeting.

d. Standing Orders and Direct Debits

- i. To approve updated standing orders and direct debits list
Proposed Cllr Chapman/Seconded Cllr Parsons. Resolved to approve updated standing orders and direct debit list as presented and signed by Councillors. Carried.

e. Document approval

- i. To approve journal entries, bank reconciliations and bank statements.
The Clerk presented Bank Statements and Reconciliation reports 150 for the Current Account and 025 for the Savings Account. Reconciliation reports and statements were checked by Cllrs Crossley and Morgan.

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Proposed Cllr Morgan/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved that Bank Statements and Reconciliation reports 150 Current Account and 025 Savings Account be approved and signed. Carried.

f. Orders for the payment of money

- i. A schedule of payments was distributed at the meeting for approval and authorisation.

Payments presented for payment were checked by Cllrs Chapman and Standbridge.

Proposed Cllr Standbridge/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved that the schedule of payments as presented be approved and authorised for payment by Cllrs Thompson or Parsons. Carried.

Payment No:	Payee	Purpose	Amount
Payments made prior to meeting date including direct debits, standing orders, salaries etc			
DD01-2111	Standard Life	Clerk Pension (15/11/21)	£98.71
FA02-2112	Mrs V Thorne	December Salary (9/12/21)	
Payment requests received before agenda published			
BACS592	SLCC	Clerk Membership	£171.00
BACS593	Mrs V Thorne	Expenses - PPE Safety boots	£19.97
FA01-2112	Mr P Carne	December Salary (15/12/21)	
SO02-2112	Miss A Marabese	December Salary (15/12/21)	
BACS594	HMRC	Q3 PAYE, EE NI and ER NI	£615.80
BACS595	A&B Gardening Limited	November Grass Cuts	£1,348.26
BACS596	Greyhound Leisure Limited	Play area remedial works	£420.00
BACS597	Miss A Marabese	Expenses - Various	£65.95
DD01-2112	Standard Life	Clerk Pension (w/c 13/12/21)	
Payment requests received after agenda published			
BACS598	Mr Lucio Marabese	ORM Orchard Pruning	£100.00

723. PLANNING AND HOUSING

a. Applications since last Council meeting for consideration

- i. CB/21/04142/OUT - The Airman Hotel, SG17 5JF - Outline Application: extension to the existing hotel to provide an additional 30 en-suite bedrooms and the erection of 9 self-contained lodges. The existing car park to be expanded and remodelled to provide a total of 80 car parking spaces. A new point of access from the Hitchin Road to provide a delivery access with turning and unloading facilities and 15 staff car parking spaces. Landscaping and biodiversity enhancements. All matters reserved apart from access.
Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Crossley. Resolved that the Council objects to planning application 21/04142 on the grounds of highways issues, design, impact on landscape and environment and noise pollution. Carried.

- ii. CB/21/04098/FULL - Meppershall Airfield, Campton Road - Two new 3 bedroom semi-detached staff dwellings.
Proposed Cllr Parsons/Seconded Cllr Morgan. Resolved that the Council objects to planning application 21/04098 on the grounds of impact on landscape and noise. Carried.

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- iii. CB/21/04970/FULL - The Mow, Hoo Road, SG17 5LP - Erection of 9 residential dwellings and all ancillary works.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Parsons. Resolved that the Council objects to planning application 21/04970 on the grounds of contrary to policy, design and layout, environmental and landscaping issues and other identified issues. Carried.

Note: For planning applications that are submitted between meetings and for which an extension to the comment's deadline date is not given, powers have been delegated to the Clerk (with a proposed response circulated to the Council) to submit comments to CBC Planning.

724. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

a. Report from the Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group – Mr A Pain

The grant application for £2740 has been approved and money should be with MPC shortly. The plan is under review by the Clerk and Mrs Chapman. Mr Pain will arrange to remove the Regulation 14 banners shortly.

725. HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT

a. Update from Clerk

The Clerk advised that:

- Hoo Road Bridleway Bollards – Damage and removal of bollards reported to CBC ROW officer with photos
- Footpath outside Sugarloaf to be replaced in early 2022.
- Meeting with Cllr Ian Dalgarno – Highways portfolio holder on 27/11 to discuss Meppershall OPCC funding and issue. He has advised that the CBC draft SID Policy is pending. Meeting with CBC Portfolio holder Ian Dalgarno arranged for Wednesday 12th January at 2:00pm (Cllr Morgan to attend).

726. ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE

a. Tree planting plans

- i. To approve budget for tree planting

Councillors asked for this to be included in the 2022-2023 budget.

b. ORM development plans

- i. To approve budget for ORM development plans

Councillors asked for this to be included in the 2022-2023 budget.

c. MPC Signage

- i. To approve budget for purchase and installation of signage in MPC owned locations and installation of notice boards at allotments and on Walnut Tree Way.

Proposed Cllr Standbridge/Seconded Cllr Crossley. Resolved that the Clerk organise this purchase and installation of all required signage in MPC owned locations and also the installation of noticeboards. Carried.

d. Allotments

- i. To receive update on tenancy renewals

Circa £879 received in allotment rent with £770 pending.

- ii. To consider cost of tap repairs and replacements and associated works

Mr B J Foster has quoted £1348 to replace 5 support gates holding stop cocks, supply and fit 6 replacement taps and supply and fit new isolating stop cock on supply pipe from High Street.

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Proposed Cllr Merryweather/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved to accept quotation for tap repairs and replacement and associated works from Mr BJ Foster at a cost of £1348. Carried.

The Clerk was also asked to engage with Mr Foster regarding Phase 2 works on the allotments to increase access to water facilities.

iii. To consider request to cultivate flowers on allotment plot for commercial sale.

A request has been made to rent 2 allotment plots in order to cultivate flowers for commercial sale. The Clerk has not provided a definitive response pending council guidance and resolution. The Clerk suggested councillors consider:

- MPC Allotment Tenancy Agreement and associated documentation follow the key legal restriction contained in the Allotments Act 1922, whereby there is a general prohibition on any “trade or business” being conducted on the allotment garden or any part thereof. An allotment garden must, by definition, “be wholly or mainly cultivated for the production of vegetable or fruit crops (we have added in flowers) for consumption by the occupier or his family”. So allotment gardens can’t operate as market gardens, or nurseries.
- MPC Allotment tenancy agreement makes reference to “A small amount of surplus produce may be sold as ancillary to the provision of crops for the family”: Whilst there seems to be no justification in preventing [an allotment] tenant from selling or otherwise disposing of ‘surplus’ produce the definition of ‘a small amount of surplus’ is a grey area.
- MPC allotment tenancies do not currently allow for the renting of plots for commercial production however a subsection in the Small Holdings & Allotments Act 1908–1926 enables an authority, “when they are unable to find proper allotment tenants from the population to let provisionally to market gardeners, farmers or others willing to take the land”. With the number of Meppershall residents due to increase but 200+ homes in the coming 1-3 years is this a risk council wish to take?
- MPC allotments are subsidised by the Parish Council and therefore any commercial gain made by tenants may be considered an inappropriate use of public funds.
- Maintenance of the ‘non-commercial’ character of our allotments.
- Setting a precedence on the sale of produce from the allotments for commercial gain that does not benefit the allotments themselves.

Councillors considered all issues as identified by the Clerk.

Proposed Cllr Parsons/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved not to permit the renting of allotment plots for commercial cultivation. Carried.

727. HEALTH & SAFETY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

a. Old Road Meadow Risk Assessment

i. To receive and approve ORM Risk Assessment.

The Clerk and Mrs Thorne completed a Risk Assessment at ORM on 7th December.

Upon review councillors requested that the Clerk discuss with the CBC Rights of Way Officer access to ORM via Fildyke Road.

Proposed Cllr Merryweather/Seconded Cllr Standbridge. Resolved to confirm receipt of ORM Risk assessment. Carried.

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b. Special Constable

- i. To consider participation in promoting a Special Constable to cover Meppershall with Shillington and Gravenhurst.

The Chair of Shillington PC has contacted the Clerk and Gravenhurst Parish Council to see if we are interested in supporting a Special Constable that would cover Meppershall, Shillington and Gravenhurst. CBC Cllr Graham has spoken to the PCC and the Beds Police Chief Constable who are discussing it seriously. They are happy for villages to start to try to identify interested people in their communities as of now, as it cooperates with the force. Dividing a special's commitment between villages would be fine. The official recruitment and training will take at least a year, before the specials would be operational in their communities.

Although councillors were supportive of this initiative they had many unanswered questions such as:

- Would any financial contribution from MPC be required?
- Would we have a guarantee that the Special Constable would be working in our area?
- How many hours would they work a week / month?

Councillors requested that the Clerk and the Chair request more information on the proposal and perhaps ask the PCC to attend one of our meetings to discuss.

728. PERSONNEL

a. Training

- i. To consider Community & Environment Officer ROSPA Visual Inspection Training Course at Huntingdon on Thursday, 31st March 2022. Course fee £295 and RPII Examination Fee £110

Proposed Cllr Merryweather/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved that the Clerk enrol Mrs Thorne on the POSPA Visual Inspection Training course. Carried.

729. CLOSE OF THE MEETING

The Chairman reminded everyone to clean their table and chair with the antibacterial wipes provided and that the next meeting would be the 10th January 2022 in the Village Hall. He wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and declared the meeting closed at 9:30pm.

Where no signature exists in this electronic version, a hard copy version is available for inspection from the Clerk.

Glossary

- ACV = Asset of Community Value
- CBC = Central Bedfordshire Council
- MPC = Meppershall Parish Council
- MVH = Meppershall Village Hall & MVHT = Meppershall Village Hall Trustees
- ORM = Old Read Meadow Nature Reserve
- VAS = Vehicle activated sign